

# Essay Writing for College Applications

## Why do colleges require essays?

Colleges use essays to try and create a personal snapshot of you unobtainable from other parts of the application. Essays tell what you are passionate about, what motivates you, what challenges you have faced, or who you hope to become. At selective colleges, admission officers also use essays to make sure that you can reason through an argument competently, that you can connect a series of thoughts, and that you can arrive at an organized conclusion.

## What role does the essay play in the application process?

While an admissions decision does not hinge on the essay, it certainly can influence the decision making process. A strong essay will capture the attention of the admissions committee. An essay with grammatical errors and spelling mistakes may leave a negative impression.

Your essay deserves effort and attention, but keep in mind that it is only a part of the overall application process. The transcript, course selection, test scores, recommendations, activities, interviews, and any other required materials will all play a part in the final admissions decision.

## Who will read my essay?

At small and/or selective colleges, admissions counselors thoroughly read all required materials that are part of the application. At Lewis & Clark applications are read by at least two people. Your application is first reviewed by the area counselor who will make a recommendation on the application. A second reader will then review the file. If the readers agree, a decision is made. If the readers disagree, the application file goes on to the admissions committee for a final review and decision. As this process unfolds, your essay is read by a diverse group of individuals. While admissions counselors take their jobs seriously, do not feel that you must write a serious essay. Your writing should reflect your voice and your personality. Do keep in mind that admissions committees reflect a wide range of ages, interests, professional experiences, and even senses of humor.

## What kinds of topics do most colleges require?

It is important that you research the essay requirements for every college on your application list. While many colleges will accept a Common Application essay, some colleges have specific essay topics which must be addressed by every applicant. Lewis & Clark will accept one of our topics presented in the application instructions or a topic presented on the Common Application. Here are a few examples of essay topics:

- Describe a specific situation or experience that led you to question your values or change one of your strongly held opinions. How did you change as a result of the experience?
- Discuss some issue of personal, local, national, or international concern and its importance to you.