

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO WRITING THE BEST COLLEGE ESSAY



WHEATON
COLLEGE
For Christ & His Kingdom



THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO WRITING THE BEST COLLEGE ESSAY

You already know your essay is an integral part of your application, so we're here to tell you how to write that stand-out piece.

Your essay shows several things about you as an applicant:

- Are you a clear communicator?
- Can you support your viewpoints with logical evidence?
- What's important to you?

In the next few pages, you'll find seven steps to help you write a college essay that will help you stress a little less and get noticed by an admissions committee.



1

READ THE PROMPT (X2)

Before you give up on this guide because of the all-too-obvious first step, hang on.

You would be surprised to learn just how many off-topic essays make their way to our admissions office each year. What are the common mistakes?

- Reading the first half of the prompt, not the second
- Reusing an essay from another application but failing to edit it to fit this school's prompt
- Getting too caught up in your response to make sure it fully answers the prompt

So, like we said: read it and then re-read it. If you're confused about what they're asking, pull in a teacher, an older sibling, a parent, or a guidance counselor.

The bottom line is, you want to be sure you know what the admissions office is asking for in their prompt.





2

IDEATE!

Once you have a good handle on the prompt, start brainstorming. Here are some questions to get you started:

- What personal stories or experiences do you have that tie into the prompt?
- How can you infuse yourself into the essay?
- What evidence do you have to support your viewpoint?

When you have some answers to these questions, it's time to move to the next step.

3

START DRAFTING

When it comes to drafting, there seem to be two preferred methods: creating an outline or just getting words—any words—down on a page.

What's our sage advice? When it comes to the first draft, it's this: you do you. Do whatever helps you get that first version out on paper.

Once you have something written, do the first edit. You're going to be tempted to edit spelling errors, punctuation, and sentence structure. Instead of getting sucked into the details, stay broad. Read through your essay with fresh eyes. As you do so, ask yourself three big-picture questions:

1. Is it specific?
2. Is it true?
3. Is every word necessary?

After saying “yes” to those three questions, move to step four.





4

GIVE YOUR BRAIN A BREAK

Yes, you read that right. Make yourself a snack, hang out with some friends, read a book...whatever it is, just get yourself away from the essay.

5

REVISE

In addition to checking punctuation, spelling errors, and sentence structure, you want to keep asking yourself big-picture questions.

Your essay should follow a particular idea on a clear path from start to finish. You can think about it like a jigsaw puzzle: every part should fit neatly into the next. Every word of your essay should be purposeful.

Here are questions to ask at this step:

1. Is there a clear point, argument, or thesis?
2. Does the story (or stories) you tell make sense and support the purpose of your essay?
3. Do you avoid generalities and provide details that serve your main point?
4. Does every word serve a purpose?
5. Have I corrected all of the grammar issues?
6. Is my personality showing through?

Re-read, revise, and re-write until you feel that every word is doing useful work.





6

ASK FOR INPUT

Once you're on solid footing with your essay, it's time to gather input from trusted guides: teachers, parents, guidance counselors, or older siblings.

First, show them the prompt (and have them read it twice!). Second, hand them your essay and give some direction. Not only should they be looking for errors in punctuation, spelling, and sentence structure, but also those big picture questions you asked yourself in step five.



TAKE A FINAL LOOK

Before taking the final look at your essay, review steps 5 and 6; by this point, you might be getting tired of what you have written. If this is the case, take another break.

You might be starting to get tired of your essay—don't mistake that feeling for believing it's not quality. If you have followed these steps, you have written a great piece. Don't mistake your fatigue for dissatisfaction.

When you know you've done your best, click submit on your essay and treat yourself for a job well done!

It's never too soon to start visiting colleges! Interested in checking out Wheaton? Go to wheaton.edu/visit for more info.





WHEATON COLLEGE

For Christ & His Kingdom

Wheaton College is an explicitly Christian, academically rigorous, liberal arts college and graduate school located just 25 miles west of Chicago. Established in 1860 in Wheaton, Illinois, Wheaton is guided by its original mission to provide excellence in Christian higher education, and offers more than 50 academic programs in various fields of study.

VISIT

Register for an in-person or virtual visit:

[WHEATON.EDU/VISIT](https://www.wheaton.edu/visit)

APPLY

Receive information on applying to Wheaton:

[WHEATON.EDU/APPLY](https://www.wheaton.edu/apply)

CONNECT

Meet your admissions counselor:

[WHEATON.EDU/CONNECT](https://www.wheaton.edu/connect)