

Inside This Issue:

- Reduce Test Taking Anxiety2
- OC National College Fair3
- Explore ROP4
- Scholarships4
- News Flash *6
- Communication With Teens6

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Irvine Unified School District
5050 Barranca Parkway
Irvine, CA 92604
(949) 936-5000

Three Steps to a Great College Essay

You, in 500 Words or Less

The college application essay is a chance to explain yourself, to open your personality, charm, talents, vision, and spirit to the admission committee. It's a chance to show you can think about things and that you can write clearly about your thoughts. Don't let the chance disappear. Stand up straight and believe in yourself!

The Essay Writing Process

OK, boot up your computer and let's get to it. To write a college essay, use the exact same three-step process you'd use to write an essay for class: first prewrite, then draft, and finally, edit. This process will help you identify a focus for your essay, and gather the details you'll need to support it.

To begin, you must first collect and organize potential ideas for your essay's focus. Since all essay questions are attempts to learn about you, begin with YOU.

Set a timer for 15 minutes and make a list of your strengths and outstanding characteristics. Focus on strengths of personality, not things you've done. For example, you are responsible (not an "Eagle Scout") or committed (not "played basketball"). If you keep drifting toward events rather than characteristics, make a second list of the things you've done, places you've been, accomplishments you're proud of; use them for the activities section of your application.

Do a little research about yourself: ask parents, friends, and teachers what your strengths are.



Now, next to each trait, list five or six pieces of evidence from your life — things you've been or done — that prove your point.

Look for patterns in the material you've brainstormed. Group similar ideas and events together. For example, does your passion for numbers show up in your performance in the state math competition and your summer job at the computer store? Was basketball about sports or about friendships? When else have you stuck with the hard work to be with people who matter to you?

Now it's time to get down to the actual writing. Write your essay in three basic parts: introduction, body, and conclusion. The introduction gives your reader an idea of your essay's content. It can shrink when you need to be concise. One vivid sentence might be: "The favorite science project was a complete failure."

The body presents the evidence that supports your main idea. Use narration and incident to show rather than tell.

The conclusion can be brief as well, a few sentences to nail down the meaning of the events and incidents you've described.

An application essay doesn't need to read like an essay about *The Bluest Eye* or the Congress of Vienna, but thinking in terms of these three traditional parts is a good way to organize your main points.

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3 Steps to a Great Essay

(Continued from page 1)

There are three basic essay styles you should consider:

Take two or three points from your self-outline, give a paragraph to each, and make sure you provide plenty of evidence. Choose things not apparent from the rest of your application or “light up” some of the activities and experiences listed there.

In this format, you focus on a single interesting point about yourself. It works well for brief essays of a paragraph or half a page.

A narrative essay tells a short and vivid story. Omit the introduction, write one or two narrative paragraphs that grab and engage the reader’s attention, then explain what this little tale reveals about you.

When you have a good final draft, it’s time to make final improvements to your draft, find and correct any errors, and get someone else to give you feedback. Remember, you are your best editor. No one can speak for you; your own words and ideas are your best bet.

Take a break from your work and come back to it in a few days. Does your main idea come across clearly? Do you prove your points with specific details? Is your essay easy to read aloud?

Have someone you like and trust (but someone likely to tell you the truth) read your essay. Ask him/her to tell you what he/she thinks you’re trying to convey. Did he/she get it right?

Your language should be simple, direct, and clear. This is a personal essay, not a term paper. Make every word count (e.g., if you wrote “in society today,” consider changing that to “now”).

Careless spelling or grammatical errors, awkward language, or fuzzy logic will make your essay memorable — in a bad way.

This article is based on information found in *The College Application Essay*, by Sarah Myers McGinty.



Reduce Test Taking Anxiety

Many students experience some nervousness or apprehension before, during, or after an exam. This kind of anxiety can be a powerful motivator. However, some students experience test-related anxiety to such a degree that it can lead to poor performance and interfere with their learning.

Some Tips For Reducing Test Anxiety

Fortunately, there are several things that can be done to make test anxiety more manageable:



- **Preparation** - develop good study habits, spreading studying over several days; ask for additional help when needed; eat good foods, get adequate rest and exercise to build energy; attend class regularly and complete all assignments in a timely manner; make and take practice tests.
- **Keep a positive attitude** - develop reasonable expectations; do not allow your grades to become dependent on the outcome of one exam; avoid negative and irrational thoughts about catastrophic results; set up a system of rewards for dedicated studying and good test performance; encourage yourself.
- **Relaxation techniques** - deep breathing exercises, imagery and visualization, and muscle relaxation techniques can help to increase focus and concentration; don’t arrive too early or get distracted by others preparing for the test; check to make sure you have everything you will need.
- **Learn good test-taking skills** - do not panic if you can’t remember something right away; answer questions you know well first, and then go back to other ones; read questions and directions carefully before you begin; outline essays before you begin to write; keep short-answers short; don’t spend a lot of time reviewing answers.

Additional Coping Strategies

The techniques for dealing with test or performance anxiety can be divided into 5 basic principles:

1. **Be healthy:** If you are physically and emotionally exhausted, your body and mind are less able to tolerate stress and anxiety. You can improve your resistance to anxiety by getting adequate rest, eating appropriately, and taking care of your physical health. If you find you don’t have time to be healthy, consider seeking assistance with time management.
2. **Be prepared:** Practice... practice... practice... study... study... study. Sounds a bit repetitive, but nothing can help reduce anxiety like confidence. In fact, if you over-prepare a bit, your responses become more automatic, and your performance will be less affected by anxiety. Preparation for an exam may include improving your study and test-taking skills. Be on time and have all the “tools” you may need for an exam (e.g., #2 pencils, calculator, watch, pen). Finally, learn and practice the anxiety management techniques in the following points, 3-5.
3. **Practice the performance:** The time limits of an exam, the tied score of a game, or the audience at your performance — all are stimuli that increase your level of arousal and add to your experience of anxiety. If you practice under similar conditions, you’ll become less sensitive to these stimuli. For an exam, work through a practice exam (or two!) under the same time constraints that will exist when you take the exam (don’t look at your notes, create as many conditions of the actual exam as possible). For an athletic or artistic performance, practice with distractions or with an audience. For conditions that you cannot actually reproduce, create them in your mind—close your eyes and “see” the audience in the seats, give the play-by-play of the last seconds of a tied game. Imagination is a powerful tool — it can help you be less anxious when reality hits!

4. **Practice relaxation methods:** In cases of anxiety, the goal is to relax. Some of the most effective ways involve altering your physical responses like breathing and muscle tension.
- o **Deep breathing:** When anxious, we often take shallow breaths. We feel like we aren't getting enough air, and get more anxious. If you focus on breathing deeply and slowly, this cycle is interrupted and the body and mind begin to relax. To learn to breathe deeply, place your hand on your stomach and inhale in a way that makes your abdomen expand. As you exhale, your abdomen should move inward. Practice taking 10-15 slow deep breaths in a row, 2-3 times per day—training your body to breathe deeply and relax. Then, during a stressful situation, focus on taking 2-3 deep breaths, and your body will relax.
 - o **Progressive muscle relaxation:** We also tense our muscles when anxious. Consciously relaxing your muscles will help your body and mind relax. Practice muscle relaxation during deep breathing by focusing on a particular muscle group (e.g., shoulders) and alternatively tensing and relaxing the muscle. Then, focus on releasing all of the tension in the muscle, repeating “relax” in your mind. Add muscle relaxation to deep breathing in a stressful situation.
 - o **Reduce distractions:** Distractions are additional stimuli that increase arousal. Explore ways to reduce the distractions in your immediate environment, e.g. sit in a back corner of the room, take a sweater so you aren't distracted by being cold, change seats if you are distracted by the person sitting next to you.
 - o **Ritual:** Rituals are repetitive behaviors that give us a sense of familiarity, help us focus, and reduce anxiety. The basketball player who bounces the ball three times before shooting a free-throw has a ritual. You may already have some rituals—getting a drink of water just before an exam or using a particular pencil or pen. Just a note of caution—make sure your rituals are not harmful or distracting to yourself or others (tapping your pencil 10 times before each question may annoy your classmates!).
5. **Control the fear:** The underlying source of test or performance anxiety is the fear of failure. Pay attention to what you are thinking and saying to yourself in anxious situations. This self-talk will likely reflect an expectation or fear of failure. You can begin to control this fear or change the expectation by changing your self-talk.
- o **Positive self-talk:** Purposefully filling your mind with positive statements about yourself and your abilities can offset or crowd-out the negative self-talk. Even if you don't believe the positives, say them anyway — “I'm ready...I can do this... Do it!” Determine the most important positive messages for yourself by writing down your 3-4 most common negative thoughts (e.g., “I can't do this”). Next, write down the opposite for each statement (“I can do this”). Repeat the positives to yourself daily for at least two weeks, and again just before and during the test or performance.
 - o **On-task self-talk:** Counter distractions and help yourself focus on the task at hand by telling yourself what to do — talk yourself through the task step-by-step, and tell yourself you're succeeding! Thinking about past mistakes or future consequences is not helpful. Keep your mind focused on the present — one thing at a time!
 - o **Gaining perspective:** Sometimes the negative thoughts people have in stressful situations focus on potentially drastic consequences of failure. In most cases, these drastic consequences are much more severe than the reality of the situation—this is called catastrophizing. Focusing on such catastrophic consequences increases anxiety and interferes with performance. It is important to recognize that one mistake does not equal failure and that one bad performance does not mean you're worthless. Take some time to evaluate the most likely consequences of your performance. If you find that you tend to catastrophize, develop some phrases that are more realistic and repeat these phrases to yourself prior to and during the exam or performance. An example might be “This is just one exam.”

Source: www.campusblues.com



OC National College Fair

Anaheim
Convention Center

Sunday, April 22, 2007

1:30pm - 4:30pm





Explore ROP!

“To find joy in work is to discover the fountain of youth” said Pearl S.

Buck, American writer. The key to job satisfaction is to be interested in what you are doing, as you will probably work for at least 35 to 40 years of your life, seven or eight hours a day, four to five days a week! Think creatively as to how to make your interests a prime part of a job or career. What skills do you have? What are your strengths and weaknesses?

An excellent way for high school students to discover and identify some of their qualities is through the Coastline Regional Occupational Program (ROP). All ROP classes offer high school credit and a grade towards graduation. Several of the classes fulfill the visual and performing arts requirements for admission into the University of California and/or The California State University.

Taking an ROP class can be very helpful in the exploration of a college major. ROP internships show early interest in an area. Your interest shows dedication and determination on your college application, which is highly prized by college admission representatives.

ROP can help students gain the experience needed to obtain a first job by hands-on experience in the classroom and at an internship site provided by the ROP class. Students are also prepared to seek advanced training and realize the value of continuing their education.

For more information on ROP career preparation and internship classes, go to your high school Career Center.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Sun Trust Off to College Scholarship

Award: \$1,000.

Eligibility: Seniors. *Not* based on GPA or financial need.

15 chances to win – one winner every two weeks from Oct – May

Website: <http://www.suntrustededucation.com/sweeps/default.asp>

Hispanic Scholarship Fund

Award: \$1,000 - \$2,500

Eligibility: Graduating high school senior of Hispanic origin. Must be a citizen or permanent legal resident, have 3.0 GPA, and complete the FAFSA in January.

Website: www.hsf.net

Deadline: December 15, 2006

Southern California Mothers of Twins Club, Inc.

Award: varies

Eligibility: Seniors who are planning on attending college and are of multiple birth.

Website: www.scmotc.org

Deadline: February 1, 2007

AXA Achievement Scholarship

Award: \$10,000 - \$25,000

Eligibility: State and national winners. Seniors who are planning on attending college. Letter of recommendation from unrelated adult.

Website: www.axa-achievement.com

Deadline: December 15, 2006

Gates Millennium Scholars

Award: varies

Eligibility: Seniors, with a minimum 3.3 GPA, who show financial need and are of African American, American Indian, Asian Pacific Islander American, or Hispanic American origin. Fill out FAFSA and Pell Grant Applications.

Website: www.gmsp.org

Deadline: January 12, 2007

Discover Card Tribute Award

Award: \$2,500 (9 state scholarships) \$25,000 (9 national scholarships)

Eligibility: Juniors with a minimum cumulative (9th & 10th grade) 2.75 GPA who have special talents, overcome obstacles, or excel in leadership or community service.

Website: <http://www.discoverfinancial.com/data/philanthropy/tribute.shtml>

Deadline: check website in December

Ron Brown Scholar Program

Award: \$10,000 per year for four years.

Eligibility: African-American seniors who plan on attending college and demonstrate excellence, leadership potential, community service and financial need.

Website: www.ronbrown.org

Deadline: January 9, 2007

Quest Scholars Program

Award: varies

Quest Scholars Program is a national non-profit organization dedicated to connecting high-achieving, low-income students with scholarships, internships, mentorship, and other educational opportunities,

Website: www.questbridge.org or (650) 566-8391

Elder & Leemaar Publishers

Award: up to \$10,000

Eligibility: Essay contest – for more information and essay questions view their website,

Website: www.elpublishers.com/content/uwsotherscholarships.php

Deadline: December 1, 2006

Spotlight Awards - Music Center

Award: \$100 - \$6,000

Eligibility: Scholarships available in the area of two-dimensional art: computer art, drawings, mixed media, painting, printmaking and photograph

Website: www.musiccenter.org

Deadline: December 1, 2006

Toyota Community Scholars

Award: \$10,000 - \$20,000

Eligibility: High school seniors who exemplify outstanding academic excellence, leadership and most importantly - commitment to community service.

Website: Applications are available in the College/Career office.

Deadline: November 20, 2006

1st Freedom Student Competition

Award: \$750 - \$3,000

Eligibility: grades 9-12. Essay about religious freedom, its history, current importance and relevance in your life.

Website:

www.firstfreedom.org/programs/studentcomp.html

Deadline: December 1, 2006

AAA Travel High School Challenge

Award: \$10,000 - \$25,000

Eligibility: Grades 9-12. Online test in January followed by State and National Competition. Most questions are travel related.

Website: <http://www.aaa.com/travelchallenge>

Deadline: check website in November for more info

Patrick Kerr Skateboard Scholarship

Award: \$1000 - \$5000

Eligibility: High school senior with a 2.5 or higher GPA planning on attending a 2- or 4-year college. Must be a skateboarder.

Website: www.skateboardscholarship.org

Deadline: April 20, 2007

Mount St. Mary's College

Award: \$6,000 - full tuition

Eligibility: Seniors desiring to attend Mount St. Mary's College

Website: www.msmc.la.edu

Deadline: November 30, 2006

CSU, Chico

Award: \$12,000.

Eligibility: High school seniors desiring to attend CSU, Chico with GPA 3.5 to 3.7 with a 1200 total SAT score or 27 ACT score

Website: www.csuchico.edu/prs/scholars

Deadline: November 2006

Elks National Foundation Awards

Most Valuable Student Competition

Award: \$1,000 - \$15,000 per year for 4 years

Eligibility: seniors – selection based on academics and leadership.

Website: www.elks.org/enf/scholars/mvs.cfm

Deadline: January 12, 2007

Legacy Award

Award: \$ 1,000.

Eligibility: Child or grandchild of an Elk member.

Website: www.elks.org/enf/scholars/legacy.cfm

Deadline: January 12, 2007



News Flash

..Harvard

...Princeton

No longer have an
early admissions policy

Starting next year (present juniors)
all applicants will have a
single application deadline
of January 1

**Deadline to Apply to
University of California &
The Cal State University is
November 30th!!**

Log on to...

www.calstate.edu

www.csumentor.edu

www.universityofcalifornia.edu/
for online applications and
information

COMMUNICATION WITH TEENS: THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Remember that during adolescence, communication generally decreases and a child will confide less in parents. This is a fairly normal process and you should not overreact.
- Listen to what is being said; that is, try to understand the teenager's feelings and where he/she is coming from. Rather than thinking about arguments or retaliations, listen to him/her.
- Stop what you are doing and look at the teenager. Listen when he/she speaks to you. Be sure that you are giving him/her the proper attention and that he/she is not talking to a newspaper or to your back.
- Be sure most of your communication is positive, not negative. Don't dwell on mistakes, failures, misbehaviors, or something they forgot to do. Give them positive communication and talk about their successes, accomplishments, interests, and appropriate behavior.
- Talk to them about their interests (e.g., music, sports, computers, dance-team practice, cars, motorcycles). Have conversations with them when you are not trying to make a point, to teach them something, or to impress them. Talk to them just to talk and to have positive verbal interaction.
- Avoid talking too much - giving long or too-detailed explanations, repeating lectures, questioning excessively, or using other forms of communication that will result in the teenager turning a deaf ear to you.
- Try to understand the teen's feelings. You do not have to agree or disagree with him/her; just make him/her aware that you understand how he/she feels. Do not try to explain away his/her emotions. There are times when you do not have to fix things or make the young adult feel better. Understanding how he/she feels may be the primary comfort that is needed.
- Do not overreact to what is said. Remember, sometimes teenagers say things that are designed to get a reaction from their parents. In addition, do not say "No," too fast. Sometimes it is better to think about the request and give a response later. In other words, think before you open your mouth.
- Try to create situations in which communication can occur (driving the child to the doctor's appointment, having the teenager help you with household tasks). You have to be physically close to the teenager for communication to occur. A television in the adolescent's room can be an additional barrier to family communication. Whenever possible, the parent should try to do things *with* the teenager, rather than separately. Although the child may not frequently accept them, provide opportunities for him/her to do things with you.
- Try to avoid power struggles, confrontation, and arguing matches. Your goal should be to have the communication move toward a compromise situation, rather than a battle. When appropriate, involve the teenager in decision making and setting consequences for his or her behavior.

From *Keys to Parenting Your Teenager* by Don Fontenelle, Ph.D.