

The Admissions Application Essay

Originality, Clarity, and Contribution, Commitment, and Connection to your Discipline

It's Personal!

□ The personal admissions application essay, perhaps more than any other vehicle, can be the most significant part of your application package. It can be, along with the interview, more often than not, the deciding factor. Side-by-side, many applications look alike. Many students can list accomplishments on a form, but it is those who can package/ market themselves in a narrative format who are going to stand out. Certain characteristics will make your personal narrative stand out: Originality; Clarity; Contribution, Commitment, Connection to your discipline.



Most schools award institutional merit based aid based on the “Admissions Application Essay”; most schools also have Phi Theta Kappa Aid. Always include a copy of your PTK certificate with your application.

- ❑ **Step 1:** Be sure you know the criterion for your response.
- ❑ What guidelines and themes are you being asked to adhere to while writing your essay? Know what these are and outline your response accordingly.

Guidelines



- ▣ **Step 2:** Be original and creative.
- ▣ This quality of your essay carries great weight. Imagine the college admissions officer sorting through literally thousands of applications, reading thousands of essays. To keep them from all running together, originality will push yours to stand out, which means that you must avoid clichés in all their tricky forms, avoid over-generalizations. Be original right out of the gate, right from the beginning. Throughout your career, especially if you work in science, technology, engineering, or math, originality and creativity will propel you to the top. It doesn't happen without some calculated risk, allow someone to review your essay before you submit.



Write a good “lead,” or introduction. This admissions essay is a “hybrid,” a cross between a good expository essay with a thesis and a really interesting feature article that works to capture the reader’s attention. It has to be interesting beyond the thousands of essays in the pile on top of and underneath yours. Compose it like a story, it’s the story of you. Make it interesting from the very beginning.

- ▣ **Step 3:** Find your inspiration.
- ▣ So, why did you choose the discipline and career path you did? "I want to help people," "I want to build things," "I'm really good at math," is NOT GOOD ENOUGH. This is where you really need to avoid cliché and be as original as you can. What do you plan to do after graduation? Pad your pockets, or make some outstanding contribution? How? What?



- **Step 4:** “What have you done for me already?”.
- So, if you are so inspired, and you plan to achieve great things in your chosen field, what have you done already, beyond taking a bunch of classes, to prove yourself? How have you demonstrated initiative? Have you volunteered? Have you worked for free just because you love what you’re doing? There need to be something driving you that goes beyond a fat paycheck.

Make Your Job a Calling

*How the Psychology of Vocation
Can Change Your Life at Work*

BRYAN DIK, PHD AND RYAN DUFFY, PHD

- ❑ **Step 5:** “Why do you want to come here? Why do you want to be part of our program?”
- ❑ Don't make this a “stock” response either. Why DO YOU want to attend this college/university? Why do you want to be part of their engineering, nursing, computer science program? Why are we so special? This needs to be addressed with fine attention to specifics, find out why this college, this program is unique and then answer why you would be a good fit. Here's the deal. Colleges/Universities and specific departments are very proud of what they do. They want to feel very confident that if they, first, let you in the program, and second, you end up graduating, that you will carry the torch well, that you will represent your college and your program with pride, that you will excel, that those who you end up working for will say, “Wow, we need to actively pursue graduates from this college/university because they make great employees.”

The logo for the University of Alabama Mechanical Engineering department. It features the words "MECHANICAL ENGINEERING" in large, bold, white capital letters, with "UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA" in smaller white capital letters below it. The background is a dark, textured image of what appears to be mechanical components or a grid.

MECHANICAL
ENGINEERING
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

- ❑ **Step 6:** “What else are you going to do for me?”
- ❑ How are you going to be an active and positive member of this college’s community? What are you bringing here that we can show others that this is a great place to come? Why would I want to give you aid? Why do you deserve it?



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