

# ◆ *Acing the College Essay* ◆

Many colleges or scholarships require that you write an essay of some kind as part of the application process. For some, the quality of your essay is the only thing that matters, so needless to say: you've got to ace it!

## 1. *Answer the Question*

Most organizations will ask that you write your essay on a particular topic. In this case, you must answer the question being asked or specifically write about the topic you've been given. You won't get anywhere if you write a brilliant essay on an unrelated topic or don't address the question specifically and directly. Your essay will be thrown into the "NO" pile faster than you can say "but wait..." and you'll end up missing a chance to seriously compete with other applicants who did in fact answer the question.

## 2. *Eliminate the first paragraph "wind-up"*

Wind-up paragraphs are weak beginnings and weak beginnings doom most essays. You have to hook the reader immediately, from the first words of the first sentence. If you don't, your essay is most certainly headed to that same "NO" pile mentioned earlier.

## 3. *Sound Human*

Don't use big words for the sake of "sounding" smarter. Use your real voice, write as you would tell the story if you were speaking to the reader face to face. Let your personality come through in the essay. You should write eloquently, with correct spelling and grammar, and in a voice more formal than what you use to text your friends, but you don't want to sound so stiff that you stop sounding like an actual human being.

## 4. *Avoid Clichés*

Clichés sound generic and are an easy way out for finding the right words to express something. Use your own words to express your own ideas because you need to stand out from hundreds or thousands of other essays. Many of those other essays are likely filled with the same old clichés and familiar sayings. You want your essay to be unique, and nothing is unique about a bunch of overused phrases that we've all heard before.

## 5. *Follow Directions Carefully*

Your chance to be creative is in the body of the essay, not in how you submit it. If the instructions state to put your first and last name and your email address on every page, then guess what? You put your first and last name and email address on every page! There is no room for improvisation or creativity in that respect. If you're asked to submit your essay by uploading it to a website or through a given link, then don't send it by email or any other means for that matter. Do exactly what you are told to do, otherwise your essay will end up where? That's right, the "NO" pile.

## 6. *Proofread*

Don't jeopardize your chances of being seriously considered for a scholarship or college admissions by sending a sloppy essay. Proofread your work carefully, don't just rely on your computer's spell checker. If possible, get someone else to read it too. You want to be sure that your voice and the points you are trying to make come through clear and concise.