

*Mastering the Art of*

**WRITING  
COLLEGE ADMISSIONS  
ESSAYS**

A guide to creating effective entrance essays

**WILLIAM BURNS & ANTHONY GIANANTE**

Preview

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A guide to creating effective entrance essays

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ESCO Institute  
P.O. Box 521  
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**Phone:** (800) 726-9696  
**Website:** [www.escogroup.org](http://www.escogroup.org)

**Fax:** (800) 546-3726  
**E-Mail:** [customerservice@escogroup.org](mailto:customerservice@escogroup.org)

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# PREFACE

We wish you safe travels as you begin your journey through *Mastering the Art of Writing College Admissions Essays*. The inspiration behind this guide was simple: we recognized a problem and set out to solve it.

At Suffolk County Community College’s Writing Center, we frequently worked with students seeking help with transfer applications. Time and time again, we saw that the written portions of these applications caused the most anxiety—especially when students were asked to respond to specific prompts. In response, we began gathering helpful resources and developed our own techniques to support students navigating this important next step in their academic lives.

Drawing from our backgrounds in literature, writing, composition, rhetoric, research, and education—as well as our experience founding writing centers in high schools and local communities—we wrote this book. Over the course of more than thirty years of combined experience, we noticed a clear pattern: students were being asked to respond to the same core essay prompts year after year. After helping countless students with these essays, we asked ourselves, “Why is there no single, comprehensive resource that addresses these recurring prompts in a useful and engaging way?”

The answer? There wasn’t one—until now.

*Mastering the Art of Writing College Admissions Essays* was created to fill that gap. What started as a shared question evolved into a practical solution—a concise, approachable, and insightful guide for students at all stages of their educational journeys.

We truly believe this book is especially timely. The college admissions process is more competitive than ever, and with that comes increased pressure for students and their families. College is no longer just an educational milestone—it’s a cultural and social expectation.

This book is designed to be both accessible and in-depth, practical yet personal. The strategies and methods presented here are not theoretical—they’ve been tested and proven effective by students who have been admitted to their top-choice schools, selected for internships, and awarded scholarships by following the guidance we offer.

Whether you’re a high school student applying to your dream college, a community college student transferring into a four-year program, or an adult learner returning to school, this guide is for you. Our goal is to walk you through the essay-writing process step by step so that your work not only stands out—but truly reflects who you are.

We know the application process can be daunting. That’s why we created a resource that is clear, supportive, and packed with proven strategies. We hope you find this book as helpful and inspiring to read as we found it fulfilling to write.

Thank you for joining us—and welcome to *Mastering the Art of Writing College Admissions Essays*.

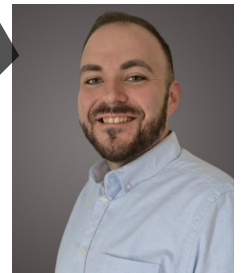
# ABOUT THE AUTHORS



**William Burns** is a Professor of English at Suffolk County Community College and has been in academia for over 20 years. His PhD is in Composition and Rhetoric and William has been the Writing Center Coordinator and chair of the Composition Committee at Suffolk. He has published articles in *Composition Studies*, *Reflections: Writing, Service Learning, and Community Literacy*, *Open Words*, and *Praxis* as well as a book entitled *Space-People-Language: A Grounded Theory of Place-Based Writing Pedagogy*, which all focus on improving student writing and enhancing writing pedagogy.

William has also delivered academic presentations for conferences in New York City, Chicago, San Francisco, New Orleans, St. Louis, Louisville, Boston, Toronto, Portland, ME, Syracuse, NY and Jacksonville, FL on student writing and the resources necessary for students to achieve in academia.

**Anthony Giansante** is a librarian at the John Jermain Memorial Library in Sag Harbor, NY. He holds a Master of Science in Library and Information Science and a Master of Business Administration. At John Jermain, Anthony contributes to program development and community outreach, and teaches classes on research methods, digital literacy, and the education of older students. His instruction is practical and inclusive, designed to help patrons at all stages gain essential academic and life skills.



Anthony's experience includes delivering presentations at conferences in Saratoga Springs, NY, and Melville, NY, covering topics such as innovative library practices and instructional strategies. His work emphasizes the importance of information access, digital literacy, research skills, and lifelong learning.

In addition to his library work, Anthony is a professional writing tutor who has collaborated with William at the Suffolk County Community College Writing Center. He supports students in developing writing and research skills, tailoring his approach to individual needs and backgrounds. With his combined expertise in library science and business administration, Anthony is committed to advancing literacy, digital skills, and educational access in both academic and community settings.

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# CHAPTER 1:

## THE PERSONAL GROWTH ESSAY

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*Add your notes, thoughts,  
and ideas here!*

### *Introduction to the Personal Growth Prompt*

Just as the path to higher education begins with self-reflection, the 'Personal Growth' essay prompt represents a vital, early step along that journey. The Personal Growth essay is an essay of reflection (looking back) and progression (looking forward). This all-important chapter guides you through responding and understanding this prompt, which is a key component of most college applications that asks you to delve deep into your personal history and past experiences. Your goal, when responding to this prompt, should be to articulate not just a story of change but a chronicle of evolution and maturity.



To be successful and memorable, this personal growth narrative needs to align with aspects of the college experience such as academics, civics, professionalism, career training, and campus life in a manner that ensures that readers of your essay see that attending their institution is a crucial phase in your personal evolution.

### *Understanding the Prompt*

In order to effectively respond to this, or any essay prompt, it is important to fully understand why the prompt is being presented to applicants in the first place. The 'Personal Growth' prompt is intended to provide members of the college admissions team with insight into your character, which extends far beyond your academic achievements and accolades. As such, when responding to this prompt, you should clearly articulate how experiences, challenges, successes and, yes, failures have molded you into the person you are today. In addition, your response should convey how your collective past acts, at least in some fashion, act as an indicator of the future trajectory of your life.

The crux of this prompt is transformation. Admissions officers are interested in how particular experiences have spurred growth and brought about significant changes in your perspective, attitude, or behavior. This transformation should be described as an ongoing evolution of your own development. Just as painters often utilize dark background colors to make the bright colors in the foreground seem that much brighter, including some negative experiences in your essay can help make the brighter moments in your life shine that much brighter!

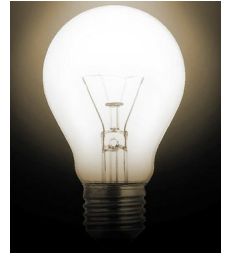
Add your notes, thoughts,  
and ideas here!

### Choosing Your Story

When selecting the perfect story for your 'Community and Service' essay, it is important that you select an especially meaningful experience that is not only important to you but one that will also resonate with those who read your work. Be sure to reflect on your community service experiences and choose one that has been particularly impactful. This could be a long-term volunteer position, a specific project you initiated, or a meaningful event you were part of. The important thing here is that you are, or were, an active participant in the experience, not simply a passive or casual observer of the event. When choosing your story, consider the following:

- The significance of your role in the service, event, or project.
- The impact the event had on the community.
- The impact your involvement in the event had on the community.
- Social/personal/community insights you gained or growth you personally experienced as a result of the event or project.
- Feedback, either direct or indirect, from the community in response to your personal participation in the event.

**Important note:** The readers of your essay are looking specifically for how you participated in this community event. If you were an observer, or played a minimal role in this particular project, it might be best to select another event. The purpose of this essay is to give you an opportunity to shine, and shine brightly. If the bulb is dim, it's probably time to change to a higher wattage bulb!



### Setting the Scene

Your essay should provide a detailed description of the experience's back story. What was the condition or situation like before you got involved? What was the community need or issue you were addressing? How did you become involved? By providing context, you set the scene for your story, helping the reader better understand the importance of the work you did.

As you set the scene for your story, be sure to discuss your previous role, if any, in the community. What role, if any, had you played in your community prior to getting involved with this project? Keep in mind that it is perfectly okay if you had no prior experience in community/social issues or activities prior to this one. Be honest and sincere. Don't feel the need to embellish or make things up to make your story sound better.

Effective responses to community and service essay prompts include a discussion of your personal motivation to partake in, or initiate, this event. This often includes a timing element. Why this issue, concern, or activity? Why now? What was the sense of urgency to take action when you did? Sharing what personally motivated you to get involved is a major aspect of this type of essay. Was it a personal experience, a passion for a particular cause, or the influence of a mentor, friend, or family member?

*Add your notes, thoughts,  
and ideas here!*

Even hobby-related stories can prove invaluable in this essay, provided they provide stellar examples of how they helped shape and mold you. Be very critical and selective when creating the short list of items to delve into the essay.

### *Brainstorming*

As you will likely have many experiences and events to choose from, it often helps to ask yourself the following questions to help you decide which ones to include in your work:

- How has this aspect of my identity influenced my life?
- What unique experiences can I share that will illustrate its impact?
- How does this element of my identity differentiate me from others?
- How does this element aid me in overcoming adversities?
- How will this element help me succeed in college?
- How will this element assist me in my future goals?

If you are able to answer at least 3 or 4 of these questions about a particular experience or event, you are very likely to have a good candidate for inclusion. If you are having difficulty doing this, it is probably best to explore other options to speak about in the essay.

### *Setting the Scene*

Begin your essay by providing context for your identity or background. Describe the environment, community, or family dynamics that have shaped you, being as descriptive as possible to create a very clear backdrop for your work.

Convey why this aspect of your identity is meaningful. Share the emotions, memories, or experiences tied to it, creating a personal connection with the reader. Without a personal connection to your reader, you will likely fail in creating an emotional bond that this essay strongly encourages you to establish.

Be sure to establish a theme for your essay. What unites the individual elements of the essay? Are you trying to convey determination, creativity, or kindness? Maybe it's diversity, integrity, courage, or optimism. Are you trying to convey passion, resilience, or ambition? Make certain the pieces of your story are unified and clearly conveyed.

### *Sharing Your Experiences*

When sharing your experiences with the reader, detail specific moments or experiences that emphasize the importance of this aspect of your identity. Use vivid descriptions and engaging storytelling to paint a picture that brings these moments to life.

If you are emphasizing a crucial personal trait or characteristic, make sure you explain what you mean by the concept. Never assume that your reader knows or understands what you mean. Words often have many different meanings. If it's important, make sure it's clear!

Overcoming challenges is always a great element to include in your essay. Discuss challenges related to your identity or background and how you addressed

### *Unveiling the Unique Aspects of the College*

It is important, especially when drafting your essay, to keep in mind that all colleges and universities are not created equal. Be sure to identify and elaborate on the unique aspects of the college that resonate with you. The members of the admissions committee know what makes their institution unique, but they want to find out if you know what makes their school unique and how you can potentially fit into their uniquely structured establishment. Is it the school's innovative curriculum, commitment to research and development, or the diversity of the student body? Be specific and detailed in your description to demonstrate your genuine knowledge about, and deeply seated interest in, the college.

As part of this essay, you want to make certain that you draw a clear, concise line that connects the college's strengths and offerings to your academic goals. How do the programs, courses, or faculty align with, and possibly complement, your educational aspirations? Discuss how the college's academic environment is ideally suited to foster your intellectual growth and help you achieve your goals.

While academic alignment between you and the college is important to stress in this essay, the desire and need for personal development should never be understated or omitted. Stress the importance of your need to further develop personally and how the college aligns with your personal development plans. Does the college's culture, community engagement, or global outlook mirror your values and beliefs? How does the college provide the perfect environment for your personal growth and the pursuit of your passions? Be specific! Identify the actual programs, features, events, projects, and initiatives that you feel will help you continue to grow on a personal level.

### *Articulating Your Contribution to the College Community*

Keep in mind that each college is unique, as is each individual who applies to one. Your perspective is yours alone, so be sure to reflect on, and clearly convey, what unique qualities or experiences you would bring to the college community. Consider your cultural background, linguistic abilities, unique talents, skills, and diverse experiences. How do these aspects of your identity add value to the college community?

Be sure to discuss your intentions and plans for future engagement and involvement within the college community. Which clubs, organizations, or campus activities align with your interests, and how do you plan to contribute actively? Express your eagerness to engage in collaborative projects, community service, or other extracurricular activities to enhance the stature of the college in the public's eye, while affording yourself the opportunity for continued personal growth.

An important aspect of this essay is to share your vision of how you intend to leave a lasting impact on the campus. Whether it's through leadership roles, innovative projects, or fostering inclusivity, explain how you see yourself making a significant contribution to the college community that would remain long after you complete your studies there.

# CHAPTER 5:

## THE INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE OR EVENTS ESSAY

Add your notes, thoughts,  
and ideas here!

### *Introduction to the Influential People or Events Prompt*

In our lives, certain people and events cast long, defining shadows that shape our beliefs and values, while helping us define the paths along which we will ultimately choose to wander. The 'Influential People or Events' essay prompt offers a unique opportunity to reflect on these significant factors. Think of this essay as a kind of cause-and-effect



discussion: your influential person or event is the cause, the person you are now is the effect. Make sure it is clear how the process of influence and inspiration positively affected you. This chapter will guide you through the process of articulating the profound impact of a person or event that has played a pivotal role in shaping your journey. As you look back on your experiences, you will most likely be able to identify one or two bifurcation points that significantly changed the trajectory of your life. It is these events that are often great topics of discussion in this type of essay.

### *Brainstorming*

To start organizing your thoughts for this essay, it is strongly suggested that you make a list of your most positive, beneficial traits and characteristics. After you have created this list, explain from where and/or from whom did each attribute or personal quality come from and exactly how it became part of your identity. It is vitally important at this stage to establish a clear lineage between each feature of your identity and its origin. If you can't establish this connection, it might be best to identify another person or event for inclusion in this essay.

### *Identifying the Influence*

The person or event that has significantly influenced your life could be a mentor, a friend, an enemy, a teacher, a family member, a historical figure, a life-altering experience, or a significant world event that had a profound personal impact. The possibilities are boundless at this stage of the essay-writing process. If you have a doubt about a person or event, put it on your list at this point. You might be surprised to know that some of the least likely people or events turn out to be the best options for this type of essay. As you work through the following steps, you'll soon determine whether or not this particular item is a winner. Don't forget, you can always remove, or add, as you move forward.

Explain the reason for choosing this particular influence. What about this person's characteristics or the event's nature has left an indelible mark on your life? What makes their influence so significant to your personal growth and identity? What is the connecting principle between the influence and your personality? Once again, if you can't establish this connection, it might be best to identify another person or event for inclusion in this essay.

well as your approach to learning and problem-solving. End with a forward-looking statement, expressing your eagerness to continue this intellectual pursuit in college, including how this interest will keep guiding and inspiring you, even in your post-college endeavors.

*Add your notes, thoughts,  
and ideas here!*

### *Writing Your Essay*

As you craft your essay, be sure to employ engaging storytelling. This will help bring your narrative to life. Use anecdotes, examples, and personal reflections to create a vivid picture of your intellectual journey. While doing so, ensure that your essay reflects your authentic voice and personality. Let the essay be a genuine expression of your intellectual passion and curiosity.

Don't forget to balance your narrative with analytical depth. Explain not just what you did, but also why it matters and how it has shaped and prepared you for future challenges.

In this essay you must also establish a well-defined connection between the issue being discussed and your academic/professional practices and goals. Remember it's not enough to simply show and talk about personal growth in this essay. You will also need to illustrate how your investment in your interest and/or problem solving also enhanced and deepened your academic and professional growth as well. This is what the readers of your essay want and expect to see in your work.

### *Refining Your Essay*

Review and refine your essay for clarity, emotional depth, and insight. Ensure that your narrative is compelling and coherent, with the main points clearly highlighted.

Don't hesitate to seek feedback from teachers, family members, friends, mentors, or peers. Constructive criticism can provide new perspectives and insights that strengthen your essay. The more eyes on your essay also means the greater chance that grammatical/rhetorical errors can be identified and corrected before submission of your essay.

Pay careful attention to the language and tone of your essay. It should reflect your voice and personality. Remember, this is your essay! Additionally, ensure that your essay is grammatically sound and free from errors. Nothing turns off an Admissions reader quicker than misspelled words, run on sentences, sentence fragments, and wrong word choice.

### *Final Thoughts*

Your 'Intellectual Curiosity and Problem Solving' essay is more than a recount of your academic pursuits; it's a window into your mind and soul. It shows how your curiosity drives you, how you confront and solve problems, and how your intellectual pursuits shape your identity and aspirations. As you write, remember that this essay is a testament to your love for knowledge and your readiness to tackle the complexities of the world—both essential qualities for a thriving college student and a future innovator or leader.

### Finalizing Your Essay

Regardless of how well you think you wrote, you need to answer a few essential questions, and it's very important to be honest with yourself as you do.

- Have you responded to the prompt in a coherent manner?
- Is your essay relevant to the prompt's topic?
- Is the purpose of your essay clear?
- Did you follow the instructions/directions as detailed in the prompt?
- Did you stay within the stated word limit (if there is one)?

Before finalizing your essay, take a step back and conduct a thorough review. Look for any lingering errors or inconsistencies that might have been missed in earlier revisions. It is here that you try to identify anything that simply doesn't look or feel right.

One often overlooked item is adherence to formatting guidelines. Ensure that your essay meets the formatting guidelines specified by the college. This includes adherence to word limits, font size, and margin requirements. Failure to comply with any of the guidelines, regardless of how seemingly insignificant, indicates that you might not be detail-oriented, which is quite often an attribute that the admissions committee is specifically looking for.



Finally, make certain that you properly prepare your essay for submission. If submitting online, ensure that the formatting is retained in the submission process. If mailing, ensure it meets the necessary presentation standards.

Here is a checklist to make certain that you haven't overlooked anything:

- ✓ Spelling/Wrong Word
- ✓ Appropriate Word Choice
- ✓ Sentence Fragments
- ✓ Pronoun Reference
- ✓ Comma Usage (Fused sentences/run-ons/introductory elements)
- ✓ Subject-Verb Agreement
- ✓ Verb Tense
- ✓ Correct Use of Capitalization
- ✓ Document Design/Formatting

### Post Essay Contemplation

Take some time to reflect on the journey of crafting your essay. This process is not just about creating a polished piece but also about personal growth and self-expression. As you finalize your essay, have confidence in the story you've told and the effort you've put into crafting it. This essay is a testament to your aspirations and your ability to communicate your story compellingly.

*Add your notes, thoughts,  
and ideas here!*

### *Avoiding Clichés and Common Pitfalls*

- **Be aware of commonly used clichés in college essays and make every effort to avoid using them.** Phrases like “life-changing experience” or “little did I know” can be overused and detract from the authenticity of your essay. If you feel the need to use expressions such as these, do so sparingly and strategically to impose the greatest reaction, impact, and effect.
- **Draw on and emphasize your unique experiences and perspectives.** Personal anecdotes and specific details make your story more relatable and interesting. This helps to differentiate your work from that of other college applicants.
- **Experiment with innovative language and descriptions.** Avoid predictable expressions, and instead, try to find new and interesting ways to convey your ideas and experiences.
- **Expand the scope of the materials you read.** By broadening your exposure to different styles and genres of writing, you will likely be inspired to incorporate new ways of expression and help you avoid clichéd narratives.
- **Seek honest feedback from teachers, mentors, or peers.** They can provide a fresh perspective on your essay, pointing out any clichés, generic elements, or overly repetitious remarks that you might have overlooked.
- **Staying true to your voice and personality.** Write in a way that is true to yourself. Authenticity naturally helps you avoid clichés and helps create a more compelling and engaging narrative.

*Add your notes, thoughts,  
and ideas here!*

### *Final Review*

As you near the end of the writing process, it is important to set your work aside to let it, and your brain, rest. After a break, which can be as long as a few days, revisit your essay with fresh eyes. Look for clichés, overused phrases, or any signs of writer’s block that you might have initially overlooked.

As you review your essay for the last time, pay careful attention to its clarity and originality to ensure you have created a well-polished, finished work. Ensure your essay clearly reflects your unique voice and story.

Make certain that you have responded to the prompt in a coherent manner. Is your essay relevant to the prompt’s topic? Is the purpose of your essay clear? Did you follow the instructions/directions as detailed in the prompt? Did you stay within the stated word limit (if there is one)?

Finally, conduct a thorough review of your work. Look for any lingering errors or inconsistencies that might have been missed in earlier revisions. Pay attention to the smallest of details, as these can differentiate between a good essay and a highly successful one.

Add your notes, thoughts,  
and ideas here!

### *Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusivity*

In a world of diverse cultures and perspectives, being culturally sensitive in your writing is vital. Recognize the importance of cultural sensitivity by avoiding assumptions, stereotypes, and generalizations, which can be offensive to the readers of your essay. In addition, using blanket stereotypes and generalizations can reveal, or at least imply, a limited understanding of other cultures and their philosophies, values and principles.

Be sure to use language that is respectful, tasteful, and inclusive. Be mindful of how certain words or phrases might be perceived by individuals from different backgrounds. Inclusivity in your writing exhibits your ability and desire to engage respectfully with the diverse college community you aspire to become a member of.

When sharing and reflecting on personal experiences, especially those involving multiple cultures or communities, focus on what you learned rather than how you changed or helped others. This approach avoids the ‘savior’ complex and respects the complexity of cultural experiences and differences.

As you write, be sure to demonstrate global awareness when such opportunities arise. Showcasing your awareness of global issues and cultural diversity can be an asset and can help your essay stand out in a sea of otherwise boring, boilerplate submissions. Demonstrating global awareness indicates that you are prepared to contribute to and benefit from a diverse learning environment.

### *Customizing for Each College*

Although mentioned before, this warrants repeating. As you finalize your essays, ensure each one is clearly tailored to the respective college. Include specific references to programs, professors, campus culture, or opportunities unique to the institution. As you write, ensure each essay, regardless of the college’s rank on your list, is of the highest quality possible. Consistent effort across all applications demonstrates professionalism and respect for each institution.



### *Cultural Sensitivity in Writing*

If you are discussing issues related to cultures or identities different from your own, it is important that you educate yourself thoroughly. Misrepresentation or superficial understanding of a concept, custom, tradition, or practice can often be easily spotted and may affect the success your application.

When discussing experiences in diverse settings, emphasize your learning and growth. Avoid depicting yourself as a hero or focusing solely on the hardships

# CONCLUSION:

## FINAL THOUGHTS AND ENCOURAGEMENT

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*Add your notes, thoughts,  
and ideas here!*

As you stand at the threshold of the door to your future college career, remember that crafting your college admissions essays is much more than a mere application requirement. This portion of the college admissions journey is a unique opportunity to reflect, introspect, and articulate your story and your aspirations. You'll describe the person you are, as well as the person you strive to become in the future. This process is not just about gaining admission to a college; it's about delving into the depths of your experiences, sharing your voice, and envisioning your future.

Your essays are canvases for your thoughts, dreams, and experiences. Each word you write is a brushstroke in the larger picture that is your life. Do not be daunted by pristine white pages; instead, see them as blank canvases waiting to be filled with the vibrant colors of your unique narrative. Remember, there is no one else on this planet with your exact experiences and perspectives. What you have to offer is unique and valuable.

### *As You Embark on this Journey*

As you embark on this journey there are some important things to keep in mind:

- **Embrace Your Authenticity:** Be true to yourself; both in your life and in your essays. Your genuine voice is your greatest strength and will resonate most deeply with admissions committees.
- **Trust in Your Experiences:** Believe in the value of your experiences, whether they are monumental achievements or quiet moments of learning and growth. Each experience has shaped you and has a place in your story.
- **Seek Growth in Challenges:** When faced with writer's block or uncertainty, view these temporary setbacks as opportunities for growth. Each challenge presents itself as a chance to learn more about yourself and to hone your ability to communicate your thoughts and ideas.
- **Reflect on the Journey:** Take a moment to reflect on how far you've come and what you've learned about yourself through this process. Writing college essays is not just about telling your story to others; it's about helping you understand yourself better.
- **Stay Hopeful and Positive:** Approach your essay writing with optimism and positivity. The college application journey is a step towards your future, and each essay is a milestone along the way.
- **Remember Your Worth:** Regardless of the outcome of your applications, remember that your worth is not defined by college acceptances or rejections. You are embarking on an exciting path of growth, learning, and discovery.

## *Conclusion: Final Thoughts and Encouragement*

*Add your notes, thoughts,  
and ideas here!*

Remember, let your essays reflect your past, give a glimpse into your present, and be the doors that open towards your future. This journey of essay writing is as much about self-discovery as it is about college admissions. Go forth with confidence, creativity, and excitement. Your story is worth telling, and the world is waiting to hear it.

Good luck!

Preview

*Add your notes, thoughts,  
and ideas here!*

### ***Important Things to Remember***

- Ensure your email is free from spelling and grammatical errors. Consider having someone else review it before sending.
- Be patient and allow at least 48 hours for a response, longer over weekends or holidays.
- Consider sending out multiple requests for recommendation letters in the event some potential recommenders are unable to write the letter for you. In the event you receive multiple letters, you will be able to select the one that best suits your needs. If you are applying to multiple schools, each with their own priorities and expectations, different recommendation letters might check different boxes and be more appropriate for different schools.

### ***Conclusion***

Requesting letters of recommendation is a critical step in the application process for academic programs and job opportunities. Approaching this task with professionalism, respect, and gratitude not only facilitates a positive response from your recommenders but also ensures that they can provide the most effective endorsement on your behalf.

Preview

## A NOTE FROM THE AUTHORS

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Dear Readers,

To speak frankly, we get it. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is fast, smart, and gets the job done. However, using it to write your assignments comes at a risk. Just to name a few, AI can eliminate the need for the student to understand the source material, and many of the assignments can lack the depth of scope needed to show that the student fully understands the material. Additionally, for students, when using AI, you limit the information you can learn, hinder your critical thinking skills, depreciate academic and ethical standards, and, perhaps most importantly, eliminate all of your personality from your writing.

However, for showing interest in our book, we consider all our readers our students. Now that you have navigated your way to the end of this work, we have one final lesson – we want you to not feel bad, scared, or ashamed to admit that AI helped you complete your work. We want you to understand that AI is a great tool that, when used properly, can enhance your writing and unlock new academic and personal interests; before we go into our final lesson, here is our definition of AI.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a field of computer science focused on building systems that can do tasks that typically need human intelligence. This includes things like learning, understanding, solving problems, recognizing patterns, and processing language.

“...tasks that typically need human intelligence.” This means that AI can do many of the tasks that once took an individual or a team hours to complete and finish the task in minutes, or even seconds. Thus, the temptation to use AI tools to write essays and generate answers to assignments is great. However, as writing is necessary in most aspects in your academic and professional lives, here are some ways that AI can enhance your writing, increase your knowledge, and open doors to individuals who have struggled learning and growing in a pre-AI society:

### Using AI for Assistance, Not Replacement

AI can be a valuable friend in the writing process, helping students generate ideas, improve grammar, or refine their writing. However, it's crucial to remember that AI should not replace your own work. It is generally thought that the purpose of education is to develop your critical thinking, creativity, and analytical abilities, and these skills can only be honed through active engagement with the material. Using AI as a substitute for human engagement eliminates a key part of learning and self-betterment. By using AI tools ethically, students can enhance their writing without compromising their learning experience.

### Citing AI Sources Appropriately

As AI tools become more advanced, they can generate content and insights that students may find helpful. However, it is vital to acknowledge these contributions in your work. Just as you would cite any book, article, or online source, it's important to properly credit AI tools if they contributed significantly to your assignment. Failing to do so can result in unintentional plagiarism, which can have serious academic consequences. Additionally, AI isn't perfect and has been known to give false sources and cite journals that do not exist and so, you have to double check everything AI generates. So, to be frank, if you are double checking AI's work, you have the time to incorporate some of your own self into your assignments.

Lastly, we can't stress citations enough. Proper citation of AI-generated content demonstrates transparency and academic honesty. It shows that you are using AI responsibly and are willing to give credit where it's due. This ethical approach not only respects the work of those who created the AI tools but also maintains the integrity of your academic work. To learn more about citations, take a look at the Purdue University Online Writing Lab or use your campus writing/literacy center, if there is one.

### Leveraging AI for Research Efficiency

AI tools can be extremely helpful when it comes to organizing and summarizing research materials. With the vast amount of information available online, it can be overwhelming to sift through countless sources to find relevant information for your essay. AI can expedite this process by summarizing long articles, identifying key points, or organizing research findings into coherent sections. However, while AI can help streamline the research process, it is

## *The Role of AI in Academic Writing: A Tool, Not a Substitute*

essential to verify the accuracy of the information it provides. This means that AI may generate the titles and links to articles that are exactly what you are looking for or completely incorrect and because of that, you are still expected to read and be familiar with the material. Therefore, students should use AI as an initial research tool to gather ideas and insights, but they must still consult original sources to ensure the information's validity.

### **Enhancing Writing Skills**

One should use AI in the writing process to enhance your writing skills. AI tools can identify and correct common grammar mistakes, suggest improvements to sentence structure, and expand your vocabulary. This can be particularly helpful for non-native English speakers or students who struggle with writing. By using AI to review your drafts, you can learn from the feedback and gradually improve your skills.

However, be aware of the idea that learning, even learning from AI, requires engagement. Students need to engage with the feedback actively. Merely accepting AI-generated suggestions without understanding why they were made does not contribute to learning but, by working with AI, students can develop a deeper understanding of grammar, style, and effective writing techniques, which will serve them well in their academic and professional lives.

### **Maintaining Academic Integrity**

AI tools can also help students ensure their work is free from plagiarism. Students are facing increasing pressure to produce original content, AI-powered plagiarism checkers can be used to scan essays for unintentional copying. This is especially important when using paraphrasing tools, as it's easy to accidentally mimic the structure or wording of the original source. Thus, while AI can help identify potential plagiarism, it is still the student's responsibility to make sure their work is genuinely original. Ethical use of AI involves using it to enhance your own ideas, not as a means to disguise borrowed content.

### **Supporting Accessibility and Learning Differences**

For students with learning disabilities, AI can be an invaluable resource, as tools like text-to-speech, grammar checkers, and AI-powered writing assistants make academic tasks more accessible and allow students to focus on developing their ideas. Therefore, it is important for students and educators to be comfortable with the use of AI for those purposes. However, these tools help level the playing field by addressing challenges in writing and comprehension, but they should be utilized as a support rather than a crutch. The ultimate goal is to build confidence in your writing by ensuring they do not become overly reliant on AI for tasks that can be improved with practice.

### **Generating Outlines and Brainstorming Ideas**

AI can assist students in brainstorming ideas or generating outlines based on initial input or prompt, which is great for providing a helpful starting point for organizing their thoughts. While this can save time and reduce stress, it's important for students to use these suggestions as a guide rather than a final product. The creative process and labor of developing their own thesis, arguments, and supporting evidence is crucial for academic growth. Therefore, the final content must reflect the student's unique perspective and critical thinking skills to ensure genuine learning.

To our students, we know that being curious is a necessary part of learning and we think it's absolutely acceptable to explore the AI tools and services that are available to you. However, use AI reasonably and responsibly. For example, using AI to proofread a paper or suggest improvements is acceptable because it helps students refine their work and learn from their mistakes – think of it as a friendly editor. Remember that AI exists to assist humans and will, if given the correct prompt, generate an entire essay. By submitting an essay entirely written by AI as one's own work undermines the greater purpose of education and will likely constitute academic dishonesty. AI should serve as a support system that helps you grow as a writer, not a shortcut to avoid putting in the necessary effort.

Though you have reached the end of this book, we encourage you to remember that learning is a lifelong process and that writing is a wonderful and consistent way to communicate your wants and needs to others and learn from the world around you. Your ideas, insights, and voice are crucial aspects of your identity and who you are. Don't give the ability and the right to express them to anyone or anything. Thank you for reading our book and we hope you enjoyed this lesson.

Sincerely,

*William & Anthony*

Preview

# Mastering the Art of WRITING COLLEGE ADMISSIONS ESSAYS

The college application essay can be one of the most daunting steps in a student's academic journey—but it doesn't have to be. *Mastering the Art of Writing College Admissions Essays* offers a practical, engaging, and empowering approach to writing entrance essays that truly reflect the applicant's voice, experience, and goals.

Authored by veteran educators William Burns and Anthony Giansante, this book was born from years of direct work with students in writing centers, libraries, and classrooms. The guide addresses the most common college essay prompts, including those focused on personal growth, identity, community service, intellectual curiosity, and more. Each chapter breaks down the writing process into clear steps—from brainstorming and setting the scene to refining and polishing the final draft.

More than just a how-to manual, this book serves as a supportive companion for any student, high school, transfer, or adult, seeking to stand out in a competitive admissions process.

With insightful commentary, relatable examples, and practical checklists, *Mastering the Art of Writing College Admissions Essays* helps students express who they are and what they bring to their future college community.

Perfect for students, educators, guidance counselors, and anyone helping others navigate the college admissions process.

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