

Writing Admissions Essays Doesn't Have To Be That Hard

One of the most daunting challenges seniors face as they go through the college application process is writing application essays. Unfortunately, most students start off thinking that they have to do this completely on their own and as a result often get stuck, sitting in front of their computers, trying to squeeze words out, one at a time. While it's true that each student is fully responsible for writing his or her own essays, other people, as in parents, good friends, teachers, counselors and others, can be very helpful along the way. For example, it's totally appropriate to ask trusted people to help you brainstorm ideas for topics, content and stories for essays. It's also proper, if not imperative, that other people proofread and give you feedback on essay drafts so that your essays stand out from the crowd of other applicant essays. The purpose of the college essay is to help admissions readers find out something about you that hasn't been said on your application. They also want to find out how well you express yourself and write. There are three specific things that students must do to assure the quality of their essays:

1. Make sure you're answering the question being asked
2. Stay within the number of words that have been specified
3. Make sure that you don't have any punctuation or grammatical errors.

Many students don't appreciate that good writing is a process, not an hour or a one day event. That is, you don't just put down on paper your first thoughts, and send them off. Good writing involves a series of steps.

1. First, brainstorm ideas with your parents, friends, or teachers to come up with some ideas.
2. After gathering your thoughts and materials needed for an essay, write a first draft. Notice, I said a first draft.
3. Once you have a draft, ask someone to give you feedback about it:
 - + What about the essay works and doesn't?
 - + Is there something missing?
 - + Are there good transitions from one paragraph to another?
 - + Does the essay have a beginning, middle and ending?

In case you're thinking that getting feedback "is for babies," just know that a good friend who has written many books that regularly show up on the New York Times Best Seller List always asks friends and colleagues to give him feedback as he writes two, three, four or more drafts of the same book. After you've received feedback, take the suggestions that make sense to you, make changes to the essay and go through the process again. Once again, make sure that the essay is grammatically correct. Some students think that admission essays are a place to "let it all hang out." I don't think so. College admission essays are not a good place for you to recount your struggles with alcohol or drugs, eating disorders, sexual experimentation, or your family's dysfunctions. It's a place to tell a story that will help a reader get to know who you are. It's also the place on the application where you can describe what turns you on intellectually, a challenge you've faced, something you have learned, or problem you've solved. While writing compelling college admissions essays isn't always easy, you'll do a better job and have fewer problems if you involve others in the process.

About the Author

Marjorie Hansen Shaevitz spent much of her life working for colleges and universities, notably Stanford University, UC San Diego, and East West Center at the University of Hawaii. Her writing career began as a co-author of *So You Want To Go Back To School*, a book for adults. She has counseled scores of adults and high school students about how to find, get accepted to and thrive in quality [colleges and universities](#).

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