

5 tips for writing your COLLEGE ESSAY



Admission committees read your college essay to get to know you – the person beyond the grades and perhaps the test scores. Understandably, you may be unsure where to start. But you already have a great start because you’ve had a lot of practice getting to know the subject of your essay –YOU!

1. Use the prompts to craft your answer.

These help the admission committees learn how you will contribute to the campus community. Think of them as ways to show your character, aspirations and what you care about.

2. Brainstorm what you want to say.

When you know you want to apply to a particular school, read the essay requirements and prompts. Think about how you can showcase what you will bring to campus. What do you want to say about yourself? Outline and organize your thoughts. Write a rough draft.

TIPS ON ANSWERING “WHY DID YOU CHOOSE SMU?”

We already know what makes our campus so incredible – from our amazing students and faculty to the dynamic Dallas area and the opportunities that abound.

- **Tell us why our campus qualities are important to YOU.**
- **Dive deeper to tell us what influenced your decision to choose SMU and how SMU will help you achieve your goals.**

3. Be yourself. Please.

Share your story in your voice and words. Tell us something only you can tell us. This is an essay about you. Brag about yourself. For example, tell us about some of your proudest moments – but don’t sound arrogant. Show us why you are confident in your ability to contribute positively.

4. Keep your audience in mind.

In addition to admission committees, your essay could be read by alumni, retired faculty and others with a variety of interests, opinions and backgrounds. Give them a fresh perspective informed by your experiences. And be sure to not insult someone who is not like you. The opening paragraph of your essay should grab our attention and help us know what to expect. Remember: your essay is often used in consideration for scholarships, the honors program and certain majors, too.

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5. Polish your essay.

Revisit your draft in a day or two, then refine it. Have someone else read it. Consider the feedback, but retain your voice. Proofread for grammar, spelling and usage. Spellcheck won't know if you put in the name of the wrong school! Finally, ask yourself if this essay is essential in getting to know you.

TIPS ON TOPICS:

What to avoid

1. Why a poor grade wasn't my fault.
2. A devastating breakup.
3. Politically, religiously or socially insensitive/embarrassing material.
4. Crude jokes.
5. Relieving your conscience or delving into unresolved issues.
6. Anything that will make readers say, "TMI!"

Use caution

1. What I learned doing community service.
2. Life lessons learned while playing sports.
3. How my trip to another country broadened my horizons.

Get more tips at smu.edu/5tips