



The STEM Academy at Showalter

"Unlocking Young Minds for the Future"

WRITING THE COLLEGE ESSAY

GPA and SAT Scores are only a piece of your puzzle. Most colleges require one "Personal statement" or college essay of about 650 words. Some schools ask for one or two additional shorter answer essays. The essay is a way that you can help to stand out from the pack of other college applicants. It is an opportunity to present your most important strengths, particularly those not listed on your transcript. And the bonus of doing a good job is an increased chance of admission, especially if you are on the academic borderline! The essay is your single greatest opportunity to distinguish yourself as an individual by **sharing who you are, what you have learned, and what motivates you.**

ESSAY WRITING TIPS

Choose a Topic That Will Highlight You

- **Don't** focus on the great aspects of a particular college. Schools already know their strengths. Don't focus on your GPA, SAT scores or the number of extracurricular activities you took part in during high school. Schools can see this information on your transcript and resume.
- **Do** share your personal story and thoughts. Take a creative approach and highlight areas that aren't covered in other parts of the application.

Stay Focused

- **Don't** try to cover too many topics. This will make the essay sound like a résumé that doesn't provide any details about you.
- **Do** focus on one aspect of yourself so the readers can learn more about who you are. Remember that the readers must be able to find your main idea and follow it from beginning to end.
- **Do** make sure you answer the question that is asked.

Show, Don't Tell

- **Don't** simply state a fact to get an idea across, such as "I like to surround myself with people with a variety of backgrounds and interests."
- **Do** include specific details, examples, reasons and so on to develop your ideas. For the example above, describe a situation when you were surrounded by various types of people. What were you doing? Whom did you talk with? What did you take away from the experience?

Allow Plenty of Time to Edit

- **Don't** write one draft of your college admissions essay and think it will be ready to send.
- **Do** start by writing a rough draft. Don't worry about quality at this stage. After you've completed your rough draft, take some time away from it and start again with fresh eyes. When you are editing your admissions essay, don't look at particulars like spelling and grammar; rather, look at the college admissions essay as a whole. Find your essay's weaknesses and work on those.

- **Do** ask a teacher or trusted adult to read your work and provide feedback on your ideas and writing. Professional writers have many people read their work before they get published. You should too.

Proofread Your Work

- **Don't** turn your essay in without proofreading it, and don't rely only on your computer's spell check to catch mistakes. A spell-check program will miss typos like these:
 - "After I graduate *form* high school, I plan to get a summer job."
 - "From that day on, Daniel was my best *fried*."
- **Do** proofread. Ask a teacher, parent or other adult to proofread your essay to help you catch mistakes.