

DO:**1. Answer the questions**

Carefully read the questions you are asked, and be sure to answer them.

2. Tell a story

Help your readers get to know you as a person by sharing examples and anecdotes to illustrate your qualities, strengths, and experiences. Use concrete details to help the committee members imagine you as a person.

3. Be yourself

Imagine you're having a conversation with the admissions committee. Write in a formal, but conversational style. Don't try to impress by using an excessively academic tone or overly complicated language. If you're in doubt, ask someone who knows you well, "Does this sound like me?"

4. Be specific about why you want to attend your chosen college or how you will benefit from a particular scholarship

For admission and transfer essays, be sure to discuss your academic and career goals and how this college will help you achieve them. Provide concrete examples and details. Research the college, but be careful not to just quote or paraphrase the website or brochure. Instead, specifically address aspects of the college or its programs that truly appeal to you and will help you meet your goals.

For scholarship essays, in addition to discussing your academic and career goals, address how this money will help you achieve those goals. Be as specific as possible. Will you use the money for tuition? Books? A laptop to help you complete assignments? Transportation?

5. Show how you will contribute to the college

Colleges seek students who will contribute to the academic and cultural life of their campuses. If you have contributed to your college, high school, or community through tutoring, service work, or extra-curricular activities, share some examples.

6. Address any low grades or other issues directly

Take responsibility for your record and explain what steps you have taken to improve your academic performance. It's fine to discuss any challenges you have faced, but don't use them as an excuse.

7. Proofread!

An essay with even one grammatical mistake or spelling error will affect the impression you make.

DO NOT:

1. Do not exceed the word limit

Some colleges will not read an essay if it goes over their word limit. Even if there is no specified limit, try to keep your essay to one-and-a-half to two pages, double-spaced.

2. Do not badmouth your current college

Rather than speaking negatively about your current college, show how you will make a *positive* contribution to your new college.

3. Do not use vague, abstract language and clichés

“I am hard working. I want to make the world a better place.” While being hardworking and wanting to make the world a better place are honorable, abstract sentences like these do not give the reader any sense of the person who wrote them. These sentences could apply to almost anyone!

Don't just *tell* the reader that you are hardworking, caring, or intellectually curious; instead, *show* these qualities through specific examples and anecdotes. Create a compelling picture that will help the committee see who you are as a person and what motivates and inspires you.

4. Do not stand out for the wrong reasons

Some students try too hard to be creative and memorable by using gimmicks or shock tactics. Avoid gimmicks, controversial topics, and overly personal experiences in your essay. You *do* want to give the readers a sense of who you are, but you *don't* want the readers to feel insulted, disturbed, or worried about your ability to face the pressures of college. Also, be cautious about using humor in your essay. We don't all share the same sense of humor, and you don't want to risk offending your readers.

5. Do not summarize your résumé or transcript in the essay

Don't try to include every accomplishment from your résumé or every class on your transcript. Instead, choose one or two specific experiences that illustrate something important about you, your personality, your life experiences, and/or the lessons you have learned.

6. Do not submit an essay with errors

Read your essay several times before you submit it. Remember, careless mistakes may give the impression that you didn't care enough to take the time to review your work.

7. Do not forget to come to the College Writing Center!

We're here to help with any stage of the process, from brainstorming to final draft!