
The 10 Things You Need to Remember

(to write successful college applications)

1. **Consider the Source**

Not all English teachers, counselors, etc. write well, so don't let them edit out your voice or discourage you. Trust your intuition, then seek feedback from the best writers you can find.

2. **Don't write about man, write about a man**

Follow E. B. White's advice to young writers by considering if you have anything new to say about man's inhumanity to man. Avoid abstractions and instead, be a storyteller. Don't write about "life," write about the life of someone you know.

3. **Be passionate**

Renaissance thinkers wanted all knowledge to be their province. Make it clear in everything you say that you have that same fervent desire & hunger to learn.

4. **Be unique**

Every year colleges are bombarded with thousands of essays that sound alike. The Dean of Admissions at the University of Virginia reported that over 3,000 essays on students' trips to Europe were received within a single year. If your essay appears that it could have been written by another applicant, rewrite it.

5. **Avoid silliness**

Don't write that your life goal is to achieve world peace or win the war on drugs as it will make you appear unintelligent. Instead, focus on what you can realistically do to make small differences in helping others on a daily basis.

6. **Avoid greediness**

Admission committee members usually underpaid so it is inappropriate to write about your plans for becoming incredibly wealthy. While there is nothing wrong with wanting to be financially successful, you do not want to flaunt it.

7. **Stress stability**

Avoid making comments such as "I never party like my friends" or "I never fight with my brother" as they sound like untrue statements. Rewrite any aspect of your essay that indicates a potential problem such as confessing you once considered suicide but counseling changed your life as you want to focus on the positive aspects and reinforce the areas of stability in your life.

8. **No politics**

Hold off on your political tirades until they are appropriate for a classroom discussion. You also want to avoid discussing religion, sex, or any other controversial topics in your essays.

9. **Be genuine**

Harvard's admissions committee often reject students with straight A's, perfect test scores, & incredible essays if it seems like the students are trying too hard to impress rather than being sincere. Admissions committees prefer that students come across as real people.

10. **Familiarize yourself with great writers**

Before you write, read good writers such as E. B. White, Russell Baker, Ellen Goodman, Garrison Keillor, Anna Quindlen, etc. who will inspire you to think as a writer would.

Adapted from: Randy McCutcheon's presentation on writing essays.

