

Westborough High School Writing the College Essay



Kristin Crosby

Director for Regional Recruitment
Washington & Jefferson College
kcrosby@washjeff.edu | (724) 672-0596

Erin Boggan

Director of Recruitment, Northeast
Gardner-Webb University
eboggan@gardner-webb.edu

3 Main Questions Admission officers consider

1. Is this student going to successfully meet the academic requirements of our college?
2. What personal qualities and strengths would this student bring to our campus community?
3. What does the rest of the application pool look like?

The Application Essay – a.k.a. “the Personal Statement”

- The only part of the application you have full control over
- The most exciting and revealing piece of the application
- Illustrates how you are a good match for our school
- Shows your desire to learn and succeed within a college environment
- Not graded by Olympic judges! We don't start with a “10” and deduct for every error. This is as much about an emotional connection as an intellectual one, and the best conclusion you can hope for is “I really like this kid!”
- It's less about “standing out” and more about revealing yourself and leaving a good impression

How to Get Started

1. Brainstorm – find a topic you like
2. Try story telling first to test your “voice”.
3. Outline
4. Write. Revise.
5. Catch the reader’s attention

TIPS

1. Leave the reader with a positive impression.
2. Be creative and unique.
3. You don't need to be superhuman to write a great essay.
4. The college essay is not the time to write a full autobiography.
5. Humor-if it works for you.
6. Don't showcase your weaknesses
7. Think about who is reading your essay.

2018-2019 Essay Prompts

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 obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. **Recount an incident** or time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
3. Reflect on a time when you questioned or **challenged** a **belief or idea**. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
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**, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself.
6. **Describe a topic, idea**, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?
7. Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.

Editing

1. The words you use are important. Choose them carefully.
2. Writing is a process. Time and patience.
3. Constructive criticism.
4. Observation – zoom in on the details, use the five senses
5. Keeping your voice.

Essay Checklist

- ✓ Is the essay interesting to you?
- ✓ Will it stand out because it shows who you really are?
- ✓ Is it important to you?
- ✓ Do you show how you think?
- ✓ Do you illustrate the issue, story, or experience?
- ✓ Is your presentation neat, logical, and clearly stated?
- ✓ Is there a good transition between separate ideas?
- ✓ Did you make a conclusion rather than ending with a summary?

Elements of a successful essay

- Thoughtful and organized – it flows naturally
- Unique – this does NOT mean that it has to be about some incredible experience to be worth expressing. Wonderful essays are often about simple ideas or moments that were meaningful to the writer.
- The topic clearly interests the writer
- Shows rather than tells – you should give the readers such convincing evidence that we draw the conclusions that you would want us to draw.
- Makes a point and gets to the point.

Common Essay Mistakes

- Showcases your weaknesses
- Contains errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
- Is too long or too short (pay attention to requested length)
- Doesn't answer the question
- Uses too many "thesaurus" words
- Feels "forced" (it's important that you write what comes naturally to you – don't write for the reader).
- Inappropriate topic

Example



The concept of global environmental citizenship incorporates a salmagundi of ideas. Central to the concept is the idea of sustainable development. Sustainable development is a call for maintenance of consumption, industrial output, and waste and pollution at levels which will not compromise the opportunities of posterity, while maintaining economic growth and employment opportunities. This concept may seem quixotic and unattainable, but a coterie of scientists and economists, under the guidance of the United Nations, set forth a set of realistic proposals that would ensure maintained human progress without bankrupting the resources of future generations.

Example



“The airport is filled with unspoken tension, flights delayed or cancelled, the potential disaster of plane crashes lurking. My brother Brian seems to sense this as we board the plane, or maybe he is aggravated by the engine’s roar as we walk down the long hallway to the door of the plane. Either way, he is nervous. I grip his hand to calm him down, then loosen my grip, remembering his dislike of human touch, so unnatural to me. Other people turn and stare at the grown man with the slow, loping gait, but he doesn’t notice. “I won’t have a seizure,” he says, but whether it is to reassure the rest of the world or himself I do not know, for he cannot tell me: Brian is a 29 year old autistic.”

Example

“Ode to My Keys



Oh—the precise clank of keys as I triumphantly approach my front door. With my keys in my pocket I am confident, fearless...capable of anything. I am guaranteed that door number one, apartment 1-D, shall be conquered to reveal my life on the other side. With my keys at my side, the world is within reach; my personal life is at my fingertips. My bed, my diary, my computer are all accessible with my keys. With my keys I can connect to my life again, create skillful masterpieces, write countless novels, and live up to everyone’s expectations.

My heartbeat quickens as I dig into the bottom of my backpack. My palms begin to sweat. Where are they? I’ve forgotten them... again. I collapse, defeated against the heavy door, with the super “burglar-proof” lock that blocks the way to my success. I find myself alone in my dank, dimly-lit lobby, falling to the mercy of an eccentric neighbor who walks dogs for a living and offers me a “glass of juice or diet root-beer”... an offer I gently decline.”