

College Essays' Worst Nightmare

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Your time to shine and market yourself to universities has come! While many colleges and universities aren't expecting applications to be submitted until sometime next year (will we make it that far with the state of 2020?), the most prestigious of schools are looking forward to hearing from you as soon as November 1st. With this in mind during the flurry of recommendation requests, form filling, and stress eating, you will be needing a college essay. Most colleges a strong student from Oak Hills will be applying to will require one, actually. So how does one write a college essay? Here is a chronological guide with tips and tricks to absolutely rock your college essay!

- 1. A topic** is often very hard to come by that hasn't been exhausted. Sports, elderly family members' passing, and the likes have all been beaten beyond "dead horse" status. Many students, when going to write their essays will say, "Nothing has happened to me!" Or more specifically, "Nothing has happened to me *that I can write about.*" This is a common misconception. While many college essays have to do with successes and struggles, it doesn't have to be about such. If you have a curious tale about an invigorating victory or devastating failure, though, there's still an important element you need to identify as well. Growth. No matter if you've had an action packed life or a relatively calm and peaceful existence, you have grown in some fashion. Use this to your advantage. The best essays I have reviewed, written, or scored have been about some form of growth. It can even be over a matter of seconds! The "ah-ha!" moment for students is one universities take pride in and seeing that you are capable of such on your own is almost always a strong candidate for consideration.
- 2. Drafting** the essay can be incredibly difficult to *begin*. In my opinion, I feel as though writing down everything that comes to mind and sorting later is much more manageable than stunting your essay's potential growth to begin. Remember, you can write about numerous subjects and pick your favorites, or you can tie them all together under their underlying themes, if applicable. Don't get caught up in trying to mentally figure out the details of an essay you haven't started. Take time to open a blank document, make a small list of ideas if you prefer, then start typing without looking for grammar mistakes, themeality, or structure. Just write.
- 3. Editing** the essay is where the magic that makes an essay proper happens. After getting all of your words onto the page, you can now go through and make it somewhat academic/professional without losing the personal touch. Look for how you'd like to structure your essay first. Are you telling a story, explaining an idea, or having an internal dialogue? Depending upon what your subject is, you will need to change your poise when writing. Dramatic, emotional pieces will have frequent pauses for increasing distinct phrases' impact, dialogue-focused pieces will have lines in between dialogue and explanations making for a spaced-out and lengthy looking piece, while story-driven essays are generally more blocky with each "act" being put into its own separate

paragraph to make the message you are conveying with each more pronounced. Try to look for awkwardly phrased clauses and sentences next, using punctuation or omitting words to figure out the flow your piece will have. After this, you can lastly go through and swap out certain words to contribute to your overall tone - such as swapping smarts for intelligence - to make a cohesive paper read easily.

4. **Reach out** to others throughout the process. A paper needs to have more than your own set of eyes looking at it in order for you to send it to an institution that will decide a good bit of your future. Take the time to ask friends, teachers, family, and finally yourself how you can improve this paper and how it will read to someone that is not familiar with you in any way, shape, or form. These folks can either verbally suggest changes to you, make comments on your document, or use suggesting features to show what they believe to be better in certain spots throughout your paper. Do not let anyone else change your entire paper, however. This is your chance at the end of the day, no one but you has to carry the responsibility and outcome.
5. **Submitting** can be a pretty nerve-wracking experience. Give your essay one *final* look over, take a deep breath, sit up in your chair and tap the submit button. Seal the deal! You've come this far, you can do it!

Depending upon when you apply, colleges will get back to you a couple months or weeks after you apply. Many colleges seriously consider your essay, so be sure to dedicate a good bit of time to it, but don't exhaust it with a crazy amount of wordsmithing. Your essay should be an extension of yourself! Best of luck with admissions, hopefully your essay will put you in consideration for your dreams! Cheers!