

The College Application Essay

Sarah Blank
University College Dublin





The College Essay

Some students writing
the college essay





The College Essay

Some admission counselors reading a college essay





Thought...

**Does the college application essay
really make a difference?**



Types of Applications & Essays

- The Common Application
 - The Coalition Application
 - The University of California Application
 - The Universal Application
 - Individual University Applications
-

- Common App Essay
- Coalition Essays
- UC Insight Questions
- Supplemental Essays



Preparing To Write



- Self Reflection
- What do you love? What do you think about? What do you read about? What do you like to learn more about? What subject do you like in school? Is there a project you loved in class? Why are you involved in what you do at school or in your community?
- Doesn't *always* need to be thought provoking or life altering
- Let us in - allow us to get to know YOU



Preparing To Write

- Post it notes over time – explore each topic to its fullest
- Journal – can help with stress too!
- Conversations with friends and trusted people
- Where do you think the best?





The Supplemental Essay

School Specific

- Why do you want to go to our university?
- How will you contribute to our university?
- How will you take advantage of the resources our university has to offer?
- How will our university support your academic or professional goals?
- If you could travel anywhere in time or space, either real or imagined, where would you go and why?
- What's your favorite word and why?
- What invention would the world be better off without, and why?
- Give us your Top Ten list.



The Supplemental Essay

Typical answer...

“I really like your school because it has nationally recognized programs and looks fun!”

Two components...

- Deep knowledge of the university
- Convincing demonstration of genuine personal interest



Supplemental Tips

- Dig for ways to **make it personal** – include personal connections to brighten a generic answer.
- Get creative in your research. **Go beyond the website** to learn what they're all about. Think hard about what you really care about – feature that in your answer.
- Do **research**. Include experiences from your own background that support what the school values.
- Look for examples of how what you want from your college experience lines up with what is offered.
- **Know why you want to go there.** Yes, it may seem obvious but you would be surprised that some students don't know why they are applying.



The Essay

- It's not an English paper - make your point quickly
- Answer all questions in the prompt
- Re-read, and re-read, and proofread
- Don't try too hard to come up with quirky ideas – **be authentic**
- Reveal something we can't find on the transcript
- Tell us something we don't know
 - “This is how I feel about...”
 - “This is what is important to me...”
 - “This is what I value...”
- Re-read, and re-read, and proofread
- **Give it the time it deserves**





Remember – It's an Essay

- Check for content not just spelling
- Style, flow, tone, and mechanics
- Opening sentence – Closing sentence
- Students who take a risk with the content and structure are generally more successful
- Content and structure **MUST** make a larger point about **YOU** the applicant
- Don't discuss several topics in one essay. Stay focused.



What Should I Write About?

Topics to Avoid

- Drugs & Alcohol
- Your run-in with the law
- Your List of Accomplishments
- One-track Social, Religious, or Political lectures
- Woe is Me
- The Travel Journal
- Excuses

Beware of Clichés

- Sports
 - Travel
 - Injuries and Illness
 - Childhood Anecdotes
 - Community Service
 - Influential Parents
 - Mental Health
 - Anything Risqué
 - Preaching
 - Kooky Topics
- 



That darn opening sentence

- “1800 miles from home – no car, no cable, no Chick-fil-A.”
- “Being Greek is a full-time job!”
- “I’ve got 99 problems and 90 of them are made up.”
- “It’s true - I don’t speak fluent Chinese, I haven’t solved world hunger, and I can’t play the harp. But I’m a middle child and I think that’s pretty special.”
- “When it rains, the inhabitants where I live are the last to know. Welcome to Short People Land.”



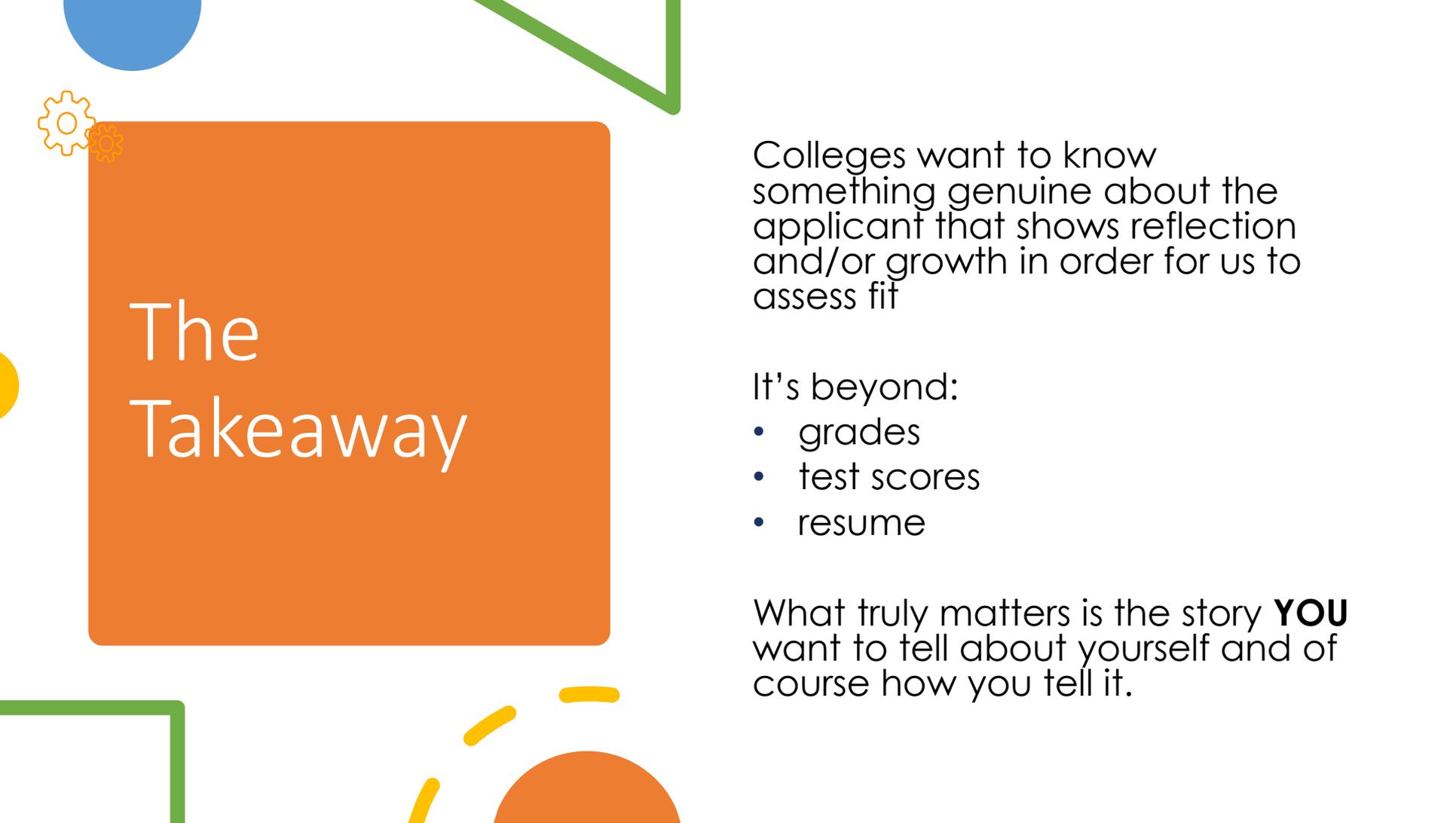
That darn opening sentence

- DO – Get to the point. Make me want to read your essay.
- DON'T – Re-state the essay prompt or tell the reader the purpose of your essay.



That pesky closing sentence

- Just as important as the opening sentence
- Don't begin the last sentence with "In conclusion" or "To summarize" or "Finally"
- Leave the reader wanting more



The Takeaway

Colleges want to know something genuine about the applicant that shows reflection and/or growth in order for us to assess fit

It's beyond:

- grades
- test scores
- resume

What truly matters is the story **YOU** want to tell about yourself and of course how you tell it.



Questions?

