

# Secrets to the College Essay...

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**Here are a few tips for developing an essay that conveys your personal qualities.**

**Plan your essays during the summer, before your senior year if you can, or early in your senior year. Allow yourself enough time for all the following steps.**

- Be sure you understand the college's topics, directions and deadlines, and look in its catalog or guidebooks for descriptions of the personal qualities it is looking for. One selective college, for example seeks "candidates whose qualities of intellect, initiative, and energy demonstrate desire for both intellectual and personal fulfillment." An essay for that college should demonstrate and persuade the institution that you have those qualities.
- Before you start your essay, jot down your aspirations and how you think the college will help you meet them. Then develop a personal inventory. Make lists of your civic and school activities, your travels, awards, honors, other accomplishments, work experiences, and any academic or personal shortcoming about yourself. To focus your essay, develop a one-sentence theme from your inventory.
- Think about the form you might use to convey your information. Straight prose is fine, but if your theme leads itself to another approach, try it.
- Now write a draft. Set the draft aside for 24 hours, then read it to spot clichés, triteness, vagueness, dullness, grammatical errors and misspellings. Is your essay focused on your theme, or does it ramble? Is it confusing or boring? Does the introduction "grab" the reader?
- Rewrite your essay based on this evaluation and repeat step 5 as often as necessary to sharpen your essay.
- Ask someone whose opinion you respect to read your essay and to give you his/her candid impressions. Ask for specifics:  
Tell me what you think I'm trying to say...  
How do I come across as a person?  
What parts confuse you?  
Where do I need more details?  
What parts bore you?  
What parts did you like the best?  
*However! Do not let this person rewrite your essay!!!*
- Go back to steps 3, 4, or 5. If this draft is the best you can do, polish it by checking

again for spelling errors, awkward phrasing, inaccurate use age, unnecessary words,  
or anything else that does not sound right to you. Read your essay out loud to locate  
the rough spots.

- Type or word process your essay - unless the college requires a handwritten version – and proofread it to catch typographical errors and any other errors you may have missed.
- Mail your essay in on time and relax. If you have done all of the above, you can be relatively sure your efforts will be noted with appreciation.

### **Some Practical Considerations:**

1. Type your essay or use the computer
2. Double space your essay
3. Check for misspellings
4. Leave space for margins
5. Keep the essay at a moderate length (check with the application)
6. Put your full name and social security number/birth date on all pages
7. You CAN use the same essay for different colleges and universities
8. Start early. Summer before senior year is ideal.