

# PPCHS

## Guide to Writing an Essay for College Admissions

The essay is one of the most important parts of the college application. It is really the only way you set yourself apart from thousands of other students who have good grades, high scores, rigorous academics, and of course, numerous extracurricular activities, leadership and community service. It is your opportunity to shine, to show the college your personality and let them hear your voice! Admissions officers have shared with me that they read approximately 4 applications an hour. When they go into their "reading period" they are very skilled at what they are looking for and can easily detect an essay that may not match the rest of the application. It is critical that you write your own essay!

### Purpose of the Essay...

- Colleges want to see that you can write...that you can organize a written message and both make and support logical arguments
- They want to get to know you...the rest of your application package is numbers that a computer can sort, but your essay and your letters of recommendation begin to paint the picture of who you are.

### Getting Started...

- Think about what makes you different from everybody else, including why a college would want to add you to its next freshman class
- Brainstorming the lists that appear on the back of this handout is a good exercise in gathering the thoughts that will help you express what is unique about you
- Decide what prompt you have to write about and how long the essay has to be.

### How to Begin...

Start by brainstorming several ideas. What are you passionate about? This is NOT the time to write about your community service project that you did to help beef up your college application. Think about something that motivated you, changed you, inspired you, and frustrated you. Write about the "thing" you have been doing your whole life ... football, singing, compensating for a learning disability, babysitting your sister. Think of the time you were most proud or disappointed of yourself and what you did to accomplish that feeling. Think about the lessons learned from that experience. Some students have shown me essays where they write about a meaningful person. The problem with that is more times than not, the essay becomes about them. You can write about a person as long as you focus more on what that person meant to you, how you learned from them, and what impact that will have on your future. Some schools are very interested in hearing about what you are bringing to their campus community. Make sure you don't throw that in as a last line or an afterthought. Doing a bit of research about the campus and how it will affect programs they already have in place is a great idea. Make sure you don't regurgitate their website back to them!

## Start Writing ...

The essay is usually not a one-shot, 15 minute deal. You should write several drafts and make each word count. The first draft should not be about word count, grammar, spelling or even flow. Get your thoughts out and then walk away. Make sure it is your voice and someone who knew you well would recognize it as your essay!!

## They Are Looking For...

Although this changes from college to college, and it can be hard to predict, there are a few ideas you can probably count on:

1. It should be organized. That doesn't mean it needs to have a three-part thesis statement, but it should have a clear beginning, body, and ending. A paragraph is a group of sentences about one main idea—that is always true no matter what kind of writing you're doing.
2. It should allow the reader to get to know you. It should be in your voice and reflect your personality. You should be the only person who can write the essay you submit.
3. It should be compelling. Readers of admissions essays sometimes read hundreds of essays in the same week. Something about yours should stand out.

## Tips...

1. Stay within the word limit. You will probably submit it online, and the web site will not allow you to paste any more words than the published limit.
2. proofread, Proofread, PROOFREAD. There are few times in life when it has to be perfect, but this is one of them. Why would the admissions committee think you will handle four years of education conscientiously if you have typos and grammar errors in your admission essay?
3. Display some knowledge of the school in your essay, as well as explaining why you chose it. What is their mission statement? What awards have they won? What is it about their culture that draws you to them? Everything you need to know is on their web site.
4. Consider having different versions of the essay that are each catered to the school where you're applying.

## Edit, Edit and Edit it Again...

This is now the time to look at spelling, grammar, flow, punctuation, tenses, addressing the prompt, word count. Ask yourself, does this essay tell the story I want it to tell and is it the best reflection of who I am? This is the time to get a second and third opinion...have people who you **respect** read the essay and take their comments to heart. Remember, everyone is going to have a different opinion, so the more people you ask, the more opinions you will get.

## Review One Last Time...

Incorporate changes that you are comfortable making. Remember, it is your essay and you should have the final say. Try not to over think it or do any massive re-writes after you had it close to finalized. Feel confident about your essay and include it in the application.