

Writing the Essay

Essays are your opportunity to share the story your GPA and extracurricular activities don't tell. Admissions officers want to get to know you as a person, so make sure to let your personality shine!

Tip	Don'ts	Do's
Research essay requirements	Do not wait until the last minute to find out if you need to write an essay.	Check early to see what each college on your shortlist requires. Take note of essay topics, word limits, and formatting requirements.
Choose a topic that will highlight your strengths	Do not focus on the great aspects of the college, the amount of dedication it takes to be a doctor, or the number of extracurricular activities you have done.	Share your personal story and thoughts. Tell a specific story that highlights your best qualities.
Keep your focus narrow and personal	Do not try to cover too many topics. This will make the essay sound like a laundry list that does not provide any details about you.	Focus on one aspect of yourself so the readers can learn more about who you are. Remember that readers must be able to understand your main idea and follow it from beginning to end. Ask a parent or teacher to read just your introduction and tell you what they think your essay is about.
Show, don't tell	Do not state something about yourself rather than sharing a story. For example, saying, "I like to surround myself with people with a variety of backgrounds and interests," instead of describing a story that shows this to be true.	Include specific details, examples, stories, and reasons to develop your ideas. For the example to the left, describe a situation when various types of people surrounded you instead. What did you do? What did you take away from the experience?
Use your own voice	Do not rely on phrases or ideas that people have used many times before. These could include statements like, "There is so much suffering in the world that I feel I have to help people."	Write about an experience that you had and how it made you take action or how it changed your thinking.
Proofread	Do not turn your essay in without proofreading it or relying only on your computer's spell check to catch mistakes.	Ask a teacher or parent to proofread your essay to catch mistakes. You should also ask the person who proofreads your essay if the writing sounds like you.

Remember to bring your essay with you to your school's Apply Yourself Florida College Application Campaign event! You can bring it on a USB drive, or email the essay to yourself.

Writing Your Personal Statement

Writing the Essay

Step 1: Review the list of questions below and come up with a few answers. This will help you come up with topics to write about.

HOME AND FAMILY

- Have you ever lived outside the United States/in another country?
- Are you the first person in your family to go to college?
- Does your family speak any language(s) other than English?
- Do you live in a non-traditional family?
- Do your parents have unusual jobs?
- Did you move a lot growing up?
- Do you live in a town with a unique setting?
- Do you look up to anyone in your family?
- Has your family faced any hardships?

EDUCATION

- Have you won any awards and/or recognitions?
- Have you worked on a special class project?
- Do you have a favorite class that relates to your intended college major?
- Have you had any hard classes that you were determined to do well in?
- Do you have someone at school you look up to?
- Has your school gone through any hard times lately?
- Are you part of a special college-going or gifted program?

ACTIVITIES

- Do you play a sport?
- Are you part of a school organization?
- Are you a leader of a team or club?
- Were you an underdog?
- Do you perform community service outside of school?
- Have you made any contributions to your community?

HOBBIES

- Do you play an instrument?
- Do you do anything creative?
- Do you have a favorite book?
- Do you have a role model?
- Do you have a favorite quote?

EVERYTHING ELSE – UNIQUENESS!

- Do you have anything about you that makes you stand out?
- Have you ever been outside the United States?

Step 2: Write down a paragraph about yourself as it relates to your answers from Step 1. It doesn't have to be perfect; it's just an exercise to help you get started.

Step 3: Search essay prompts for the college(s) you will apply to. Jot down the answers below.

Name of college/university: _____
Prompt/topic: _____
Word/page count: _____
Any additional instructions: _____

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Step 4: Refer back to your answers from Step 1 to see which ones best fit the essay prompt(s) of your chosen college(s). Start outlining what you will discuss in each paragraph of your essay:

Paragraph 1: _____
Paragraph 2: _____
Paragraph 3: _____
Paragraph 4: _____
Paragraph 5: _____

Step 5: Begin the first draft of your essay.