

## College Essay FAQ's

### **Q. How do I get help with my essay?**

A. Email your essay to [cccessayhelp@gmail.com](mailto:cccessayhelp@gmail.com); visit the CCC, Writing Center, or an English teacher. Internet resources: [www.collegeessayguy.com](http://www.collegeessayguy.com); [www.essayhell.com](http://www.essayhell.com)

### **Q. Why do I have to write an essay for my college applications?**

A. Most of the information that will go on your college application is already set—grades, test scores, classes you've taken, extracurricular activities. The one part that you have complete control of to shape however you want is your essay. It's an opportunity for the school to get to know you as an individual apart from your numbers.

### **Q: How do I begin to write my essay?**

A: Start by reading some good college essays. You can find some online, in books, in the CCC, and on the CCC website. You don't want to copy them, of course, but it's helpful to get an idea of the type of content, tone, and structure that has worked for others.

### **Q. Then what?**

A. Brainstorm, then just start writing.

### **Q. How long is this going to take me?**

A. It depends, but be sure to leave yourself plenty of time for editing and polishing.

### **Q: How many essays will I need to write?**

A: It depends on how many schools you apply to, and how many essays each requires. You'll likely write a main personal statement for your Common App, plus supplemental essays as required by each school. So you may write as many as 15.

### **Q: What should my essay be about?**

A: Something you care about.

### **Q. Who's going to read my essay?**

A. If you come to a college visit in the CCC, the college rep you meet is likely going to be the first person to read your essay if you apply to that school. They're often recent graduates of the school. Like you, they don't like to be bored. Don't bore them.

### **Q: What are college admissions officers looking for?**

A: They want to find out who you are, what you can contribute of value to the campus, and if you can write.

### **Q: How do college admissions officers evaluate my essay?**

A: It depends on the school. Some mostly use it to assess a student's writing ability, while others are more interested in a student's story.

**Q: So which is more important: your story or your writing skill?**

A: Both are important. A good story, well told. That's your goal.

**Q: How much do essays matter?**

A: It depends on the college, but essays tend to matter more for small schools, or schools who look at applications holistically.

**Q: Can I get into Harvard with a great essay and bad grades?**

A: Nope. A good essay can heal the sick, but it can't raise the dead. Schools look at your GPA, course rigor, and test scores first. But if you're being compared to other students with a similar profile, a strong essay can help you.

**Q: Can a bad college essay negatively affect my application?**

A: Yes.

**Q: Are any topics off limits?**

A: Theoretically, no—any topic could make a great essay. However, some are more challenging than others. As a general rule, avoid topics that show poor judgment or bad behavior (drug or alcohol use, illegal activity) or anything that's just too much information (your love life or bathroom habits). Avoid topics that could anger your reader (pontificating about religion or politics, for example). Some topics are done so often they're clichéd (sports injury, sports victory/defeat, mission trip, death of a pet or grandparent), however if you can bring something fresh and original, give it a try.

**DO:**

Write a strong first sentence that makes the reader want to keep reading.

Write in the first person (this essay is about you) and use the past tense.

Use vivid action verbs (sputtered, froze, raced)

Use casual, conversational style to show your own voice (but avoid texting abbreviations, slang, technical jargon the reader won't know, and curse words).

Use specific naming words: instead of "shoes," say, "stilettos" or "Chuck Taylor All Stars." Instead of "dancing," say, "doing the nae-nae." Instead of "my neighbor's dog," say "my neighbor's Yorkie, Gus." Get specific.

**DON'T:**

Don't use fancy words just to impress; this seriously doesn't work. Write like you talk.

Don't repeat the prompt—just jump right in.

Don't quote Webster's Dictionary. That's a waste of words, and boring.

Don't start with a quote from another writer—use the space for your own words.

Don't use clichés—they're a dime a dozen.

Don't use the passive voice. Instead of "The eclipse was seen by the whole school; it was astonishing," write, "The whole school saw the astonishing eclipse."