



# Your College Essay — Where to Start

When thinking of unique and memorable college essays, I am often taken back to the modern myth which surfaced during my senior year in high school. It was a story of a senior in high school who was applying to one of the most prestigious colleges in the country, and as part of the application process, he was asked to write an essay on courage. According to the tale, the young man took a long, hard look at the essay question and contemplated what courage really meant to him. After much consideration, it finally came to him; he rifled through his desk for a red marker, and then scribbled “courage” in bold letters across the application. He mailed it in, this one-word wonder of an essay, and three months later he was accepted.

Now I can’t say I recommend this particular approach for all, or even any essays, but I do, however, think there are some key essay writing tenets which can be taken from it. First of all, there’s originality. When thinking about your essay, consider what characteristics or experiences of yours set you apart from the crowd. Not only that, think of how you could present or depict them in a new and original light. Given that admissions counselors read essay after essay, it speaks volumes to send them one which is truly unique to you, and in which your own distinct voice shines through.

This idea of originality of voice brings me to the second tenet, which seems fairly obvious yet can often be forgotten in the scramble of ACTs, SATs, financial aid forms and college fairs; be yourself! Use the essay as a time to break away from the rigid mold of college applications, where you find yourself penciling in numbers, grades and percentages. Take

this time to let them know how much more you are than a GPA, class rank or verbal SAT score. Strive to make your essay something that represents you, sounds like you, and will make the admissions counselors want to know you.

## Here Are Some Suggestions on How to Get Started!

1. Name 5 or more things you are passionate about. What do you really care about in your life? (your younger brother, grandmother, music, reading, cooking, the little kids you baby-sit, the Middle East, poetry, football, your friends, keeping a journal)
2. What are 3 specific accomplishments you are most proud of? Think broadly.
3. Describe how 5 people or experiences have shaped you in important ways.
4. What has been the most difficult time/experience in your life?
5. What was the hardest decision you have ever made?
6. What are the bright spots in your daily life, the things you look forward to?
7. What summer experience, job or volunteer experience do you remember most? Why?
8. What are you most afraid of? Why?
9. Where do you see yourself in 10 years?
10. In what ways are you most different from your friends or siblings?
11. What dreams or fantasies do you have about the future?
12. What real-life experiences have you had so far that you will remember to tell your grandchildren?
13. What qualities about you do others tease you about or make fun of?
14. How do you hope to be different as an adult than you were as a child? How do you hope to be the same?

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