

## HELPFUL HINTS FOR COLLEGE ESSAYS

For students who want to get a jump on their college application essays, here is a step by step guide to efficiently getting started.

1. Decide which schools you are really applying to and go to their admissions websites. See if they even require an essay or writing of sorts. LOTS of colleges and universities no longer accept them. Some have very specific requirements in terms of the writings you are asked to complete. Even some of the common app colleges do not ask for/require the common app essay. So, your first task should be to find out what essays or writings you will actually have to do. (This is a great time to find out if your schools need recommendation letters and from whom also.)
2. If there are some you actually have to do, your next task should be to copy and paste each prompt, character/word/page limits, and other directions into a document and save it. That will be a great place to add brainstorming for possible topics for the writings, etc. When you get someone (anyone who might help you) to read them for you to give you feedback, they will need to know your prompt and the size limitations.
3. I would then brainstorm underneath each topic for possible ways to approach the prompt. If the prompt asks about an event that exemplifies XYZ, you can bullet some possible events that fit X, Y, or Z.
4. Then, before writing drafts, I would go to this article and read it: <https://www.carrollk12.org/schools/high/sch/SchoolCounseling/CollegeCareerPlanning/Documents/ExpertAdvice.pdf>. I find it super helpful with my students. You could also Google something like advice about admissions essays and get something else you might find useful. Don't worry about getting advice from your specific college admissions staff. Most advice is universal.
5. Now go back and look at your list. Are any of them going to lead to the "bad" essays? Anything else you could add that to your brainstorming list that might possibly get you to a more original "good" essay?
6. Now it is all about getting something, no matter how cheesy or shallow it is, down on paper. Do it. Hold your nose and don't worry so much about the grammar.
7. Now add details, imagery and descriptions that allow the reader to actually visualize what you are saying. Show, don't tell. That is the most important part.
8. Finally, go back and work on the sentence fragments, punctuation and other grammatical issues you find. Read it out loud to a human and you will be able to hear most of the awkward things that need changing all by yourself.
9. Before asking for anyone to read and comment on your essays, make sure you have completed steps #1-8. If you intend to ask a teacher for feedback, do the asking in person and NEVER have your parents do the asking. You need to give AT LEAST two weeks for a teacher to have time to read it and give you feedback. Depending on the time of year and how many other seniors have asked for the same sort of advice, you might be looking at even longer, so get started as soon as possible. Know your deadlines.