



THE ACADEMIC
SUPPORT LINK

COLLEGE APPLICATION
ESSAY SUPPORT

5 Mistakes

to Avoid When Writing Your College Application Essay

Mistake # 1

You didn't ask yourself: What do I want admissions officers to know about me? Here's your opportunity to reveal important information that isn't anywhere else on the application. For example, a job teaching tennis to 10 year olds may show your leadership skills and ability to communicate.

TIP:

A failed experience that you learned something from reveals your resiliency and problem-solving ability—positive personal qualities.

Mistake # 2

You picked the wrong essay topic: Admit it. Someone (maybe your parents) "suggested" your essay topic. You start to write and just can't finish it. What's the problem? This essay is about you, so it should be your idea! Select an experience that sparked new interests, changed your thinking, or reveals your strengths.

TIP:

The "right" topic is something you can't stop thinking about or wait to tell your friends about. Maybe it's a project in engineering class or your conversation with the vet at an animal shelter.

Mistake # 3

You didn't take the time to proofread your essays. In 20 minutes, you have dashed off an essay and hit send, without making sure that it is perfect. Editors, such as myself, spend days reviewing documents for grammar, spelling, organization, etc. Plan your essay, avoid clichés, and make sure that you have included what, where, when, and why.

TIP:

Print out your essay, put it away, and then look at it in a day or two. Undoubtedly, you will find errors.

Mistake # 4

You ignored the word length, and you wrote too much or not enough. Directions are meant to be followed! Understand that college admissions officers sometimes have thousands of essays to read. Don't annoy them by writing essays that are too long or too short.

TIP:

Over the word limit? Look closely. Cut or combine words and express yourself more concisely.

Mistake # 5

You have left out important details. Focus on the specifics and give examples. One of my students wrote her essay on why she became a vegetarian. "A 30-second commercial changed my life forever. It depicted dozens of chickens squeezed into dirty coops, cows dragged by their necks into factory lines, and pigs confined to cages so small that their flesh squeezed through the metal." And that was only in the first paragraph!

TIP:

Your essay should show your initiative, curiosity, personal growth, self-direction, or obstacles you've overcome.

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