



COACHING FOR COLLEGE e-Tip Sheet for parents who have a student preparing for college

The College Application Essay - October

Oh, no...Oh, yes...whether it is called a College Essay, Writing Sample or Personal Statement, some or maybe all of the college applications your son or daughter completes will require it. Some universities consider it a major component of the student's application. The words will help the university become acquainted with the student beyond the high school courses, grades, test scores, and other objective data. It might be 250-500 words, generally one to two pages, on any topic or on topics suggested. I looked through some college applications and pulled sample topics for students. Here's what I found:

- Humor is often called life's best medicine. Describe a time in your life when humor has helped in a difficult situation.
- Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.
- Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.
- In the spirit of Ben Franklin, what invention would you create to make life easier, to advance society, or to simply make life more interesting?

Yes, it's a lofty challenge. Some of our sons and daughters are Hemingway-like, but if you have a reluctant writer, you will hear moans and groans of "what should I write?" Hold on; steady now... remember, the newness of the senior year, homecoming, and fall sports are ending and that means focusing on their futures. Sometimes staying busy with homework, sports, clubs, jobs, relationships, etc. can be good ways to procrastinate on the college application process, particularly the essay. Really. Just write the essay and get that out of the way. Then come back a few days later or a week later and reread it. You, the parent, can read it too. We all know filling in the data blanks on the application is the easy part. It's the nontangible, the creative, unique thoughts or opinions that your student writes that hold up the mirror and reflects what test scores don't necessarily reflect. Now it their time to express in words and say what they think or feel without the pressure of a timer, proctor, and answer sheet to be used as a gage.

Feel your teen could use a jumpstart for the college planning process? Perhaps as the parent, you realize you could use a tune-up on your career path as well or want to prepare to become an *Empty Nexter*®. Contact Beckon Call and let's talk!

Coaching for College e-Tip Sheet© is written by Barbara Wulf. Send questions, comments, and article ideas to: Barbara.wulf@me.com or call 920-725-2930.

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What do you do as a parent during the “essay phase” of the college application?

1. Parents, do not write the essay. This is one of those challenges your son or daughter must do alone. Remember when they took the driver’s license exam? You waited in the motor vehicle waiting room while they took the road test. The essay is all about the student’s thoughts and perceptions. You can toss out a few ideas or make suggestions, but usually we enjoy or at least tolerate writing about something that is meaningful to us. Later, you can be on standby to proofread the essay.
2. Empathy and Encouragement dusted with Humor can be helpful.
3. Taking time to talk with your son and daughter, to be a sounding board, to bounce some thoughts and ideas around the essay might help jumpstart the creative juices or sketch an outline for the essay. Often times a long walk or run, long shower, or even listening to music can free up the creative mind and add a new sense of energy to the essay.
4. Some students will choose to go to the keyboard and begin to compose. Others might prefer to write it down. Still, some might want to talk it into a recorder first and then type it. Taking time to talk with your son and daughter, to be a sounding board, to bounce some thoughts and ideas around the essay might help jumpstart the creative juices or sketch an outline for the essay.
5. Don’t forget that your son or daughter can consult a favorite English teacher. That teacher would probably be willing to spend a few minutes to help your student get unblocked, assist with a grammar question, etc.
6. Composing the essay is the long term goal, but getting there requires short term goals or steps. Breaking it up in sections can help get the job done. Remember, the university wants to hear from your student so avoid long quoted sections or use of rhetoric.
7. Proofreading is necessary. Have your student read it aloud to hear how it sounds.
8. Some incentives or cheerleading along the way might be good ways to mark the writing progress. Try making your son or daughter’s favorite dinner or dessert as a yard marker to keep the momentum moving forward and rewarding perseverance. A gift certificate for a massage or new CD could be a reward for completing the essay.

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And, maybe, the finished product will be reward in itself. After all, this is just one of many writing assignments that are yet to come as our students head to the university.

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