

How to Edit Your College Essay

Due The First Week of College Planning Class (second week of school)

Now that you have the “meat” of your essay done I would like you to go through the following steps three times, **once on your own, and then two more times with two different people**, ideally a family member or close family friend or tutor who knows you well. Return this form with all drafts of your essay attached by the due date above.

Essay MUST be 250-650 words.

Essay Prompt Chosen (Please Circle)

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

2. The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later success. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

3. Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?

4. Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma - anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.

5. Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.

Directions for Editing:

- On the following pages please **check that you've addressed each step in the editing process** and write any comments in the blank space provided.
- You may also write comments on the essay itself, but **please do not change anything directly.**
- Write any **general comments or feedback** in the space provided at the end of the checklist.
- The students will be expected to compile the feedback and make changes in class with my assistance.

1. Begin by reading the essay out loud. Doing so uses a different neural pathway than reading silently.

___me

___person 1 _____ (name)

___person 2 _____ (name)

2. Consider the tone of the essay, and avoid pretentiousness. Showcase yourself without bragging. Don't be shy, don't hide behind formal and ornate prose...let the admissions officers see *you* as a person. Write as if you were telling the story or having a conversation with a respected adult you don't know too well. If you think your essay sounds egotistical and pompous, chances are your intended audience does, too. Be sure the essay is written in your voice, college's want to see who you are, and what you have to say in your style, not the more mature writing style or ideas of a teacher, parent or tutor.

___me

___person 1

___person 2

3. Remove tangential paragraphs. If a paragraph is not integral to your essay, it will lead the reader down a dead-end path and just leave them there. The flow of the essay will be disrupted, and the reader won't be so eager to see what's next.

___me

___person 1

___person 2

4. Check to see if there is too much setup and explanation in your essay. It's natural to go into great detail when first explaining or describing something. These passages can be frequently shortened or deleted without loss of clarity.

___me

___person 1

___person 2

5. Go through the essay and remove every or almost every - instance of "to be". Using the active voice will almost always shorten and improve your essay.

___me

___person 1

___person 2

6. Next, remove redundant phrases. You don't have the luxury of repeating yourself for emphasis in a 250-650 word essay.

___me

___person 1

___person 2

7. Finally, remove redundant words. If a sentence is equally clear without a word, then it should be cut.

___me

___person 1

___person 2

8. Make sure your essay makes grammatical sense. Check your tenses. Trace each modifier (adjective, prepositional phrase, etc.) back to the item it's describing; match each subject with its predicate. Check specifically for misplaced modifiers and singular subjects with plural predicates, e.g., "none of them know."

___me

___person 1

___person 2

9. Check your spelling and word usage. Catch all the common errors like "noone" for "no one." Do not rely on spell checking software; it will not catch misused homonyms ("their" for "there") or misspelled words or typos that are other words "hat" instead of "that", "to" instead of "too").

___me

___person 1

___person 2

10. Look at your word choices carefully. Don't use the ten-dollar word when the fifty-cent one will do. Using ostentatiously literary words usually leads to problems of tone.

___me

___person 1

___person 2

11. Good writing is not the result of a democratic process; it requires a unified vision and execution. When seeking the editing advice of others, don't let their suggested changes change the overall "voice" of your essay unless the voice needs changing. By incorporating too many "editing suggestions" for word changes, sentence structure, etc., the essay can quickly fall apart and lose the sense that it's coming from you.

___me

___person 1

___person 2

Person 1 General Comments:

Person 2 General Comments: