

Life After York Q & A: Parent to Parent Advice

Essays

College Essays 101

Why do they matter?

- ▶ Part of college application for most colleges (but not all).
- ▶ Chance for the college to hear student's authentic voice.
- ▶ May distinguish a candidate from an equally qualified peer or provide rationale for a struggle.
- ▶ Most important at highly selective schools which frequently require several essays and expect tailored answers.

Getting started

- ▶ All York students write 1 college essay in English class during the spring semester of junior year.
- ▶ Work with your student to brainstorm a set of ideas, experiences he/she might want to write about (a favorite class, summer camp, music group, community service).
- ▶ Use a mix of experiences. Try to write more than one essay.
- ▶ Start early and keep at it. Give this process plenty of time.

Types of Questions

Common App Examples (250-650 words):

- ▶ Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
- ▶ The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
- ▶ Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?

University of Illinois (300-400 words)

- ▶ Explain your interest in the major you selected and describe how you have recently explored or developed this interest inside and/or outside the classroom.

College Specific (175-200 words)

- ▶ What excites you about the University of Notre Dame that makes it stand out from other institutions?

Tips for Students

- ▶ Be memorable & focused. Tell a story. Don't use essay to relist your activities. Dive deeply into one learning experience. Explain how your qualifications will make you successful at this college. Make them remember you!
- ▶ Be creative. Use a hook. Closing should be strong.
- ▶ Be prepared. Brainstorm your message. Don't turn in your first effort. Essays improve the more you rewrite. Read it out loud. Request peer or teacher edits. Revisit the essays, especially for a favorite school!
- ▶ Be yourself. Try not to brag. Show learning and growth using your style and voice.
- ▶ Be direct. Keep it simple. Choose your words wisely. Give specific examples.
- ▶ Be professional. Keep to character counts. Some essays will be very short answer, others longer answer. Don't rely on spell check alone.

Parent to Parent Tips

- ▶ Remind students that writing is a process!
- ▶ Ask open-ended questions.
- ▶ Do not write the essay for your student. Colleges can tell an adult “voice” vs. a teen voice.
- ▶ When reading your student’s first effort, do not let your emotions show if the essay is not quite where you think it ought to be. Kids will take it personally. Be positive and supportive.
- ▶ If you cannot work productively with your student, find a friend, neighbor or other family member to help. Having more than one person read the essay is essential.
- ▶ Encourage your student to peer edit their essays with a friend.
- ▶ English teachers, given enough notice, will review essays.
- ▶ Have student save all essays to their computer (in fact, have them e-mail essays to themselves and parents in case of computer crashes). Students may want to repurpose for scholarships. Also, students may want to refer to the essays later in college.