10 Tips for Writing a College Essay

• **Write about yourself.** A great history paper might be very well written, but it doesn’t tell anything about the writer. Regardless of the topic, make sure you shine through your essay.

• **Use your own voice.** Admissions can tell the difference between the voice of a 40-year-old and a high school senior.

• **Focus on one aspect of yourself.** If you try to cover too many topics in your essay, you’ll end up with a resume of activities and attributes that doesn’t tell as much about you as an in-depth look at one project or passion.

• **Be genuine.** Don’t try to impress, because Admissions have heard it all. Just tell what is important to you.

• **Consider an everyday topic.** Sometimes it’s the simple things in life that make the best essays. Some of the best essays have included reflections on the daily subway ride to school, or what the family goldfish observed from the fishbowl perched on the family kitchen table. It doesn’t have to be a life-changing event to be interesting and informative.

• **Don’t rely on “how to” books.** Use them to get your creative juices flowing, but don’t adhere too rigidly to their formulas, and definitely don’t use their example topics. While there are always exceptions, the “what my room says about me” essay is way overdone.

• **Share your opinions, but avoid anything too risky or controversial.** Your essay will be read by a diverse group of individuals from a wide range of backgrounds, so try to appeal to the broadest audience possible.

• **Tell a good story.** Show why you are compassionate; don’t tell you are. Show that you have overcome great difficulty; don’t start your essay with “I have overcome great difficulties.”

• **Don’t repeat what is already in your application.** If you go to a performing arts school and all of your extracurricular activities and awards relate to dance, don’t write about how much you love dancing. Tell something I couldn’t know just from reading the other parts of your application.

• **Finally, don’t forget about the supplements.** The supplement questions are very important – you should plan to spend as much time on them as you do on your essay. A well-written essay won’t help if your supplement answers are sloppy and uninformative.
**Parts of the Essay**

1. Thesis statement

2. Body 5 paragraphs

   - Use TWO paragraphs if you are giving both sides of the argument or situation – one paragraph for, and one against (or the opposite).
   - Use THREE paragraphs if you are only giving one side.

3. Closing - Summarize your information but do not introduce new information.

| Thesis statement: | § Present situation and/or Both sides of Argument (1-2 sentences)  
|                  | § What you are going to do in this essay / Your opinion (Thesis sentence) |
| Paragraph 2: Five Sentences | § Topic Sentence: Argument 1 or Reason 1  
|                            | § Example, Explanation, or supporting detail (2-4 sentences) |
| Paragraph 3: Five Sentences | § Topic Sentence: Argument 2 or Reason 2  
|                            | § Example, Explanation, or supporting detail (2-4 sentences) |
| Paragraph 4: Five Sentences | § Topic Sentence: Argument 3 or Reason 3 or Argument against  
|                            | § Example, Explanation, or supporting detail (2-4 sentences) |
| Conclusion: Three Sentences | § Summary  
|                            | § Present situation and your opinion  
|                            | § Future statement- what happens if readers don’t take some action on this issue? |