

four essentials of college admissions essay writing

College admissions officers look for these four elements in your essay:

You

They want to know who you are as a person. What makes you tick? What do you think about? What makes you an individual? What are the guiding principals that influence your decisions? Who is the person behind the GPA, the test scores, the activities, the mailing address? How can you make sure that your essay reveals who you are as a person, beyond all the things you do?

Genuineness

Your essay needs to sound like you, through and through, so don't use words you wouldn't normally use. Don't try to impress your application reader by using a large vocabulary. Write as yourself, without pretension and without taking yourself too seriously. Make sure that your writing creates the impression that you are sincerely trying to communicate with the reader.

Thoughtfulness

Admissions officers want to make sure that the students they accept are thinking people who learn from their experiences, reflect on life, and have a desire to continue learning. Make sure your writing shows that you reflect upon and learn from your experiences. This may require you to think about things you've never deeply thought about before. Take the time to do this, so that you can show that you're not going through life on auto-pilot.

Surprise

Admissions officers read hundreds, if not thousands, of essays. You want your essay to stand out, to approach its topic in a fresh way. Even though your essay is a writing sample, it doesn't need to sound like an English composition. Have some fun; allow your essay to reveal who you are, to express your unique voice. Approach your topic from an original angle, even if the experience you're writing about seems ordinary.

Why and how do colleges use the essay?

The essay is your chance to "stick out from the crowd," to personalize your application and give the admissions committee a chance to know you. It also gives the college an opportunity to evaluate your "writing ability, motivation, creativity, self-discipline, character, and capacity for growth." Use the essay as an opportunity to showcase yourself and your abilities.

The Handbook for College Admissions, Thomas C. Hayden

The 3 Ts of the essay process

Time

Plan to do several drafts and to beat application deadlines.

Thought

Really THINK about the topic, and remember that the admissions/scholarship committee reads hundreds or thousands of essays, so make it interesting for them.

Thoroughness

Do a complete job. Don't cut corners! Have a polished final product that you are proud of submitting.