**Writing College Essays**

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| **Goals of the Essay:**  To help the reader get to know you--regard the essay as a window to your personality, values, and goals  To illustrate your uniqueness  To enable the reader to evaluate your writing  To help the reader create a full and memorable picture of you  To tell the story only you can tell  **General Guidelines:**  Conform to the guidelines regarding length; otherwise, one page, single spaced or two pages, double spaced, is appropriate.  Use your own voice--informal, conversational, and not stilted.  Avoid humorous essays unless you are good; but freely use humor.  Watch spelling.  Avoid overly familiar quotations or definitions.  Travelogues, Outward Bound, Mountain School, Camp Counselor, and Death--all need a personal, fresh perspective; any topic can work if approached in a unique way.  Don't repeat list of activities.  Don't let mom, dad, or anyone else write the essay.  Dialogue works.  Think small--anecdotes and rich details work.  Be free with format.  Don't write about writing essays, SAT's or the college process.  Accentuate the positive--even in painful experiences.  Don't write a traditional introductory paragraph.  The first few sentences are critical and must engage the reader.  **How to Write:**  Decide your message first.  Write as if you are brainstorming--then revise.  Spend as much time thinking as you do writing.  If you are stuck, have a brainstorming session with someone close to you.  If you write about an activity or an experience, focus not on how good you are or what you have accomplished, but what it means to you.  Don't ask yourself or anyone else, "What should I write about?"  The appropriate question is "What should I tell them about me?"  Reorganize your thinking.  Test the "success" of your essay by asking someone to read it and then asking not "Do you like it?" but "What do you think it says about me?"  Finally, ask yourself, "If college deans were to place me with roommates based on this essay, would they be able to choose compatible people?  Would it give them enough to go on?" |