

# ADMISSIONS APPLICATION ESSAY: WRITING YOUR WAY TO COLLEGE

## AUDIENCE AWARENESS

Admission officers read thousands of essays each year, spending just one or two minutes on each. You want to use your essay to quickly capture their attention and provide them with new information that is not readily found elsewhere on your application in a clear and concise manner.

## DRAFTING AND REVISING

### Drafting

- Start with BRAINSTORMING. Come up with as many ideas as you can without worrying if they are “good” or “bad.” You can create a list, draw a map/diagram, or free write whatever comes to mind without worrying about grammar.
- Next, create an OUTLINE. Think about the structure of the paper including the overall theme, introduction, the body paragraphs, and how you’re going to purposefully use your conclusion to do more than summarize.
- Finally, create your ROUGH DRAFT. This doesn’t need to be perfect, but it should be complete with a clear idea of where the paper is going and all major parts of the paper. Remember – writing creates knowledge, so you may find yourself going in an unexpected direction.

### Revising

- Start by considering your topic, ideas, and audience. Do you need to add or remove any paragraphs to better fit your genre and topic? Are you keeping your theme throughout?
- After that, you can move on to checking for grammatical errors or word choices that make it hard for your reader to understand you. You may also want to have someone else look at it.

## WAYS TO STAND OUT

- Be your own biggest fan. While you want to be honest and avoid bragging, don’t sell yourself short. You are a unique and desirable candidate and if you want them to believe it, you need to go into your writing believing it too!
- Narrow down your topic. While we know you have many accomplishments to talk about, talking about too many things with such a limited word count will inevitably make your discussions more surface-level and detract from your essay.
- Find an angle, or hook. Try to find a way to grab your audience’s interest from the first paragraph. The opening paragraph is arguably the most important and you want to make sure you don’t lose their attention.
- Be specific and try to show, not tell. Think in terms of showing concrete experiences. Don’t tell them you’re resourceful, show them how you’ve developed and demonstrated that trait. Don’t state you’re going to be an excellent doctor without showing the specific experiences that support that.
- Focus on yourself and your achievements. While you may have many guest stars in your paper and be super thankful to your band teacher, make sure you are highlighting your special skills and unique attributes.
- Be mindful of the risks you are taking and how they shape your voice. Gimmicks, cliches, and humor are all risks. Make sure you stand by how you use them.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Personal Statement Top 10 Rules and Pitfalls:  
[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/job\\_search\\_writing/preparing\\_an\\_application/writing\\_the\\_personal\\_statement/top\\_10\\_rules\\_and\\_pitfalls.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/job_search_writing/preparing_an_application/writing_the_personal_statement/top_10_rules_and_pitfalls.html)
- Advice on Writing Undergraduate Application Essays, including guidance from Admissions Officers:  
[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general\\_writing/undergraduate\\_applications/index.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/undergraduate_applications/index.html)
- Information on Pre-Writing (also called Invention):  
[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general\\_writing/the\\_writing\\_process/invention\\_starting\\_the\\_writing\\_process.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/the_writing_process/invention_starting_the_writing_process.html)
- Sample Essays that Worked (Johns Hopkins University):  
<https://apply.jhu.edu/application-process/essays-that-worked/>
- Tailoring Documents for Audience:  
[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/job\\_search\\_writing/preparing\\_an\\_application/tailoring\\_employment\\_documents\\_for\\_a\\_specific\\_audience/determining\\_audience.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/job_search_writing/preparing_an_application/tailoring_employment_documents_for_a_specific_audience/determining_audience.html)