

TIPS

# Essay Writing Do's and Don'ts

A great essay will help you stand out from the other applicants, so take the time to do a good job on it. Check out these tips before you begin:

## DO keep your focus narrow and personal

Your essay must prove a single point. Your main idea should be clear and easily followed from beginning to end. Ask someone to read just your introduction, and then tell you what your essay is about.

(And remember, it's about showing them who you are.)

## DO back up what you say

Develop your main idea with specific facts, events, quotations, examples, and reasons.

**Okay:** "I like to be surrounded by people with a variety of backgrounds and interests"

**Better:** "During that night, I sang the theme song from Casablanca with a baseball coach who thinks he's Bogie, discussed Marxism with a little old lady, and heard more than I ever wanted to know about some woman's gall bladder operation."

## DO give specifics

Avoid clichéd, generic, and predictable writing by using vivid and specific details.

**Okay:** "I have gotten so much out of life through the love and guidance of my family. I feel that many individuals have not been as fortunate; therefore, I would like to expand the lives of others."

**Better:** "My Mom and Dad stood on plenty of sidelines 'til their shoes filled with water or their fingers turned white, or somebody's golden retriever signed his name on their coats in mud. I think that kind of commitment is what I'd like to bring to working with fourth-graders."

## DON'T tell them what you think they want to hear

Admissions officers read plenty of essays about the charms of their university. Bring something new to the table.

## DON'T write a résumé

Don't include information that is found elsewhere in the application. Your essay will end up sounding like an autobiography, travelogue, or laundry list. Yawn.

## DON'T use 50 words when five will do

Eliminate unnecessary words.

**Okay:** "Over the years it has been pointed out to me by my parents, friends, and teachers—and I have even noticed it myself—that I am not the neatest person in the world."

**Better:** "I'm a slob."

## DON'T forget to proofread

Typos and spelling or grammatical errors can be interpreted as carelessness or just bad writing. And don't rely on your computer's spell check.!!

Based on information found in *The College Application Essay*, by Sarah Myers McGinty

TIPS

✓ CHECKLIST

# First Draft Checklist

Before you think you're satisfied with your first draft essay, use this checklist to do some essential "QC."

## The good

- The essay reveals something insightful about yourself or your personality
- Introduction clearly states what the essay is about
- Used imagery to make your story vivid and memorable
- Varied your sentence structure (not all short, not all long, not all starting with "I")
- Used active verbs
- Single focus maintained throughout
- Has the right tone—honest and sincere
- Smooth transition between paragraphs
- Every point supported by examples
- Answered the essay question

## The bad

- No plagiarized material (using another person's words without giving credit)
- No misspelled words (don't rely on spell-check)
- No run-on sentences or other grammatical errors
- Unnecessary words or sentences that do not support the main point
- Wrong facts—e.g., placed city in wrong country, attributed wrong book to author
- Referring to the wrong college if reusing essay from another application

## The ugly

- Clichés or overused catchwords or phrases
- Boring "laundry list" of activities and accomplishments
- Reads like a generic essay—anyone could have written it
- Dumb jokes or gimmicky attempts to be clever
- Sarcasm or flippant tone
- Inappropriate language, slang, or anything in bad taste