

## The DOs and DON'Ts of Writing Your College Essay

- DO spend lots of time THINKING. Who are you? What do you value? What difficulties have you faced? What personality traits characterize you? Have you ever experienced an epiphany, a moment in which you saw the world, or yourself, differently? What might your friends say about you?
- DO be yourself. Think more about what you want to say than about what you think they want to hear. Write about what MATTERS to you, what you feel strongly about.
- DON'T repeat information that the reader already knows. Tell them something about yourself that does not appear elsewhere in your application. This is precious space—DON'T waste it.
- DON'T be afraid to be autobiographical. This is not a five-paragraph English or history paper—it is a PERSONAL statement.
- DO include details that are specific and concrete. Avoid generalizations—they are boring. Keep in mind what your English teachers have probably told you—SHOW rather than TELL. For example, don't TELL them about your leadership skills or your perseverance—SHOW them in the story you tell.
- DO answer the question! Not a different question that you wish you'd been asked. When they ask you to elaborate on ONE activity, don't discuss four or five.
- DON'T choose a topic that is too controversial or negative.
- DON'T have too many adults “revise” your essay. Yes, it should be free of grammatical errors, and yes, it's fine to have your English teacher check it over for that reason, but the colleges want to hear an 18-year-old voice, not a 45-year-old voice. And they CAN tell the difference.