

WRITING AN EFFECTIVE ESSAY

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SESSION OVERVIEW

ADMISSION OFFICE PERSPECTIVE

SCHOOL COUNSELOR PERSPECTIVE

Why essays important in the admissions process?

How can school counselors help?

How admissions officers read your essay and what do they look for?

Getting started strategies

How can you write your best college essay?

Before you submit do's and don't.

ADMISSIONS PERSPECTIVE

Section 1

Tell Us Your Story: Writing Your
Best Personal Essay

What Is A Personal Essay?

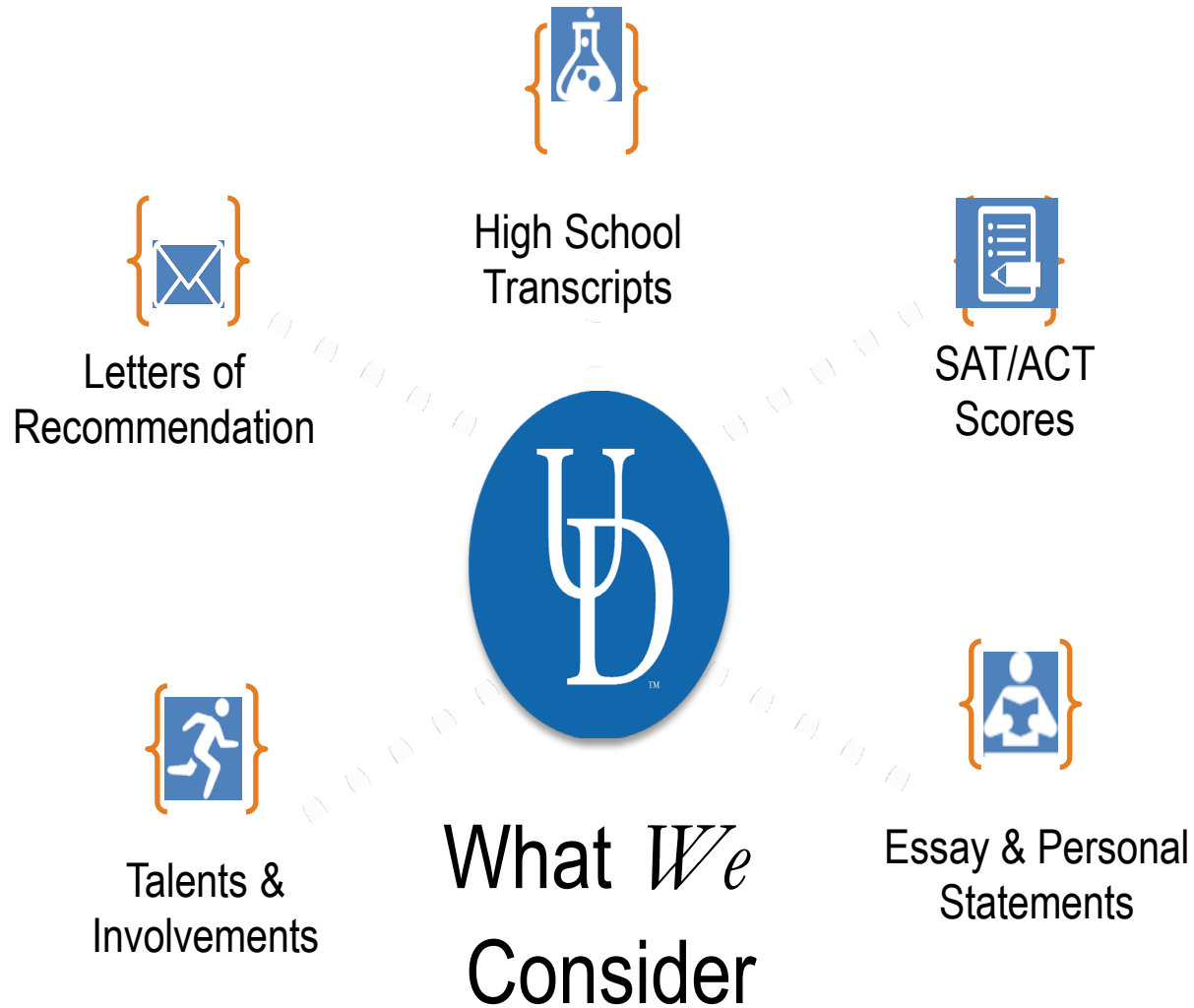
DEFINITION

A written statement colleges may require students to submit as part of their application process.

Some colleges offer applicants specific questions to answer, while others simply ask applicants to write personal statements about themselves.

- Provides complete control over the message you want to convey
- How you present yourself to others
- Highlights your personality and your values

How Essays Are Considered In Admissions



How Decisions Are Processed

Applications received

Applicants file the online Common Application by Jan. 15 and submit transcripts, test scores and recommendation letters. All materials are collected in an electronic file.



Applications read

Admissions officers read application files and evaluate course selection rigor, grades, SAT or ACT scores, class rank, recommendations, extra-curricular activities and more. Files are either denied, placed in a yes pool or submitted for committee review.



Committee reviews

A committee deliberates borderline cases, considering academic strengths and weaknesses, personal qualities and obstacles that students may have faced. Applications are labeled no, yes, wait-list or possible.



Final decisions made

Admissions leaders review the yes pool, predict how many will enroll, consider the financial aid budget and other factors. The university then notifies students of final decisions.

Students offered admission must decide by May 1 whether to accept. If necessary, the university will offer admission to some on the waiting list.

*These students were admitted through an early decision program that requires them to enroll if offered admission. This program locks in students before the regular admission cycle.

Source: George Washington University

Nick Anderson and Cristina Rivero/The Washington Post

Where Essays Matter In College Admissions

- **Capacity-driven majors** (i.e. Nursing, Engineering, OT, etc.)
- **Selective programs** (Honors and Distinguished Scholars)
- **Borderline candidates** (borderline grades and/or test scores) for admission
- **Test optional students** (Delawareans only)
- **Profile stories** (i.e. stories highlighted by UD leadership)
- **Scholarship opportunities** (Distinguished Scholars, etc.)

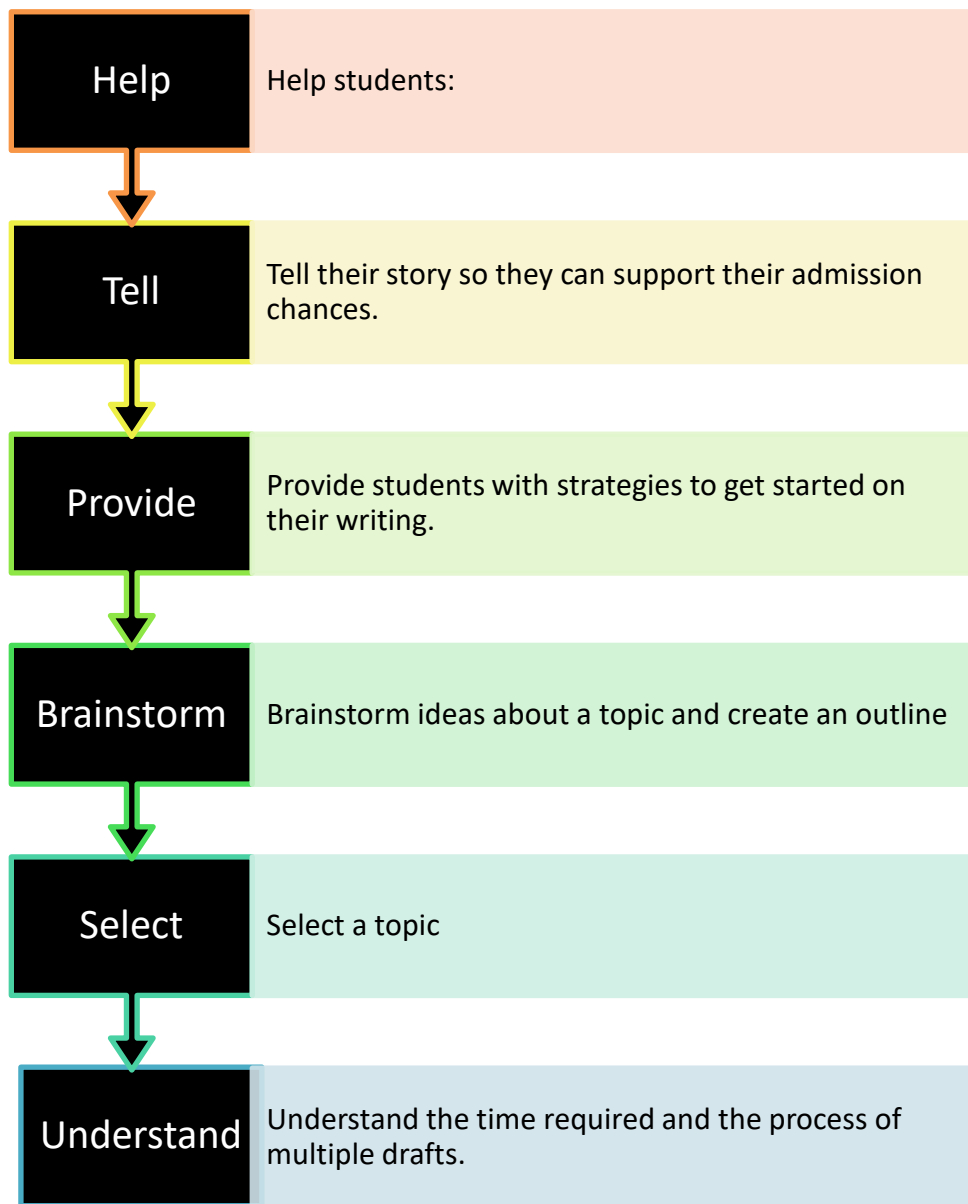
Counselor Perspective

Section 2





Role Of The School Counselor



Helping Students Get Started

Opening Paragraph Tips

Opening
Paragraph
Tips

Attention
Grabber

Build
Excitement

Make the
reader want
to read on

I have them
work on this
first



Brainstorming Prompts

Telling Your Story Ideas

Describe something you achieved

Describe something that happened to you

Describe a challenge you overcame

Provide Examples

Describe how you felt in a certain situation

Explain something you did in a particular space

Share a lesson learned

Share your interest in a certain field

Describe an achievement or event that best reflects who you are as a person.

TELL YOUR STORY!
Convince them to admit you.

Word Count
500 – 650 words

SHARE WHO YOU ARE!!!!!!



Helping Students Get Started

School Counselor Strategies



Partner With English Teachers



Writing Workshops With Student Teachers



Ask students to complete 3 drafts



Start junior year



Provide students with a list of topics from college websites



Senior Conference

Writing Tips

The essay should reveal who you are as a person --- what you think, what you like, what you value, personal strengths.

Remember – this is not an autobiography. It is a snapshot of you in 500 words or less.

The opening sentence should grab the readers attention

If you could speak directly to the admissions office what would you say to make sure you were admitted.

Use concrete examples that demonstrate characteristics or traits, not just stating what you do or have achieved.

Check Your Writing Skills -
The essay also is being judged on how well you write because writing is an important component of college academics.



EXAMPLE: COMMON APP ESSAY

Section 3

Some students have a background or story that is so central to their identity that they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

When I was two years old my parents realized I wasn't meeting certain milestones as a child. They questioned the doctor on a regular checkup in regards to my speech delay as well as my dislike of touch, loud noises, and eye contact. The doctor told my parents how to get started with help for me. Eventually a speech therapist came to my home once a week to work with me and teach my parents how to understand and work through my problems. This process went on for a year until I was three and went into the preschool disabled program. There I had a speech therapist as well as an occupational therapist work with me during the day. I improved on speech and worked through my sensory issues and was able to enter into a regular Kindergarten class with no aides. During grade school, I did well in academics and participated in activities such as T-ball, karate classes, and piano lessons. I seemed to have overcome my speech delay and sensory issues, but may have developed another problem.

Between nine and thirteen years of age (from 4th to 8th grade) I had a hard time finding friends. Fitting in was hard to do, especially in middle school since there were new students from other towns. It didn't bother me all that much, although there were times where I did feel a bit awkward and lonely. I joined the track team briefly, though I quit because I felt nervous and uncomfortable around my classmates. Most of the time people would just ignore me which made it harder for me to reach out and socialize. My parents were concerned and the doctors determined through their analysis that I have "slight" Asperger's syndrome. Both the doctors and my parents agreed that I should challenge myself by joining clubs in order to break through this barrier.

In 9th grade I joined the Latin club, but I was still too nervous to join the Latin Cretamen team. It wasn't until 10th grade that I joined the team because I worked myself up attempting to have more courage. After practicing really hard, my Cretamen team went on to compete in the state finals at Princeton University, where we went on to win second place. On top of this, I even won third place in the state for creating a limerick. Both of these accomplishments made me feel like I was a part of something and overall made me feel accepted. In addition to these two activities, I volunteered at St. John of God in Westville, NJ this past summer. This is the same place that I went to when I was little before moving on to the preschool disabled program in my district. During my volunteer time, I helped adults with disabilities in their daily work. I came to realize I wasn't just helping them, they were helping me with my social skills. Since then I felt I gained enough confidence to join the American Red Cross in my community. I have recently been trained to assist during a blood drive and continue to challenge myself by interacting with my fellow members. I also continue to be a member of my Latin club and Cretamen team where I enjoy activities and try to open up more with my classmates.

Throughout my life I have tried to gain acceptance and am still working to fully meet that goal. My social awkwardness and the difficulties I face each day may seem simple to overcome for some people, but to me it is extreme. I plan to go to a four-year college to major in Biochemistry and possibly continue my education further. I am determined to persevere in socializing more with people as well as feel proud of myself.

Evaluate The Essay

Score	5	4	3	2	1
Answers the Question	Absolutely	Clearly	Adequately	Partly	Off-Topic
Use of Example(s)	Clearly appropriate	Appropriate	Adequate	Needs Improvement	Little or No Evidence
Specificity	Paints Pictures with Words	Specific	Vague or Wordy	Very Vague	Overly Vague and Repetitive
Grammar	Few or None	Generally Free of Errors	Some Errors	Accumulation of Errors	Errors Obscure Meaning
Style and Wording	Elegant and Powerful	Smooth & Pleasant	Clear & Readable	Awkward At Times	Difficult to Understand

Closing Reminders

Section 4

Essay Reflection Tips

REMEMBER

Don't share
info that is
on the
already on
the
application.

Be genuine
Don't make
up stuff.

Don't use
slang.

Don't try to
flatter.

Don't trust
spell check.
Read and
reread.

STRONG
opening
statement.

ADMISSIONS Takeaway Points

- Pick a prompt that best demonstrates the experiences that have defined you
- Utilize your support system (i.e. proofread, brainstorm)
- Reveal yourself (but to an appropriate extent)