

ESSAY WRITING FOR

Application Essay

TOEFL Essay

Personal Statement for Graduate School

Application and Personal Statement Essay

I. HOW IMPORTANT IS IT?

The more important the school, the more important the essay. But schools take it seriously, so you should too.

II. WHAT DOES THE ESSAY DO?

It gives the admissions officers insight into your personality and intellect that your academic records cannot show. This means, you want to present these qualities in your essay.

III. WHAT ARE THE READERS LOOKING FOR?

Admissions committee members want to know what type of person you are. They are looking for the quality of your thoughts, character, goals and commitment. That means you must write an interesting, insightful, revealing and nongeneric essay. Also, they are looking at the quality of your writing.

IV. BEFORE YOU START WRITING

Nongeneric means the personal statement should be just that – personal. You're being asked to tell about yourself, something that might not be easy. Therefore, ask yourself these questions:

- What is special about your life's story?
- When did you become interested in this field and what have you since learned about it?
- How have you learned about this field?
- What are your career goals?
- Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships?
- What personal characteristics do you possess that would enhance your prospects for success in the field?
- What skills do you possess?
- Why might you be a stronger candidate than other applicants?
- What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the committee to be interested in you?
- Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain?

V. TWO MAJOR CATAGORIES OF ESSAYS

- General, comprehensive personal statement (the type of statement often prepared for the Personal Comments section of the standard medical school application form and that many law school applicants elect to write.
- Essays that are responses to very specific questions such as those found on business school application forms.

VI. IMPORTANT THINGS TO INCLUDE

- Fashion your essay in the form of a story. Or, tell your story as a story. Give it some drama without being theatrical. As a foreign-born applicant, you can tell of the obstacles you have had to overcome.
- The opening paragraph is the most important. Find a punchy start that will grab the reader's attention. At the same time, say what you are going to discuss.

VII. WHAT NEVER TO SAY

- In general, experiences or accomplishments during high school or earlier are not a good idea.
- Don't mention subjects that are potentially controversial (religion and politics).
- Don't include topics that could be offensive or seem strange.
- Don't apologize for what you think are academic shortcomings or not being a native speaker of English.

ESSAY BASICS TO KNOW AND PITFALLS TO AVOID

I. THE BASICS: CLEAR THINKING

First, know what you want to say - make an outline. The essay should have a discernable beginning, middle and end. In the beginning, state the theme(s) that you will deal with. In the middle, support your point with examples. At the end, summarise your statement.

II. THE BASICS: CLEAR WRITING

- Keep the essay simple, clear and easy to read.
 - Strip the sentence down to its essential components, saying just as much as you need to and no more. The force of a few words.
 - Germans who write English tend to use many clauses strung together in a cacophony of cluttered constructions.

- Keep sentences under 25 words.
- Don't overuse dashes – and parentheses ().
- The essay must have a clear beginning, several examples to support your topic and a clear ending.

III. GET THE RIGHT VOCABULARY

- Know the correct words and phrases for contrasting, comparing, showing similarities and difference (on the one hand, on the other hand).
- Use correctly the words needed for cohesion: however, nevertheless, but, besides, for example, for instance, thus, therefore. You need to master this. We will go into more detail later.
- Beware the pitfalls of false friends. Know how to use correctly such words as: control/check, sympathetic/likeable, actual/current, etc.
- Be sure you use phrasal verbs correctly. The confusion of such phrasal verbs as 'to do for' and 'to do to' can be catastrophic for the meaning you wish to convey.

IV. USE THE RIGHT GRAMMAR

- Beware of the ambiguously placed adverbials for example, 'We must examine the meaning of the words we use carefully'. Here, 'carefully' should come after 'examine'.
- The dangling participle or infinitive clause:
'Walking down the street, it is natural to see many advertisements.'
'To be able to take part in the examination, various certificates have first to be obtained.'
- Beware of Germanisms: 'These both situations are relevant.'
- Subject/verb agreement. 'The wars of the past year between one country or the other are now over.'

V. COMMON COMMA PITFALLS

- Do not insert a comma between a nominal clause and its verb:
'He told me that he would be coming on Tuesday.'
- Know the difference between a non-restrictive relative clause, which uses commas, and a restrictive relative clause, which doesn't:
'We then sent for John, who was supposed to have the information.'
'We then sent for the man who was in charge of the project.'
- Use a comma after a subordinate clause when it begins a sentence:
'If the dog bites me, I will be very angry.' but 'I will be very angry if the dog bites me.'

VI. WATCH YOUR STYLE

- Don't let your essay be too conversational in style.
- You can vary your style by using appositive phrases. The appositive phrase is a noun phrase that immediately follows another noun phrase and refers to the same person or object as the first noun phrase:
'Among the most interesting of living creatures are the protozoans. The protozoans are the one-celled animals.'
'Among the most interesting of living creatures are the protozoans, the one-celled animals.'
- For symmetry, use parallel structures:
'The essay was carefully planned and well-written.'
'Her behaviour was both foolish and impolite.'

VII. CONCLUDING THE ESSAY

- The easiest way to end your essay is with a brief summary of the main argument.

Example for an essay titled 'Examinations contribute little or nothing to the process of education'

Viewed in this way, exams do contribute something to the process of education. Tough, aggressive and appalling as they are, they help to make students fit for life in our tough, aggressive and, in many ways, appalling society. Institutionalized education cannot do without examinations. And it is a pity.

- A statement that points to the future.

From an essay on 'The Seventies in Retrospect'

In pushing open the doors to the twenty-first century, we cannot be sure what direction we are moving in. There are too many unsolved problems, which make optimism almost impossible. Every new crisis upsets the carefully built-up balance of power and interests. In view of all these situations and developments, one wonders whether anybody will have the strength to steer the boat in a different direction.

VIII. OVERVIEW OF THE MAJOR PITFALLS

- German syntax: 'In 1995, he moved to Los Angeles.'
- False friends: 'The actual informations are now available.'
- Phrasal verbs used incorrectly: 'I looked after the book for weeks but couldn't find it.'
- Improper collocations.