

## WRITING THE COLLEGE APPLICATION ESSAY - FORMAT

Are you in the University Transfer Program here at Alamance Community College and applying to colleges and universities in order to obtain a bachelor's degree? If so, you will soon be filling out college applications, which almost always include an essay section. Sometimes it is hard to think of what to write about. This workshop will help you to brainstorm ideas for your admissions essay as well as to write and revise it.

There are two reasons why colleges ask you to write an essay as part of your application:

1. To show the admissions committee who you are, in addition to what you've done.
2. To show the admissions committee you can write. (Sparknotes Editors)

### Step 1: Brainstorming.

First, get some ideas about what you can write about.

The application essay is the only place on the application where you can express your personality—who you are and why you would be a good fit for a college's sophomore class.

Imagine that admission counselors are reading hundreds, if not thousands, of applications quickly. They want to be surprised, excited, drawn in because you are unique, interesting, innovative, committed, undaunted by failure, fascinating, or somehow different from the crowd.

The college application essay can make your application stand out and be noticed. The essay is the only place to be creative, innovative, and interesting in the entire application.

List as many things you can think of that are creative, innovative, and/or interesting about you \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

List some things you own, that are in your room at home, that are probably unique to you, and that let your personality come through \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

With only an approximate 650 word limit you won't have space to reveal everything about yourself, but you will have an opportunity to highlight a slice of who you are. You want that slice to be interesting and engaging. (Sparknotes). College admission counselors want to know how well you write, but they also want to know about your "thought process, values, preferences and style" (McGinty 11). So what you write about is as important as how well you write it. It is the only opportunity you have to tell the application committee a little about yourself, your values, your enthusiasm, your creativity, and your writing ability. Assume that they have already looked at your grades, your recommendations, your resume, your application itself—they read the essay last.

What have you done that showed your creativity? \_\_\_\_\_

What have you done that showed your enthusiasm? \_\_\_\_\_

What have you done that showed your values? \_\_\_\_\_

What do you do that people find interesting or unusual? \_\_\_\_\_ -

Do you have a hobby that is a passion or that is unusual? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have a favorite quote or saying that guides you? \_\_\_\_\_

If you were a character in a novel or a play, who would you be? \_\_\_\_\_

(The novel has to be well-known)

Have you ever met any one person who has influenced your life radically? Who? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Have you experienced an event that changed your life forever? If so, what? \_\_\_\_\_

## **Step 2. Getting Started on the Writing Process**

After you have your topic, freewrite about it—including as many concrete details, snippets of dialogue, and examples as you can. Write about twice the word limit—1300 words for the

Common Application essay. Don't worry about format, grammar, spelling, or paragraphs just yet. Make yourself sit in a chair and just write for 15 minutes, then take a break. Write so that someone can visualize what you are writing about. Concrete details are the key. Every essay has a claim (the characteristic about yourself that you want to get across) and the evidence (the details that show that characteristic in you). If you write 1000 words and find that any other student could change just a few words and turn that essay into an essay about him or her, then you are not being specific enough (McGinty 87). Observe and describe your environment in detail.

Then, think of paragraphing—an introductory paragraph, several body paragraphs, and a short concluding paragraph. The introductory paragraph doesn't have to be the beginning of the story—starting “in the middle of things” or “in medias res” is a common and effective introduction and framing device. Then “flash back” to the events that led to your being in the position described in your introductory paragraph.

Write several middle paragraphs—not necessarily three!

Write a concluding paragraph. Think about referring back to your introduction to give a satisfying sense of conclusion. Notice that the 3 sample essays in this handout all refer back to the introduction in their concluding paragraph. Use up your word limit—don't let your essay be more than a few words short of the word limit.

Dig Deeper: While you are writing, try to state more than just the facts. This is the time to try and take your ideas further. If you think you don't have anything else to say, look at what you've jotted down and ask yourself: “So what?” Why is what you said important? What did it teach you? What does it mean? What are the broader implications?” (Sparknotes Editors).

Revise the introduction so that it points directly to your conclusion.

## **Step 3. Revising for Style.**

## **Step 4. Revising for readability, grammar, punctuation, and mechanics.**

Let at least three other people, like a parent, an English teacher or other professor, and a Writing Center tutor, read your essay. Make sure that all words are spelled correctly, and that there are no mistakes in grammar, punctuation and mechanics. This is essential! Do not hit the “send” key until you have had at least three other people read over your essay.