

The Pitfalls of Essay Writing: What *NOT* To Do and Include in Your College Essays

1. *DON'T* launch directly into the writing process
Spend a good amount of time brainstorming your ideas. In an informal manner, spend some time examining all of the different perspectives your essay may contain. Be creative! Reflect on all your knowledge and experiences to find a topic that truly interests you.

2. *DON'T* treat your essay like it's AOL Instant Messaging
Always have your audience (the admissions office at a university) in mind. The people reading your essays will not understand private jokes from your high school – informal terms and language may only confuse them. Make sure to explain fully every reference and idea you present.

3. *DON'T* “Thesaurusize” your sentences
Instead of flipping through your thesaurus to find big, impressive words, use simpler words that are clear, precise, and convey your true meaning. For example, “procure” may sound smart, but “obtain” works just as well and might be easier to understand. Shorter words can be very effective!

4. *DON'T* depend on the computer to correct your spelling and grammar
Your computer may change “from” to “form” or leave the apostrophe out of a possessive “it's.” The computer does not understand your writing as well as you do – make sure to edit words to what *you* want them to be!

5. *DON'T* use more words than necessary
Use strong, concise, and clear language. Don't repeat ideas you have already stated unless you are adding a new concept. Your essay should progress

6. *DON'T* use primarily passive tense
Again, fewer words will make your essay stronger. Rather than “he had been hoping to,” state “he wanted.”

7. *DON'T* be afraid to revise (or not revise at all!)
Editing your paper will always improve your essay! Your ideas may be more effective if you change paragraph order and condense some of your main points.

8. *DON'T* save all of your work until the last minute
Essays that you revise over a period of at least a few days will be clearer and better organized. Rather than edit your rough draft five minutes after writing it, allow yourself a few days before coming back to your essay. You will then have a better idea of how well you present your ideas.