



How to read any college essay like a pro

Start at the top and work through the questions. If you're reading rough ideas or a draft, the quality of writing don't matter. Address structure, tone, and language issues when the story and ideas are there.

1 Is it built on a strong foundation?

Know your audience

Imagine your audience was a tour guide who got a job in the admissions office after graduating last year. They want to know what kind of friend or student you'll be.

Is the essay a common type of learning and growing experience (for example, *I didn't make the team* is similar to *I didn't get a part in the play*)?

Know your intention

An effective college essay is an engaging, authentic short story that shows who the student is.

Did the essay catch your attention and keep it to the end? Was it authentic? Was it a story (in the broadest sense of the word, as opposed to a school paper, news article, etc.)? Did you get a sense of who the student is?

Know your role

The best college essays are written like a teenager telling their story around the campfire to friends. An academic or sales perspective won't lead to the kind of essays admissions officers want to read.

What perspective did the writer take? A teen around the campfire, or something else?

2 Does it have three types of content?

Stuff that happened

These are specific events, conversations, places, and so forth. This is what gives the reader a sense of "Oh, I'm in a place and time and can visualize what's going on."

In-the-moment experience

Can you tell what they were thinking or feeling at the time? What was going in their head, their heart, their body sensations, etc.?

Deep thoughts

Are there after-the-fact observations, insights, or perspectives? It's what the writer understands, thinks, or feels today looking back.

3 Is it well-written?

Everything is there for a reason

Essays can say more with less. Does every story, idea, sentence, and word serve a purpose?

It's easy to read

Does it make sense and have a flow that works? Is it smooth? Is anything confusing or ambiguous? Is it missing important information or making assumptions about what the reader knows?

It's proofread

Is it well-written? It doesn't have to follow formal rules of grammar (better if not, actually). But every sentence does need to be clear and understandable. And, no typos.



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