

Top 10 Admission and Scholarship Essay Writing Tips

1. Use Your Own Voice.

Big words, especially when misused, detract from the essay, inappropriately drawing the reader's attention and making the essay sound contrived or not genuine

Before: Although I did a plethora of activities in high school, my assiduous efforts enabled me to succeed.

After: Although I juggled many activities in high school, I succeeded through persistent work.

2. Be Interesting.

Admissions officers & scholarship committees have to read hundreds of essays, and they must often skim. These people aren't looking for a new way to view the world; they're looking for a new way to view you the applicant. The best way to grip your reader is to begin the essay with a captivating snapshot. Notice how the slightly jarring scene depicted in the "after" creates intrigue and keeps the reader's interest.

**Before: The college admissions and selection process is a very important one, perhaps one that will have the greatest impact on one's future. The college that a person will go to often influences his personality, views, and career.*

**After: An outside observer would have called the scene ridiculous: a respectable physician holding the bell of his stethoscope to the chest of a small stuffed bear.*

3. Use Personal Detail. Show, Don't Tell!

Good essays are concrete and grounded in personal detail. "Show don't tell," means if you want to relate a personal quality, do so through examples of your experiences not just saying it.

Before: I developed a new compassion for the disabled.

After: The next time Mrs. Cooper asked me to help her across the street, I smiled and immediately took her arm.

The first example is vague and could have been written by anybody. But the second sentence evokes a vivid image of something that actually happened, placing the reader in the experience of the applicant.

4. Be Honest.

Don't embellish your achievements, titles, and offices. It's just fine to be the copy editor of the newspaper or the treasurer of the Green Club, instead of the president. Not everyone has to be the star at everything. You will feel better if you don't strain to inflate yourself.

5. Be Concise.

Wordiness not only takes up valuable space, but it also can confuse the important ideas you're trying to convey. Short sentences are more forceful because they are direct and to the point. Certain phrases such as "the fact that" are usually unnecessary. Notice how the revised version focuses on active verbs rather than forms of "to be" and adverbs and adjectives.

Before: My recognition of the fact that the project was finally over was a deeply satisfying moment that will forever linger in my memory.

After: Completing the project at last gave me an enduring sense of fulfillment.

6. Don't Use Slang Yo'!

Write an essay, not an email. Slang terms, clichés, contractions, and an excessively casual tone should be eliminated. Here's one example of inappropriately colloquial language.

Well here I am thinking about what makes me tick. You would be surprised. What really gets my goat is when kids disrespect the flag. My father was in 'Nam and I know how important the military is to this great nation.

7. Use Active Voice Verbs

Passive-voice expressions are verb phrases in which the subject receives the action expressed in the verb.

Before: The lessons that prepared me for college were taught to me by my mother.

After: My mother taught me lessons that will prepare me for college.

8. Seek Multiple Opinions.

Ask your friends and family to keep these questions in mind:

- Have I answered the question?
- Does my introduction engage the reader? Does my conclusion provide closure?
- Do my introduction and conclusion avoid summary?
- Do I use concrete experiences as supporting details?
- Have I used active-voice verbs wherever possible?
- Is my sentence structure varied, or do I use all long or short sentences?
- Are there any clichés such as "cutting edge" or "learned my lesson?"
- Do I use transitions appropriately?
- What about the essay is memorable?
- What's the worst part of the essay?
- What parts of the essay need elaboration or are unclear?
- What parts of the essay do not support my main argument?
- Is every single sentence crucial to the essay? This must be the case.
- What does the essay reveal about my personality?

9. Answer the Question.

Many students try to turn a 500-word essay into a complete autobiography. Not surprisingly, they fail to answer the question and risk their chances of attending college. Make sure that every sentence in your essay exists solely to answer the question.

10. Revise, Revise, Revise.

The first step in improving any essay is to cut, cut, and cut some more. The EssayEdge.com free help course guides you through the entire essay-writing process, from brainstorming worksheets and question-specific strategies for the twelve most common essay topics to a description of ten introduction types and editing checklists.

Remember....

- You can use the computers in the counseling center for things like application essays
- If you need help, we are always available for appointments
- We can always look over rough drafts of essays—just come in and ask!