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Works Cited

Cantore, Jean Ann. "Make Your College Essay Shine." *Career World* 28.3 (1999): 16. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 7 Dec. 2012.

Section:

College bound

MAKE YOUR COLLEGE ESSAY SHINE

Here's how to write an essay that will reflect you at your best.

"I can't believe I already have to write a paper for college, and I haven't even started taking classes," Shelly Aiken groaned as she read the application for the school she wanted to attend. "They want me to write about an experience that has changed my life. Why?"

Shelly's reaction to writing yet another paper is normal. But there is an upside to writing a college application essay. With so many students competing for admission to college, a strong application essay can help you stand out from the crowd. In fact, it may be your only chance to tell admissions counselors what your class rank can't say.

Why Write?

It takes more than having good grades or high SAT scores to get into college these days. With so many applicants, admissions officers can afford to be picky. They're looking for good students, but they also want people who will be positive additions to the college community.

"Our university requires application essays to help admissions counselors get to know prospective students a little bit better," says Brandon Rosenthal, admissions counselor at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California. "The essays provide an opportunity for you to set yourself apart from the rest of the applicants."

The information you provide on a college application is important, but it doesn't tell admissions counselors what you're really like and what's important to you. An essay provides a chance for you to get counselors to see you as a person and not just another set of test scores.

Essay Choices

Essay questions vary, depending on the college. At Pepperdine University, some standard ones include: "Tell us about an event that has affected or changed your life"; "If you were to write a book about yourself, what title would you choose and why?"; and "If four historical figures could be your teachers at Pepperdine, who would they be and why?"

Students are asked to write 300 to 500 words on one of these topics.

"I look for a little creativity and something that's going to grab me," Rosenthal says. "Humor used in the right sense will go a long way. Most of the counselors who read these essays at our school have been out of school for only two or three years, so it's not a literary crowd, sitting in high-backed chairs."

At the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, applicants find themselves writing on such topics as: "Discuss how a particular work of music, literature, or art has inspired your life" and "What about you needs improving, and how are you working on it?"

"Our application process is very competitive," says Patrick Dwyer, acting associate dean of admissions at the William "We often have to choose among students who have similar grades and backgrounds. The application essays help us do so. We also want to see students' writing skills."

Most essays are on broad topics, so it's important to pick one that will allow you to express yourself well. For example, don't pick the question about life-changing experiences if something doesn't come to mind immediately. Instead, choose the question about what you would title a book about yourself or how a piece of art has affected you. The main thing is to choose a question with which you're comfortable.

Get Going

Because your college application essay has a bearing on whether or not you get into the school of your choice, you'll want to give it your best shot. Here are some points to ponder as you start writing.

Allow plenty of time to develop your paper. Plan to work on the essay over several days. Once you have written a good draft, put it away for a day or two. That way, when you read it again, you can look at it with "fresh" eyes. Your mistakes will pop out. Once you have your essay in final form, ask a parent, teacher, or friend to read it. Getting an objective opinion about your essay before you submit it will help you make the essay even better. That doesn't mean someone else should write it for you. But a little editing and proofreading won't hurt.

Once you start writing, keep your essay simple and focused. It's easy to get off on a tangent, especially when you're writing about an emotional topic or one that's special to you. Remember to answer the question.

Focus your essay on yourself and your thoughts. As with the essay question about the four historical figures you'd enjoy having as teachers, remember that the essay is about you and how

you feel. Droning on about what a great man Abraham Lincoln was and giving details of his life will not make a good application essay; you're not supposed to write a biography. Talk instead about how you have patterned your beliefs after Lincoln's.

Keep in mind the appearance of your essay. Spelling and grammar mistakes won't win you any points with admissions counselors. After all, if you can't write well on an application essay, you probably won't write well in a freshman English class. If possible, type your essay so it's easy to read.

Use good taste and judgment in composing your essay. For instance, if you choose to discuss how a tragedy made you grow up quickly, don't dwell on the details of the tragedy. Feel free to explain briefly what happened, but then go on to talk about how it affected you. Remember to keep your tone positive.

Explain your opinions well so that you don't offend the reader. "You don't really know your audience for the essay," Dwyer says, "so don't blurt out strong opinions without explaining how you got them. I've read wonderful essays on either side of gun control and other controversial issues."

Have fun writing the essay. As strange as it may sound, having a good time putting together the essay will make it a better paper. "Once you turn it into an English project with big words, you lose us," Rosenthal says. On the other hand, he adds that making up stories or exaggerating facts is not a good idea. Rosenthal also advises against bragging about yourself. There's a place on the application itself to list your academic accomplishments and to say that you were high school football captain.

Depending on how seriously you take the assignment, a college application essay can help you or hurt you in getting into the school of your choice. But with a good effort, you can write an essay that will make admissions counselors take notice.

PHOTO (COLOR): In February of my junior year, I took off a week from school to participate in a work camp in the heart of the city. This program has had a great impact on how I see myself and my future.

PHOTO (COLOR): American journalist, editor, and author Walter Lippmann (b. 1889; d. 1974) was considered the dean of American journalists. His career spanned six decades and two world wars. Because of my interest in 20th-century history, Lippmann would be the person I would most like to interview.

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