

Sample College Essay 1

You Be the Judge:

Read the following application essay. See if you can figure out this essay's strengths and weaknesses. Click the menus below to view critiques of the essay.

From the time I was able to realize what a university was, all I heard from my mother's side of the family was about the University of Michigan and the great heritage it has. Many a Saturday afternoon my grandfather would devote to me, by sitting me down in front of the television and reminiscing about the University of Michigan while halftime occurred during a Michigan Wolverines football game. Later, as I grew older and universities took on greater meaning, my mother and uncle, both alumni of the University of Michigan, took me to see their old stamping grounds. From first sight, the university looked frightening because of its size, but with such a large school comes diversity of people and of academic and non-academic events.

In Springfield High School, non-academic clubs such as the Future Physicians and the Pylon, both of which I have belonged to for two years, give me an opportunity to see both the business world and the medical world. These two clubs have given me a greater sense of what these careers may be like. In Future Physicians, I participated in field trips to children's hospitals and also participated in two bloodbanks.

Currently I hold a job at Maas Brothers. This lets me interact with people outside my own immediate environment. I meet different kinds of people, in different moods, with different attitudes, and with different values. This job teaches me to be patient with people, to have responsibility, and to appreciate people for what they are.

In the community I am active in my church Youth Group. As a high school sophomore, I was our church's representative to the Diocesan Youth Fellowship. I helped organize youth group events, the largest being "The Bishop's Ball," a state-wide event for 300 young people. I also played high school junior varsity soccer for two years. As a senior I will be playing varsity soccer, but in the off-season. As a junior I coached a girls' soccer team for the town. This gave me a great deal of responsibility because the care of twenty-four girls was put into my custody. It felt very satisfying to pass on the knowledge of soccer to another generation. The girls played teams from other parts of Florida. Though their record was 3-8, the girls enjoyed their season. This is what I taught them was the greatest joy of soccer.

The past three years of my life have given me greater visions of my future. I see the University of Michigan as holding a large book with many unread chapters and myself as an eager child who has just learned to read. I intend to read and probe into all the chapters. The University of Michigan offers me more than the great reputation of this fine school, but a large student body with diverse likes and dislikes, and many activities, both academic and non-academic, to participate in. With the help of the University of Michigan, I will be successful after college and be able to make a name and place for myself in our society.

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

Sample College Essay 2

Read the following application essay. See if you can figure out this essay's strengths and weaknesses.

My most important experience sought me out. It happened to me; I didn't cause it.

My preferred companions are books or music or pen and paper. I have only a small circle of close friends, few of whom get along together. They could easily be counted "misfits." To be plain, I found it quite easy to doubt my ability to have any sort of "close relationship."

After the closing festivities of Andover Summer School this past summer, on the night before we were scheduled to leave, a girl I had met during the program's course approached me. She came to my room and sat down on my bed and announced that she was debating with herself whether she wanted me to become her boyfriend. She wanted my reaction, my opinion.

I was startled, to say the least, and frightened. I instantly said, "No." I told her I on no account wanted this and that I would reject any gestures she made towards starting a relationship. I would ignore her entirely, if need be. I explained that I was a coward. I wanted nothing whatsoever to do with a relationship. I talked a lot and very fast.

To my surprise, she did not leave instantly. Instead, she hugged her knees and rocked back and forth on my bed. I watched her from across the room. She rocked, and I watched. Doubts crept up on me. Opportunity had knocked and the door was still locked. It might soon depart.

"I lied," I said. "I was afraid of what might happen if we became involved. But it's better to take the chance than to be afraid."

She told me she knew I had lied. I had made her realize, though, how much she actually wanted me to be her boyfriend. We decided to keep up a relationship after Andover.

Even then, I was not sure which had been the lie. Now I think that everything I said may have been true when I said it. But I'm still not sure.

I learned, that night, that I could be close to someone. I also realize, now, that it doesn't matter whether or not that person is a misfit; the only important thing is the feeling, the closeness, the connection. As long as there is something between two people -- friendship, love, shared interests, whatever else -- it is a sign that there can be some reconciliation with fear, some "fit" for misfits. And it shows that fear need not always win, that we can grow and change, and even have second chances.

I am still seeing her.

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

Name _____ Date _____

Writer's Rubric for Ideas

6

- ✓ The message is clear, focused, and concise. It would be easy to summarize.
- ✓ The writer seems to have an in-depth understanding of or insight about the topic.
- ✓ The main idea, thesis, or storyline is easy to identify and well-defined; it gives the piece a strong sense of direction.
- ✓ The writer supports and expands the main idea or story with numerous carefully selected, beyond-the-obvious details, and (as needed) research from multiple sources.
- ✓ The result is satisfying; it answers the reader's questions thoroughly and well.

5

- ✓ The message is clear, focused, and fairly well-focused. It can be summarized.
 - ✓ The writer seems to know the topic well.
 - ✓ The main idea, thesis, or storyline is easy to identify and fairly well-defined.
 - ✓ The writer supports the main idea or story with well-chosen details and (if needed) research.
 - ✓ The result answers most of the reader's questions.
-

4

- ✓ The message makes sense. It can be summarized with little thought. It may need expanding or condensing.
 - ✓ The writer seems generally comfortable with the topic.
 - ✓ The reader can readily infer the main idea, thesis, or storyline even if the writer does not state it.
 - ✓ The writer includes *some* interesting or unusual details-though support feels thin in spots. The writer needs to dig deeper, think harder, or do more research.
 - ✓ The reader may have some questions, but on the whole, the writing conveys the key issues.
-

3

- ✓ The message is not clear throughout. Summarizing takes work. The piece is too skimpy, or it needs cutting.
 - ✓ The writer sometimes knows what he/she is talking about and sometimes struggles.
 - ✓ The reader can make a guess about the main idea, thesis, or story.
 - ✓ Detail and support are present but sketchy, vague, or questionable. Some details are common knowledge or just very general or repetitive.
 - ✓ The reader is left with questions.
-

2

- ✓ The message is vague or unclear. Summarizing takes invention. The main idea is buried under *too much* information or else not developed at all.
 - ✓ The writer seems uncomfortable with this topic, writing mainly to fill space.
 - ✓ What is the writer trying to say? What is the main idea? What is the point?
 - ✓ Detail and support are limited or not helpful to the reader's understanding?
 - ✓ The reader is left with many questions.
-

1

- ✓ The writer is still searching for a message. Summarizing is not possible.
 - ✓ The writer either did not know the topic or choose to say very little.
 - ✓ The reader cannot construct or extract anything meaningful, even by guessing.
 - ✓ The writer relies on generalizations and random thoughts, not details or support.
 - ✓ It is hard to identify questions because there is not message or thesis yet.
-

Writer's Rubric for Organization

6

- ✓ The organizational pattern is ideally suited to the genre, topic, and purpose.
- ✓ The structure guides the reader through the piece and showcases main ideas.
- ✓ Elements within the piece are creatively arranged to promote understanding.
- ✓ Pacing is just right; complex or technical issues are explored in depth.
- ✓ Transitions are smooth, clearly connecting sentences and ideas, and creating a coherent whole.
- ✓ The opening is strong and compelling. The ending is satisfying and effective.

5

- ✓ The organizational pattern is appropriate for genre, topics, and purpose.
- ✓ The structure makes the discussion or the story easy to follow; the main ideas stand out.
- ✓ Elements within the piece are effectively arranged to promote understanding.
- ✓ Pacing is appropriate; the writer gives extra time to complex or technical issues.
- ✓ Transitions connect clearly, making the piece coherent.
- ✓ The opening is appealing and functional. The ending wraps up the discussion.

4

- ✓ The organizational pattern works for this genre, topics, and purpose.
- ✓ The reader can follow along and locate key information without undue difficulty.
- ✓ Elements within the piece are satisfactorily arranged in most cases.
- ✓ Pacing is adequate, though readers sometimes want to slow down or speed up.
- ✓ Transitions connect ideas sufficiently so the discussion hangs together.
- ✓ The opening is appealing and functional. The ending wraps up the discussion.
- ✓ The opening and closing are functional for the genre.

3

- ✓ The organizational pattern may be overly formulaic or confusing.
 - ✓ The organization challenges readers; it is hard to follow the piece or to find information quickly.
 - ✓ Elements within the piece sometimes seem out of place.
 - ✓ Pacing is unbalanced; the writer spends too much time on some things, too little on others.
 - ✓ Transitions are missing or overdone; the reader must help make connections.
 - ✓ The opening does not clearly set the stage. The ending does not clearly wrap things up.
-

2

- ✓ The organizational pattern is so formulaic that it is distracting, or there is no pattern.
 - ✓ Lack of order frequently leaves the reader feeling lost; key information is buried.
 - ✓ Elements within the piece often seem out of place.
 - ✓ Pacing is faulty. The writer is consistently dragging his/her feet or rushing along.
 - ✓ Transitions are missing, overdone, or flawed; it is hard to make connections.
 - ✓ The opening and ending are misleading, irrelevant, formulaic, or missing.
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1

- ✓ The text reads like a disjointed collection of random thoughts.
 - ✓ Lack of structure makes the piece difficult to follow even with rereading.
 - ✓ Extensive re-ordering is needed.
 - ✓ Random order makes pacing impossible to judge.
 - ✓ Transitions are absent. Ideas do not seem connected.
 - ✓ There is no real opening or closing. The piece just starts and stops.
-

Name _____ Date _____

Writer's Rubric for Voice

6

- ✓ This writing is individual and appealing. You feel compelled to share it aloud.
 - ✓ The piece is honest and passionate when appropriate-yet restrained or courteous as needed.
 - ✓ The writer's in-depth knowledge of the topic creates a confident voice that balances authority with a personal touch.
 - ✓ The writer's curiosity and/or enthusiasm is contagious; the reader feels engaged.
 - ✓ The voice is carefully selected to fit the purpose and the audience.
-

5

- ✓ This paper stands out from others. You might share it aloud.
 - ✓ This piece shows a balance between honesty and passion and courteous restraint.
 - ✓ The writer clearly knows the topic well and seems self-assured.
 - ✓ The writer's curiosity and/or enthusiasm keeps readers reading.
 - ✓ The voice is appropriate for the purpose and the audience.
-

4

- ✓ This is a functional, sincere voice. You might share *moments* aloud.
 - ✓ The piece is appropriately restrained or courteous; it may show *moments* of passion as well.
 - ✓ The writer has some knowledge of the topic; more would create needed confidence.
 - ✓ Moments of enthusiasm pique the reader's interest.
 - ✓ The voice is an acceptable for the audience and purpose.
-

3

- ✓ The voice comes and goes. It is not quite ready to be shared.
 - ✓ The writer may be in hiding or may display too much anger, hostility, or other inappropriate emotion.
 - ✓ Knowledge of the topic seems limited, and this hurts the writer's confidence.
 - ✓ Moments of enthusiasm are offset by apparent indifference; the voice is sometimes tired.
 - ✓ The voice needs revision to fit purpose and/or audience.
-

2

- ✓ This is an "anybody" kind of voice, definitely not ready to be shared.
 - ✓ The writer's emotions are out of control. *Or else*, no one seems "at home" here.
 - ✓ The writer seems uncomfortable with this topic; the voice may be hesitant or hostile.
 - ✓ The reader may be offended or may have trouble remaining engaged.
 - ✓ The voice is very faint or not a good fit with audience and purpose.
-

1

- ✓ This voice is difficult to identify or describe, or it is the wrong voice for the writing task.
 - ✓ The writer is not personally present in the piece. It has a "boilerplate" feel to it.
 - ✓ Lack of knowledge suppresses confidence.
 - ✓ The reader senses the writer is struggling to find the right voice.
 - ✓ The voice is either missing or wholly inappropriate for audience and purpose.
-

Name _____ Date _____

Writer's Rubric for Word Choice

6

- ✓ The writing is clear, striking, original, and precise.
 - ✓ The language is perfectly suited to the writer's purpose and audience.
 - ✓ Words are lively and distinctive; new or unusual words are clearly and thoroughly defined.
 - ✓ The writer achieved a strong, consistent sense of balance-not inflated, not simplistic.
 - ✓ Powerful verbs give the writing energy and create vivid imagery.
 - ✓ Modifiers are used with restraint to enrich meaning, voice, or imagery; they are never overdone.
-

5

- ✓ The writing is clear and often original. Words are generally used accurately.
 - ✓ The language is well-suited to the writer's purpose and audience.
 - ✓ Phrasing tends to be lively; new or unusual words are usually defined.
 - ✓ The writing is generally balanced, not inflated or simplistic.
 - ✓ The writer relies on strong verbs to enrich meaning and make text lively.
 - ✓ Modifiers support meaning, voice, or imagery; they are never overdone.
-

4

- ✓ The writing is clear in most cases.
 - ✓ More often than not, language is well-suited to the writer's purpose and audience.
 - ✓ Lively phrasing outweighs flat language, jargon, slang, or clichés; new or unusual words are reasonably clear from context.
 - ✓ Balanced writing outweighs inflated or overly simplistic language.
 - ✓ The writer uses some strong verbs – more would lend life and energy.
 - ✓ Modifiers support meaning and imagery- but may occasionally go too far.
-

3

- ✓ The writing is occasionally unclear or vague, though the main idea still comes through.
 - ✓ At times, the language seems appropriate for purpose and audience.
 - ✓ Flat language, jargon, slang, or clichés outweigh lively, distinctive moments; new or unusual words are not common or may not be clear from context.
 - ✓ Inflated or overly simplistic language outweighs balanced writing.
 - ✓ Modifiers tend to be overdone; more restraint and/or precision is needed.
-

2

- ✓ Many words and phrases are misused, vague, or unclear. What is the message?
 - ✓ The language often seems unsuited to audience and purpose.
 - ✓ Flat language, jargon, slang, or clichés are problematic; new or unusual words are not always used correctly.
 - ✓ Inflated or overly simplistic language dominates the text.
 - ✓ Modifiers are frequently overdone, obscuring meaning or creating a strained voice.
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1

- ✓ Confusing, vague, or incorrect words and phrases bury the writer's message.
 - ✓ The language is not appropriate for audience or purpose.
 - ✓ Flat language, jargon, slang, or clichés dominate; new or unusual terms, if used, create confusion.
 - ✓ The writing is consistently inflated or overly simplistic
 - ✓ Strong verbs are absent; this writing *craves* energy.
 - ✓ Modifiers, if present, are overdone; obscuring meaning or negatively affecting voice and tone.
-

Name _____ Date _____

Writer's Rubric for Sentence Fluency

6

- ✓ The writing is smooth, natural, and enjoyable to read-silently or aloud.
 - ✓ Sentences are highly varied, significantly enhancing voice.
 - ✓ Sentence length and structure enhance meaning and readability.
Problems (run-ons, convoluted sentences, choppiness) are absent from the text.
 - ✓ Transitions are natural, unobtrusive, and essential in connecting key points.
 - ✓ In narrative, fluency invites expressive oral reading that brings out the voice.
 - ✓ Dialogue, if used, definitively captures and echoes the cadence of real speech.
 - ✓ Repetition or fragments (if present) are deliberate and effective.
-

5

- ✓ The writing is smooth and quite easy to read.
 - ✓ Sentences are varied, adding to the voice.
 - ✓ Sentence length and structure support meaning and readability.
Problems (run-ons, convoluted sentences, choppiness) are rare.
 - ✓ Transitions clearly connect key points.
 - ✓ In narrative, fluency allows for expressive oral reading.
 - ✓ Dialogue, if used, sounds natural and authentic.
 - ✓ Repetition or fragments (if present) are usually stylistically effective.
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4

- ✓ Despite a bumpy moment or two, it is fairly easy to read this piece aloud.
 - ✓ Sentences show some variety.
 - ✓ Sentence length and structure usually support meaning and readability.
Problems (run-ons, convoluted sentences, choppiness) are outweighed by well-crafted sentences.
 - ✓ Transitions connect key points. They may be over or under-used.
 - ✓ In narrative, fluency permits expressive oral reading, given some rehearsal.
 - ✓ Dialogue, if used sounds reasonably natural more often than not.
 - ✓ Repetition or fragments (if present) are effective more often than not.
-

3

- ✓ Sentence problems and awkward structure occasionally slow the reader or necessitate re-reading.
 - ✓ Sentences tend to follow a pattern, with repetitious beginnings.
 - ✓ Sentence length and structure impair support readability.
Problems (run-ons, convoluted sentences, choppiness) are common.
 - ✓ Transitions tend to be over or under-used or missing.
 - ✓ In narrative, fluency problems may block expressive oral reading.
 - ✓ Dialogue, if used, is more often forced or mechanical than natural.
 - ✓ Fragments (if present) tend to be unintentional and ineffective.
-

2

- ✓ Sentence problems and awkward structure consistently slow the reader and require re-reading or rehearsal.
 - ✓ Sentence length and structure work against readability.
Problems (run-ons, convoluted sentences, choppiness) are common and interfere with the message.
 - ✓ Transitions are consistently problematic or missing.
 - ✓ In narrative, fluency problems make expressive oral reading difficult.
 - ✓ Dialogue, if used, is more often forced or mechanical, not natural or authentic.
 - ✓ Unintentional fragments are common and do not add to style.
-

1

- ✓ The writing is consistently awkward, difficult to follow, and challenging to read.
 - ✓ Sentence length and structure seriously interfere with readability.
Problems (run-ons, convoluted sentences, choppiness) are distracting and pose obscure meaning.
 - ✓ Transitions are not attempted.
 - ✓ Expressive oral reading is not possible without revising the text.
 - ✓ Dialogue, if used, is not authentic or is difficult to identify as *dialogue* within the text.
 - ✓ Unintentional fragments get in the way.
-

Name _____ Date _____

Writer's Rubric for Conventions

6

- ✓ Only the pickiest editors will spot errors. The impact of those errors on the text is insignificant.
 - ✓ The writer uses conventions skillfully and (as appropriate) creatively to bring out meaning and/or voice.
 - ✓ The writer shows control over a wide range of conventions.
 - ✓ Citations (if needed) are accurate, complete, and correctly formatted.
 - ✓ Presentation (if important) has eye appeal and highlights key information.
 - ✓ This piece is virtually ready to publish.
-

5

- ✓ A few errors are noticeable *if you look closely*. None affect clarity.
 - ✓ The writer often uses conventions to enhance meaning or voice.
 - ✓ The writer shows control over numerous conventions, particularly basics (easy spelling, end punctuation, basic capitalization, simple paragraphing).
 - ✓ Citations (if needed) are accurate, complete, and usually correctly formatted.
 - ✓ Presentation (if important) has eye appeal and highlights key information.
 - ✓ This piece is virtually ready to publish with minor touch-ups.
-

4

- ✓ Errors are noticeable, but do not impair meaning or significantly slow down a reader.
 - ✓ The writer uses conventions with enough skill to make the text readable.
 - ✓ Despite some slips, the writer shows reasonable control over most conventions.
 - ✓ Citations (if needed) may reflect small errors in completeness or formatting.
 - ✓ Presentation (if important) is satisfactory and allows the reader to find information.
 - ✓ A good once-over is needed prior to publication.
-

3

- ✓ Noticeable, distracting errors *begin* to slow down a reader, though it is still possible to figure out meaning.
 - ✓ Though many things are done correctly, errors are noticeable and sometimes distracting.
 - ✓ The writer knows some conventions-but is not always in control, even over basics.
 - ✓ Citations (if needed) contain errors in content or formatting.
 - ✓ Presentation (if important) lacks eye appeal and makes it hard to tell which information is most important.
 - ✓ Thorough, careful editing is needed prior to publication.
-

2

- ✓ Numerous errors make reading a chore.
 - ✓ Though a few things are done correctly, serious errors consistently impair readability.
 - ✓ The writer does not have conventions under control.
 - ✓ Citations (if needed) are missing or have many errors in content or formatting.
 - ✓ Presentation (if important) is confusing or distracting.
 - ✓ Line-by-line editing is required prior to publication.
-

1

- ✓ Serious, frequent errors often make this text challenging to decode or interpret.
 - ✓ The reader must do a lot of mental “editing” to uncover the message.
 - ✓ This writer seems to struggle even with basic conventions.
 - ✓ Citations (if needed) are missing or too limited/sketchy to be valuable.
 - ✓ Presentation (if important) is problematic, making key information hard to find.
 - ✓ Careful, word-by-word editing is required prior to publication.
-