

# **EFFECTIVE COLLEGE ESSAY WRITING**

## **Essay Assistance**

[www.collegeanswer.com](http://www.collegeanswer.com)  
[www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)  
[www.collegeview.com](http://www.collegeview.com)  
[www.kaplan.com](http://www.kaplan.com)  
[www.nacacnet.org](http://www.nacacnet.org)  
[www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com)  
[www.princetonreview.com](http://www.princetonreview.com)  
[www.xap.com](http://www.xap.com)

The purpose of the college essay is to enable the admissions representatives to learn more about you. A well-written essay will enable representatives to see you as a person, rather than just as a GPA and SAT score. The essay will provide insight about your experiences, personality, and values. It could be used to detail important experiences and circumstances that profoundly affected your life, personal growth, and even your school performance.

Most colleges require essays of 500 words. This is approximately two (2), double-spaced sides of paper with a regular 12 point-sized font, one and one quarter (1¼) inch left and right side margins, and one (1) inch top and bottom margins.

## **Six Common Essay Topics**

1. Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.
2. Discuss an issue of personal, local, national, or international concern and its importance to you.
3. Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.
4. Describe a character in fiction, an historical figure, or a creative work (as in art, music, science, etc.) that has had an influence on you, and explain that influence.
5. A range of academic interests, personal perspectives, and life experiences add much to the educational mix. Given your personal background, describe an experience that illustrates what you would bring to the diversity in a college community, or an encounter that demonstrated the importance of diversity to you.
6. Topic of your choice.

## **EFFECTIVE COLLEGE ESSAY WRITING continued**

### **Pre-Writing**

- 1. Don't just read the question-- read beyond it.** Interpret the question and decide what information the admissions committee is seeking. You must look beyond the surface. This may be the most important task before writing down your ideas.
- 2. Write about what you know. YOU!** Don't try and write about subjects with which you are not familiar. Now is not the time to do a research paper.
- 3. Be unique.** Brainstorm many ideas to find your most interesting and creative perspectives. Remember to find ideas that belong uniquely to you so that your essay does not remind the admissions committees of the thousands of other essays they have read. Everyone is "unique," but you want to "stand out" and distinguish yourself from all the other applicants!
- 4. Decide on a topic or thesis that will answer the essay question.** This will keep you focused on the question topic.
- 5. Know your audience.** Admissions representatives are judging you. Don't annoy, anger, antagonize, insult, or confuse them. Remember that all attempts at humor are NOT funny and satire is more difficult to write than it appears to be.
- 6. Admissions reps are people, too.** Your essay will be more effective and memorable if it affects them emotionally.
- 7. The essay is a press release and marketing tool.** Use it to develop the image that you want the admissions committee to have of you. Make a list of your best, most impressive, or unique qualities. Don't try to re-invent yourself or try to create a false image of yourself. The truth is always more interesting (and fabrications are easy to detect.) It may be helpful to ask your family, teachers, or friends about how they perceive you and to tell you about your best attributes.
- 8. Write an outline.** Use this as a road map for your essay. An outline will keep you moving on course and in the right direction. It will also allow you to see how your ideas flow. You can fill in the details at a later time.
- 9. Consult the experts.** Use writing guides ("The Elements of Style" by William Strunk, Jr. or "The New York Public Library Writer's Guide to Style and Usage") to check your grammar, punctuation, word usage, etc.

## **EFFECTIVE COLLEGE ESSAY WRITING continued**

### **Writing**

1. **Make a great first impression.** Be aware that the first impression is a lasting one. Write a great introductory paragraph. Use a “grabber” to get their attention. Also, make a strong finish by writing an excellent conclusion.
2. **Actions speak louder than words.** Don’t brag. Use vivid detail to illustrate a picture that demonstrates your strengths and uniqueness. For example, describe how hard you have worked to overcome obstacles and achieve your goals, instead of telling the representatives about your greatness.
3. **Follow the K.I.S.S. Method. Keep It Short and Sweet.** Keep the essay “flowing” and your actions and experiences “moving” by writing shorter, direct sentences that are “to the point.”
4. **Watch your tone!** The tone is the underlying message of the essay which is written “between the lines.” Your essay should exert confidence, yet humility. Be sincere and humble.
5. **Don’t be repetitive, drawn-out, or boring.** Keep the action alive and moving. Use your outline as a guide.
6. **Don’t re-write your resume or list of activities.**
7. **Improperly used words do not impress.** Use a thesaurus judiciously, rather than capriciously. See? Inappropriate wording breaks the readers’ flow. In other words, use a thesaurus carefully, rather than carelessly.
8. **Start early and be patient.** A good essay will usually require at least **two** revisions. Have teachers, counselors, and your family members help you perfect your essays.

### **Editing**

When proofing your essay, try to look through the eyes of the admissions representatives. Are you telling them what you want? Will they interpret what you are writing differently than what you want them to understand?

1. **Sentence:** Are your sentences clear? Do they use vivid, image-forming language?
2. **Paragraphs:** Are they organized in a way that they create a smooth flow of ideas?
3. **Structure:** Does your essay accomplish and state what you intend it to?

### **IMPORTANT:**

Proofread! Proofread! Proofread! (for spelling, grammatical, and content related errors.)

Do not rely on spelling and grammatical checks on your computer. These features will not identify incorrect word usage due to typing errors (ex. “form” and “from”).

## **SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS WRITING**

The purpose of a short answer question is to elicit a response about a specific topic. You may use some of the techniques for writing an essay, but remember that most responses to short answer questions are only 150 – 200 words, which is less than one typewritten side of paper. Like your essays, these questions are an important part of the application and should be reviewed by your teachers. Short answer questions may also be part of a supplemental application.

### **Examples of Short Answer Questions:**

1. Please briefly elaborate on one of your activities (extracurricular, personal activities, or work experience). Attach your response on a separate sheet (150 words or fewer).
2. Tell us about the academic areas which interest you most and your reasons for applying to Brown.

# **THE COLLEGE RESUME**

You should also submit a resume to colleges. It's very impressive! It is a great means to highlight and organize your education, experience, and accomplishments within a one or two page format. You may use the following format to design your resume.

## **Resume Advice and Assistance**

[www.businessweek.com](http://www.businessweek.com)

[www.hotjobs.com.com](http://www.hotjobs.com.com)

[www.monster.com](http://www.monster.com)

[www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com)

[www.webresume.com](http://www.webresume.com) (design a resume online)

If you have access to a computer with Microsoft Word you can find a helpful template to write a resume:

1. Click "Start" → All Programs
2. "New Office Document" (on top of the pull-down menu)
3. "Other Documents." You may choose any of the resumes or use the "Resume Wizard" for assistance.
4. You may also use a normal Word document for the resume.

## **Use the following guidelines:**

### ***Education:***

Write the name of your high school. Include your approximate cumulative average (the average that you have attained after your junior year of high school) and your expected date of graduation.

### ***Honors/Awards:***

List any awards and honors you have received starting with the most recent honors and/or awards.

### ***Advanced Placement & College-Level Coursework***

List all A.P. and college-level coursework and the institution that granted the credit (i.e. College Now courses)

### ***Extra-Curricular Activities:***

List any school and/or extra-curricular activities, including positions held.

Write all of your extra-curricular experiences and indicate the most recent position and experience first. Describe each experience beginning with the "power verbs." See next page for a list of "power verbs."

### ***Internship Experience:***

Follow same guidelines as "*Extra-Curricular Activities.*"

### ***Volunteer Experience:***

Follow same guidelines as "*Extra-Curricular Activities.*"

### ***Work Experience:***

Follow same guidelines as "*Extra-Curricular Activities.*"

## THE “COLLEGE” RESUME continued

### **Power Verbs:**

accelerated	collected	established	launched	rehabilitated
accommodated	compared	evaluated	led	remodeled
accomplished	compiled	examined	linked	repaired
achieved	composed	excelled	maintained	reported
acquired	computed	executed	marketed	represented
acted	consolidated	exercised	measured	researched
activated	constructed	expanded	mediated	resolved
adapted	contracted	expedited	modernized	restored
added	contributed	extracted	modified	revamped
adjusted	converted	facilitated	monitored	reviewed
administered	cooperated	familiarized	motivated	revised
admitted	coordinated	fashioned	multiplied	revitalized
advanced	counseled	finalized	negotiated	revived
advised	created	forecasted	operated	scheduled
aided	customized	formulated	orchestrated	served
analyzed	debugged	fostered	organized	set goals
appointed	dedicated	founded	originated	settled
apportioned	delegated	fulfilled	performed	shaped
apprised	deliberated	guaranteed	persuaded	solicited
approved	demonstrated	generated	pioneered	solved
arranged	designated	grew	planned	sought
assembled	designed	guided hired	polished	spearheaded
assessed	determined	identified	prepared	spoke
assigned	developed	illustrated	prescribed	stimulated
assisted	devised	implemented	processed	streamlined
attained	diagnosed	improved	procured	strengthened
augmented	directed	improvised	produced	studied
authored	displayed	increased	programmed	submitted
authorized	drafted edited	influenced	projected	summarized
balanced	educated	informed	promoted	supervised
bolstered	elevated	initiated	publicized	supplemented
boosted	elicited	innovated	queried	sustained
brainstormed	employed	inspired	raised	synthesized
budgeted	empowered	instituted	rated	systematized
built calculated	enabled	instructed	realized	tailored
catalogued	encouraged	integrated	recommended	trained
chaired	engineered	interpreted	recorded	transformed
charted	enhanced	interviewed	recruited	translated
clarified	enlarged	introduced	rectified	updated
classified	enlisted	invented	refined	upgraded
coached	enriched	judged	referred	validated
collaborated	envisioned	justified	reformed	verified
			regulated	wrote

Source: <http://careerservices.rutgers.edu/careerservicesguide/verbs.html>

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# SAMPLE COLLEGE RESUME

**Student's Name**  
**Street Address**  
**City, State, Zip**  
**Phone Number**  
**Email**

**EDUCATION**  
**Fall 20XX-**  
**Present**

Name of High School  
Expected date of graduation: June 20XX  
Cumulative Average 90.12

**HONORS**

- English Department Award
- Math Department Award

**ADVANCED PLACEMENT & COLLEGE-LEVEL COURSEWORK**

- "Introduction to English Composition", Lehman College, NY
- "World Civilization 1"

**EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

- High School Student Government (2 years)
- High School Varsity Basketball (1 year)

**INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE**

**Summer 20XX**

Hudson River Park Conservatory, NY  
*Intern*

- Educated visitors regarding the local environment
- Assisted staff with collecting biological samples

**VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE**

**20XX-present**

Saint Barnabus Hospital, N.Y.  
*Recreation Volunteer*

- Organized recreational activities for elderly patients
- Assisted nurses with distributing meals

**WORK EXPERIENCE**

**Summers 20XX**  
**and 20XX**

Red Apple Development Center, N.Y.  
*Teacher's Assistant*

- Promoted effective classroom management strategies for 25 elementary school children
- Provided tutorial services to students
- Helped plan and supervise recreational activities

**SKILLS**

- Fluency in Spanish
- Knowledgeable of Microsoft Office: MS Word, MS Excel