

College Essay Writing Checklist for College Applications

Prepping

Understand the prompt.
Carefully read and understand the prompt. Explain it in your own words. If you're choosing between several prompts, figure out which ones resonate with you. You want to **choose a prompt that you identify with** so it's authentic to you and easier to write.

Brainstorm topics.
Brainstorm ideas for potential topics. Defer all judgment – no idea is a bad idea at this point. Try our [Common App Essay Brainstorm worksheet](#), some of these [brainstorming exercises from the College Essay Guy](#), or a free whiteboard like [Miro](#).

Narrow down your topics.
Select a topic from your brainstorm. Choose a topic you genuinely want to write about, not something you think a college admissions officer wants to read. They want to learn more about you, so be you.

Create an outline.
Create an outline to organize your thoughts into a clear structure. You'll need an introduction with a good hook, body paragraphs where you make your points clear, and a conclusion to tie it all together. **Be specific** – it will make it much easier to write your essay.

Writing

Write a compelling introduction.
The introduction needs to hook your reader's attention and prepare them for the rest of the essay. State your thesis or main idea, but do so in a way that is true to you – this is an opportunity to be creative and showcase who you are.

Develop strong body paragraphs.
This is the meat of your essay! Be specific, and **make sure each paragraph serves a purpose** – nothing should be filler. Provide examples and details to support your points.

Polish your conclusion.
Don't restate everything you've already said, just try to make a lasting impression.

Show, don't tell.
Use descriptive language and vivid details to paint a picture. Don't overtly explain things to your readers – allow your writing to speak for itself.

Write in your own voice.
Your essay is a representation of you, so it should be written in your voice. Your personality should shine through in the writing – avoid clichés and generic statements. As you write, check for authenticity – **does each sentence and paragraph sound like you?**

Write a "bad" first draft.
Don't agonize over your first draft. Just write! You'll have time to revise it, so just get something down.

Revising

Seek feedback.
Choose 1-2 people who you trust and ask them for feedback. This could be a teacher, peer, or mentor. Ask for constructive criticism, but be wary of getting too much feedback. This is your essay, you don't want to dilute it with too many other voices.

Revise and edit.
Using the feedback, revise your essay for clarity, coherence, and consistency. Consider the overall flow and structure.

Proofread.
Carefully proofread your final draft to catch any grammar errors. **Read it out loud** to identify awkward phrasing or unclear sentences.

Check the formatting.
Follow any specific formatting guidelines provided by the college. Check word count limits and adjust accordingly.

Do a final review & submit on time.
Take a final look to ensure your essay meets all requirements and confirm that it answers the prompt. Submit it on time!

Re-use your essays for scholarships.
Many scholarships require essays that are similar to college essays. [Explore scholarships on Going Merry](#) and see if you can reuse or re-purpose parts of your essay for scholarship apps!