

COLLEGE APPLICATION ESSAY TOPICS

The Common Application

- Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.
- Discuss some issue of personal, local, national, or international concern and its importance to you.
- Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you and describe the influence.
- Describe a character in fiction, a historical figure, or a creative work that has had an influence on you, and explain the influence.
- A range of academic interests, personal perspective, and life experiences adds much to the education mix. Given your personal background, describe an experience that illustrates what you would bring to the diversity in a college community or an encounter that demonstrated the importance of diversity to you.

Grand Valley State University

- Describe your educational achievements in the face of any challenging social, economic, or cultural circumstances that you have encountered: (please attach a separate sheet if necessary)
- At Grand Valley, we feel that a range of thoughtful perspectives is necessary for open inquiry, liberal education, and a healthy community. Please tell us what unique perspectives you will bring to our university: (please attach a separate sheet if necessary)

Michigan State University

- Briefly discuss an activity or organization that you are participating in outside of your own cultural group.
- If admitted to MSU, you will join a diverse community of students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Please respond to the following hypothetical situation. In your first semester English Course you are assigned a group-writing project that is to be completed within a week. In addition to yourself your group is comprised of 5 others, some of whom are from different countries and racial ethnic backgrounds than you. Please explain how past life experiences have effectively prepared you to work with the group to achieve success.
- If you feel your high school record doesn't accurately represent your academic abilities, please include and discuss any particular circumstances that may have contributed to your challenges.

Alma College

- Why do you hope to get a liberal arts education at Alma College? What contributions do you hope to make at Alma?
- Describe a significant experience, achievement, or risk you have taken in your life and evaluate its impact on you.
- Identify and evaluate a current issue of local, national, or global importance and explain why this issue is important to you.
- Explain how you interpret "diversity" and analyze its importance in a liberal arts education.

COLLEGE ESSAY TIPS

- ✓ Consider EXACTLY what the question asks!
- ✓ Make your essay unique to YOU!
- ✓ Remember that the school is seeking the applicant that fits its mission and will be a good fit. Work to convince them delicately that you are the right fit.
- ✓ Don't simply repeat information that is already on your application form. Give specific incidents and concrete examples.
- ✓ Don't use long words or obscure vocabulary to impress the committee. (You don't want to come off as artificial and showy.)
- ✓ Follow guidelines such as word count, font size, etc.
- ✓ Appearance is important! Spell all words correctly; follow grammar and punctuation rules; and keep your paper neat.
- ✓ Save your essays! You may be able to tweak an essay and use it for several schools or for scholarship application essays.

Five Things to Cover in Your Essay

- ❑ **The big picture.** First and foremost, explain to the admissions committee why you're pursuing their program. Tell them where you see yourself in five, ten, or twenty years, and address the role that they can play in making your dream a reality.
- ❑ **Specifics.** Point out the aspects of your field that interest you most and explain why you believe that their school or program will be the best fit. If you considered other schools before applying to this one, tell the admissions board specifically why the others didn't stack up.
- ❑ **Your "goods."** Though you've alluded to them throughout your essay already, take a moment to talk about some of your past accomplishments, both professional and personal, that have led you down this path.
- ❑ **Plan of attack.** Your credentials don't always speak for themselves. In this case especially, it's important to tell the admissions council precisely how you will succeed in the program. Talk about some of the personal characteristics that you will utilize, and reiterate the fact that your future goals rely on earning this degree certification.
- ❑ **The hook.** Possibly the most important thing to remember while writing your admissions essay: Keep it fresh. The review board could be reading several essays at a time, so you don't want yours to get lost in the shuffle. Supplement your credentials with personal stories, anecdotes, and current-events parallels where it feels comfortable and appropriate to do so.

Sample College Application Essay 1

The Essay

From the time I was able to realize what a university was, all I heard from my mother's side of the family was about the University of Michigan and the great heritage it has. Many a Saturday afternoon my grandfather would devote to me, by sitting me down in front of the television and reminiscing about the University of Michigan while halftime occurred during a Michigan Wolverines football game. Later, as I grew older and universities took on greater meaning, my mother and uncle, both alumni of the University of Michigan, took me to see their old stamping grounds. From first sight, the university looked frightening because of its size, but with such a large school comes diversity of people and of academic and non-academic events.

In Springfield High School, non-academic clubs such as the Future Physicians and the Pylon, both of which I have belonged to for two years, give me an opportunity to see both the business world and the medical world. These two clubs have given me a greater sense of what these careers may be like. In Future Physicians, I participated in field trips to children's hospitals and also participated in two blood banks.

Currently I hold a job at Maas Brothers. This lets me interact with people outside my own immediate environment. I meet different kinds of people, in different moods, with different attitudes, and with different values. This job teaches me to be patient with people, to have responsibility, and to appreciate people for what they are.

In the community I am active in my church Youth Group. As a high school sophomore, I was our church's representative to the Diocesan Youth Fellowship. I helped organize youth group events, the largest being "The Bishop's Ball," a state-wide event for 300 young people. I also played high school junior varsity soccer for two years. As a senior I will be playing varsity soccer, but in the off-season. As a junior I coached a girls' soccer team for the town. This gave me a great deal of responsibility because the care of twenty-four girls was put into my custody. It felt very satisfying to pass on the knowledge of soccer to another generation. The girls played teams from other parts of Florida. Though their record was 3-8, the girls enjoyed their season. This is what I taught them was the greatest joy of soccer.

The past three years of my life have given me greater visions of my future. I see the University of Michigan as holding a large book with many unread chapters and myself as an eager child who has just learned to read. I intend to read and probe into all the chapters. The University of Michigan offers me more than the great reputation of this fine school, but a large student body with diverse likes and dislikes, and many activities, both academic and non-academic, to participate in. With the help of the University of Michigan, I will be successful after college and be able to

make a name and place for myself in our society.

The Critique

Admission officials consider how you write your essay, not just what you write about. Try to critique your own essays in the same way this sample essay is critiqued below.

The Introduction

The introduction seems to have a lack of focus: Where's the writer going with this paragraph? Where's the writer going with this essay? Also, the writer needs to tighten the phrasing (e.g., "while halftime occurred" to "at halftime" or "From first sight" to "Immediately").

The Body

There is a very abrupt transition from the first paragraph to the second: How did we get from Michigan's diversity to the writer's clubs? The second paragraph also includes general statements with little evidence: How did these activities reveal career paths?

Can the writer be more specific? What does "participated in two blood banks" mean? Did he drive volunteers from across town, sign people in all day on three Saturdays every month except August or spend 15 minutes one Thursday afternoon in the nurse's office giving blood?

In the third paragraph, we have to ask: What does the writer do at Maas Brothers? "Interact" needs definition. What here shows that the writer has thought about the time spent at Maas Brothers? Also in this paragraph, there is a misspelling of different ("diffrent"): The writer did not proofread thoroughly.

The information in the fourth paragraph (as well as the previous two paragraphs) appears elsewhere in the application. Essays that simply run down your accomplishments don't add to your application. And does the reader need to know that "the girls played teams from other parts of Florida"?

The writer would be better off focusing on one of the things discussed in this essay, such as working with the girls' soccer team. What he did to make Jennifer and Gretchen and Courtney enjoy soccer even though they won only three of their games would be more vivid and focused than a lot of talk about passing things on to future generations.

The Conclusion

The conclusion returns to the earlier idea of diversity at Michigan, but this idea was

not developed in the body of the essay. It's not necessary to mention "the great reputation of this fine school." Instead, the writer should give specific, programmatic reasons Michigan offers the kind of education he needs.

Overall

This essay seems full of information and demonstrates basic essay organization, but it lacks focus and proof. The reader gets a laundry list of activities rather than a clear sense of who the writer is and what he cares and thinks about.

The writer also repeats some phrases. He mentions the "University of Michigan" six times and repeats "academic and non-academic" twice.

Sample College Application Essay 2

The Essay

My most important experience sought me out. It happened to me; I didn't cause it.

My preferred companions are books or music or pen and paper. I have only a small circle of close friends, few of whom get along together. They could easily be counted "misfits." To be plain, I found it quite easy to doubt my ability to have any sort of "close relationship."

After the closing festivities of Andover Summer School this past summer, on the night before we were scheduled to leave, a girl I had met during the program's course approached me. She came to my room and sat down on my bed and announced that she was debating with herself whether she wanted me to become her boyfriend. She wanted my reaction, my opinion.

I was startled, to say the least, and frightened. I instantly said, "No." I told her I on no account wanted this and that I would reject any gestures she made towards starting a relationship. I would ignore her entirely, if need be. I explained that I was a coward. I wanted nothing whatsoever to do with a relationship. I talked a lot and very fast.

To my surprise, she did not leave instantly. Instead, she hugged her knees and rocked back and forth on my bed. I watched her from across the room. She rocked, and I watched. Doubts crept up on me. Opportunity had knocked and the door was still locked. It might soon depart.

"I lied," I said. "I was afraid of what might happen if we became involved. But it's better to take the chance than to be afraid."

She told me she knew I had lied. I had made her realize, though, how much she actually wanted me to be her boyfriend. We decided to keep up a relationship after Andover.

Even then, I was not sure which had been the lie. Now I think that everything I said may have been true when I said it. But I'm still not sure.

I learned, that night, that I could be close to someone. I also realize, now, that it doesn't matter whether or not that person is a misfit; the only important thing is the feeling, the closeness, the connection. As long as there is something between two people — friendship, love, shared interests, whatever else — it is a sign that there can be some reconciliation with fear, some "fit" for misfits. And it shows that fear need not always win, that we can grow and change, and even have second chances.

I am still seeing her.

The Critique

Admission officials consider how you write your essay, not just what you write about. Try to critique your own essays in the same way this sample essay is critiqued below.

The Introduction

The introduction is brief and memorable. The reader is drawn into the rest of the essay.

The Body

The second paragraph shows that the essay has a clear focus: his anxiety about relationships. The next two paragraphs use a style that is simple and direct. They employ short sentences and simple words to tell a simple story.

We see that he is thoughtful by the way he narrates the next several paragraphs. The story of his conversation with a girl is a way for the writer to show us about himself — that he's conservative and shy but willing to take a risk.

The Conclusion

He concludes with a strong summary paragraph and end sentence. Like his introduction, his ending is simple yet memorable.

Overall

Boyfriends and girlfriends can be risky essay topics. However, this writer skillfully employs the story of the beginning of a relationship to illustrate a larger point — the power of love to overcome fear.

This essay enriches an application full of academic achievements, scores and grades. It's definitely not something found elsewhere in the application. It's short and to the point. It's interesting because it's believable.

Adapted from [The College Application Essay](#) by Sarah Myers McGinty.