

## HELPFUL TIPS FOR COLLEGE ESSAYS

**Word Choice.** Don't use 50 words when 5 will do.

**Voice.** Use a relaxed conversational style. Be authentic, not superficial.

**Use Active Verbs.** Action verbs make your essay much more lively than passive voice, which come across as cold and detached. For example, "My Botany teacher recommended me for a semester of study at Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania" is much better than "I was recommended for a semester of study at Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania by my Botany teacher."

**Don't Thesaurize your composition.** Big words don't necessarily make good essays.

**Transitions.** To help your essay preserve its logical flow, use transitions. For example, avoid stock phrases such as "in conclusion, in summary, to conclude, etc." Also, avoid clichés or predictable writing.

**Introduction.** Begin with an introduction that surprises your readers and entices them to read beyond the first paragraph. For example, if you are an avid volunteer for the Appalachian Trail Club and you have chosen to write about your latest trip, you could start with a description of the sights and sounds as you move about the forest clearing trails.

Admissions officers will spend 1-2 minutes reading your essay. Let your introduction grab the reader's interest from the beginning. Don't summarize the introduction. In doing so, the admission counselor would have no reason to read the rest of your essay.

**Conclusion.** The conclusion is your last chance to persuade the reader or impress the reader with your qualifications. Avoid writing a summary of what you have written in the essay. Such redundancy is unnecessary.

**Revisions.** Write your draft, put it down, spend some days away from it. Pick it up again. Revise. Seek the assistance of another skilled reader – teacher, counselor, parent, friend. Revise. Revise. Revise.

**Short and Simple Sentences.** According to a recent study at Stanford University, individuals who use complicated language are viewed as less intelligent than individuals who use simpler, more concise language. You want your readers to understand your essay. If you use obscure terms needlessly, they won't be impressed.

**Spell Check.** Don't rely on your computer's spell check. It can miss spelling errors like the ones given below:

“After I graduate **form** high school I plan to work for a nonprofit organization for the summer.”

“From that day on. Daniel was my best **fried**.”

**Focus**

Rather than describing everything you have done with your life, give a full description of one or two items or events. The magic is in the details.

**Disadvantages.** Instead of showing yourself as a victim, focus on how you overcame the situation. Economic disadvantage, immigrant status or family losses can make compelling stories if you concentrate on the positive aspects of overcoming your hardships. If this is part of your own story, tell it.

**Poor Academic Performance.** What happened that contributed to your poor performance and how did you correct it?

**Avoid.** Don't mention GPA's, standardized test scores, academic awards or any other information that may be found on your resume or provided elsewhere in your application package.

*EXAMPLE:*

During my junior year, I played on the tennis team, served on Student Council, maintained a “B+” average, traveled to France for a summer of study and received a “26” on my ACT test.

**Topic.** Will your topic turnoff a large number of people? Stay away from specific religions, political doctrines or controversial opinion.

**Honesty.** Even though you may be tempted to create hardships, it is completely unnecessary.

**Originality.** Develop you main idea with vivid and specific facts, events, quotations and examples.

*Overused*

“I worked long hours for many weeks to train for my gymnastics competition.”

*Better*

Every morning I awoke at 5:00 a.m. to sweat, tears, and blood as I trained on the Uneven bars hoping to bring the state gymnastics trophy to my hometown.”

