



# How to Write the College Essay

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6,200  
Students

80%  
of Freshman  
Live on Campus

55% Female    45% Male

14:1  
Student-to-faculty ratio



From All 50 States  
70 Countries

21  
Average Class Size

90  
Academic  
Programs

150  
Clubs &  
Organizations

25  
Greek  
Organizations

14  
Division 1  
Sports



SETON  
HALL  
UNIVERSITY

1 8 5 6



Hackensack  
Meridian Health



SETON HALL  
UNIVERSITY

Interprofessional Health Sciences Campus



BUCCINO  
LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

#4 In the  
Nation for  
Internships

93%  
Employment Rate



50%  
Higher Mid-Career  
Earnings than  
National Average



30-Minute Train Ride  
to NYC

Intern at...



ESPN

Johnson & Johnson



Prudential



CNN





**University of  
New Hampshire**



Durham, NH



[admissions.unh.edu](https://admissions.unh.edu)



[Nhien.Quach@unh.edu](mailto:Nhien.Quach@unh.edu)





**WHITWORTH**  
UNIVERSITY

**FREE** application (including  
Common App)

**100%** of admitted students  
receive scholarships

**100+** majors and programs

**NCAA DIII** athletics

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# What is the college essay?

## Why is it Important?

**You are Unique**

**Tell YOUR Story**

**Colleges want to know YOU**

**Another way to show  
academic ability and personal  
contributions**

## Types of Essays

**Personal Statement (Common  
app/Coalition App)**

**Supplemental questions**

**Major/Program Specific**

**Scholarship Application**



# What the college essay is NOT

A narrative resume

A biography/story about someone else

Making excuses

A book report

A time to try out a new writing style

# What Makes a Great Essay?

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- A captivating hook
- Focused Topic
- Organized Structure
  - 1/3 Narrative/Story and 2/3 Reflection/Analysis
  - Clear beginning, middle, end
- Personal yet appropriate tone
- Sincerity and authenticity
- Sound grammar and proper spelling, formatting

WHAT DO I  
WRITE ABOUT  
WHAT DO I  
WRITE ABOUT  
WHAT DO I  
WRITE ABOUT

What do I write  
about?



# Brainstorm Activity

Divide a piece of paper into four squares and label:

1. Obstacles/Challenges
2. Strengths/Successes/  
Accomplishments
3. What makes you, YOU?
4. Goals/Dreams



# Brainstorm Activity

## **Obstacles/Challenges: How did it affect you and what did you learn?**

- Athletics: Injuries, not making the team
- Family finances, challenges
- Moving and/or changing schools
- Physical/Mental Health: Depression, ADHD, accident, COVID\*

## **Strengths/Successes/Accomplishments**

- AVOID a laundry list of successes
- Can be large or small – why is it important for YOU
- Have you had a positive impact on community or school?
- Can you show dedication, focus, persistence, ambition, vision, leadership?

# Brainstorm Activity

## What makes you YOU?

**Questions to ask yourself:** How do you see yourself? How do others see you? Is there a checkbox you've always checked off? What are you comfortable sharing?

**Background** topics: Has family background impacted you?

**Identity** topics: Religious identity, stereotypes, twin/triplet, adoption...

**Interest/Talent** topics: What are you very good at? What is your individual talent? Does NOT have to be a "classic" talent (e.g. piano virtuoso)

# Brainstorm Activity

## Goals & Dreams

What is your career goal and/or dream major?

Why should the college accept you into their program?

Why are your goals your goals? How do you intend to get there?

Connect the dots from previous accomplishments to impacting your future goals

ONLY FOR college-specific essay: connect your goals to their specific program and do your research

Have you taken specific classes/internships/volunteered to prepare you for these goals?

# Top 10 Tips to Keep in Mind

1. Take time to brainstorm.
2. Hook the reader and give them a reason to keep reading.
3. Give yourself options with the prompt you select – don't force it to fit your story. Your story should fit the prompt.
4. Think small – you're not making a movie, just a snapshot!
5. Think about what drives you to do what you do.
6. Target your audience by going to the website and finding key buzz words the university uses – then showcase your ability to offer those specific qualities.
7. Avoid bragging. This is a behind-the-scenes glimpse into who you are.
8. Show *your* personality.
9. When in doubt, take a break and come back later.
10. Consult a mentor for advice and proof-reading.

**do's**

**&**

**dont's**

# The “Don’t” List

- ❑ Don’t write what you think they want to hear
- ❑ Don’t be cynical, condescending, vague, or offensive
- ❑ Don’t just rewrite your resume
- ❑ Don’t forget your audience
- ❑ Don’t forget to answer the question/prompt
- ❑ Don’t submit without another editor



A photograph of a campus scene. In the foreground, there is a large tree on the left and a black metal fire pit with a conical roof in the center, containing a fire. In the background, there is a brick building with a sign that reads "The College Center". A person is riding a bicycle on a path to the right.

# The “Do” List

- ❑ Know your essay will be read
- ❑ Start early; be prepared to write multiple drafts
- ❑ Give them a reason to keep reading
- ❑ Focus on the message you wish to tell the reader (have a thesis!)
- ❑ Keep it personal and specific but know you don't have to relive or share trauma
- ❑ KNOW the essay requirements, topics, word limits (typically 500-1000 words MAX)
- ❑ Edit (content, not just grammatical)
- ❑ Make it interesting for a long-lasting impression
- ❑ Leave plenty of time to write supplemental and additional writing samples required by major



# Final Tips

- Submit ON TIME
- Editing and rewriting are not the same as proofreading
- Stay within word count limits
- Have *multiple* people read your essay for feedback
- Be consistent throughout your application – changes in writing quality raise flags for admissions counselors

# Helpful Resources

- [The College Essay Guy College Application Hub](#)
- [Purdue Owl Writing Lab](#)
- <https://www.commonapp.org/apply/essay-prompts>
- [Google Docs & Google Sheets](#)
- <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/how-to-write-a-college-essay>

# Questions?

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