

# Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: How do I begin to write my essay?**

A: My favorite exercises are the Essence Objects and Values Exercises, which you can Google.

**Q: How long should my essay be?**

A: It depends. Your main essay can be up to 650 words; your supplemental essays will vary.

**Q: How many essays will I need to write?**

A: Around 10-15 essays is average and these include the Common App main statement, plus supplemental essays. Some essay topics, however, may be re-used for multiple prompts, which can save time.

**Q: What are college admissions officers looking for?**

A: I believe they're looking for the answers to these three questions:

- 1.) Who is this person?
- 2.) Will this person contribute something of value to our campus?
- 3.) Can this person write?

**Q: How do college admissions officers evaluate my essay?**

A: Each school has its own criteria and different readers will prefer different elements. Michael Gulotta, Associate Director of Admissions at the Univ. of Southern California, for example, has told me he most looks to the essay to assess a student's writing ability. But Rick Diaz (Regional Director of Undergraduate Admission at SMU) is less interested in writing ability and more interested in a student's story.

**Q: So which is more important: your story or your writing skill?**

A: Both are important. "A good story, well told." That's your goal.

**Q: What should my essay be about?**

A: In a word, you.

**Q: How do I structure my essay?**

A: I teach students two structures, Montage Structure and Narrative Structure, both of which may be Googled, and which will likely be covered in your workshop.

**Q: How much do essays matter?**

A: It depends on the college, but generally between 10%-30%. Essays tend to matter more for small schools, or schools that look at applications holistically. Essays matter most when it comes to differentiating you from students with similar academic profiles (grades, test scores, extracurriculars).

**Q: If my grades are bad, can I get into Harvard with a great essay?**

A: Nope. But there are lots of other great schools besides Harvard. For a list of Colleges That Change Lives, Google "Colleges That Change Lives College Essay Guy Podcast."

**Q: Can a bad college essay negatively affect my application?**

A: Yes.