



## College Applications: Writing the Essay

One common element of college applications is the essay or personal statement. While some seniors moan about the time and energy that this will take, the essay is actually a golden opportunity for your student to set himself/herself apart from hundreds (if not thousands) of other applicants. Here are some tips for helping your student as he/she writes the essay.

### The Writing Process

1. Read the Question Carefully: Some colleges simply leave a space on the application for an unspecified personal statement, while others will ask a specific question. The first step: read the question several times and talk about the various ways a student could approach that question.
2. Remember Audience and Purpose: Colleges don't require the essay just to torture your student. Your student's transcript and test scores give them plenty of data (GPA, class rank, course rigor, ACT/SAT) – but the data doesn't reveal much about your student's personality. Colleges look at the essay to discover who your student is as a person and to gauge the quality of his/her writing.

As your student considers the topic, encourage him/her to focus on those experiences that will be most revealing in terms of character and personality. The essay should be unique to each student – if your student ends up with an essay that could be used by several students, it probably doesn't provide much insight. The audience for the essay is clearly an academic one, and the tone of the essay should reflect this. A more informal tone, however, could be employed depending on the subject matter of the essay.

3. Think Narrow and Deep: It is imply not possible to tell everything about yourself in an essay that will average around 500 words (just try it – see #6 below). Considering the purpose of the essay, your student might be better off writing from a narrative perspective rather than completing a traditional expository essay. This allows your student to demonstrate character traits through experience. For example, if your student wants to focus on her creative qualities, she might narrate the experience of preparing for a concert. This will allow her to utilize more descriptive language and to explore the topic in greater depth.
4. Draft, Rest, Draft: Among high school students it is a common attitude – “I can write a quality essay in one draft.” Nope. Help your student to plan ahead so there is time to complete multiple drafts of the essay along with some rest time. Letting an essay rest for a few days will help your student to look at it from a more objective and evaluative perspective.
5. Seek Out Feedback: Encourage your student to show the essay to others to get valuable feedback. Some possibilities might be: you, siblings, peers, teachers (if they have available time), counselors and administrators. If your student is struggling, the College & Career Resource Center has information on writing the essay (including examples for inspiration).
6. Sympathize: No, we're not kidding. Share in your student's experience by writing your own response to the essay prompt. Use the experience to make your own discoveries about this process!

### Upcoming Dates:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Monday, October 6: PTA Meeting (6:30 pm, library)</li><li>• Tuesday, October 7: Parent/Teacher Conferences (4-7 pm, cafeteria)</li><li>• Tuesday, October 14: Site Council (5 pm, library)</li><li>• Wednesday, October 15: Explore Test</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wednesday, October 15: Freshman Lock-in</li><li>• Thursday, October 16 – Friday, October 17: State Teacher Meetings, no school</li><li>• Girls Hockey Meeting (6:30 pm, auditorium)</li><li>• Wednesday, October 29: Early Release Day</li></ul> |
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# Guidance Notes Continued...

## Parent/Teacher Conferences Tuesday, October 7

Conferences are first-come, first-served this year. We ask that parents and teachers respect the five minute time limit for conferences. How to cover everything in five minutes:

- Keep it specific – if you feel your student could be doing better, ask about specific challenges (late work, incomplete assignments, etc.) that need to be addressed. Focus on specific actions your student can take to improve performance.
- See conferences as a beginning of the conversation – five minutes might simply be too short for you and the teacher. If you feel the conversation should continue, make arrangements as your five minutes ends to continue through email or phone conferencing at your and the teacher's convenience.

We have two parent information programs planned for the evening of conferences:

- Paul Mattke, Assistant Principal, will be presenting information on our new advisory program
- Nancy Katzmarek, Janet Knoll and Darron Chapman will be presenting information on supporting your student's academics

Both presentations will be in the library – check them out!

## Tutoring Available!

Tutoring is available in the library every Monday, Wednesday and Thursday from 2:15 – 3:15. National Honor Society students and staff members will be available to help students. Bus tokens are also available for students.

## College Applications: Official Transcripts

Remember, all college applications require at least one official transcript. Some FAQs:

**What makes it an official transcript?** The transcript will contain the most recent class rank and grade point average calculation (as of June, 2008), will be embossed with the official school seal and must be delivered to the college sealed in a letterhead envelope with a signature and stamp across the flap.

**Can my student see what is on the transcript?** Technically, no, your student cannot have access to an unsealed "official" transcript (that is what makes it official). However, your student can request an unofficial transcript, which is exactly like the official transcript, but without the fancy embossing. See Traci in the school counseling office to make a request.

**What is the class rank based on?** Class rank is determined by the weighted grade point average that appears in the Performance Summary at the bottom of the transcript. Grade point averages and class rank are updated every term.

**How does my student request an official transcript?** Simple – your student just needs to complete a form available in the school counseling office. The official transcript will be ready to pick up in one to two days!

### Helpful People to Contact...

- Counselors: Jesse Kramer, Barbara Kurtz, Meredith Rambow
- College & Career Resource Center: Grant Grays
- Parent Liaison: Nancy Kolb
- IB/Curriculum Coordinator: Charlotte Landreau
- Attendance: Joan Theisen, Sybil Shakir

You can contact any of these people by phone at 293-8940, or through email: [firstname.lastname@spps.org](mailto:firstname.lastname@spps.org)