

Tips for Writing a Great Essay

General

- **Read and *answer* the question asked.** You'd be amazed how many essays we receive that don't relate at all to the question we were asking!
- **There is no "right" answer.** Don't think you know what we want to hear. Whatever you have to say about the topic is of interest to us.
- **Be authentic.** We want to hear your voice in your response – the experiences, opinions and values that have shaped you. Feel free to write on something you are passionate about so we can get to know you better.
- **Be proactive!** Each year, we talk to students who have everything ready but their essays – if they could just get them finished, their application would be complete. Get started on your essays soon, and don't spend months agonizing over whether they're perfect. We don't read through them with a red pen in hand!
- **Avoid re-writing your accomplishments in paragraph form.** You've already given us that information in your application.
- **Re-use essays (or portions of essays) when possible, especially when applying to a lot of schools.** However, make sure to re-read before hitting the submit button or mailing them in! The worst possible way to finish your essay to U-M is to say, "And I just can't wait to be a Spartan!" This happens. Seriously.
- **A research paper is different from an admissions essay.** If you are re-using something you've previously written, make sure it directly answers our question – and not one that a teacher posed to you for an assignment.

English 101

- **Use mature professional writing skills.** Avoid contractions, slang, and "you." If you have questions, talk to your English teacher.
- **Avoid funny fonts, big margins, large font size, etc...** We were once in school too, and we know all the tricks of the trade for making things appear longer than they really are! Work with a standard font (such as Times) and a standard size (such as 12).
- **Explain any abbreviations.** Sure, we know the obvious ones (NHS, anyone?), but talking about the B.O.B. award that you won for participating in the F.D.R. may not make sense to someone who doesn't go to your high school.
- **If making an argument, back it up with consistent facts.** Have an opinion about global warming? Affirmative action? Think that capital punishment is evil? Why? Your argument should be supported by facts, not the opinions of others.

- **Use spell-check and proofread your essay.** Look at this slightly different (from actual essays) spelling of a, um, common word – that spell-check wouldn't flag.

“My work as a Candy Striper has really influenced me to become a nurse”

vs.

“My work as a Candy Stripper has really influenced me to become a nurse”

Didn't catch it? Here's a hint – there's an extra “p” in the second sentence... Please have at least 2 people read your essay to check for major errors. Bonus if you use people who don't have a massively vested interest in your college education.

- **Plagiarism is academic fraud and will cause your application to be thrown out of consideration.** You know those great websites that will write your essays for you? We know about them too. Aah, the power of Google...
- **Pick one topic and stay with it.** You don't have a lot of room to discuss a variety of different topics, so strive for depth on one subject versus breadth.
- **Make sure your essay can stand alone.** Avoid saying something along the lines of, “As I stated earlier in my application...” Please re-write the topic at the top of the essay so we can quickly identify what you're writing about.
- **Be careful with humor.** It can be tough to pull off in writing. And remember – you don't necessarily know your audience. Your essay will be read by a number of different people from a wide array of ages and backgrounds.

What we're looking for

- **Tell us what is unique about you.** Why would you stand out among our 20,000+ applicants? Is there something different about your personal experiences? Your response should provide us with an opportunity to get to know you on a more personal level, beyond your GPA, test scores, and curriculum.
- **Use recent examples.** It's always best to focus on issues that occurred while you were in high school, since we're only reviewing your high school performance when determining if you'll be admitted. If something happened when you were younger that has significantly affected you, talk about it, but then put the focus on how this event has affected you in recent years.
- **Watch your tone.** There's a big difference in focusing your essay on “U of M needs me as a student because...” versus “please please please admit me!”
- **Don't make excuses.** If you've had a poor or inconsistent grade performance due to unusual or stressful circumstances, feel free to share that information with us; it can be useful. But don't strain credibility by making up false excuses. Be honest – we'll respect that.
- **Be truthful, but make sure you're comfortable with your potential audience.** Students often feel compelled to share extremely personal and even traumatic experiences in their responses – health issues, death of a family member, abuse, etc. We will absolutely keep your information confidential; however, if you decide to reveal something deeply personal, be aware that a number of people will potentially be reading your essay.
- **Tell us why we're great.** Talk about campus programs you've attended. Tell us why you're a great fit for Michigan. Remember that athletics can be a reason, but should not be the *only* reason you want to come to Ann Arbor!