

Admission Essay Cheat Sheet

Just Starting?	Already finished?
Brainstorm sentences or words for these questions... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I dream about... <input type="checkbox"/> I think about... <input type="checkbox"/> I'm afraid of... <input type="checkbox"/> I'm interested in... <input type="checkbox"/> On the weekends I like to... <input type="checkbox"/> I'm good at... <input type="checkbox"/> I'm not good at... <input type="checkbox"/> I'm glad when... <input type="checkbox"/> I'm sad when... <input type="checkbox"/> I don't believe... <input type="checkbox"/> I have difficulty with... <input type="checkbox"/> I laugh when... <input type="checkbox"/> I get angry when... <input type="checkbox"/> I love it when... 	Does your Essay.. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Tell a story? <input type="checkbox"/> Highlight one aspect of your personality that isn't already reflected in your application? If you try to cover too many, it sounds like a resume. <input type="checkbox"/> Have a clear main idea? <input type="checkbox"/> Include specific details and examples to help develop your main idea? (hint: use the five senses to describe something). <input type="checkbox"/> Sound like yourself? Avoid using general statements like, "I am passionate about helping people." Let your personality show! <input type="checkbox"/> Sound good when you read it out loud? Mistakes become more clear when you read aloud.

Common Themes of Successful Essays:

Tells a story using specific details

- "Maurizio brought me to a dangerously steep staircase that looked like it had been purposely drenched in oil to increase the chance of a fall. As he gracefully flew down each step, I clutched onto the rusty tile walls, strategically putting one foot first and then the other."

Connects the story to a bigger theme and has a "take away"

- "It was in that lunchroom when I was 17, when I realized that I can choose how to remember something. I can choose to find meaning in that day, not in the horror but in other people's kindness."

Demonstrates ability to reflect on and learn from experiences

- "Moments such as those challenge my criteria of what constitutes true success. My mother, despite never going to college, still managed to make a difference in my life. Tomorrow, she will put on her uniform with just as much dignity as a businesswoman would her power suit. What is her secret? She wholeheartedly believes that her son's future is worth the investment. The outcome of my education will be vindication of that belief."

Voice and personality

- “Today is the day when Isaac (that’s me) starts his job of putting smiles on grim faces as the reader of the morning announcements. “But Isaac, that job is super boring! You just read what’s written on a piece of paper,” is what an uninformed person might say...”

Curiosity and/or passion for learning

- “To me, the Italian language holds an essential connection to my past, but also a constant goal for the future. It is likely that I will never fully master the vernacular and colloquialisms, yet learning this language will stimulate me intellectually and culturally for life.”

Demonstrates how you will make a positive impact on a community

- “I watch the [morning] announcements evolve from an unfortunate but necessary part of the day to a positive and inspiring event. It is now more than just a monotonous script; it becomes a time to make sure that everyone has at least one thing to smile about.”

Some Things to Avoid:

Writing an essay that “anyone” could have written

- This is the college’s opportunity to get to know YOU better. Even if you don’t think your topic is something insanely unique, adding personal details and emotions helps them understand how YOU as an individual respond to different situations. Being genuine and specific is always better than exaggerating a story to stand out.

Talking about how great you are

- The essay is not meant to be a brag sheet, that’s what your grades, scores, and resume do. Instead, write earnestly about something you care deeply about.

Talking too much about struggle

- For many of us, difficult times represent periods of growth and learning, but make sure that this doesn’t escalate into you only talking about hard times and not the growth that followed. Instead of saying “because of this struggle, I act(ed) this way” try “because I value ____, I responded to this setback in ____ way and learned ____.” This shows more of YOU being in control of the outcome.

Telling and not showing

- If you want to show personality, make sure that you aren’t simply stating things like “this made me ashamed” or “I loved how beautiful it was”. This doesn’t let the reader into your individual thoughts. Instead, get specific! Say “I could see how angry my friend was and I looked away” or “the quietness and familiar feel of the woods always helped me think”. If you go in detail, the reader will know how you’re feeling without you having to tell them

Writing too much

- Keep in mind that you don’t need to tell absolutely every single detail of an experience. Colleges read hundreds of applications, so make sure you pick some specifics and really zoom in. They don’t need the whole story to take away your message.

Tips for Successful Writing

Use action words

- If you find yourself having trouble cutting essays down to 1-2 pages or you're over the word limit, swap out passive or long descriptive sentences for to the point verbs. Swap "my teacher had a very positive influence over my life" for, "my teacher influenced me to ____".

Cut down on adverbs

- Adverbs include modifiers, commonly words that end with -ly or describe frequency. These sometimes add unnecessary detail. Examples include: "He *always* helped me" or, "she smiled *sweetly*".

ALWAYS read the prompt, the whole prompt and nothing but the prompt

- It WILL be obvious to a reader if you do not do this and will make your essay much less genuine.
- In addition, NEVER copy and paste essays between different prompts or applications. You are likely to miss something and it will make you look tacky and not invested.

Have a "So What?"

- Know why you're writing what you're writing and why it matters to YOU. If someone asked you why they should care or why you care, you should have an answer in mind. "This is why I'm a certain way" or "This is something/someone so integral to me that I wouldn't be myself without it"

Do your research

- If the school is asking you why you want to go there, check their website out and do research. Know what sets them apart, what unique programs they offer, etc.
- Never write about a program you THINK they have, always double check.
- Know how to spell the name of the school correctly.

Finally...

Make sure you can answer these questions:

1. Is the topic of my essay important to me?
2. Am I the only person who could have written this essay?

Check Spelling and Grammar

- Proofread your work out loud! You'll be surprised by what you're able to catch when you read it aloud.

Make sure you close with an emphasis on your "So What"

- The last part of your essay will be the part that is most likely to stick with the reader. For this reason, be sure that you return to the point you most want to hammer home. What did you learn? How did you change? What is important about your story and why you're telling it?



*It's always a good idea to get a second set of eyes on your work! If you're stuck and need help with ideas, or just need some help polishing your essay, feel free to email the director of college counseling for Peak Ed and Elevated.