**The Ultimate Guide to Your College Application Essay**

**DO**

1. Be specific; be concise; be coherent.
2. Be honest.
3. Proofread, proofread, proofred. If you dont use spellcheck, your gonna lookdumb. If you *only* use spellcheck, you might not realize that you used the wrong “your.” Proofreading is a process!
4. Answer the full question/prompt.
5. Follow the word count.
6. Make sure your essay reveals something about your character and personality.
7. Make every sentence count.
8. Be cautious about your use of humor. Humor can help show your voice, but it can also very easily alienate your reader (which is the *last* thing you want to do). Sarcasm is extremely difficult to convey accurately in writing.

**DON’T**

1. Circumvent the despoilment of the thesaurus. Don’t use “big” words just to make yourself seem big.
2. Don’t use gimmicks, like writing in haiku, Old English, or text-messaging jargon.
3. In your essay to Cal State Long Beach, don’t talk about how much you love Loyola Marymount. Check MULTIPLE TIMES if you are recycling an essay!
4. Avoid empty words and phrases like “really,” “special,” “unique,” “things,” “events,” “interesting,” “each and every,” and “meaningful.”
5. Avoid vague and predictable conclusions: “I learned a lot,” “I interacted with others different from myself,” “I benefited from the love and support of my family,” “I learned to work with others.”
6. Don’t write about your SAT scores or grades. The essay is a chance for you to express yourself as a person, not just a statistic.
7. Avoid passive voice.

**DON’T** Write:

1. *The Dictionary:*This essay opens with a word, followed by the applicant describing the word’s significance, and it always sounds contrived.
2. *Parents*: Writing about how admirable your parents are is hard to do without sounding generic.
3. *Sports:* Admission counselors have read every sport disaster and/or victory story out there. They also know you loved your coach. Take a new approach or address something different!
4. *The Recipe*: “Two cups enthusiasm, one teaspoon determination, and a dash of dreams make the perfect student.” In other words, “I only have two tablespoons of creativity and I just wasted them on that cheesy recipe.”
5. *The List*: If you try to include every accomplishment you’ve made in high school, you’ll run out of space before you ever show any depth.
6. *The Quotation*: Admissions counselors have heard every famous quote ever. JFK and FDR are great men, but we no longer care if you’ve “asked what you can do for your country” or if “the only thing to fear is fear itself.”

**Above all, your essay should distinguish you from others.**

How are you a different, better applicant than every other applicant who applies to this college?

**Essay Application Prompts**

**Common Application Prompts**

Length: 650 words

Select one of the following:

* Some students have a background or story that is so central to their identity that they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
* Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure.  How did it affect you, and what lessons did you learn?
* Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea.  What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?
* Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content.  What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?
* Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.

\*Remember, each college may have additional essay prompts!

**UC Application Prompts**

Length: 1,000 words combined

Answer both of the following:

* Describe the world you come from — for example, your family, community or school — and tell us how your world has shaped your dreams and aspirations.
* Tell us about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment, contribution or experience that is important to you. What about this quality or accomplishment makes you proud and how does it relate to the person you are?