The College Admissions Essay

Who Will Read Your Essay?

- Most likely…

A few recent graduates of the university, a low-level admissions officer, and possibly, an admissions director.

*They will have read hundreds of these applications and essays already.*

Your Essay is Important!

- U-M Admissions Director Ted Spencer told M-Live in 2014 that he reads the essays and written responses first, and then looks at test scores and grades.

  “It gives me a pretty good idea of where the student stacks up academically.”

What Do They Want to See?

- Serious intent to pursue a college education.
- Genuine desire to attend that college.
- Ability to think clearly, logically, and creatively.
- A connection between your interests/intentions and that college’s needs/offers.
- Ability to write engaging essays that distinguish you from other applicants.

What Do They Look For?

- The ‘real you’ behind your typical resume features (GPA, test scores, etc.).
- Originality – An essay that tackles perhaps a common topic with an unexpected angle.
- Genuineness – Again, the real you, without relying on pretentious language, big words… ‘exaggerations’ (i.e., lies).
- Personal reflection – That you have considered the deeper meanings of your experiences, to yourself and others.

Personal Qualities They Look For…

- Compromise & flexibility with others
- Concern for others
- Confidence
- Creativity
- Diligence/persistence/work ethic
- Enthusiasm
- Initiative
- Insight (particularly about yourself)
**Personal Qualities They Look For…**
- Intellectual ability & curiosity
- Leadership
- Maturity
- Open-mindedness
- Optimism
- Organization
- Overcoming adversity

**Personal Qualities They Look For…**
- Risk-taking
- Sense of humor
- Seriousness of purpose – to pursue a college education.

**Things to Think About…**
- Audience (remember who is reading it).
- Purpose – Not to "get in," but to show who you really are.
- Focus – Don’t generalize ("I like sports"), but rather be specific (write about one play in one game).
- Language – Be precise, articulate, and economical. Avoid "fancy" wordiness.
- Make NO ERRORS in grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc.

**The best essays…**
...Tell a story.

They do not simply list all of your activities and accomplishments.

**Common College Admission Essay Topics**
- **Personal Growth Essays** – Tell about a time you learned something.
  (Variation: The ‘Regret’ Essay – Tell about a mistake you’ve made and its consequences.)
  *Strategy:* Think about a past event and how it illustrates who you were then and who you are today.

**Common College Admission Essay Topics**
- **Role Models & Influences Essays**
  *Strategy:* Avoid name-dropping. Focus on an ordinary person, what he/she has meant to you, and how you have grown as a result of knowing that person.
Common College Admission Essay Topics

- **Hobbies & Interests Essay**
  
  *Strategy:* Focus on why the activity is important to you, what you have learned from it, and how it is relevant to other areas of your life.

Common College Admission Essay Topics

- **International Experience/Diversity Essays**
  
  *Strategy:* Consider writing about how such experiences have moved you to develop new goals, and keep the experiences personal.

Common College Admission Essay Topics

- **‘School Target’ Essays** – Why do you want to attend this school?
  
  *Strategy:* Apply your academic goals to specifically related programs/activities that school offers. Show that this school offers you something others do not.

Common College Admission Essay Topics

- **‘Favorites’ Essay** – Often used as a short essay answer rather than a long essay. Write about books, songs, people, etc.
  
  *Strategy:* Work hard to stand out by choosing a subject close to home — make it personal.

Essay Problems

- Careless errors, such as “except” instead of “accept” or the wrong their/there/they’re or its/it’s.
- Not answering the prompt.
- A boring introduction.
- Wordiness/overuse of big words.
- Poor transitions; lack of sentence variety.
- Clichés
- Ineffective conclusions