



BERKSHIRE SCHOOL COLLEGE COUNSELING

SIXTH FORM SUMMER COLLEGE ESSAY REQUIREMENT

In addition to the required summer reading for all students, rising sixth formers at Berkshire are required to write their college essay over the summer. The pace and expectations at the beginning of each Sixth Form year can make it challenging for sixth formers to find the time to write their most thoughtful and effective college essay. Therefore, in order to encourage each student's best effort with this critical component of the college application process, **we require every sixth former to submit a college essay to his or her English VI teacher on the first day of classes in September.**

This essay should not be an initial draft, but rather a polished essay that reflects each student's significant effort and considerable revision. The relative quiet of summer provides time to consider and determine the essay topic and to begin the lengthy and essential process of drafting and revision. While each sixth former will work with a college counselor (and other trusted readers) to revise and finalize the essay before including it with his or her applications, the essay submitted in September should be close to a final draft. Our college meetings with students during April and May of the Fifth Form year include discussions about appropriate and effective essay topics. In addition, our college counselors visit every Fifth Form English class during the spring to present a workshop on writing an effective college essay, highlighting models of effective essays and outlining key strategies.

With most colleges and universities accepting the Common Application, sixth formers can usually submit one essay with all their college applications. Most colleges, however, will also require additional school-specific short essays or responses (supplements), making it even more important for students to devote time over the summer to completing their primary essay. The college essay is a central component of each student's application, and it remains the one place in an application for a student to truly highlight his or her unique and distinctive personal qualities. Writing an effective college essay should be a deeply reflective exercise. The essay should provide a clear window into who each student is as a person and what values, experiences, and qualities he or she will bring to a college or university community.

The essay is also regarded as a writing sample that allows college admissions officers to assess each applicant's skills and talents as a writer and critical thinker. We encourage our sixth formers to embrace the challenge of writing an effective college essay and to use it to celebrate their unique talents, interests, and aspirations while also showcasing their strongest writing.

Included on the back are the topics for the 2011-2012 Common Application's Personal Essay (college essay) and some key ideas to support each sixth former's most effective essay. Students should carefully review both when determining their essay topic and as they draft, revise, and assess their own essay.

The final version of your college essay should be between one to two pages (250-500 words) in length and is typically formatted in 12-point font with 1" margins. Students should always include their full name at the top of the essay in the event that their application materials are temporarily (and rarely) misplaced within a college admissions office.

We encourage sixth formers to follow up with their college counselors with any questions or for advice at any step in this process. Good luck!

2011-2012 COMMON APPLICATION PERSONAL ESSAY

Please write an essay on a topic of your choice or on one of the options listed below. This personal essay helps us to become acquainted with you as a person and student, apart from courses, grades, test scores, and other objective data. It will also demonstrate your ability to organize your thoughts and express yourself.

Note: Your Common Application essay should be the same for all colleges. Do not customize it in any way for individual colleges. Colleges that want customized essay responses will ask for them on a supplement form.

- Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.
- Discuss some issue of personal, local, national, or international concern and its importance to you.
- Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.
- Describe a character in fiction, a historical figure, or a creative work (as in art, music, science, etc.) that has had an influence on you, and explain that influence.
- A range of academic interests, personal perspectives, and life experiences adds much to the educational mix. Given your personal background, describe an experience that illustrates what you would bring to the diversity in a college community, or an encounter that demonstrated the importance of diversity to you.
- Topic of your choice.

KEYS TO AN EFFECTIVE COLLEGE ESSAY

Less is more. Write with a clear, concise, and easy-to-follow style. Use specific and vivid examples. Always remember that the best writers spend most of their time editing the words they can do without.

Be true to yourself. A personal essay is a window into *your* unique qualities. Be authentic. Write with your true self in mind, not an idealized version of whom you'd like to be.

Don't make a big deal out of nothing. Choose a significant experience and talk persuasively but appropriately about its impact on you.

Tell a story. The most successful college essays are simply stories well told. It's not an *academic* piece of writing. It's a *creative* piece of writing. Write with a voice that's conversational and welcoming.

Set the hook. Your first sentence and first paragraph need to sing. Remember that your essay is sitting in a stack of a hundred others. Make the admissions officer "sit up" at the start of reading yours.

The brutally honest question: Could anyone else have written this essay? If the answer is yes, start over.