

## **College Essay Overview**

**Overview:** The college essay or personal statement is a short, reflective piece. In it, students write about who they are and how they have developed as a person and student. It is usually about 400 to 600 words, and could be about an important experience, overcoming a challenge, sharing an idea, future hopes and dreams, or any other topic.

While being open-ended can provide a lot of flexibility, it can also make this essay intimidating. To best represent yourself, you want to make sure that you are authentically writing about something you care about in your own voice, while also demonstrating your thoughtfulness and writing ability.

A few tips and tricks are listed below:

- I. **Be Proactive and Plan:** Make sure that you start writing early and have an idea of what you are trying to say. Last minute, rambling first drafts read much worse than a polished piece written over the course of several weeks.
- II. **Understand the Prompt or Directions:** Some colleges will request a personal answer to a specific question, or may ask why you are interested in their institution. Do your research and make sure you are answering the prompt directly.
- III. **Capture Your Audience's Attention:** Remember that the person reading this does not know you beyond your application materials, so capture their interest and make it clear who you are, what is important to you, and how you learn.
- IV. **Be Focused and Clear:** Avoid tangents or unnecessary phrases. Make sure you are staying on topic and writing towards a clear goal in your writing. Make sure you are specific, factual, and honest.
- V. **Be True and Authentic:** While you do not want to be too casual or conversational in your writing, make sure you are writing how you normally would sound. Do not try to use fancier words or phrases to impress people, and instead try to be your best self.
- VI. **Proofread and Edit:** Through using spell-checks, having a friend or family member help, or letting your work sit for a few days, make sure you do not have any typos or mistakes. You want this to be polished and complete.

### **Five Final Pieces:**

Use Your Voice

Make Them Care

Have an Underlying Theme

Tell Us Something We Do Not Know

Use Clear Sentences and Paragraphs