



1. Avoid Risky Topics

Tricky subjects should be—most often—off-limits. To avoid distancing the reader, eliminate these:

- Politics
- Race
- Personal secrets
- Personal ethical dilemma
- Others' secrets or ethical dilemmas
- Unresolved personal issues
- Evoking pain/anxiety in reader
- Other controversial issues
- Sex
- Death
- Gimmicks
- Religion
- Humor

2. Avoid Topics That Don't Impress

- Something you haven't cared about until now
- Your brother's opinion
- An old news story
- Tokenism
- An over-discussed social topic
- Your opinion as fact
- Not revealing anything of yourself

3. Avoid Tones That May Annoy

- Complaining
- Know-it-all
- Apologetic
- Boastful
- Apathetic
- Self-important
- Superficial
- Critical
- Sarcastic
- Bored
- Sappy
- Over-dramatic
- Condescending
- Pity-seeking

4. Avoid Content That May Offend

- Avoid writing that embarrasses
- Avoid writing that is crude or racist
- Avoid writing that stereotypes
- Avoid writing that misrepresents a culture
- Avoid writing that insults
- Avoid writing that labels
- Avoid writing that nauseates

5. Goal of the Essay

- The student shared a story that communicated something about who he/she is.
- The student reflected on the meaning of the story.

6. Originality

Essay readers see a number of popular topics pretty frequently. Here are a few...

- Foreign travel ("Last summer I studied in Spain.")
- Service project ("I carried bricks and it was hot outside.")
- What's in my room/on my bulletin board ("Let me tell you about my trophies.")
- All my achievements ("Being awesome is not as easy as I make it look.")
- Typically atypical experiences ("I went skydiving.")
- Special encounter with a loved one ("My grandmother taught me how to sew.")
- Loss of a loved one ("I was sad when my dog died.")
- The "big game" ("We won!"/"We lost!")
- Encounter with someone who's different ("At the shelter, I met a charming homeless person of a different race who had Down Syndrome.")
- Brown nosing ("Your school is so fantastic I can't stand it.")

There are others! In your opinion, using the list above and your common sense, the writer has chosen a topic that is:

- Unique
- Possibly overused

Aside from the topic, how has the writer approached the topic?

- Common: any number of students could have written it
- Creative angle: while common topic, unique approach!
- Unique: could only be written by this student

7. Focus

A focused essay communicates a single message, such as, “Failure produces growth” or “Justice requires sacrifice.” Are you able to identify the focus, or singular message, communicated in this essay?

— A single clear focus is identifiable in the essay. A unified meaningful thread runs throughout.

In this essay, the message communicated is:

— The essay lacks a clear focus. I struggle to identify the singular message/meaning of the essay.

Based on what I read, a possible focus might be:

8. Support

— The writer has provided evidence, proof, examples, illustrations to support the focus/meaning of the essay.

— The writer has not provided evidence, proof, examples, illustrations to support the focus/meaning of the essay.

9. Show, Don't Tell

— The writing in the essay “tells.” The reader is informed, as when given recipe ingredients.

— The writing in the essay “shows.” The reader is drawn in, as when tasting a cake.

10. Voice

Has the student written using language and tone he or she might use when speaking to an aunt or uncle?

— Yes, the voice is just right. It sounds like an informal speaking voice.

— No, the voice is a bit too casual. It overuses slang. One example from essay is:

— No, the voice is a bit too formal. It sounds overly academic. One example from essay is:

11. Audience

In your opinion, is the student’s writing—content, language, tone, etc.—appropriate to the situation, writing to a college admissions essay reader?

Yes No

Any red flags? Explain. . .

12. Technique

a. Introduction (The “Hook”)

— The opening sentences engage the reader.

— The opening sentences do not engage the reader.

b. Active/Passive Voice

— The writer creates interest by using active voice throughout the essay.

— The writer could improve by using active voice throughout the essay.

*If passive, please identify one point where passive voice is used now:

c. Precise/Vague Language

— The writer uses precise language.

— The writer uses language that lacks precision. Using more specificity would improve the writing.

*Identify one point where language is vague:

d. Unnecessary Words

— The writing is tight and efficient without lots of unnecessary words.

— The writing uses unnecessary words, sentences and phrases that can be removed without changing the meaning.

*Identify one point where cutting words might improve the essay:

e. Description

— The writing includes interesting descriptions: sights, smells, tastes, sounds and textures.

— The writing could be improved by adding descriptive language.

*Identify one point where adding description might improve the essay:

- f. Overuse of Adjectives and Adverbs
_ The writing avoids overly flowery speech (excessive use of adjectives and adverbs).
_ _ The writing uses overly flowery speech.

*Identify one point where flowery speech can be eliminated:

- g. Dialogue
_ The writing employs dialogue appropriately (not too much or too little).
_ The writing is strong without including dialogue.
_ The writing uses too much dialogue.
_ The writing could benefit from the inclusion of dialogue.

*Identify one point where dialogue might enhance the writing:

- h. Variety of Sentence Length/Structure
_ The writing uses a variety of sentence lengths and structure.
_ The writing could benefit from increasing the variety of sentence lengths and structures.

*Identify one point where sentence length/structure seems repetitive:

- i. Conclusion
_ The closing sentence/s are purposeful and effective.
_ The writing could benefit from a stronger conclusion.

13. Avoid Telling Everything

An essay that is *too much* may overwhelm a reader.

- _ The essay does not attempt to do more than is possible in so few words.
_ The essay is too much, sounding more like a resume, autobiography, magnum opus, advertisement, etc.

If it is too much, please specify:

- _ Too wide: writer has listed achievements and experiences that aren't necessary to the central focus of the essay.

_ Too broad: The writer has tried to tell too much of the story.

_ Too deep: Writer has tried too hard to say something colossally meaningful.

14. Mechanics Check

- _ No errors in Fact
_ No errors in Spelling
_ No errors in Grammar
_ No errors in Punctuation
_ Relatively Free of Clichés
_ Hasn't Overused Quotations
_ Stays Tightly Focused
_ No Unnecessary Digressions
_ Within Word Limit
_ Clean Presentation

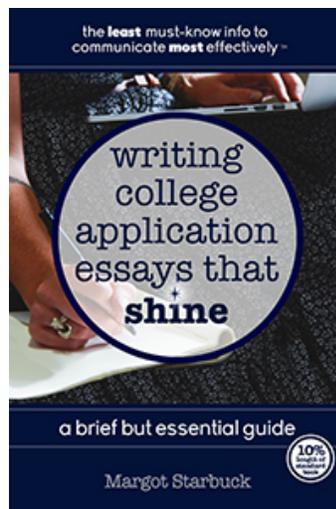
15. Final Comments

What was the strongest part of the essay?

Did you have any red-flag concerns as you read? Explain:

Be the admissions reader: Do you want the student on your campus? Why? Why not?

Other comments/questions/concerns? Explain:



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