

TIPS FOR WRITING ESSAYS AND PERSONAL STATEMENTS

Goal: Write simple, direct statements that honestly represent who you are and what you are capable of, so you will be seen as a unique, responsible person. Your statements must get, and hold, the reader's attention throughout.

Preparation Tip: 1. Paper, pencil or pen, recording machine. 2. Carefully read the question. 3. Outline your main thoughts to your answer. 4. Verbalize your answer into the recording machine. 5. Replay your answer and make changes as needed. 6. Write out your answer. 7. Ask a trusted person to edit your statement.

If you follow these seven steps, your statement should accurately represent your thoughts, your sincerity, your writing style, it should be clear and concise, and it should be easy to defend if necessary.

DO's

1. Answer each question directly and DO NOT "beat around the bush".
2. Be as brief as possible, yet very clear. Use personal examples whenever possible.
3. Show you are unique or different, either in your qualities, experiences or writing style.
4. The most important sentence is the first. It is the "hook". Polish it until it shines. Anecdotes are effective.
5. Consider making your opening sentence a paraphrase of your concluding statement.
6. Express your main thoughts in the opening paragraph. Don't ramble!!
7. Tell the truth who you are/are not. Be sincere. Be yourself.
8. Come across as a person who has had a variety of meaningful experiences.
9. Explain how you have coped with adversity and successes.
10. Emphasize what you learned from both experiences (adversity and success)
11. Convey your understanding of how the college considers itself unique or outstanding. An excellent resource is the college's "mission statement" which can be found in its catalog or website.
12. Especially for personal statements, tie yourself to the college. Understand the college's mission statement by asking or by reading its catalog or website. Be able to answer the following: why are you interested in attending the college, and what can the college offer you and vice-versa?? In other words, be sure to demonstrate there is a mutual "good match" between you and the college.
13. Be upbeat and avoid using negative words or phrases.
14. Ask a trusted, objective person like a teacher to edit your finished statement (essay).
15. Make copies of everything.

DON'T'S

1. Don't force it, be too funny, too sad, too cute, too silly. Get to the point!
2. Don't repeat things that are covered in other parts of your college application.
3. Don't let modesty cover up your greatest assets and accomplishments.
4. Don't be afraid to express your anxieties or indecisiveness. Be direct and unapologetic. College admissions personnel like to help, so they appreciate your revealing your human side.
5. Don't try to save the world. Avoid the social-problem-of-the-day and other trendy topics is possible.

ADDITIONAL TIP

1. Practice writing essays during your junior year or before. Excellent sources for questions are the Common Application, and either current or old college applications.

EXCELLENT RESOURCES

1. www.myessay.com. Complete, user-friendly guide to writing essays.
2. NAASP (Common Application).. <http://www.commonapp.org>
3. Strunk, W. and White, E.B., "The Elements of Style". MacMillan Publishing
4. The College Board. <http://www.collegeboard.com>. See Index.