

USEFP News

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Application Essays

Tips for Writing Your Way Into Your Top Choice School

By [Allen Grove](#), About.com Guide

Nearly all colleges rate application essays as either important or very important in their admissions process. A poorly executed essay can cause a stellar student to get rejected. On the flip side, exceptional application essays can help students with marginal scores get into the schools of their dreams. The tips below will help you win big with your essay. Also be sure to check out these [tips for the six personal essay op-](#)



[tions](#) on the common application and the [sample essays](#).

Avoid the List Many college applicants make the mistake of trying to include all of their accomplishments and activities in their application essays. Such essays read like what they are: tedious lists. Other parts of the application provide plenty of space for you to list extracurricular activities, so save your lists for the places where they belong. The most engaging and compelling essays tell a story and have a clear focus. Through carefully chosen detail, your writing should reveal your passions and expose your personality. A thoughtful and detailed narration of a difficult

time in your life tells far more about you than a list of competitions won and honors achieved. Your grades and scores show that you're smart. Use your essay to show that you're thoughtful and mature, that your personality has depth.

A Touch of Humor (but just a touch) While it's important to be thoughtful and mature, you don't want your college application essay to be too heavy. Try to lighten up the essay with a clever metaphor, a well-placed witticism, or a little self-deprecating humor. But don't overdo it. The essay that is filled with bad puns or off-color jokes will often end up in the rejection pile. Also, humor isn't a substitute for substance. Your primary task is to answer the essay prompt thought-

fully; the smile you bring to your reader's lips is just a bonus (and a tear can sometimes be effective too). Many students have been rejected for failing to take the prompt seriously and writing essays that end up being more foolish than clever.

Tone, Tone,

Tone Not just humor, but the overall tone of

your application essay is remarkably important. It's also difficult to get right. When you are asked to write about your accomplishments, those 750 words on how great you are can make you sound like a braggart. Be careful to balance your pride in your achievements with humility and generosity towards others. You also want to avoid sounding like a whiner -- use your essay to show off your skills, not to explain the injustices that lead to your low math score or failure to graduate #1 in your class

Reveal Your Character

Along with the essay, most colleges rate "character and personal qualities" as extremely

important in their admissions decisions. Your character shows up in three places on the application: the interview (if you have one), your involvement in extracurricular activities, and your essay. Of the three, the essay is the most immediate and illuminating as they read through thousands of applications. Remember, colleges aren't looking solely for straight "A"s and high SAT scores. They are looking for good citizens for their campus communities.

Mechanics Matter

Grammatical problems, punctuation errors, and spelling mistakes can hurt your chance of being accepted. When excessive, these errors are distracting and make your application essay difficult to understand. Even a few errors, however, can be a strike against you. They show a lack of care and quality control in your written work, and your success in college partly depends upon strong writing skills.

If English isn't your greatest strength, seek help. Ask a favorite teacher to go over the essay with you, or find a friend with strong editorial skills. If you can't find expert help, there are many on-line essay services that can provide a careful critique of your writing.

Could YouTube Be the New Essay in College Applications?

Article By Rebecca Kern - Posted March 23, 2010 - www.usnews.com

The Flight of Jumbo stars a remote-controlled blue elephant helicopter created and flown by a high school student as an homage to Tufts University's school mascot. Whereas, *GMU Song* features a student singing an original song along with her ukulele about why she belongs at George Mason University. Then there's *Math Dances*, starring an energetic high schooler performing interpretive math dances for Tufts.

The videos were part of these high school students' applications to the college of their choice, and they have received thousands of views on YouTube. Welcome to what could be the future of college applications.

George Mason, Tufts, and St. Mary's College of Maryland are the first colleges to accept videos as part of their applications for admission. George Mason and St. Mary's accept the videos as a supplement or in lieu of a written essay, while Tufts currently accepts them only as a supplement to the application. Other schools have accepted videos as supplements to applications over the years, but these three schools are among the first to solicit them specifically in their applications. While George Mason and Tufts both officially began accepting videos as part of their undergraduate applications in the fall of 2009, St. Mary's began accepting them in the fall of 2008. Tufts received more than 700 videos from its nearly 15,500 applicants, while George Mason received about 120 videos



from its 20,000 applicants and St. Mary's received between 200 and 300 videos from its 2,500 applicants in 2009.

Andrew Flagel, George Mason's dean of admissions, says the reason the school added videos to its application was to provide another outlet for students to add personality to their application. The school also accepted the videos as a way to cut down on the expense and time tied to conducting student interviews, he says.

While many of the videos feature high-quality production and animation, quite a few look very homemade. "From our standpoint, we're not looking for the best film producer or best video equipment," Flagel says. "What we are really looking for is energy, enthusiasm, and leadership; someone who would make the best George Mason student." He says that so far he hasn't seen any of the students' videos work against them in the process, adding that the admissions officers view the applications holistically,

with the most weight focused on the student's academic record.

Richard Edgar, the St. Mary's director of admissions, says the school added a video as an essay to see another side of a student. "It's so important for us to understand who they are," he says. "The essay should be able to share about the soul of the teenager."

Hayley Fremuth, a high school senior from Ellicott City, Md., was accepted early admission to St. Mary's for this fall. She created a video to show the college her many talents. "Your résumé is supposed to show what you've done, and the essay is supposed to show who you are," she says. "The visual effect you get from a person in a video is different from their writing style. I wanted to show them who I was when I wasn't on a piece of paper."

The Common Application, which is currently accepted by 389 member schools, has solicited videos on its arts supplement for the past two years, and it will be accepting videos in the athletic supplements next year, says Rob Killion, executive director of the Common Application. "Other than that, we have no plans to encourage or solicit video or other multimedia submissions from common applicants," Killion says. By contrast, the Universal College Application, which currently has 86 member schools, began allowing students to submit optional multimedia through its main

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application form during the fall of 2008, says Joshua Reiter, the president of ApplicationsOnline, which creates this consortium application.

While colleges are becoming more receptive to videos as part of an application, there are still mixed opinions among high school counselors. Some counselors worry about privacy issues surrounding videos on YouTube and their possible negative effects when students apply for jobs. There are also concerns about a socioeconomic disparity between students who can afford to make videos and those who can't. "If accepting videos becomes commonplace, it will increase the divide between haves and have-nots," says Jim Jump, the director of guidance at St. Christopher's School in Richmond, Va., and the president of the National Association for College Admission Counseling. "I also worry about an 'arms race' where students feel like they have to outdo each other, where production values and packaging become more important than substance." However, others argue that video technology is widely available to young people these days. "The accessibility of tools to do online video are common in phones, cameras, and classrooms," Fligel of George Mason says. "I very much doubt the access to this is more significant than access to essay support and the ability to hire consultants for essays and standardized tests."

To further level the playing field for all students' accessibility to multimedia in college supplements, Steve Metzman founded CollegeSupplement.com, a company that provides video cameras to high school students, allowing them to create videos and digital portfolios to send as supplements to colleges. Currently, the company has partnerships with several large public school districts, including inner-city schools in Philadelphia and Chicago, and he says over 250 colleges have viewed the students' online supplements at CollegeSupplement.com. Students can create videos about their experience growing up in inner-city neighborhoods. For students who don't have the money to travel for college trips, these videos enable the students to introduce themselves to college admissions counselors, Metzman says.

Deborah Carrera, the principal of Kensington Creative and Performing Arts High School in Philadelphia, said she signed the school up with CollegeSupplement.com to offer her primarily Latino and African-American students the chance to show colleges their diverse backgrounds. "We want to afford the students this opportunity to present themselves in a creative and 21st-century way," she says. "These videos paint a story of resiliency. They show hopes and aspirations and put a face and a story to the application. "

Jonathan Drullard, a senior at Kensington, created a video with CollegeSupplement.com. He will be the first in his family to graduate from high school and the first to go to college. Drullard will be attending the Community College of Philadelphia this fall. "The program was a great way to show kids how can you be more than just a piece of paper," he says. "It gives kids a voice."

Some high school counselors worry that videos add further pressure to an already stressful application process. John Boshoven, a counselor for continuing education at Community High School in Ann Arbor, Mich., says, "I hope it won't add a whole flavor of show biz to the application process. There's enough competition as is." Likewise, Marjorie Jacobs, director of college counseling at SAR High School in Riverdale, N.Y., says, "These videos are truly adding a degree of stress, pressure, and an unrealistic set of standards for young people."

Despite their critics, applications with videos may become common. Shirley Bloomquist, an educational consultant in suburban Washington, D.C., says she thinks that in five years, the vast majority of colleges will allow videos as an option. "These videos are going to transform admissions," she says. "This is the medium where young people are right now. The videos are an opportunity to provide a window of insight and depth into the person, and can give the written word some vitality."

Recommendation Letter Tips, Tricks, and Advice *from www.writeexpress.com*

Academic Letters

Admission to any institute of higher learning usually requires one or more letters of recommendation. Graduate programs often require the submission of two or more letters and frequently follow specifically outlined procedures for their creation and submission. Be sure to follow these instructions carefully.

Letters required for admission to post-graduate studies are typically written by a faculty member, academic advisor, or administrator. In some cases, an employer can write the letter if academic recommendations are not available. These letters provide the admissions committee with information not found in the application—information that shows the applicant matches the school's expectations and requirements. The letter also provides an opportunity for an applicant to be seen as an individual, and helps him or her to stand out from the hundreds or thousands of other applicants.

It is important that the person providing the recommendation has a good understanding of your academic history, interests, goals, and direction. Normally, this type of recommendation letter is addressed to a specific person and should be submitted along with the admission application or as outlined in the admissions procedure. In many cases, accredited universities require that letters of recommendation be sent directly to specific departments or to the admissions office. If this is the case, the applicant may be required to sign a waiver of confidentiality and relinquish his or her right to access the information contained in the letter or forms. Academic letters of recommendation may contain evidence or confirmation of the following:

- Academic performance
- Honors and awards
- Initiative, dedication, integrity, reliability, etc.
- Willingness to follow school policy
- Ability to work with others
- Ability to work independently

Faculty and Counselors: Don't forget to attend or request one of USEFP's Letters of Recommendation Workshops. You can also contact us to set up an appointment to discuss effective writing tips in detail. Our office also has copies of helpful handouts and sample letters to guide you.

UPCOMING EVENTS AT USEFP, MAY 2010:

Undergraduate Seminars

Graduate Seminars

College Search

Effective Essay Writing Tips and Statement of Purpose Workshops

School Counselor Training

Pease contact your local office to register for upcoming events and receive additional information, you can also see our event calendar online at: <http://www.educationusa.info/Pakistan>

Islamabad: advising@usefpakistan.org;

Karachi: advisingkarachi@usefpakistan.org;

Lahore: lahoreadvising@usefpakistan.org

Upcoming Test Dates for TOEFL, GRE, and SAT

<http://www.usefpakistan.org/testinghome.html>

SAT:

General and Subject Tests

Test Dates:

May 01, 2010

June 05, 2010

International Registration:

Please check for early registration options for international candidates.

iBT TOEFL:

Test Dates:

May 08th, 2010

May 16th, 2010

May 22nd, 2010

June 12th, 2010

June 13th, 2010

June 26th, 2010

July 10th, 2010

July 24th, 2010

GRE:

The GRE Test is offered four days a week, Monday through Thursday, throughout the year.

Please visit our website or call in order to register for a particular test day.



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