**Psychology in Literature: Admissions Essay**

**Most colleges determine your character and ability to thrive in their environments from evaluating a personal statement that conveys rich, descriptive, and memorable details. Your task is to compose a relative narrative that either answers a particular, necessary prompt or one that simply reveals something particularly revealing about your identity and life.**

**Writing Tips for a Successful College Essay**

*A good essay can help a qualified applicant stand out from the competition and turn a “maybe” into a “yes”.*

1. **KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE!!!** Admissions officers read thousands of essays, most of which get rejected due to being cliché, predictable, or uninteresting. How can you make a tired-eyed reader *want* to read your piece and ultimately accept you?
2. **Insight** – It is a time to give an account of a *powerful* experience or significant relationship that has changed your perspective or challenged your beliefs. Stay away from merely giving a chronological account (a.k.a. listing) of events/experiences. Write about something that cannot be learned from a résumé or activities list. Focus on the significance of 1 or 2 events; show, don’t tell. The reader needs to be able to visualize you and/or your situation. Indulge the audience’s subjective instincts!
3. **Be Careful of the Obvious**. For instance, "How my trip to France taught me independence" is a bit too easy. But, if reflective, anything - travel, a significant personal struggle, a family experience - can be an impressive subject. What makes you or your experience special?
4. **Use a distinctive Voice**—The more you are your unique self, the better. Give your piece a heartbeat; humanize the writing. Make personal connections to the world around you (culturally, socially, politically, etc.). Take *some* risks, but don’t be so controversial or judgmental you offend someone.
5. **Demonstrate Intellectual Interests**—Present yourself as an informed citizen. Reveal an ability to organize thoughts and defend ideas under the pressure of time.
6. **Prove It** - Develop the main idea with vivid and specific facts, events, quotations, examples, and reasons. There's a big difference between simply stating a point of view and letting an idea unfold in the details.
7. **Write and Rewrite!** The essay is the closest possible model to a principal form of college writing, the term paper; so treat it as an example of your college readiness.

**Helpful Resources:**

* **College Board:** www.collegeboard.org College and major search, entrance exams, financial aid, essay writing tips
* **Check out a College:** www.checkoutacollege.com Community college information from Washington’s Community & Technical Colleges
* **Common Application:** www.commonapp.org Online application used by more than 400 private colleges and universities

**Various Topics for Admissions Essay**

*If you know the college you are applying to, find out what their admissions essay topic is and respond to that. If you’re attending UNR or another institution without an essay requirement, just choose a topic that you think best represents you.*

* Tell us how a particular book, play, film, piece of music, dance performance, scientific theory or experiment or work of art has influenced you. If you choose a novel, film or play, assume we know the plot. (University of Notre Dame)
* Tell us about a situation where you have not been successful and what you have learned from the experience. (William and Mary)

**Topics continued:**

* The late William Burroughs once wrote that "language is a virus from outer space." We at the University of Chicago think he¹s right, of course, and this leaves us wondering what else came here with it. Could this finally explain such improbable features of modern life as the Federal Tax Code, non-dairy creamer, Dennis Rodman, and the art of mime? Name something that you assert cannot have originated any other way. Offer a thorough defense of your hypothesis for extraterrestrial origins, including alternate explanations and reasons for eliminating them from consideration. (University of Chicago)
* Anatole France said, "If 50 million people say a foolish thing, it is still a foolish thing." On what subject do you disagree with most people, and why? (Northwestern)
* Of all the activities you listed above, which one has proved to be the best, or the worst, use of your time, and why? Use one specific example to illustrate how this activity has, or has not, been worthwhile. (University of Virginia)
* Describe a situation in which your values or beliefs were challenged. How did you react? (NYU)
* You have just completed your 300-page autobiography. Please submit page 217. (University of Pennsylvania)
* Do you believe that your academic record accurately reflects your abilities? Explain.
* If you were to describe yourself by a quotation, what would the quote be? Explain your answer. (Dartmouth)
* What single adjective do you think would be most frequently used to describe you by those who know you best? Briefly explain. (Stanford)

**General Topics**

* A significant relationship I had or have:
* A treasured object I possess:
* A time I took a risk:
* A time I felt humbled:
* One thing very few people know about me is:
* Something I regret:
* A time when I was, or felt, rejected:
* Something I am really proud of:
* Something that changed the way I think or look at the world:
* How I am different from most people I know:
* My greatest fear:
* A time I felt truly satisfied:
* A person I admire:
* An object I own that tells a lot about me:
* Something funny that I did or that happened to me

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Excellent!****Psych Lit. Admissions Essay Rubric** | **Adequate** | **Needs Improvement** |
| **Format** | * Typed, 12 pt professional font
* Double-spaced
* 500 words
 | * Typed, 12 pt professional font
* Spacing has some issues
* Not one-inch margins but professional
* Less than 500 words
 | * Typed, 12 pt professional font ???
* Double-spaced ???
* Heading/Title Page has many issues
* Margins are NOT one-inch & unprofessional
* Incomplete
 |
| **Organization & Focus** | * + Title is interesting and relevant
	+ The topic is meaningful and central to the piece
	+ Ideas are clear, concise, & easy to follow; focus is tight & transitions are effective, smooth & logical
* Supporting details are abundant and “show” necessary information
* A thoughtful analysis of ideas exist; insight is achieved
* Writer conveys a mature, positive attitude about the topic and issues addressed
 | * + Title exists
	+ The topic is clear but *lacks* depth &/or meaning
	+ Ideas have *some* lapses in clarity & focus; transitions are either rough or redundant
	+ *Some* “showing” details exist but more are needed; ideas are too general or abstract
	+ *Some* analysis and/or insight regarding the topic is achieved
	+ The author *attempts* to be positive but may convey *some* negativity or immaturity regarding the topic
 | * + Title is missing or falls flat and needs CPR…S.O.S…HELP!!
* The topic seems generic, cliché, impersonal, or confusing
* The audience is not motivated to read
* Ideas are scattered, confusing, and/or hard to follow; the central idea is not clear
* Too much “telling” and not enough “showing.” Where are the details? Writing is vague and abstract.
* No or very little analysis and insight are accomplished
* The writer’s attitude seems negative or immature regarding the topic and issues
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| **Writer’s Voice & Originality**  | * Ideas are creative and unique to you; essay has “flesh” and a “heartbeat.” Cliché is avoided
* Details are personal, relevant, & interesting; text allows others to discover the author
* Vocabulary is relevant & appropriate; fresh word choice is employed
* Effective stylistic choices involving syntax, diction, and tone were used
 | * Creativity is *attempted* and *somewhat* reveals the author’s unique traits; the essay needs more humanization and less cliché storytelling.
* *Some* personal details exist, but little discovery about the author occurs
* The vocabulary is clear but *lacks* variation & innovation
* *Some* problems with stylistic choices to include but are not limited to: syntactical variety, ineffective diction, underdeveloped tone, etc.
 | * Little or no creativity exists; the author does not stand out as a unique individual. S/he sounds like a robot.
* Details??? Where are they?
* Vocabulary/word choice is flat, juvenile or inappropriate
* Numerous problems with stylistic choices; elementary syntax and diction; bland, empty tone
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| **Conventions/ Error Free** | * No conventional errors; proper edited English
* Stylistic deviations and risks are effective, necessary, and greatly enhance the elements of the story
* Writing demonstrates control, sophistication, and finesse! Exquisite composition!!!
 | * *Some* errors in grammar, capitalization, spelling punctuation and/or usage/phrasing
* Writing demonstrates *lapses* in control & faculty of language but is overall coherent & understandable
* Good effort!
 | * Numerous errors in grammar, mechanics, and usage distracting and lowering the quality of writing
* Writing lacks control and coherence
* The piece seems rushed and insincere
* Did you forget to proof read? Yikes!
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| **Admit?****/100** | **Accept** | **Wait-List** | **Reject** |