WRITING THE COLLEGE ESSAY

Why do some colleges require essays?

- *To help them judge the depth of a student's understanding of intellectual or social issues, to get a glimpse into his/her quality and freshness of mind, and to "light up" issues referred to skeletally elsewhere in the application.*
- *To see the student's writing style, technical correctness, and writing fluency.*

How much weight will the college assign to my essay?

- *The essay is often used by admissions officers to confirm a decision if the applicant's other credentials are clear. In close cases, a very powerful or poor essay can tip the scales one way or the other.*

What subject should I write about?

Anything of real interest to you; it should "light up" another part of the application.

- *Autobiographical: Be careful of the obvious…"How my trip to France taught me independence." However, if truly reflective, travel, a significant personal struggle, or a family experience can be a very impressive subject. Try to keep your essay anecdotal. If writing about your trip to France, don't provide the college with a travelogue; rather, focus on one particular facet of your trip.*
- *Social/Political: Your essay should be tied to your interests. An essay on "devotion to environmentalism" carries more weight if it reflects your actions.*
- *Intellectual Interests: Respond to works of a particular author, research in certain areas, places where you have grown and reached beyond your curriculum.*

How long should my essay be?

- *Pay attention to the guidelines provided on the application and keep your essay within these guidelines. If no guidelines are provided, your essay should be at least 2/3 of a page, but no longer than 4 pages.*

What format should I use?

- *Your essay should be neat and readable. Unless the college's application expressly requires that it be handwritten, your essay should be double-spaced on the computer.*

SOME TIPS ON WRITING YOUR ESSAY

- *Be honest*
- *Read the topic question(s) carefully and be sure to respond to the question(s) asked.*
- *Write about a subject or idea with which you are familiar. In other words, personalize your essay.*
- *Make your essay come alive through anecdotes, vivid characters, conversations, comparisons, metaphors, and/or humor.*
- *Be yourself. Do not attempt to use words or ideas that are unfamiliar to you. It usually shows.*
- *Write about the specific rather than the general, the concrete rather than the abstract.*
- *Avoid a "laundry list" of accomplishments. That information is already available elsewhere in your application.*
- *Be neat and proofread, proofread, proofread!*
- *Have someone else proofread it (English teacher, peer, and/or parent)*
- *Avoid trying to be silly, cute or outrageous.*
- *Before beginning to write your essay, brainstorm ideas, then make an outline.*

HELPFUL WEBSITES FOR INFORMATION ON WRITING THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS ESSAY

http://icpac.indiana.edu/publications/infoseries/txt/is-15txt

http://www.petersons.com/ugrad/application/html

www.ivyessays.com

http://world.std.com/~edit/tips6.htm

www.collegeboard.com
click on "Getting into College"

http://www.princetonreview.com/college/apply/articles/process/essayjump.asp

KEEP THE READER IN MIND

Your first goal is to make the reader want to admit you. Therefore, you need to find out what makes your reader "tick" and identify the assumptions and experiences you and the reader share. The reader or admissions officers are looking for students who can handle the academic workload and make a positive contribution to college life. They are particularly impressed with students who have taken the time to learn about their school and can demonstrate that the students will be both happy and productive there. In addition, admissions personnel will react favorably to an application that can demonstrate:

- *A serious intent to pursue a college level education*
- *A genuine desire to attend a particular college*
- *An ability to think clearly, logically, and abstractly*

College admissions personnel are under a great deal of pressure to sift through piles and piles of application forms, transcripts, recommendations, and essays. In fact, it is not unusual for admissions officers to read as many as fifty complete applications a day. Therefore, you must write so that you get your points across quickly and easily. Structure your essays logically, guide your reader from point to point, making it easier for the reader to pay attention and understand the ideas. Without structure, your reader may become confused, lose interest, and stop reading.

To keep busy readers reading, you must design an introduction that first grabs the reader's attention and then tells the reader what is to come. A beginning paragraph that details the purpose and direction of the forthcoming discussion helps admissions officers quickly understand the most essential points and how your ideas are connected throughout the essay. The reader is also more likely to stay "tuned in" if you provide strong transitions and use concrete examples.

Be yourself! Use words that are natural to you and at the same time appropriate to the situation. If humor is your style, be humorous.

USE DESIRABLE TONES

No student would come right out and say to an admissions officer. "I'm terrific," or "You're stupid," or "I'm desperate, please take me." Yet, admissions officers frequently "hear" these messages in the tone of the essay.

Although students do not usually set out to make inappropriate statements, word choice and phrasing often misrepresent their attitudes toward themselves and their reader. When a reader "hears" an inappropriate, negative, or extreme tone, he or she frequently "tunes out" or lowers his or her opinion of the student.

QUESTION	***INTENT OF ESSAY QUESTION***	***SUGGESTIONS OR COMMENTS***
A. "It is our aim to get to know you as well as possible through this application. With this in mind, please describe in detail some special interest, experience, or achievement, or anything else you would like us to know about you. Essays on a personal, local, or national topic that is of particular concern to you are also welcome."	*In essence, this question asks the student to "tell us something about yourself." Since the variety of suitable topics is so broad, the admissions committee is as interested in your choice of topic as it is in what you have to say about it.*	*Be sure to relate your topic to yourself. It's not enough to simply write about political unrest in South America or your involvement in the school play. In all cases, you'll need to show how your experiences have had an effect on you.*
B. "Write an essay that will help us to understand you better as a person and a prospective student."	*This essay has two parts. The first part closely resembles question A. The second part asks students to address the issue of why he or she would be a good candidate for this college.*	*Be careful to answer both parts of the question. Make sure the second part of the essay shows how you and the college are well matched. Refer to the college catalog, brochures, and your notes to help make your answer specific.*
C. "You have an opportunity, if you wish to take advantage of it, to offer any additional information that you believe the committee should consider in reviewing your application."	*This question may be viewed as required or optional depending on the number of essay questions appearing on the application.* *<u>Required:</u> If this is the only essay question on the entire application, be sure to grab this opportunity to add a human dimension to your SAT scores, GPA, and other personal statistics.* *<u>Optional:</u> If your application requires you to write one or more in-depth essays, then you need only respond to this "optional" question if there is some special situation you feel you must explain, such as how a serious illness affected your high school record during your sophomore year. Other situations might include:* *- a divorce in your family* *- a parent losing a job* *- going to a new school*	*While optional questions don't need to be answered for your application to be considered complete, you will want to answer the question if your response can provide additional information that could help the admissions committee know you better and possibly decide in your favor.*