

Writing the Admissions Essay

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Senior Assistant Director of Admissions



University
of Vermont

Carrie Pratt, M.Ed.

Essex High School, 2005

Saint Michael's College, BA in English, 2009

University of Vermont, M.Ed in Interdisciplinary Studies, 2016

15 years of experience in higher education, including admissions, career services, community engagement, campus recreation and an appointment as adjunct faculty

Read 5,000+ admissions essays



Currently work as the Senior Assistant Director of Admissions Communications at UVM, recruit students from Michigan and serve as the admissions liaison for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

College Board Enrollment Leadership Academy class of 2022 with enrollment colleagues from across the nation

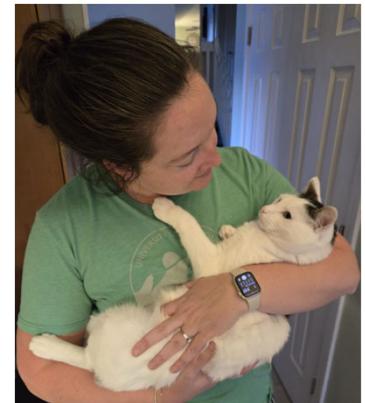


Carrie

Certified Group Fitness and Yoga Instructor teaching at UVM Campus Recreation for 13+ years

Read 52 books last year—my favorites were All In Her Head by Elizabeth Comen and Long Bright River by Liz Moore

Volunteer every Sunday at the Humane Society of Chittenden County caring for cats and small animals



3.5 level Pickleball player

Part of a bicultural family - my husband is from Cyprus and we have family all over the world, including our nephew, Marco, in the UK and niece, Ellie, here in VT

Have three quirky kitties – Achilles, Thor and Rocky (named after Rocky in Project Hail Mary!)

Been skydiving and know how to waterski

SO WHAT?



Application



Essay

Different elements of the same person that, together, give you a sense of who I am!



Today's Agenda

What is the Common App Essay?

Purpose of the essay

Picking a topic

Writing tips

Approaching supplemental essays

Ethics

Questions?

What is the Common App Essay?



Mandatory section of the Common App

7 prompts to choose from (including topic of your choice!)

650 word maximum

Goes to ALL the colleges you apply to on Common App

The essay is...

for sharing more about who you are as a person

for providing a sense of what's important to you

for going beyond the numbers

for showing your writing skills

for telling *your* story

The essay is not...

a place to talk about your high grades

for talking about why you want to attend a specific school

a recycled essay from English class

a list of activities or resume

your entire life story

According to others...

“Ask your friends what they are writing and then don’t write about that!”

- National Association of College Admissions Counseling

“The best way to tell your story is to write a personal, thoughtful essay about something that has meaning for you. Be honest and genuine, and your unique qualities will shine through.” - Princeton Review

Choose your topic before your prompt??

A good topic is one that **YOU** are excited to write about.

What are your key moments?

What is important to you?

What do you want your reader to know about you?

What would your application be incomplete without?

Consider which prompt that topic fits...

Which prompt is going to be the best vehicle for me to share my story?

Which prompt will push my writing to the next level?

What haven't I thought to address?

Common App Essay Prompts

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

The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?

Common App Essay Prompts

Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?

Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?

Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.



Don't worry about impressing the
Admissions Counselor or writing what
you think they want to read...

JUST BE YOU!

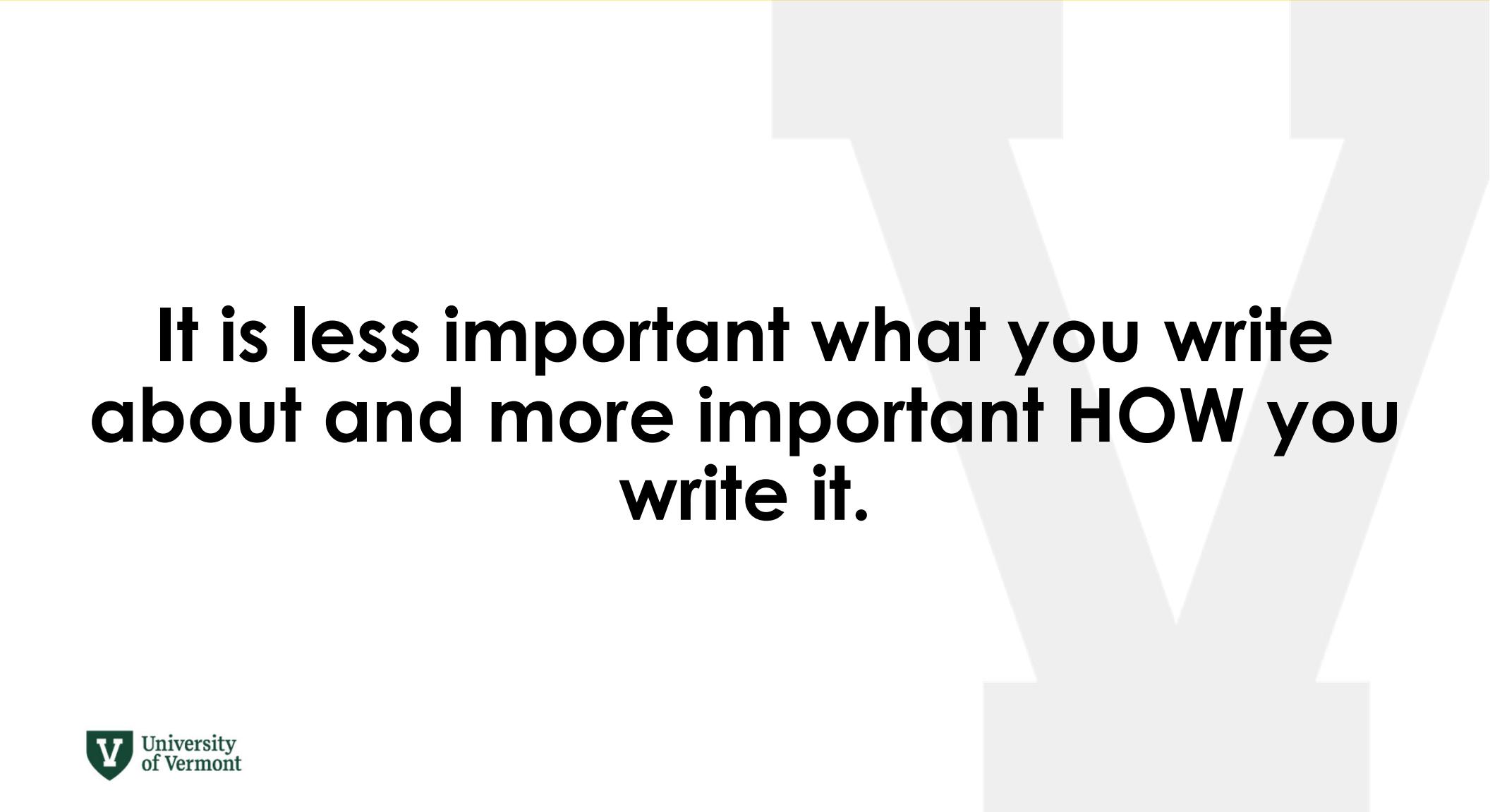
How does a counselor review an essay?

What else can I learn here? What gaps can I fill in? What can I use here to advocate for this student?

What are the key takeaways?

What does the student want me to know?

We are looking at your writing skills and evidence that you put time and effort into your essay.



**It is less important what you write
about and more important HOW you
write it.**

Focus on:

reflection

analysis

outcomes

learning

Make your English teacher proud!

Use paragraph breaks

Proper spelling/grammar

Don't use too much dialogue - if you're quoting others you're not focusing enough on reflection/analysis/outcomes/learning

Don't use a thesaurus to sound lofty or "smart"

Be sure to proofread, and ask others to proofread as well

Raw processing of unresolved personal issues

Topics that lack respect or sensitivity for your audience

Writing about a challenging time you've had just because you think it will "sell."

If you need help, please reach out to a trusted adult, the National Suicide Prevention Hotline (800-273-8255) or the SAMHSA National Hotline (800-662-4357)



School-specific optional essays

Think of them as an opportunity to show your interest, talent and individuality. (in short: write them)

1. Why UVM?
2. Established in Burlington, VT, Ben & Jerry's is synonymous with both ice cream and social change. The "Save Our Swirled" flavor raises awareness of climate change, and "I Dough, I Dough" celebrates marriage equality. If you worked alongside Ben & Jerry, what charitable flavor would you develop and why?
3. UVM is a community that celebrates the unique identity of every student, faculty and staff member. Tell us how your identities have shaped the ways you interact with the world.
4. From the Green Mountains to Lake Champlain to our campus, UVM students are inspired by our location to think about their relationship to the environment. What does your relationship with your environment look like?
5. If you could pick one song to be the soundtrack of your life, what would it be? What is your connection to the song?
6. What is your favorite sentence from your application essay?



Be ethical.

Don't even think
about plagiarizing.

“If you are still wondering whether your use of AI in crafting your application is ethical, ask yourself whether it would be ethical to have a trusted adult perform the same task you are asking of ChatGPT.

Would a teacher be able to review your essay for grammatical and spelling errors? Of course! Would that same teacher write a draft of an essay for you to tweak and then submit? Definitely not.”

- Caltech

Why do you want to use AI for this task?

Save time/make it easier

Be something you are not

Appear to be a better writer than you are

How do you want to show up for college?

Prepared/ready/confident

Authentically you

Ready to learn and be challenged

Using AI is taking
away an opportunity
from yourself.

Final Thoughts:

Be yourself and be ethical

Showcase your writing skills

Focus on growth, learning, outcomes and/or analysis

**If all your friends could write the same essay...consider
writing something else!**

Questions?

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