

Learning More About the College Application Essay

What is The Essay All About?

- Telling them who you are, not what you've done
- Gives the admissions officers an inside look into who you are besides your grades and scores
- About conveying key qualities about yourself that may not be obvious otherwise

Suggestions From an Admissions Officer for International Students

- Don't be afraid to write about your everyday life. It may seem uninteresting to you, but that doesn't mean it will be the same for the admissions officer.
- Show how you stand out from other people in your community.
- Know why you want to go to college abroad. How will it impact your goals? What influenced the decision?

Further Suggestions: Questions to Consider

- How have people in your community responded to your educational goals and
- Have you overcome odds to reach the level of education that you have?
- What further obstacles lie in your path?
- How is education viewed in your family? Your culture?
- What is it like to be an educated male/female in your culture?

Typical Questions: “Tell us about yourself...”

- Gives the school a chance to know you better and see how you portray yourself
- Examples
 - “Please complete a one-page personal statement and submit it with your application.”
 - “How would you describe yourself as a human being? What quality do you like best in yourself and what do you like least? What quality would you most like to see flourish and which would you like to see wither?”
 - “Describe the most challenging obstacle you have overcome, its impact on you, and what you learned from the situation.”

Typical Questions: “Why our college?”

- Essay about your goals and your commitment to your choice of school or career
- You should have a clear idea about why the college is a good fit for you, what type of students are there, and what has led to your college aspirations.
- Examples:
 - "Why is [university name] a good college choice for you?"
 - "Please tell us about your career goals and any plans you may have for graduate study."
 - "Tell us about yourself, your reasons for applying here, and your reasons for seeking a college education."
 - "Describe your reasons for selecting [university name] and your personal and professional goals and plans for after college."
 - "Please relate your interest in studying at [university name] to your future goals."

Typical Questions: “Be Creative”

- These essays evaluate who you are through your response to a more creative question
- Examples
 - “Take a photograph of something that has impacted your life’s goals and tell us why.”
 - “If you had to put five items into a time capsule to be opened a century from now, what would they be? Why would you choose them?”
 - “Do you believe there's a generation gap? Describe the differences between your generation and others.”
 - “Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.”

Steps From *The College Application Essay*

- **Step 1: Think about yourself**

What are your strengths and weaknesses?
What are your best qualities? What kind of person are you: An intellectual? A creative type? Curious? Passionate? Determined?

Steps From *The College Application Essay*

- **Step 2: Choose a positive quality you'd like to convey to the admission committee**
Don't pick an event or something you've done. President of the Nuclear Awareness Club is not a personal quality. Focus on a quality of your mind or of your character. Complete this sentence: "I am a very _____ person."

Steps From *The College Application Essay*

- **Step 3: Tell a story**

Set a timer for 20 minutes. Pretend you're taking an exam at high school and the question is, "Tell a story about an experience or time when you showed you were a very _____ person."

Use the characteristic you identified in Step 2.

Write or type non-stop for 20 minutes; force yourself to keep telling the story and what it reveals until the timer goes DING.

Some Internet Resources

- Sample Essays:
http://www.internationalstudent.com/essay_writing/college_essay.shtml
- Essay Writing Tips:
http://www.internationalstudent.com/essay_writing/writing_tips.shtml
<http://www.review.com>
- Use Search Engine: College essay tips, sample college essays, college applications essays, college essays for international students

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

21G.034 / CMS.930 Media Education and the Marketplace
Fall 2005

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.