

Brainstorming About the College Application Essay

The most important part of your essay is the subject matter. You should expect to devote about 1-2 weeks simply to brainstorming ideas. To begin brainstorming a subject idea, consider the following points. From brainstorming, you may find a subject you had not considered at first.

- What are your major accomplishments, and why do you consider them accomplishments? Do not limit yourself to accomplishments you have been formally recognized for since the most interesting essays often are based on accomplishments that may have been trite at the time but become crucial when placed in the context of your life.
- Does any attribute, quality, or skill distinguish you from everyone else? How did you develop this attribute?
- Consider your favorite books, movies, works of art, etc. Have these influenced your life in a meaningful way? Why are they your favorites?
- What was the most difficult time in your life, and why? How did your perspective on life change as a result of the difficulty?
- Have you ever struggled mightily for something and succeeded? What made you successful?
- Have you ever struggled mightily for something and failed? How did you respond?
- Of everything in the world, what would you most like to be doing right now? Where would you most like to be? Who, of everyone living and dead, would you most like to be with? These questions should help you realize what you love most.
- Have you experienced a moment of epiphany, as if your eyes were opened to something you were previously blind to?
- What is your strongest, most unwavering personality trait? Do you maintain strong beliefs or adhere to a philosophy? How would your friends characterize you? What would they write about if they were writing your admissions essay for you?
- What have you done outside of the classroom that demonstrates qualities sought after by universities? Of these, which means the most to you?
- What are your most important extracurricular or community activities? What made you join these activities? What made you continue to contribute to them?
- What are your dreams of the future? When you look back on your life in thirty years, what would it take for you to consider your life successful? What people, things, and accomplishments do you need? How does this particular university fit into your plans for the future?

If these questions cannot cure your writer's block, consider the following exercises:

1. Ask for Help from Parents, Friends, Colleagues, etc.

If you cannot characterize yourself and your personality traits do not automatically leap to mind, ask your friends to write a list of your five most salient personality traits. Ask your friends why they chose the ones they did. If an image of your personality begins to emerge, consider life experiences that could illustrate the particular traits.

2. Consider your Childhood

While admissions officers are not interested in reading about your childhood and are more interested in the last 2-4 years of your life, you might consider events of your childhood that inspired the interests you have today. Interests that began in childhood may be the most defining parts of your life, even if you recently lost interest. For instance, if you were interested in math since an early age and now want to study medicine, you might incorporate this into your medical school admissions essay. Analyze the reasons for your interests and how they were shaped from your upbringing.

3. Consider your Role Models

Many applicants do not have role models and were never greatly influenced by just one or two people. However, for those of you who have role models and actually aspire to become like certain people, you may want to incorporate a discussion of that person and the traits you admired into your application essay.

4. Read Sample Admissions Essays

Before you sat down to write a poem, you would certainly read past poets. Before writing a book of philosophy, you would consider past philosophers. In the same way, reading sample admissions essays help you to see what topics other applicants chose.

5. Goal Determination

Life is short. Why do you want spend 2-6 years of your life at a particular college, graduate school, or professional school? How is the degree necessary to the fulfillment of your goals? When considering goals, think broadly. Few people would be satisfied with just a career. How else will your education fit your needs and lead you to a fulfilling life?

If after reading this entire page you do not have an idea for your essay, do not be surprised. Coming up with an idea is difficult and requires time. Actually consider the questions and exercises above. Without a topic you feel passionate about, without one that brings out the defining aspects of you personality, you risk falling into the trap of sounding like the 90 percent of applicants who will write boring admissions essays.

The only way to write a unique essay is to have experiences that support whatever topic you come up with. Whatever you do, don't let the essay stress you out. Have fun with the brainstorming process. You might discover something about yourself you never consciously realized.

Question: Tell us about an opinion that you had to defend. How has this affected your belief system?

I chuckle to myself every time I think about this. I am perceived as a mild-mannered, intelligent individual until I mention that I am involved in riflery. It is interesting to watch someone's expression change. It is as if I instantaneously grew a pair of horns and a sharp set of claws. Believe me this gets worst; I am a member of the NRA. I try to tell these folks that I belong to the NRA to fire my rifle. "Oh my God! You fire real guns? with real bullets?!?" they remark with a perplexed look on their face. Besides having horns and claws, I now possess a tail and leathery wings.

This is how it began five years ago. I had played on a soccer team for several years. As I grew older I began having difficulty playing soccer because of shortness of breath. I was diagnosed as having mild asthma, which ended my soccer career and eliminated my participation in most physical sports.

Shortly afterward, during a Boy Scout summer camp, I participated in riflery at their shooting range. This was the first time I had ever touched a firearm. To my amazement, I won the camp's first place award for marksmanship. I was more than eager when a friend of mine asked me if I would like to join a shooting club.

My parents were wary when I asked to join the rifle club. My mother feared guns, but my father felt there was no problem with trying this sport. Gratefully, he gave me the opportunity to try rifle marksmanship, despite secretly hoping that I would quit. Both of my parents were afraid of what people would think about their son's involvement with guns.

Like my parents a majority of people believe that all firearms are dangerous to our society. All they remember are the hysterical news releases of street violence and injured children. I am often asked how many deer I've shot. Frankly, I could never bring myself to injure another living creature and neither would most of the competitors I have met. Yet, I keep finding myself defending the sport from all of the misconceptions that surround it. Most people have developed a negative impression of the sport and I have found that these prejudices are difficult, if not impossible, to rectify.

Because of this conflict, I have become an open minded individual. I express my opinions without reservation, and I have learned to accept opinions and viewpoints contrary to my own. I do not intend to alter what I enjoy because of the ignorance of friends and acquaintances. If people have a negative view of me simply because of the sport I am active in, then they must be so superficial that they cannot see the person who I really am. I am no longer apprehensive of being perceived as a gun toting, trigger happy fanatic,

even though I still endeavor to educate my friends and relatives on the beauty of this sport.