



7 Tips for Parents and Students to Master College Essays

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For some students, one of the most intimidating parts of the college application process is writing the application essay. And many scholarship applications—for both school and outside scholarships—require an essay as well. Here are some tips for both students and parents on mastering the college essay.

JULIE:

Writing a scholarship essay will fall mainly to the student, but as a parent there are ways to support and assist your child with this important task.

1. Research: Before your high school student attempts to begin an essay, it's helpful to do some general research on what makes a good essay. One book that we found full of great information was Ben Kaplan's *How to Go to College Almost for Free*. He devotes an entire chapter to writing effective scholarship essays.

[Follow these [10 Twitter handles](#) in your scholarship search.]

Also, help your child research the specific schools being applied to and scholarships being applied for. Know as much as possible about what the person or committee who will be reading the essay is looking for.

2. Brainstorm topics: Coming up with ideas for an essay is often the hardest part. Sit down with your student and, together, make a list of all the experiences he or she has had in high school. Write down everything, no matter how small. And don't limit yourselves to school activities. Include work experiences, church involvement, and community work. These things should help spark ideas for essay topics.

[Use these 7 tips to [jump start the college application process](#).]

3. Proofread your student's work: As a parent, you shouldn't be involved in writing your child's essays, but every writer needs a good editor. Proofread your student's essays and encourage him or her to seek out trusted teachers and counselors to do the same.

LINDSEY:

1. Be specific: College admissions representatives receive hundreds of essays each week, and I'd guess that the first ones to hit the trash are those that are too general. Avoid broad statements about yourself.

Instead of saying you are a natural leader, write about a time when you were faced with a leadership challenge. Instead of saying you are organized, write about how your organizational skills helped you to complete a project.

2. Make it personal: Include personal anecdotes and examples of whatever is unique about you. In my college essays, I wrote about things like my quirky family and the many personalities of the high school newspaper staff.

Use descriptive language and imagery so that admissions officers get a feel for who you are and what your life is like.

3. Stay narrow: Going in-depth on one or two ideas is often better than trying to fit all your accomplishments into one essay. Use your résumé to list everything you've done. The essay, on the other hand, should give extra insight into one or two of your most meaningful experiences.

[Find out why [short and concise essays work best](#).]

4. Get the easy things right: Don't give college admissions representatives reasons to disregard your essay. Stay within their word limit; turn everything in on time; and stick to the essay prompt.

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