

# College Essays Do's and Don'ts

The purpose of college essays is to give the colleges you're applying to a glimpse of who you are beyond your SAT/ACT scores, transcripts, and GPA. The college essay is an opportunity for you to show a college your personality, character, imagination, sense of humor, and creativity. A well-written essay will help you stand out from other applicants and could assist you in being admitted to the college of your choice.

## DO

- Do start your essay early. Give yourself at least a month before the application deadline to write your essay. A good time to start is during the summer before your senior year.
- Do think of a main idea or theme to focus on in your essay.
- Do create an outline to organize your ideas.
- Do start your essay with an interest-grabbing sentence, paragraph, statement, question, quote, or anecdote.
- Do show how your experiences have shaped your interests and inspired you to pursue your education and life goals.
- Do keep it personal. Tell stories that showcase your strengths.
- Do think about what sets you apart from the other applicants.
- Do be specific. Avoid generic, clichéd, and predictable writing.
- Do eliminate unnecessary words.
- Do be aware of the technical requirements: maximum words and pages, topic of paper (if applicable), written or typed, and document format (i.e. line spacing).
- Do proofread for spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. Don't rely on your computer's spell check. Also, have your friends, family, or teachers critique your essay.

## DON'T

- Don't tackle a topic that cannot be explained in 500 words or less.
- Don't just tell them what you think they want to hear. Set yourself apart from other applicants. Give examples, explain your thought process and interests, and tackle a topic that is personal and might not be something everyone else is writing about.
- Don't use the essay to make excuses for poor grades.
- Don't write about other people's experiences.
- Don't tell your whole life story.
- Don't print using fancy font or colored paper.
- Don't think you can get away with using your first draft. Reread, rewrite, and polish your essay!
- Don't be afraid to change your essay topic. If your initial topic is not something you are interested in writing about or if you can't find interesting things to say, find a new topic.
- Don't include information that's found elsewhere in the application (like your resume).
- Don't use wishy-washy phrases or clichés.

