

# »» Essay writing tips to 'wow' college admissions officers

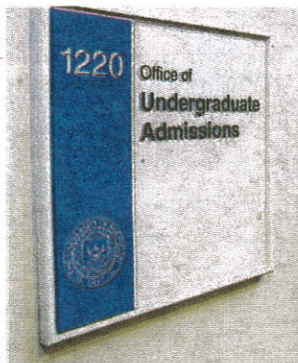
**By Paige Carlotti**

Special to USA TODAY

You've taken the tests, requested the recommendations, completed the common app, and now it's finally time to refocus on what you've been putting off: the essay.

While most students spend days, sometimes weeks, perfecting their personal statements, admissions officers only spend about three to five minutes actually reading them, according to Jim Rawlins, director of admissions at the University of Oregon.

High school seniors are faced with the challenge of summarizing the last 17 years into 600 words, all while showcasing their "unique" personality against



thousands of other candidates.

"It's hard to find a balance between sounding professional and smart without using all of those long words," says Lily Klass, a senior at Milford High School in Milford, Mass. "I'm having trouble reflect myself without sounding arrogant or rude or anything like that."

The following tips will help applicants make the leap from average to accepted:

### Open with an anecdote

Since the admissions officers only spend a brief amount of time reviewing stories, it's pivotal that you engage them from the very beginning.

"Instead of trying to come up with gimmicky, catchy first lines, start by sharing a moment," says Janine Robinson, writing coach and founder of Essay Hell. "These mini stories naturally grab the reader. ... It's the best way to really involve them in the story."

Let the moment you choose be revealing of your personality and character. Describe how it shaped who you are today and who you will be tomorrow.

### Put yourself in the school's position

At the end of the day, colleges want to accept someone who is going to graduate, be successful in the world and have the university associated with that success. In your essay, it

is vital that you present yourself as someone who loves to learn, can think critically and has a passion for things — anything.

"Colleges always say to show your intellectual vitality and curiosity," Robinson says. "They want kids who are going to hit the ground running — zoom to class and straight out into the world. They want them hungry and self-aware."

### Follow the instructions

While the directions on the applications may sound generic, and even repetitive after applying to a variety of schools, Rawlins points out that every rhyme has a reason.

"They have to know that college put a lot of thought

into the instructions we give them — so please follow them!" he says. "We've given a lot of thought to the words we use. We want what we ask for."

### Use this space

Most colleges don't have the time or bandwidth to research each individual applicant. They only know what you put in front of them.

At the end of the day, however, Rawlins wants students to know that the personal essay is just another piece of the larger puzzle. "It makes a massive difference — good or bad — to very few out there, so keep it in context."

Experience Morningside

