



## Application Essays/Scholarship Essays/Letters of Application

Start early. **Read the instructions. Read them again.** Brainstorm; write notes on sticky pads, napkins, and candy wrappers. Think, write, and talk about what you might have to say before you start writing. Talk to your friends, your relatives, and your parents. What has changed for you lately? What's important to you? What kinds of stories do you relate to your friends? Are there threads in your life that form patterns? Have a draft. Early. Have someone read your draft. Early. An essay that was written the night before reads like what it is: a first draft.

### What to say and how to say it:

1. **Forget** what you think “they” are looking for, you will go down the wrong track. What do you have to say? For instance, many questions deal with difficulties or challenges. Remember, not all challenges must end on a note of triumph.
2. **Find** a reader or readers: teachers, advisors, friends, siblings, someone you trust who will respond to your writing *seriously*, and without ideas about what it *should* say. Trust your own instincts; don't change or rearrange simply because someone advises you to.
3. **Find** your voice and write with it: your writing should sound like you, not like something you think sounds smart or formal. A good essay should read like an interesting letter or conversation. Loosen up. Find a natural tone and style.
4. **Pay attention** to details; avoid broad statements, you have plenty to say.
5. **Entertain**: your essay may be one of hundreds. Write for the enjoyment of your audience. It will give you authority. It means you have a voice worth listening to.

***Writing is never done, it's just due.***

Several drafts are better than one. Read your draft and ask yourself these questions:

### Is your essay focused?

are you answering the question?

is your idea or theme interesting, entertaining, and complex?

are your ideas linear and easy to follow?

**Is your essay organized?**

- is each paragraph connected to your main idea or theme?
- are the paragraphs limited to one idea?
- is there order within your paragraphs?

**Is your essay developed?**

- are any claims and statements supported?
- are there sufficient details, examples, and illustrations?
- have you avoided unanswered questions?
- is it entertaining?

**Unity:** have someone read your essay and write down every idea in each paragraph. If there is more than one then you have an organization problem. If the reader stops and asks questions for clarity or interest, you have not developed your essay well enough. Make sure you have clear transitions to connect your paragraphs.

**Look at sentences:** can some be tightened or eliminated? Simplify. *Who, which, that,* and *what* should be avoided. Look for short sentences that can be combined, long sentences that can be shortened to two. Sentence variety will lead to better writing. Are your sentences clear? Try starting sentences with verbs instead of nouns or pronouns.

**Words:** be absolutely sure you know the meaning of each word you have used. Do not rely on spell checkers.

**Grammar:** are your sentences grammatically correct? Ask an expert. Have someone read your essay out loud to you. Do not correct grammar and punctuation simply because the computer tells you to. You may change your meaning.

**Punctuation/Spelling:** are you sure you know the comma rules? Don't try fancy punctuation techniques. If you are unsure, consult a handbook, or rewrite the sentence. Do not rely on grammar/spell checkers.

**Finally, let it rest:** put it in a drawer, get some sleep, walk the dog. Get away from your draft for a while. You will be able to look at it with new eyes and new ideas.

## BEFORE YOU TURN IN YOUR FINAL DRAFT ESSAY CHECKLIST

- Read the instructions again, have you answered the question?
- Do you have one main idea that is clearly supported by the rest of your essay?
- Is there a clear relationship between paragraphs?
- Have you offered enough details?
- Is your writing clear? Have you avoided big words and awkward sentence constructions?
- Are you satisfied with the introduction? Is it catchy and entertaining?
- Are you satisfied that the conclusion works to bring your writing to a close?
- Have you had someone read your draft aloud at least once to catch grammatical or punctuation errors?
- Have you read your essay aloud at least once?
- Have you used words you know the meaning of?
- Is your punctuation correct?
- Is your spelling correct?
- Do you feel good about your writing?