

College Application Essay Process



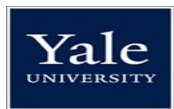
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Class of 2025



57,435

1,970



46,905

2,169



37,601

1,498



33,240

1,340



60,551

2,358



BROWN

46,568

2,537

Harvard turns down 500 students with
PERFECT SAT SCORES
&
1,100 students with an 800 on SAT Math



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The New York Times

Rethinking College Admissions

**“Colleges recognize that they have contributed
to warping the values of students...”**

- Drawn into a competitive frenzy
 - Manic résumé padding

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PAST

Community Service

Mathlete
Team

Gave Blood

MORE RECENTLY

Started Own Foundation

Fermat's Last Theorem

Gave Kidney

What is the purpose of the essay?

"Purest part of the application...
what colleges can't see via
grades and standardized tests."

The New York Times

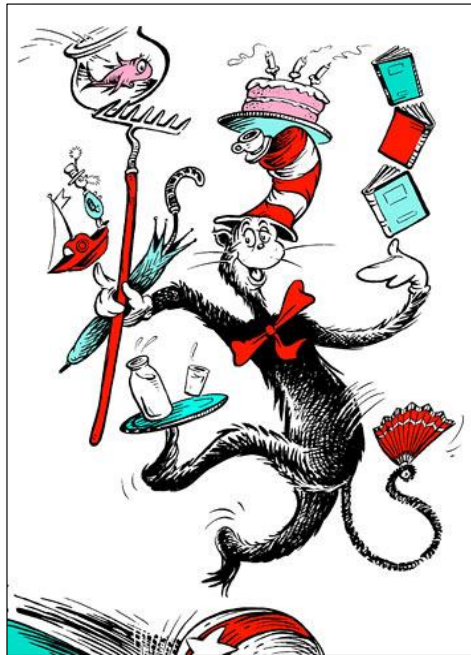
**The only tool colleges have to
figure out what make YOU...**

Un~~ique~~

“Our admissions officers are looking for something that is **Authentic and Imperfect.**”

— Amy Gutman, President UPenn
Time magazine

Not “**Manufactured**” and “**Perfect**”





**What's *real* and what's merely
"window dressing"**

- Community-service projects?
- Family obligations & part-time work
vs. saving the rainforests?

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TOP TEN MISTAKES STUDENTS MAKE ON THEIR COLLEGE APPLICATION ESSAYS

PLUS A FEW MORE TIPS...

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1. Academic Accomplishments



Birds of a Feather



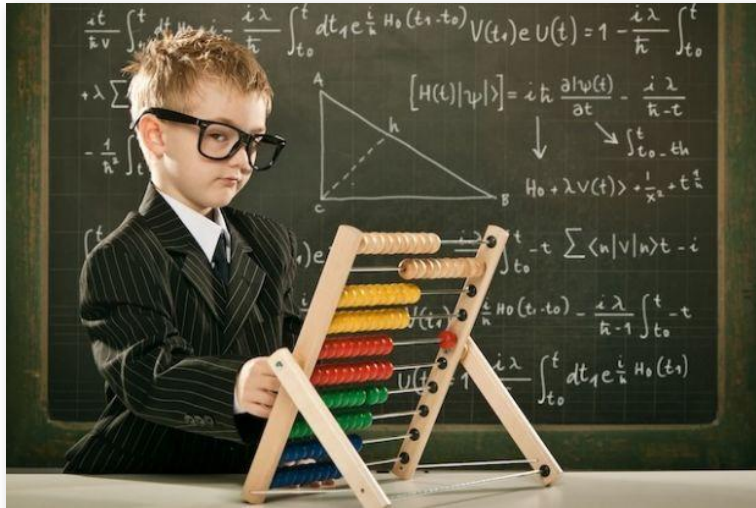
- Similar Classes – Every AP course offered
- Similar Grades – 4.0
- Similar Test Scores – 1600 on SAT
- Similar Extra-Curricular Activities
 - a. President of Physics Club
 - b. Class President
 - c. Swim Team Captain
 - d. 1st Violin in School Orchestra
 - e. Yearbook Editor
 - f. Mathletes Captain
 - g. 1000 hours of community service

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Déjà Vu
Déjà Vu
Déjà Vu
Déjà Vu
Déjà Vu

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2. Trying Too Hard to Appear Intellectual



THESAURUS

“Plethora” or “Myriad” or “Thus”

SHAKESPEARE VS. *TWILIGHT* SERIES

Fifty Shades of Grey

PHRASING

“I want to partake in the diffusion of knowledge with high impact professors to diversify the angles from which I look at different issues.”

BAD EXAMPLE



From an early age, we accept death as the inevitable, but do not comprehend its actual denotation. Death is the impending future that all people must eventually grasp. In my early teens, my grandfather tragically perished. As a youth who did not identify with such a cataclysm I was saturated with various emotions. Initially, I was grieved by the loss of a loved one and could not understand why this calamity had to befall upon my family. I always considered death to have a devastating effect, but was shocked by the emotional strain it places upon an individual.

3. Trying Too Hard to Appear Creative



- How my life is like the phases of the moon
- Why the essays are actually meaningless
- I can prove I am good

4. Taking the Generic Approach

Check the Basement for Pods **or** Avoid Clichés Like the Plague

- “I’m hardworking, ambitious and driven”
- “I love to be challenged”
- “My thirst for knowledge”
- “My peers often look to me for leadership”

5. Your major for your Common App essay



6. “Trying too hard.”



Was I abducted by aliens when I was six?

Don't overthink this:
The best topics are hidden in plain sight

The WHY US essay *Demonstrated Interest*

7. Not Reading the School's Website

- The multitude of educational opportunities provided by Penn makes the institution an extraordinary resource of knowledge.
- As one of the world's leading research universities...
- The school's location in one of the country's premier cities...
- I am also impressed with the social opportunities at PENN
- I also admire PENN's focus on community service



- Prestigious University
- Distinguished Professors
- Unparalleled Resources
- Spectacular Campus

Strolling around the tree lined Quad in the shadow of magnificent architecture hearing students discussing issues ranging from evolution, to hypothesizing Lincoln's views on current politics, the energy and intellectual diversity on campus was palpable.



Specific to...

- Academics
- Internships
- Clubs
- Organizations
- Traditions...



Campus Visit?



Official Tour

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Students in their Natural Habitat



Got Class?



8. Introductions



As a senior in high school, everyone around me – teachers, friends, parents – asks about the future on a daily basis. “Emily, have you finished your college applications?” “Emily, what are you going to major in? Do you know what you want to do after college?” I haven’t even finished high school yet, but no one seems too concerned about that. While I’m balancing running, the demands of Advanced Placement schoolwork, tutoring, and applying to college, all everyone seems concerned about are what my major is and what I want to do with myself in the future. When I get asked these questions, I realize that while I have been actively pondering my future, I haven’t made formalized plans on the field of study I want to pursue.

Why This College?



Not Just TOO MUCH...

With over three thousand colleges scattered across the United States to choose from, it might seem like a daunting task to pick one in which suits my needs perfectly. However, I truly believe that NYU is the perfect place to foster my interests for several reasons.

Applying to the University of Michigan

Perfect...

During my high school career, many of the most memorable lessons combined disciplines. As one of my teachers put it, one can't learn in a vacuum. The University of ***** encourages an **interdisciplinary education** which will provide me with the potential of new discoveries and a greater understanding of how things are interrelated while giving me the chance to take charge of my education; **tailoring it to fit my goals**.

Speaking of Introductions

“What is your most meaningful extra-curricular activity?”

My most meaningful extra-curricular activity is...

Nothing compares to my experience in Model UN.

9. Run for the Hills (Usually)



- Volunteering: [Saving Rainforests](#)
- Sports Injuries
- Death
- Disease
- Divorce
- Disorders
- Relationship Break Up

Authentic Perspective



Write About Anything

It's OK to fail.

How I discovered my love of science
when all I really wanted to do was
impress a girl in class.

10. Never Be Negative



**The Smarter the Student
the Less Common Sense**



- “Students at my high school are insanely cutthroat, only caring about their own grades”
- “Forced to work with others”
- “I want to study abroad to get away from my parents”
- “I am very competitive in every aspect of my life. It is important to me to show that I am better than everyone else”
- “The pain of boring classes plagued me”
- I had Ms. [Blank], a math teacher infamous for her brutality and harsh grading in the whole of New Jersey.
- “Escape the complaints of my overbearing mother”

Not just negativity...
THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE SAYING

- “Any time we did not get the desired results from an experiment, we modified the data for the sake of getting good grades”
- “I and my group of insatiably curious young geniuses”
- “As I audaciously and humbly lead my fellow peers, people are attracted to my charisma”
- “I know I want to do something with the human body”
- “I would like to take advantage to the study abroad program in the capital of the United States, Washington D. C. where I can surround myself with government buildings”
- “My favorite aspect of the school is its location. As an avid skier and snowboarder, I am overjoyed that Cornell is less than half an hour away from a nearby ski resort”
- “I am a young girl waiting for adultery.”

My parents worked very long hours...as an only child, I found myself home alone quite often.... I taught myself how to make noodle soup, adjust the air conditioning, and use the oven.



Extracurricular Activities, Summers, Work...



"Get the cart! Someone get the cart! Do we have the box on the bus? Is the robot arm here? And where are those freshmen? Someone call those freshmen!"

It was the morning of the Robotics competition, and twenty tech "nerdlings," as we were called, were all scrambling to get on the bus before we missed check-in. Our chief commander and club advisor, Mr. Park, was shouting orders. The robot arm was missing. My partner and I were trying to fix the string on our mousetrap vehicle that was refusing to cooperate.

Sophomores were huddled in a corner, trying to cram last-minute information into their heads that they could use as arsenal to beat down the other teams. The secretary was trying to collect last-minute permission slips from everyone.

"Let's go!" shouted Mr. Park. We all rose with a roar and cheered, calling out our battle cries. We were ready to go to war with the other robotics teams in the state.

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Earning a medal at the robotics competition, especially after all the many hours of preparation that our team puts in should be the most gratifying part of the whole experience. It's not. It's the bus rides.

No one is allowed to study for tests or do homework. Cell phones are turned off. We all just tease each other, laugh at dumb jokes and sing silly songs and limericks.

We eat from a 2-gallon-sized container of pretzels and probably talk way too loud. It's the one time during a school day that we are not students or science and tech nerds. We are just teens. I get to experience my teammates outside of academics where we all feel safe enough to be goofy.

The bus rides always end too soon and we return to our game faces. First however, despite a warning from our advisor, we open the emergency exit at the back of the bus and leap out – together.

1. 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.

- **Anything with intrinsic value**

- Art
- Guitar
- Basketball
- Cooking...Freedom? Culture?

- **Loud annoying laugh**

- **Competitive Nature**
- **Love of Learning**
- **First Generation American**

2. 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?

- **Teaching kids**
- **Robotics or Soccer**

- **Tore my ACL**
- **First AP class test...However....**

3. Reflect on a time when you *questioned* or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your *thinking*? What was *the outcome*?

- **Gender Roles**

- Girls Ice Hockey
- Boy who knits
- Girl drummer in a rock band
- Boy cheerleader

- **No Social Media, Prefer books to ebooks, etc**

- **God**
- **Abortion**

- **Authority.... Caution....**

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4. Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?



Do Not....

1. Turn it into the person's biography. This essay is still about YOU
2. Write about a relationship with a Special Needs person.
 - Showed me we are not that different
 - Taught me to embrace who I am

You Can...

If someone in your life has ever gone above and beyond normal expectations.

1. Family... No such thing as a family member going above and beyond
2. Teacher...But NOT "She spent extra time with me"
3. Friend
4. Store clerk
5. Stranger on the street

5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or *realization* that *sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.*

- EMT
- “Planner” until camping experience
- **Driver’s License**
- **One week “science” camp in 11th grade**
- **“Life is too short” “Seize the Day”**

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6. Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?

1. Don’t get too technical:

...performing nitric oxide synthase concentration assays in tandem with polymerase chain reactions while attempting transient transfection... dedicated towards modification of human endothelial progenitor stem cells.

2. Beware: If you write about the thing you are majoring in, you will look one dimensional



7. Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.



- How my life is like the phases of the moon
- Why these essays are actually meaningless
- I can prove I am God

Clarifying Creativity

Embrace the Goose Poop



“Catchy” Openings

Most are **artificial** and feel **forced**

- A quote
- A question
- Dialogue
- “Whoosh. My tennis racket pierced the air, scattering the surrounding particles but unable to connect with the fuzzy green and white sphere that taunted me...”

Authentic...Organic

- “Embrace the goose poop”
- “I had lost my sister’s ‘A.’”
- “It was once my tormenter: my laugh. This is no ordinary laugh.”

Start Early



**How many writers does it
take to change a light bulb?**

**Does it have to be a light
bulb?**

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Variables Out of Your Control

Diversity of...

- Race
- Religion
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Geography

Plus...

- Likelihood of enrolling
- Fund-Raising Potential
- Legacies

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- Apply to at least 10 colleges. 12 is good. More is overkill
- Reach Schools...YES – YES – YES
- Did you struggle for your grades? (tutors, etc.)
- Check your web footprint: Google images, etc.

“Harvard rescinded admissions offers to at least ten students for ‘offensive’ memes in private Facebook group chat.”

- Email address – No: CutiePieGrl , Villageldiot, 10Splaya4evr

Shameless Self-Promotion

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- Free hard copy of this presentation
- Free links to useful resources
- Detailed information about my services which include:
 - a. One on one college essay advising
 - b. My book

