

## The College Essay & The College Interview

### Writing College Essays: Fundamentals

- Good writing is writing that is easily understood.
- Avoid the word 'however'.
- Buy and read *The Elements of Style*, by William Strunk Jr., and E.B. White.
- Do not use exclamation points.
- Do not put quotation marks around words that aren't quotations.
- Do not restate the same information over and over again. Instead, simply say it clearly once.
- Have a good writer critique your writing.
- Have a good speller proofread it.
- Longer is not necessarily better. Avoid repeating information from other parts of your application.
- Avoid generalities.
- Maintain the proper tone.
- Try not to write about what everyone else writes about.
- Don't apologize and don't explain.
- Write about something you really care about.
- Remember what the point of the essay is.

### Checklist For An Effective Essay

Your essay:

- ◆ Makes a significant statement about you.
- ◆ Answers the questions posed.
- ◆ Demonstrates a match between you and the college.
- ◆ Includes only information that contributes to your point.
- ◆ Provides examples and explanations to back up your statements.
- ◆ Uses an appropriate tone: friendliness, enthusiasm, confidence, respect for authority, etc., avoids inappropriate tones such as groveling, whining or antagonism.

- ◆ Shows a respect for your reader's level of understanding.
- ◆ Captures and maintains a reader's attention.
- ◆ Includes a clear thesis and a preview statement so the reader knows the purpose and direction of your discussion.
- ◆ Avoids ambiguous statements.
- ◆ Avoids choppy sentences, passive phrases, wordiness, or other stylistic problems.
- ◆ Provides a neat and attractive format.
- ◆ Uses acceptable grammar and proper punctuation.
- ◆ Uses correct spelling.

### The College Interview

Questions to Expect:

- How would you like to see yourself grow over the next four years?
- What might your teachers say is your greatest strength as a person? As a student?
- What are your shortcomings in those areas?
- Do you have a hero or heroine? Who and why?
- If you could reach for a telephone and talk to any living person, who would you call? Why?
- Have you ever thought of not going to college?
- What might you do instead?
- What sets you apart as an individual?
- If your best friend was asked to describe you, what would he or she say?
- What do you do in your spare time?
- If you could ask one, two, or three people to dinner, whom would you invite and why?
- Why are you considering this college?
- What do you enjoy reading?
- What books did you read this year that influenced your thinking? What newspapers and magazines do you read regularly?

## **Questions to Ask During Your Interview**

- ✎ When must I declare a major? Is it possible to switch?
- ✎ Which departments are considered the strongest on this campus?
- ✎ Are off-campus programs available for credit? Internships? Study abroad? Inter college exchange?
- ✎ How diverse is the student body? Does one group dominate?
- ✎ What happens on weekends? Where is the center of the social scene? Do many students go off campus?
- ✎ If the school has fraternities and sororities (or clubs), what percentage of students belong to them? What is the effect of choosing to belong—or not—on an individual's social life?
- ✎ What activities (such as lectures, concerts, dances, and informal activities) take place on campus?
- ✎ What facilities are available for organized athletic programs? For individual exercise? Is the college involved in intercollegiate sports? Is there a well-organized intramural program? What publications, drama, choral, music groups, etc., are available on campus?
- ✎ What kinds of counseling and placement services are available if I need them?
- ✎ Are there any hidden qualities about this school that I should know? Any recent or upcoming changes?
- ✎ What are the current social issues that students are discussing?
- ✎ What kind of housing is available? Are all freshmen housed on campus? What percentage of students live off campus?
- ✎ How would you describe the sense of community and school spirit at this college?
- ✎ Can I expect the same level of financial aid each year?
- ✎ Be careful not to ask questions whose answers are easily found in the college's published materials. You

might say, "In your college catalog it says...", then question the information.

## **College Visit Summary Sheet**

(After you visit a college, print out this section and fill in the information. That way you'll have an easy reference when it comes to decide where to apply—and where to accept!)

Name of College:

Date of visit:

Interviewer:

### **What freshmen or special programs are offered?**

How serious do the students seem about academics?

### **Is there a core curriculum?**

How strict or flexible are curriculum requirements?

How available are faculty members for consultation or help?

List your impressions of the student body in terms of appearance, style, degree of interest, and enthusiasm.

### **How complete and modern are the facilities?**

How active is the social life? How many students stay on campus over the weekends?

Do fraternities, sororities, or other groups dominate the social scene?

Are there restrictions on freshman participation in athletics?

### **What rules and regulations govern social life?**

### **What is the cost of the college?**

What is the availability of financial aid and the deadline date for filing the FAFSA?

What part of the financial aid package is usually work/loan/grant?

Can I expect the same level of financial aid each year?

Are there merit or special interest scholarships not based on need? If so, how are they administered?  
What are the typical costs for social activities?

**Are there part-time job opportunities?**

What are the projected increases in tuition and room and board for the next few years?

**What were your “gut” likes and dislikes?**

**What seemed different or special?**

**RATE THE COLLEGE (5 HIGHEST)**

Academic Offerings	1	2	3	4	5
Student Body	1	2	3	4	5
Campus Facilities	1	2	3	4	5
Availability of Financial Aid	1	2	3	4	5
Overall Rating	1	2	3	4	5

**Self-Assessment: These questions will help you pick a college by telling you about yourself.**

- ✓ List (WRITE DOWN) a few objectives or reasons anyone might have for wanting to go to college. (Examples: to become broadly educated, to make money, to please my parents, to get away from home, or to meet new and different people.)
- ✓ List a few college characteristics (definite, specific things) that anyone might consider in a college. (Examples: size, location, cost, varsity sports, fraternities/sororities, etc.)
- ✓ Now list the two or three most and two or three least important objectives and characteristics for YOU.
- ✓ Base your college searches, visits, and decisions on the things that matter most (or least) to you.
- ✓ Don't bother with information that doesn't pertain to your intended field of study, your interests, or other situations.