

Writing the College Application Essay
Step One: Brainstorming

- ✚ Is your topic overdone? If so make sure you have a unique or convincing answer to a classic topic — this can pay off big.
- ✚ Will your topic turn off a large number of people? The only thing worse than not writing a memorable essay is writing an essay that will be remembered negatively! Avoid specific religious and political doctrines and controversial opinions.
- ✚ If presenting a controversial topic, you must acknowledge counter arguments without sounding arrogant.
- ✚ Will an admissions officer remember your topic after a day of reading hundreds of essays? What will the officer remember about your topic? What will the officer remember about you? What will your lasting impression be?

After evaluating your topics and making your final decision to write on a personal hardship or tragedy, remember: Just because something sad or horrible has happened to you does not mean that you will be a good college or graduate school student. You don't want to be remembered as the pathetic applicant but the one who showed impressive qualities under difficult circumstances. You must use the horrible experience as a lens with which to magnify your own personal characteristics.

Step three: Writing the essay

Remember your two goals:

1. To persuade the admissions officer that you are extremely worthy of admissions
2. To make the admissions officer aware that you are more than a GPA and a standardized test score, that you are a real-life, intriguing personality

There is no one step-by-step method to follow to write a good essay. Every topic requires a different treatment since no two essays are alike. The following are some suggested steps to assist with the writing process:

1. Answer the question.
2. Be original.
3. Be yourself.
4. Don't thesaurusize your composition.
5. Use imagery and clear, vivid prose.
6. Spend the most time on your introduction:
 - a. Do not summarize in your introduction.
 - b.

9. Give your draft to others: Check for the following:

- a. What is the essay about?
- b. Have you used active voice verbs wherever possible?
- c. Is the sentence structure varied?
- d. Are there any clichés?
- e. Is transition used properly?
- f. Is imagery used often and makes for clarity?
- g. What is the best part of the essay?
- h. What is the worst part of the essay?
- i. What parts of the essay need elaboration or are unclear?
- j. What parts of the essay do not support your main argument?
- k. Is every single sentence crucial to the essay?
- l. What does the essay reveal about your personality?
- m. Could anyone else have written this essay?
- n. How would the following blank be filled in?

“I want to accept you to this college because our college needs more _____.”

10. **Revise, Revise, Revise:** You are only allowed so many words so use them wisely.

Sample Questions

Kellog--Northwestern

- ✚ Each of our applicants is unique. Describe how your background, values, academics, activities, and/or leadership skills will enhance the experience of other Northwestern students.
- ✚ Outside school I ...

Haas--University of California, Berkley

- ✚ If you could have dinner with one individual in the past, present, or future, who would it be and why?
- ✚ Describe an innovative solution you have created to address a specific change.

Harvard

- ✚ What have you learned from a mistake?
- ✚ How have you experienced culture shock?

Kenan-Flagler--University of North Carolina

- ✚ Describe the major obstacles or challenges you have faced in pursuit of your goals. Tell us how you addressed these challenges and how they have shaped you.
- ✚ Tell us about any international experience you have, either living or working (traveling) abroad. Tell us how it has impacted your global perspective.

Digital Essays – New and innovative use of PowerPoint presentations are beginning to be used by some colleges and universities. Creativity and cleverness are allowed in these digital essays. Slides are limited in number and text, and visuals combine to make the presentation. This shows the school your mastery of technology as well as presenting yourself to them. Schools get a relief from the boring “same ole, same ole” essays they have seen for decades.

Remember: Be original, creative, and honest. Sell yourself to the university.