

# University application essays (or 'personal statements')

What to say, and what *not* to say!

# Essays are an important part of your application

The **less** important your **GPA** and  
**test scores**,  
the **more** important your **essay**

# Why are essays required?

Essays are where a student establishes their identity:

- They separate you from all the other applicants
- They are usually about you, your personality, your plans

# What are universities looking for in an essay?

1. Who you are (personally, not demographics)
2. Why you're special
3. What you will bring to campus
4. Why you want this program and school
5. Why now
6. How the degree is part of your long term plans

**Do you “FIT” with their program and school?**

Essays are the one piece of  
your application where  
**you have complete control**

Essays may be your only  
chance to ‘sell yourself’ to the  
Admissions Committee

– be proud of yourself

# Preparation: do your research

- Write your CV or resume before starting your essay
- Think about your reasons for wanting to take ***that specific degree at that school***  
(Not “I have 37 cousins/friends at your school...” or  
“My family wants me to be an accountant, though I really want to be an artist...”)
- Websites can show you the program and school’s identity, and sometimes their typical student profile  
Do you like what you see on their website?

# Three types of essay questions

## “You” questions

- Personal stories and lessons you’ve learned
- Tell a story with a message

*“Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence”*

## “Creative” questions

- Show your values, personality and ambitions

*“What idea, invention, discovery, or creation do you think has had the biggest impact on your life so far? Briefly explain”*

## “Why Us” questions

- Show that the school’s mission is a reflection of who you are

*“Please relate your interest in studying at \_\_\_\_\_ to your future goals”*



# Example question

Questions can be long and complicated

- **Find the keywords in the essay question**

The University values an educational environment that provides all members of the campus community with opportunities to grow and develop intellectually, personally, culturally and socially. In order to give us a more complete picture of you as an individual, please tell us about the particular life experiences, perspectives, talents, commitments and/or interests you will bring to our campus. In other words, how will your presence enrich our community? (*University of Wisconsin*)

# Example question

## Find the **keywords** in the essay question

The University **values** an educational environment that provides all members of the **campus community** with opportunities to **grow** and **develop intellectually, personally, culturally** and **socially**. In order to give us a more complete picture of you as an individual, please tell us about the **particular life experiences, perspectives, talents, commitments** and/or **interests** you will **bring to** our **campus**. In other words, **how will your presence enrich our community?** (*University of Wisconsin*)

# Writing your essays

**JUST DO IT – ESSAYS DON'T WRITE THEMSELVES**

- Expect to write more than one draft
- Get your third draft proof-read by a peer
- Use the skills taught in your SILC classes

***Don't forget to observe deadlines***

# Do's and Don'ts

## DO

- Respect yourself and the reader
- Make sure each word adds value to your answer
- Remember that you are 'selling yourself'
- Use "I" in your writing

## DON'T

- Ignore the essay requirement
- Copy someone else's
- Use exactly the same essay for different schools
- Use poor English
- Duplicate information (such as name, date of birth, etc)
- Handwrite the essay
- Write only about yourself, ignoring the school & program
- Overlook the actual question!

# Turn negatives into positives

If the essay asks you to write about negative experiences, or your weaknesses or failures, you should do so.

You should **always** turn the 'negative' into a 'positive' by explaining how you grew as a person.

- Relevance – only include a negative point if it affects your application
- Proportion – don't stress the problem too much. Emphasize the growth and learning you gained from the experience
- AVOID BLAME – you should 'own' any negative things that you include. Don't write about things being someone else's fault

# Writing example:

## Into, through & beyond method

### **Into**

- How you lead the reader into the essay – images, examples, context
- Show a key point about your character

### **Through**

- Take the reader through your story
- Show, don't tell
- Use strong images and summaries

### **Beyond**

- Connect to who you are now and who you want to be
- Describe the impact on you

# Writing tips

Don't forget:

- Word count
- Spell check
- No duplicate information
- Word choice – no repetition
- Honesty
- Be concise

***Did you answer the question?***

# First draft

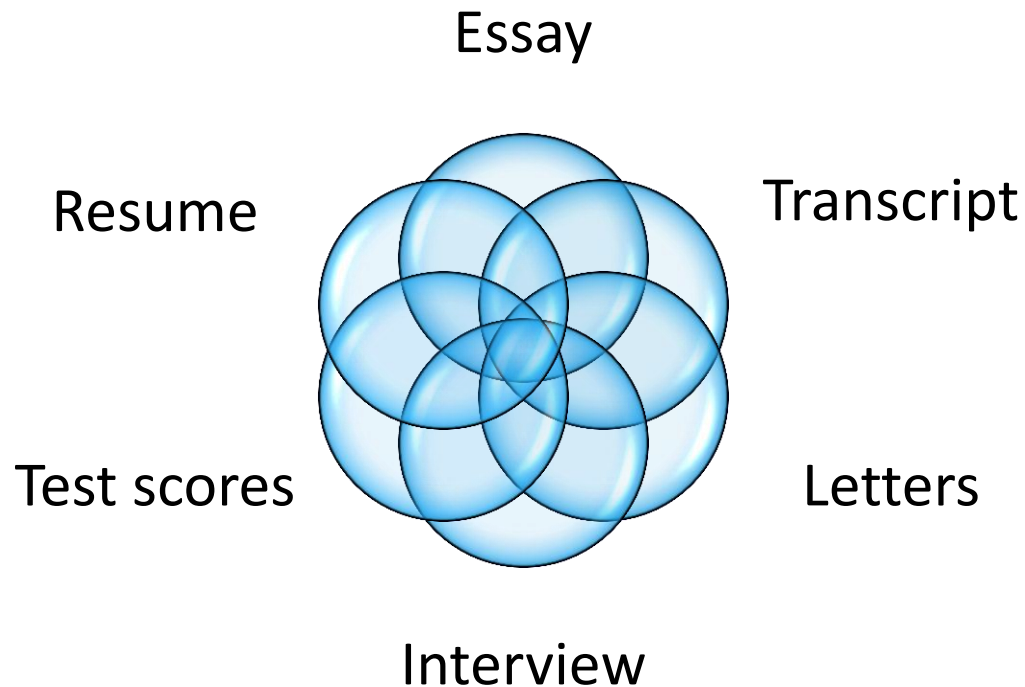
Read through your essay using two highlighters:

- **1/3** should be about the program
- **2/3** should be about you

***Connect yourself and the program where possible***



# Your essay is part of your **whole application**



***Does it fit with the other pieces?***

# Keyword glossary

- **Achievement / Accomplishment:** something completed by a special effort
- **Candid:** frank, honest, open
- **Career path/progression:** a person's general course of action through an area
- **Contribution:** something beneficial that you give
- **Diversity:** how are you different to the 'typical' person. May include ethnicity, religion, nationality, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, appearance and background.
- **Experience:** a list of all the skills you have to offer
- **Goals:** what you want to achieve
- **Impact:** influence, effect
- **Influential people:** a person whose actions and opinions might strongly guide you.
- **Key:** an important fact
- **Mentor:** a wise and trusted counselor or teacher
- **Opportunities:** a favorable combination of circumstances, time, and place
- **Personal development:** to bring out the capabilities or possibilities within yourself
- **Qualities/traits:** a distinguishing attribute, characteristic that you have
- **Strengths:** positive aspects of yourself
- **Weaknesses:** negative aspects yourself

# Sample questions

- Describe the world you come from — for example, your family, community or school — and tell us how your world has shaped your dreams and aspirations. *(University of California)*
- Tell us about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment, contribution or experience that is important to you. What about this quality or accomplishment makes you proud and how does it relate to the person you are? *(University of California)*
- Discuss your career progression to date. Why do you want to pursue an MBA at this point in your career, and how will this degree help you to achieve your career goals? In addition, specifically discuss how the Leeds School of Business MBA program fits with your education interests and career goals. *(University of Colorado)*
- At times it is our personal failures that result in key learning opportunities that will eventually lead us toward professional experiences. Discuss a significant nonacademic failure or disappointment that you experienced and how it has impacted your career progression. How did you handle the situation, and what have you learned from it? *(University of Colorado)*

# Sample questions

- The University values an educational environment that provides all members of the campus community with opportunities to grow and develop intellectually, personally, culturally and socially. In order to give us a more complete picture of you as an individual, please tell us about the particular life experiences, perspectives, talents, commitments and/or interests you will bring to our campus. In other words, how will your presence enrich our community? (*University of Wisconsin*)
- Tell us about your academic goals, circumstances that may have had an impact on your academic performance, and, in general, anything else you would like us to know in making an admission decision. (*University of Wisconsin*)
- Please provide a brief statement of your long term educational and professional goals. Also provide a brief list of tasks for which you have been responsible as an employee that are related to the graduate program to which you are applying. (*University of Wisconsin*)

Any questions?