

### Essay Advice from College Admissions Officers

A college application essay is your opportunity to share something meaningful about yourself. Tell your story in your own voice and in your own words. Here is what admissions officers say about the essay.

**Stefanie Niles, Ohio Wesleyan University, Vice President for Enrollment and Communications**

“The essay, in my experience, definitely matters in an admission committee’s overall consideration of a student’s admissibility to an institution. I want to be sure that students address the question asked of them in a way that gives me insight into who they are. I believe that a student should write about what is important and meaningful to them, and that feeling will shine through their essay.”

**Lorenzo Gamboa, Santa Clara University, Senior Associate Director of Admissions**

“Students do not need to compile an entire season into an essay. Just give us one place, one time, one moment, and that will do it for you. The key is to show genuine passion, commitment and that they have what it takes to survive at the school.”

**Christina Lopez, Barnard College, Dean of Admissions**

“The whole application process is one big “Match.com” process. The students are creating their ‘profile’ within their application and reflecting in the essays on who they are as scholars and people.”

**Christoph Guttentag, Duke University, Dean of Undergraduate Admissions**

“By the time (the application) comes to us, many of them have gone through so many hands that the essays are sanitized. I wish I saw more of a thoughtful voice of a 17-year-old.”

**Gregory Sneed, Denison University, Vice President for Enrollment Management**

“Even after reviewing a mediocre transcript or seeing a limited activities list, I can be swayed to admit a student who writes an essay that really blows me away. The topic of the essay doesn’t need to be mind-blowing (in fact, the most mundane topics are often the most relatable and enjoyable), but if it reveals a someone who would be highly valued in our campus community, that could tip the scales.”

**John Ambrose, Michigan State University, Executive Director of Admissions**

“Be your most authentic self! Students put a lot of effort into trying to convince admissions officers who they think we want to see. Authenticity is always appreciated.”

**Shawn Felton, Cornell University, Director of Undergraduate Admissions**

“Answer the question. Since so many students don’t do that, you could actually stand out by doing that very basic thing. We are creating a class. We look at numbers, grades and test scores. But there’s more to it. We are trying to put a face with all of this information.”

**Jan Deike, Vanderbilt University, Assistant Director of Admissions**

“Sometimes students feel that because they haven’t found the cure for cancer, they have nothing to share. Life is truly lived in the smaller moments, and that can be a powerful essay.”