



Writing your essay

(sometimes called the personal statement)

It's that dreaded word: the essay. Many students wrestle with how to find the right words to describe themselves, to share their achievements and their goals—to put on paper what makes them unique. AND why a college or scholarship funder should choose them.

The best advice: Be yourself. Be real!

Writing the essay.

Before you sit down to write the essay, pull out your list of experiences and review what you've done the last couple of years to develop your education and career goals.

READ the question that the application asks. What does the question ask you to focus on? Always **ANSWER THE QUESTION** that is asked.

Check to see if the essay has a word limit. Sometimes it is a minimum number of words, and sometimes a maximum number of words. Be careful to create your essay to fit the requirement.

Generally, college admissions applications and financial aid applications want you to share your education and career goals in the essay. Here are some common questions to guide you as you write:

- ◆ *Why* do you want to pursue this educational path? Why this career?
- ◆ *How* would attending this college/university, or receiving this scholarship, help you reach those goals?
- ◆ *How* will you use your education or career to make a difference in your community or in the lives of others?

Share personal, *relevant* experiences that have shaped who you are as a person or shaped what you want to do with your life. As you share these experiences, remember to be concise—don't include meaningless or trivial details.

Use good grammar. You want to sound intelligent (of course, you are!). But don't get lost in using a lot of big "smart" words just to use them. Essays that go overboard with big words, or that sound too philosophical, often don't show the real, true person that the applicant is. They can sound like you are trying too hard to impress.

Expect to rewrite your essay a few times. Write it, save it. Let it simmer for a while, and come back and read it in a couple of days so that you can give it a fresh read. When you have it where you think you want it, ask someone else to read it and edit it. Choose someone that you know has good communication skills. You **WANT** someone to catch your mistakes and help you fix them before you submit your essay.

Know when the deadline is, and submit on time!

Use **ACTION** words.

Action words can be verbs, adjectives or adverbs.

Achieved, active, adapted, applied, balanced, caused, completed, created, defined, dependable, determined, earned, energized, examined, experienced, expressed, gained, graduated, inspired, learned, led, managed, motivated, overcome, participated, produced, pursued, responsible, served, steered, studied, tackled, volunteered, worked, won

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