A top-down view of a person's hands writing on a white notepad. The person is wearing a dark blue and white striped long-sleeved shirt. Their left hand holds a white ceramic cup filled with dark coffee. Their right hand holds a blue pencil, having just finished writing the text. The notepad is on a dark wooden surface. There are two crumpled pieces of white paper, one in the top left and one in the top right. The text is written in a bold, black, hand-drawn font.

**DON'T TELL THE
READER HOW YOU
FEEL MAKE
THEM FEEL IT
FOR YOU!**



What should the essay do for the applicant?

1. Your essay should serve to **highlight** an important part of your application.
2. It should reveal something important about you that isn't found elsewhere in application.
3. Most importantly, it should help you **stand out** in a pool of other applicants.

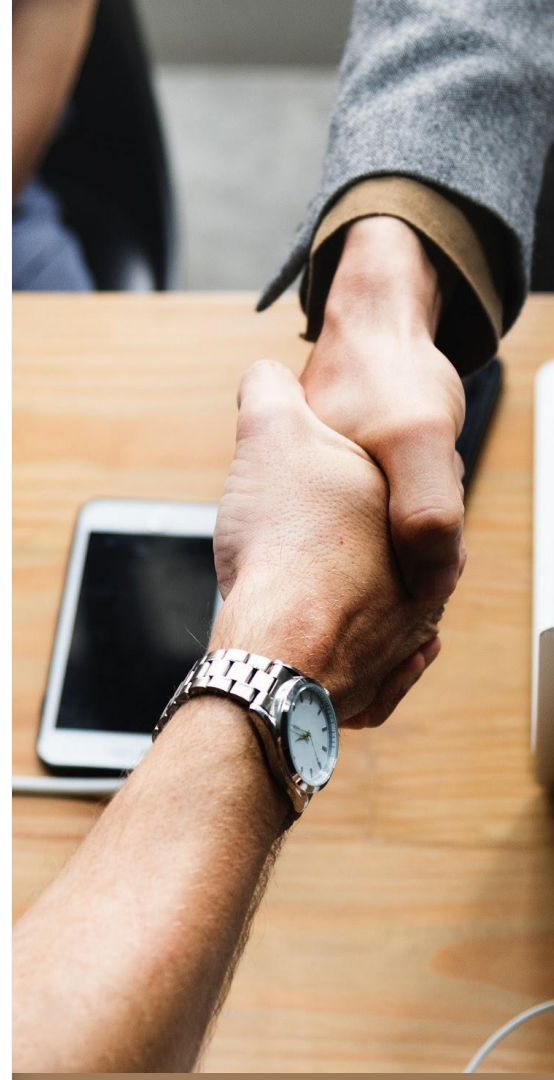
Importance of the College Application Essay



- ◆ The college application essay is used to demonstrate an applicant's writing and critical thinking skills.
- ◆ Most importantly though, it's an opportunity to show colleges who you really are - a person, and not a set of numbers.
- ◆ You can bring attention to various different aspects of yourself:
 - ◇ Personality
 - ◇ Experience
 - ◇ Qualities
 - ◇ Perspective

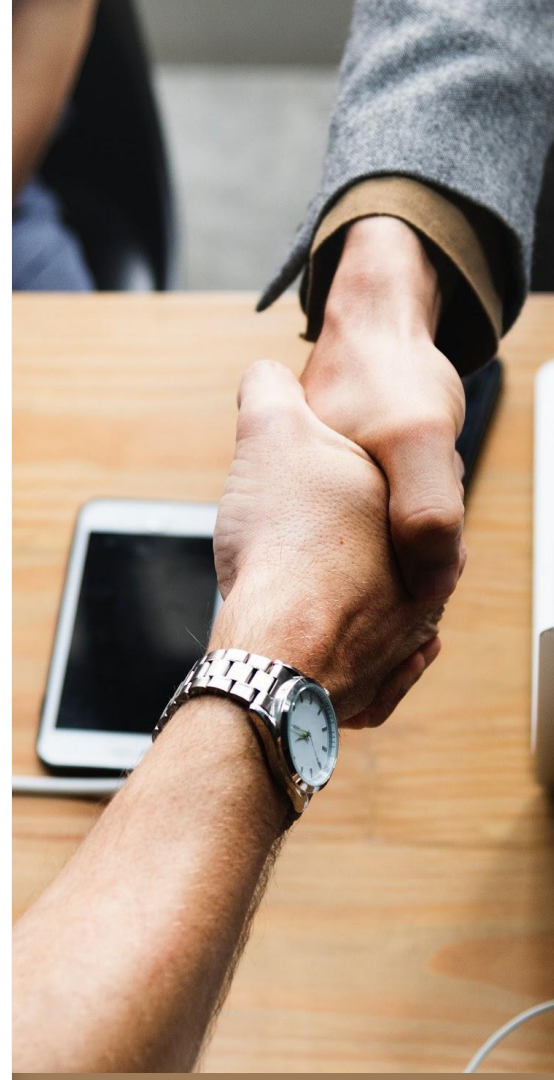
How can we convey to the reader who we are?

- ◆ The best way to add depth to your essay is to address **real life events** that help support the qualities you're trying to showcase.
- ◆ It's important that the reader can gain insight into your **voice**.
 - ◇ Work to craft a unique narrative, a story only you can tell.
 - ◇ Focus on key details that show the world through your eyes.



How can we convey to the reader who we are?

- ◆ **Tone** is key! The message of your essay is important, but how you convey that message can make all the difference.
- ◆ Don't undermine the importance of submitting an essay that is thoughtful and sincere. Colleges want to get to know the real you.
- ◆ All in all, your essay should be a **compelling story** that helps the admissions officer understand who you are.



Basic Tips for Essay Construction

- ◆ Keep your essay **focused** on a single point or thesis. What's the one most important thing you want the reader to take away from this?
 - ◇ Reinforce your main idea with vivid facts, events, quotes, etc. Be specific!
- ◆ Make sure to write using **active voice**.
 - ◇ Use “do”; “am”; “does” instead of “to be able to”; “would be”; “have done”
- ◆ Don't waste time and energy trying to write what you think admissions officers want to hear or over-elaborate.
 - ◇ You can write well while still maintaining your own voice.
 - ◇ Condense and say things clearly when possible.
- ◆ Always remember to go back and **proofread!**



Essays Schools Tend to Love



- ◆ Essays that demonstrate students' intellect and curiosity about a particular topic.
- ◆ Essays that highlight cultural identity and elaborate on how the student has been shaped by their surroundings.
- ◆ Essays that show strength overcoming **true** adversity.
- ◆ Essays that showcase interesting aspects and characteristics that will make a student stand out.
- ◆ Essays that clearly express the student's personality so admissions officers really feel a connection.

Essays Schools Tend to Shy Away From



- ◆ Essays that are too abstractly structured and hard to follow, or essays that are too methodical and read like a report.
- ◆ Life-changing experiences that come off ingenuine or phony.
- ◆ Controversial topics, such as politics or religion, that aren't personal to the writer.
- ◆ Narratives with an underlying melodramatic tone.
- ◆ Song lyrics or pop culture references that aren't relative to the narrative.
- ◆ Overused clichés: the “big game”, uninspired service trips, a “day-in-the-life”, etc.



Boring vs. Painting a Picture



“I was surrounded by people with a variety of backgrounds.”

VS.

“During that night, I sang the theme song from Casablanca with a baseball coach who thinks he’s Bogie, discussed Marxism with a little old lady, and heard more than I ever wanted to know about some woman’s gall bladder operation.”

Telling vs. Showing



“I want to help people. I have gotten so much out of my life through the love and guidance of my family, I feel that many individuals have not been as fortunate; therefore I would like to expand the lives of others.”

VS.

"My Mom and Dad stood on plenty of sidelines 'til their shoes filled with water, or their fingers turned white, or somebody's golden retriever signed his name on their coats with mud. It is that kind of commitment I'd like to bring to working with fourth graders."

How do these sentences differ?



- ◆ The smallest details are what matter most and help bring a story to life. Remember, show — don't tell!
 - ◇ How can you bring the reader's senses to life?
- ◆ These details are what will help your story feel genuine and heartfelt.
- ◆ Most importantly, your attention to these details are what will help highlight your personality; your thoughts, actions, and reactions.
- ◆ A detailed and well-thought-out essay will be more likely to stick out in admissions officers' minds!

Too Much of a Good Thing . . .

- ◆ While a good essay features a detailed narrative, remember that not all details are made equally.
- ◆ Try to avoid:
 - ◇ Redundancy (e.g. "beautiful and pretty", "shining, radiant", "in my own personal opinion")
 - ◇ Uncomfortable or "gross" details
 - ◇ Flowery descriptions when simple ones will be just as effective
 - ◇ Excessive negative detail; you're meant to leave a positive impression
- ◆ **Note:** It's okay to include negative details about yourself — they reflect you as a person. But make sure that they're tied to your story and ultimately lead to the positive impression - the “you” that you want colleges to see!