# **Tips for Writing an Effective Application Essay**

* When you apply to college, you’ll need to complete an essay as part of your application. This is your opportunity to show admission officers who you are and to provide information about yourself that didn’t fit in other areas of your application. The essay also reveals what you can do when you have time to think and work on a writing project.
* The number one piece of advice from admission officers about your essay is “Be yourself.” The number two suggestion is “Start early.”

### Choose a Topic That Will Highlight You

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### **Don’t** focus on the great aspects of a particular college, the amount of dedication it takes to be a doctor or the number of extracurricular activities you took part in during high school.

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### **Do** share your personal story and thoughts, take a creative approach and highlight areas that aren’t covered in other parts of the application, like your high school records.

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### Keep Your Focus Narrow and Personal

### **Don’t** try to cover too many topics. This will make the essay sound like a résumé that doesn’t provide any details about you.

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### **Do** focus on one aspect of yourself so the readers can learn more about who you are. Remember that the readers must be able to find your main idea and follow it from beginning to end. Ask a parent or teacher to read just your introduction and tell you what he or she thinks your essay is about.

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### **Don’t** simply state a fact to get an idea across, such as “I like to surround myself with people with a variety of backgrounds and interests.”

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### **Do** include specific details, examples, reasons and so on to develop your ideas. For the example above, describe a situation when you were surrounded by various types of people. What were you doing? Whom did you talk with? What did you take away from the experience?

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### Use Your Own Voice

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### **Don’t** rely on phrases or ideas that people have used many times before. These could include statements like, “There is so much suffering in the world that I feel I have to help people.” Avoid overly formal or business-like language, and don’t use unnecessary words.

### **Do** write in your own voice. For the above example, you could write about a real experience that you had and how it made you feel you had to take action. And note that admission officers will be able to tell if your essay was edited by an adult.

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### Ask a Teacher or Parent to Proofread

* **Don’t** turn your essay in without proofreading it, and don’t rely only on your computer’s spell check to catch mistakes. A spell-check program will miss typos like these:
	+ "After I graduate *form* high school, I plan to get a summer job."
	+ "From that day on, Daniel was my best *fried*."
* **Do** ask a teacher or parent to proofread your essay to catch mistakes. You should also ask the person who proofreads your essay if the writing sounds like you.

### **Collegeboard.org.**

<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/essays/tips-for-writing-an-effective-application-essay-college-admissions>

# **Sample College Application Essay**

### **You Be the Judge**

Read the following application essay. See if you can figure out this essay's strengths and weaknesses. Then keep reading to see our critique.

### The Essay

From the time I was able to realize what a university was, all I heard from my mother's side of the family was about the University of Michigan and the great heritage it has. Many a Saturday afternoon my grandfather would devote to me, by sitting me down in front of the television and reminiscing about the University of Michigan while halftime occurred during a Michigan Wolverines football game. Later, as I grew older and universities took on greater meaning, my mother and uncle, both alumni of the University of Michigan, took me to see their old stamping grounds. From first sight, the university looked frightening because of its size, but with such a large school comes diversity of people and of academic and non-academic events.

In Springfield High School, non-academic clubs such as the Future Physicians and the Pylon, both of which I have belonged to for two years, give me an opportunity to see both the business world and the medical world. These two clubs have given me a greater sense of what these careers may be like. In Future Physicians, I participated in field trips to children's hospitals and also participated in two blood banks.

Currently I hold a job at Maas Brothers. This lets me interact with people outside my own immediate environment. I meet different kinds of people, in diffrent moods, with different attitudes, and with different values. This job teaches me to be patient with people, to have responsibility, and to appreciate people for what they are.

In the community I am active in my church Youth Group. As a high school sophomore, I was our church's representative to the Diocesan Youth Fellowship. I helped organize youth group events, the largest being "The Bishop's Ball," a state-wide event for 300 young people. I also played high school junior varsity soccer for two years. As a senior I will be playing varsity soccer, but in the off-season. As a junior I coached a girls' soccer team for the town. This gave me a great deal of responsibility because the care of twenty-four girls was put into my custody. It felt very satisfying to pass on the knowledge of soccer to another generation. The girls played teams from other parts of Florida. Though their record was 3-8, the girls enjoyed their season. This is what I taught them was the greatest joy of soccer.

The past three years of my life have given me greater visions of my future. I see the University of Michigan as holding a large book with many unread chapters and myself as an eager child who has just learned to read. I intend to read and probe into all the chapters. The University of Michigan offers me more than the great reputation of this fine school, but a large student body with diverse likes and dislikes, and many activities, both academic and non-academic, to participate in. With the help of the University of Michigan, I will be successful after college and be able to make a name and place for myself in our society.

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### The Critique

Admission officials consider how you write your essay, not just what you write about. Try to critique your own essays in the same way this sample essay is critiqued below.

#### **The Introduction**

The introduction seems to have a lack of focus: Where's the writer going with this paragraph? Where's the writer going with this essay? Also, the writer needs to tighten the phrasing (e.g., "while halftime occurred" to "at halftime" or "From first sight" to "Immediately").

#### **The Body**

There is a very abrupt transition from the first paragraph to the second: How did we get from Michigan's diversity to the writer's clubs? The second paragraph also includes general statements with little evidence: How did these activities reveal career paths?

Can the writer be more specific? What does "participated in two blood banks" mean? Did he drive volunteers from across town, sign people in all day on three Saturdays every month except August or spend 15 minutes one Thursday afternoon in the nurse's office giving blood?

In the third paragraph, we have to ask: What does the writer do at Maas Brothers? "Interact" needs definition. What here shows that the writer has thought about the time spent at Maas Brothers? Also in this paragraph, there is a misspelling of different ("different"): The writer did not proofread thoroughly.

The information in the fourth paragraph (as well as the previous two paragraphs) appears elsewhere in the application. Essays that simply run down your accomplishments don't add to your application. And does the reader need to know that "the girls played teams from other parts of Florida"?

The writer would be better off focusing on one of the things discussed in this essay, such as working with the girls' soccer team. What he did to make Jennifer and Gretchen and Courtney enjoy soccer even though they won only three of their games would be more vivid and focused than a lot of talk about passing things on to future generations.

#### **The Conclusion**

The conclusion returns to the earlier idea of diversity at Michigan, but this idea was not developed in the body of the essay. It's not necessary to mention "the great reputation of this fine school." Instead, the writer should give specific, programmatic reasons Michigan offers the kind of education he needs.

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#### **Overall**

This essay seems full of information and demonstrates basic essay organization, but it lacks focus and proof. The reader gets a laundry list of activities rather than a clear sense of who the writer is and what he cares and thinks about.

The writer also repeats some phrases. He mentions the “University of Michigan” six times and repeats “academic and non-academic” twice.

*Adapted from* [The College Application Essay](https://store.collegeboard.org/sto/productdetail.do?Itemkey=104286&category=519&categoryName=College+Planning+Books&secondCategory=&secondCatName=&thirdLevelCategory=&thirdLevelCatName) *by Sarah Myers McGinty.*