

## How To Write Great College Essays: Advice From HECA Members

For many students, writing their college essay is one of the most challenging parts of applying to college. Here are some tips from members of the Higher Education Consultants Association to help you get started with your college essays.

**Writing your college essays will probably be unlike anything else you've written!** Nearly everything assigned in your English classes is geared to keeping the author out of the writing, while the focus on your college essays is totally YOU, putting across some of your core values, personality traits, important experiences, etc. It's a sea change, but when you "get it," you'll be able to take off and write those essays! – **Judith P. Mackenzie, Mackenzie College Consulting, Seattle, Washington**

**If you can say something that will make the reader say, "Me too!" as he finishes reading your essay, you have succeeded.** Don't fear your audience. The reader of your essays is probably not some crusty old gatekeeper looking for a reason to deny your application, but a fairly recent college graduate who is looking for a lively, interesting essay written by a person they would like to invite to attend their college. Be your lively, interesting self! – **Jon Tarrant, Jon W. Tarrant Associates, Carlisle, Pennsylvania**

**One method to find essay inspiration is to create a list of little known facts, facts only you would know.** Brainstorm a list of your favorites; your likes and dislikes; unusual events you have experienced; issues, images, or stories that affect your mood; etc. Review your list and see if you can weave your insider information into a portrait of who you are. Or find one fact/event you can build on to reveal a new aspect of yourself. Remember to keep the essay positive and do not repeat information given in your application. - **Linda Ohlsson, Quail, Fosdick, Harris, Boise, Idaho**

**When brainstorming topics for personal statements, look for the unexpected, something that someone who knows you would be surprised to learn about you.** Use the first paragraph to describe a moment, creating through words a visual that draws the reader in. The following paragraphs can roll back in time and explain that image, the photographic moment. Try to write an essay that is multidimensional in what it reveals about you. When all of the above can be woven together, it's usually a home run for the student – something they are proud of, a story that's a blueprint for who they are now and how they will live their life. - **Sharon Lack, Sharon Lack Associates, Redwood City, California**

You may have your essay completely figured out in your head—or an idea or even (gulp) nothing at all. But you just can't get started. That's because the part of your brain that's saying, "I hate essays! I need a perfect first line! My idea is stupid!" is working overtime. **Try this trick: If you usually write on screen, switch to pen and paper. If you use a notebook, switch to your computer.** Write your name or "no clue what to write" or whatever comes to mind, over and over. Before you know it, you'll be writing that essay! - **Lisa Mathews, New England College Consultants, Bedford, New Hampshire**

**Still haven't hit your theme? Here's the question I ask my stumped students:** If I took everything away from you, everything - stuff, family, personality traits, your dog – what ONE thing would you never allow me to rip from your life? Why? Happy writing! – **Marilynn Aiches, Berkeley, California**

**About the Higher Education Consultant Association (HECA):** HECA is a member-run professional organization for independent college admissions consultants. HECA members are familiar with a wide range of colleges and are experts at helping students with their college searches. You can find a HECA member in your area in the **HECA Member Directory** at [www.hecaonline.org](http://www.hecaonline.org).