

# Making your essay stand out

From education.yahoo.com

Most colleges will ask you to include a personal statement in your application. They do this because they want to see if you can write, but they also want to meet the person behind the GPA and the SAT or ACT score. So make good use of the opportunity to show them who you really are and what makes you special. Follow these Top Nine Tips to help your essay stand out from the pack.

## 1. Start with yourself

Take a look at your credentials and your personal information. Write your resume and a list of your activities. List everything, and don't be afraid to toot your own horn. Then look at what your strengths are and make sure these strengths are covered in your application. It is also OK to talk about your anxieties or a very difficult time in your life. If you do, speak of how you grew because of this experience. Be genuine.

## 2. Write in your own words

There should be no question in anyone's mind as to who wrote your personal statement. Many colleges include a request for a "graded sample" of essay writing from their applicants. This policy began when it became apparent that some candidates were paying other people to write their essays. If you think you're not a great writer, work on developing your own style. Writing is like any other skill: practice makes perfect.

## 3. Deal with how you look on paper

See how you look on paper. Look at your transcript. Was there a semester that your grades tanked because you were having some personal problems? Do your grades get better as you progress through high school because you got more and more serious about going to college? You don't want to turn the personal essay into an apology for a bad grade, but if there is a story worth telling, consider using the personal essay to do it.

## 4. Make your reader see it through your eyes

This is another version of your English teacher's mantra, "show, don't tell." When you are telling a story, try to make it come alive with lots of visual detail and specific example. Show the admissions committee what you mean. Create interesting characters and vivid scenes. Use an active voice and sensory words.

## 5. Cover new ground

The personal essay should not be a retelling of every little detail in your resume and transcript. It should introduce some new information about you or expand on something from your resume or transcript. Choose one significant event or one aspect of your personality that you want to illuminate. The personal essay should reveal something that is not revealed anywhere else in your application.

## 6. Presentation counts

Lots of spelling and grammatical errors will ruin your chances of making a good impression, no matter what you have to say. Use a word processor to write your essay if at all possible and use the spelling and grammar checks. If you are entering your application online, be sure to write your essay beforehand, revise it, and proofread it. Get the opinions of your English teacher and guidance counselor before you start filling in the online template with the final copy. Don't just click send.

## 7. Own the personal statement

So much of the college admissions process is impersonal; take advantage of this opportunity to reveal who you really are. Be yourself, and be creative. The essay is your place to shine. Colleges are asking to get to know you on a personal level, so you need to let them in. Remember, you own this section.

## 8. Write for your audience

Different colleges require different essays. Always read the directions for each school's essay carefully. If they say limit your statement to 500 words, they mean it. Also make sure to write different essays for different colleges. You can use the same general theme, but be sure to include how you and a particular school match up. You want each school to feel like it's your top choice.

## 9. Write it now!

The personal essay is too important to leave it until the last minute. You'll need to put your essay through several drafts and ask adults you trust to read it and give you feedback. For that process, you'll need time. So, start today. If you think of what you write now as just a rough draft, that may take the pressure off.

# Fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

from education.yahoo.com

The first day you are eligible to file your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is January 1. To receive the most financial aid possible, submit your FAFSA form as soon as possible after January 1 prior to each academic school year for which you plan to attend. Be sure to check with your school to find out the priority financial aid deadlines, as these may be earlier than federal deadlines.

## 1. Federal Eligibility Requirements

- You must be a U.S. citizen, national or eligible non-citizen with a valid Social Security Number.
- Males between the ages of 18-25 must be registered for Selective Service.
- You must have a high school diploma or General Education Development (GED) certificate or pass the approved "ability to benefit" test.
- You must be enrolled at least half-time and seeking a degree or certification through an eligible program.

## 2. Information to Have Available

- Your Social Security Number.
- Your driver's license, if applicable.
- U.S. income tax returns; for dependent students your parents' income tax returns would be necessary. Otherwise, your returns and your spouse's, if applicable, would be utilized.
- Records of untaxed income: Social Security benefits, veterans benefits, welfare, temporary assistance to needy families or child support.
- Current bank statements, investment records and mortgage information.
- If you are not a U.S. citizen, your alien registration identification card.

## 3. Avoid Common Errors

- The number one mistake when filing a FAFSA is leaving a question or field on the form blank. If the answer is zero or does not apply to you, put in a zero or mark "N/A".
- Read the instructions carefully.
- Double-check all of your answers for accuracy.
- Make sure that the form is signed, as required. If you submit an electronic signature, make sure you receive a confirmation.
- If you are completing the paper form, be sure all information is legible, paying close attention to numbers, such as your Social Security Number, school codes and dollar amounts you provide on the form.

## 4. Understanding Your Student Aid Report (SAR)

Approximately four to six weeks after you submit your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form to the Department of Education, you will receive a Student Aid Report (SAR). Depending upon how you submitted your FAFSA, you will receive either an e-mail or paper form containing your SAR. Each school listed on your FAFSA will also receive a copy of your SAR. The school's Financial Aid Office will use the information contained in the SAR to determine your total financial aid package, including your loan eligibility and Federal Work-Study qualification.

## 5. Review Your Student Aid Report Carefully

As soon as your SAR arrives in the mail, you should carefully review the information for possible mistakes. Compare the information listed on the SAR to your copy of the FAFSA you submitted to make sure the information matches.

## 6. Correct Any Errors on Your Student Aid Report

If you find incorrect information, there are three ways to correct it:

- Enter the corrections online at FAFSA Corrections on the Web.
- Fix any mistakes by writing the correct answers on the SAR and mailing it to the designated address provided.
- Contact the Financial Aid Office at the school you plan to attend to see if they will send the corrections electronically for update.