

getting it done

Some colleges and universities require applicants to write three admissions essays; others one or two. Write one good one and you can reuse it or parts of it for different schools (in different countries, if you wish) with just a bit of rewriting.

The path to constructing a good essay no matter the topic is always the same and entails more than just coming up with a beginning, middle, and end. Our coaching sessions will look like an ice cream cone, starting wide then narrowing to a point. Be prepared to write and rewrite, draft and redraft. Please bring two, double-spaced hard copies of your draft or preliminary ideas to the first session. Without these in hand we cannot proceed.

This kind of work usually requires at least the four core sessions I've outlined below but usually more.

Session 1. The Big Picture

Understand the topics you are being asked to write on. Explore how you might approach them, starting with the rudimentary "Tell us about yourself" or "Tell us why you want to go to Mount Holyoke," for example. All essays count. Strive to come up with something original.

Pick an idea and an approach you think stands out for each essay question then set a course and go. Write. Write some more. Don't look over your shoulder, worry about organization, transitions, topical sentences, conclusions, or word count at this point. Just get your thoughts down.

We'll settle on an assignment that will focus on shaping the guts of your essays.

Session 2. Honing In

Here we'll address the core of your essays, what they're expressing, how they're expressing it, if and how they could express it better, and what might be missing.

Honing In (cont.)

This job is often tougher than it sounds. At this point we're still working in the realm of idea and approach, what to leave in and take out, how to reveal who you are and let your voice be heard. You'll open up paragraphs that want to say more; you'll slash others that don't say anything. To make your meaning clear, we will consider thesis, transitions, organization, and conclusion.

Your assignment will consist of revising your drafts to reflect how you reshaped your idea and approach. Your thinking, which is to say organization, and writing should be clearer at this point.

For writing tips, go to <http://www.anndantonio.com/anns-maxims>. Go to www.anndantonio.com/s/style-sheet.pdf for reference books and Web links.

Session 3. Nittier and Grittier

It's time to use literary devices like how to construct a lead paragraph intriguing enough to grab your reader; to come up with memorable metaphors; to demonstrate your sense of humor; to vary sentence structure; to find stand-out verbs. Make sure what you write delivers what you said you'd write. Ask yourself if you're doing your job in an original way, if the reader is getting a glimpse of the real you, if you answered the question. Conclude by tying a bow around the package you presented; don't merely repeat your introduction.

Session 4. Begin to Fine Tune

Here you'll hunt for typos (beyond those that spell-check finds), punctuation and grammatical errors, missing words, cut-and-paste mistakes, spacing problems—sloppiness that any professional reader, admissions officer or not, would notice. Without such care to detail, no one would take any kind of writing seriously—great topic, top grades, high standardized test scores, or not. This session is one of the last chances to clean yourself up for public presentation. The words that appear on the screen or the page are in effect your face.

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Please note: I will not write your essays for you. My job is to coach you to think clearly about what you want to say and write it to the best of your ability.

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