

## The College Essay

The college essay is an opportunity for the applicant to share more about him/herself with the admission committee. It is one piece of a whole puzzle that comes together to form a picture of the applicant. Below are a few helpful hints to think about when writing:

### A GOOD ESSAY SHOULD:

- ✓ Answer the question at hand- all of it!
- ✓ Give the reader a clear sense of why the writer chose to a particular topic- why it is important to him/her.
- ✓ Show the reader *how the student has grown/changed* as a result of the experience discussed in the essay.
- ✓ Be clearly organized and concise. Avoid “flowery” language and extensive scenic descriptions.
- ✓ Be proofread carefully; spell check will not catch everything.
- ✓ Be re-written several times, and not saved for the last minute!
- ✓ Be written in the writer’s own words and voice. The essay should reveal the writer’s self. A funny person can write a funny essay, but someone who is not should not attempt to be.

### WHEN WRITING A COLLEGE ESSAY, AVOID:

- ✓ Answering only half the question. Don’t just “*indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you...*” without also making sure that you “*...describe that influence.*”
- ✓ Allowing someone else to correct and re-write the essay. Asking for feedback is expected, but the changes must be made by the writer!
- ✓ Using words that are not part of every day vocabulary. This is not an opportunity to practice SAT words or use the thesaurus to “sound smart”.
- ✓ Using the essay as an opportunity to explain a flaw in the writer’s academic record. If something needs to be explained, this should be done elsewhere.
- ✓ Cutting and pasting the same essay to fit every college application, as it usually will not work. The Common Application makes this less of a problem, but avoid inserting the names of colleges in an essay; the wrong essay could end up at the wrong school!
- ✓ Position papers and political hot topics. It is *very* obvious when a student is re-using an essay s/he wrote for a class. Popular topics seem to include: abortion, the war in Iraq, the Presidential election, etc. Also, this may inadvertently offend the reader. Likewise, poetry and creative writing are not useful essays.

### TO TEST THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ESSAY, ASK YOURSELF:

- ✓ What am I trying to say?
- ✓ If I had to summarize the whole essay in two sentences...
- ✓ How does it start and end? Am I still talking about the same thing?
- ✓ Does this really sound like me?
- ✓ What does the reader know about me after reading this?