

## How to write a standout college essay?

### 1. Start with reflection, not writing

- List 5–7 qualities you want colleges to see (curious, steady, funny, resourceful, etc.).
  - For each quality, brainstorm 2–3 moments where you lived it (a small failure, a quiet success, an everyday ritual—not just big awards).
  - Choose the story that feels most “you,” even if it looks ordinary on paper; depth matters more than drama.
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### 2. Tell a focused story, not your whole life

- Zoom in on one thread—a single day, challenge, project, or relationship—rather than summarizing your entire high school career.
  - Use a simple structure: hook → scene/story → what changed → what it says about you now.
  - Show your qualities through actions and details instead of listing them (let the reader infer “leader,” “resilient,” “curious”).
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### 3. Be specific and concrete

- Replace general statements with vivid details: sounds, sights, small choices you made, what you thought in the moment.
  - Avoid vague lines like “I learned the value of hard work”; instead, describe one situation that proves it.
  - Ask: Could another student have written this paragraph? If yes, add more personal specifics or a different angle.
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### 4. Use a strong but natural voice

- Write like a polished version of how you speak—clear, direct, and honest, not stuffed with big words.
  - Let your humor, seriousness, or introspection show; admissions officers want to “meet” you, not a persona.
  - Read your draft out loud; if a sentence sounds fake or unlike you, rewrite it in simpler language.
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## 5. Open with a hook that fits your story

- Try starting with a surprising line, a small moment in the middle of an action, or a short piece of dialogue.
  - Avoid generic openings like “Ever since I was young...” or “I have always been passionate about...”—they blend into thousands of other essays.
  - After writing the whole draft, revisit your first 1–2 sentences and sharpen them; often the real hook is buried in paragraph two.
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## 6. Reflect deeply: why does this story matter?

- Make sure you answer “So what?”—what did you realize, how did you change, and how does that shape what you’ll bring to campus?
  - Connect your story to a few core values (curiosity, empathy, initiative, persistence) rather than to a generic moral.
  - In supplements, show how your traits and goals align with specific things at that college (programs, traditions, learning style).
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## 7. Edit intentionally and protect your voice

- Do 2–3 rounds of revision: first for big ideas and clarity, then for structure and transitions, last for wording and errors.
  - Ask a teacher or mentor what feels strongest and where they got confused, but be careful that edits don’t erase your voice.
  - Fix grammar and typos; messy writing sends the message that you didn’t care enough to proofread.
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## A quick exercise you can do today

- Set a 10-minute timer and write about one tiny moment (making breakfast, a bus ride, a failed quiz) that changed how you see something.
- Don’t worry about sounding impressive—just tell the story as clearly and honestly as you can; you can shape it into an essay later.