

Writing a transfer or scholarship application essay

Congratulations on your plan to transfer or to apply for a scholarship! Applications like these usually ask you to include an essay or “personal statement” with your application. Admissions teams and scholarship review boards use these essays to get a sense of who you are beyond what they can see in the details of your transcripts and instructor recommendations. The essay is your chance to highlight what makes you unique as a student and as a person, and how that makes you a good fit for the school or scholarship.

If you can, attend a Writing Center workshop on writing transfer essays, and come by the Writing Center for feedback on your ideas and draft; we’re ready to help!

Here are some tips from the Writing Center to help you write your best essay:

Remember the writing process

An application essay is not the same as an academic essay. However, most of what you’ve learned about writing academic essays will help you with this one. Above all, don’t forget to **follow your best writing process**. Consider your audience and purpose. Brainstorm responses to the essay question and select the most effective points to make. It’s common to construct this essay around a specific story—something that happened to you or that you did (or perhaps a series of things) that can illustrate what it is you want to communicate about yourself. Draft and revise as many times as necessary. When you are satisfied with your draft, edit carefully and ruthlessly. And always proofread—check for missed errors or typos—as if your life depended on it. (Your acceptance to the college or university might!)

Organize!

As you revise, pay special attention to **organization**. Application essays allow for more creative content than most academic essays do, but you will still want to guide your reader. It’s easy in a personal essay to accidentally “wander.” If you are using a story to construct your essay, you might start with a gripping moment in the story that will intrigue the reader. Use description, and consider using direct dialogue—have the people in your story say things directly. (Be sure to punctuate properly!) If you are using more of a theme-based approach, consider using a focused thesis and possibly even topic sentences to communicate the key points you want to make.

Watch your language

When you edit, work to ensure the writing is **clear and concise** and that every word counts.

- **Avoid wordiness.** Application essays are not very long; you need every word to count. Cut unnecessary adverbs and adjectives, intensifiers, repeated ideas, and convoluted constructions.

Anthropology ~~was definitely the class that most~~ made a significant impression on me ~~for the reason that the excellent instructor~~ worked ~~constantly and tirelessly~~ to communicate ~~all of the most important~~ critical material.

Anthropology made an impression on me *because* the instructor worked *hard* to communicate the critical material.

- **Be direct.** Sometimes writers try to make their work “sound smart” by using unnecessarily fancy words and sentence constructions. This kind of writing actually sounds puffed up and unsophisticated, and often introduces errors.

About the various philosophical approaches in which are possible, I am uncertain as to the most efficacious of the choices.

I am not sure which philosophical approach is best.

- **Be specific.** Avoid vague and imprecise language (sometimes called “fuzzy writing”). Vague words should be replaced with more specific words that more precisely communicate what you mean, even if it uses *more* words to make your point.

During my summer abroad I met some amazing people and helped with medical services.

During my summer at a displaced farm workers camp in Ghana, I worked with international aid workers from eight European countries, developing and implementing systems to help workers get access to health care at the camp.

- **Avoid clichés.** Clichés are over-used expressions that no longer communicate much; replace them with more precise words that say what you mean.

I did my best *to go above and beyond the call of duty; to make a long story short*, I was given a promotion. It was then that the importance of the work really *hit me right between the eyes*.

I always did my best and ultimately was given a promotion. It was then that the importance of the work became clear.

- **Avoid overuse of “I.”** While writers typically avoid first person in academic writing, you will certainly use it for your application essay. Nevertheless, revise as many “I + verb” sentences as you reasonably can. Beginning sentences with “I + verb” creates a distracting repetition and often obscures the true focus of a sentence. Find what the true subject of the sentence should be, and pair it with a strong verb.

I found myself challenged by school, but I think that education was the key to me discovering possibilities.

School challenged me, but education unlocked possibilities.

Polish

When you are satisfied with the content, structure, and language of your essay, **proofread meticulously** for errors, overlooked repetitions, printer mistakes—everything. Try these techniques:

- **Take time away before proofing.** We become so familiar with our writing that it is hard to “see” it as it is actually written. Time away can help.
- **Read aloud.** Read in a natural voice at a reasonable speed. This can help catch problems your eye may have missed. (If you’re shy about being overheard, read in your car, or in the bathroom with the shower running.)
- **Read “backwards.”** This is an old typesetter’s trick. Reading the last sentence first pulls each sentence out of context, so that your brain is less likely to “fill in” or “fix” problems as you read.
- **Use a straightedge.** Using a straightedge or a piece of paper with a one-line slit cut out allows you to focus on one line at a time.

Finally, for an important piece of writing like this, it makes sense to ask someone whose skills you trust to read the final copy and point out any typos or printing errors you missed. (Please be cautious about asking professors for this help, unless they have indicated they are willing.)

Best of luck!

We wish you all the best with your transfer or scholarship application. If you have any questions about this or any of the other writing you do for school, drop by the Writing Center in L-321, or visit our website at skagit.edu/student-resources/writing-center/. Want help online? Go to skagit.mywconline.com.