

Student Study Guide

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College Application Essay Tips

The Average College Essay Is Between
250 To 500 Words

It's a short blog (and you've read plenty of those, right?).

When you're ready, follow these simple tips and you'll be well on your way to creating an incredible college application essay you'll be proud to submit.

1. Be Concise

Most colleges set a minimum of 250 words for their application essays. They usually don't have a max, but aim for no more than 700 words, at most.

2. Use Proper Grammar

Use proper punctuation, spelling and double check everything.

3. Be Honest

Honesty is essential for a college application essay. Don't state you've earned awards you didn't, and avoid making it appear as though you're the best at everything you do. Just be yourself and be honest.

4. Be Likeable

How do you do that? Present yourself as someone humble, interesting and who would be able to hold an enjoyable conversation.

5. Get To The Point

Avoid babbling. Constantly evaluate your essay and ask yourself, "Can I shorten this at all?" If you can, do it.

6. Show, Don't Tell

This is one of the most commonly offered bits of writing advice, even for pros who make a living writing. It means if you can show a scene rather than telling it, do it.

Example of telling: When I was 15, I went to the park with my friends and found a squirrel that was hurt, so we brought it to a local veterinarian.

Example of showing: One afternoon at a local park with friends, we spotted a squirrel twitching and flopping around. Our first instinct was to walk away, but the cries emanating from it told me we had to help, so we gathered up an old box, carefully placed it inside, and called around until we found a vet in the area willing to help it.

7. Ask People To Read It

Have several people read your essay. Accept their advice, even if you don't agree with it at first. They'll have a completely different perspective than you.



Choosing a School

It's Decision Time! Which College Will You Choose?

Most schools want a decision by May 1. Here are some tips to help you choose the school that's best suited to help you achieve your goals and dreams:

Don't Focus On The Cost

There are usually plenty of grants, scholarships and loans that could offset the cost. However, be honest with yourself and your family. If you don't get any scholarships, and it is too expensive, pick one that is more reasonable.

Location

The farther away your college is from home, the tougher it's going to be to go back and visit. It will also cost more, whether you drive, fly or take a train.

Environment

What's the atmosphere on campus like? Is it welcoming to your race, culture or ethnicity? Are students friendly, outgoing and supportive?

Activities

What kinds of activities does the college or university have for students? Are you interested in athletics? What about debate or chess or some other hobby? Check out these activities as they can make the entire experience more fulfilling and rewarding.

The more activities in which you're engaged, the better it'll be when applying to grad school or jobs.

Pros

- Affordable
- Has degree program you want
- Offers scholarships
- You can play sports
- Good student life
- Good administrative support

Cons

- Costly
- Has limited major programs
- Lots of competition for scholarships
- Students seem standoffish

Majors and Extra Curriculars

You probably have an idea about what you want to do in life, but it can change. Narrow your focus towards programs best suited to your career goals, ambitions and interests, and don't forget to check out the extra curricular activities.

Size

How many students attend the school? A larger student body may demand more outward ambition and effort on your part.

Support

Does the college offer internships? Scholarships? Learning labs? Quiet study areas? What kind of advisors and support do they offer? You'll want a strong support network to lean on.

Residences

Many colleges and universities require freshmen and sophomores to live on campus, but they do make exceptions for those who live close to campus or have family in the area with whom they can live.

The cost of dorm living can be significant, and it's a good way to help you narrow down your choices, especially if you have a number of colleges on your list that are not too far from your home.



Advisor Questions

There Are Two Types Of Advisors You Should Rely Upon

Your two most helpful advisors are your high school advisor/counselor and a college advisor. The college advisor is someone who works with (and most likely at) the college you're interested in attending (or to which you've already been accepted), and you should certainly speak to one at the colleges you would like to attend.

Here are some questions you might consider asking:

High School Advisors

- Would you recommend any specific colleges or universities for me?
- Is my academic course load strong enough for my first choice college/university?
- Do you think my extracurricular activities are/have been enough? If not, can you recommend one that could strengthen my chances?
- How can I become a member of the National Honor Society?
- Is there a SAT/ACT prep course available through our school or in town I can take?
- What options will I have if I decide not to attend college?
- What steps can I take to help my chances of being accepted to the college of my choice?
- Do you have a list of requirements for each college/university?

College Advisors

- I want to pursue a career in _____. Will (the university) be a good fit for me? Why or why not?
- If accepted, what types of resources would be available to help me plan my course load?
- What's the difference between a curriculum guide and a school bulletin?
- What's the difference between a major and a minor degree? How would a pursuit of a minor benefit me?
- What kinds of resources or support does the college offer upon graduation?
- What resources are available to help me when I need assistance in a class, with coursework, or a quiet place to study?
- Do you sponsor overseas study programs?
- What are drop/add dates? Why would I need them?

