

**College Essay Writing Hints**  
Adapted from Tim Averill's suggestions

**"The thicker the file, the thicker the candidate."**

1. You might want to review the following texts:  
Hayden, Thomas C. Handbook for College Admissions  
Moll, Richard. Playing the (Private) College Admissions Game  
Curry and Kasbar. Essays that Worked
2. Whatever other advice you get, be yourself. As Dean Jewett of Harvard has stated, "things that are fake, CLANK!"
3. Don't be afraid to be personal. Use specifics and details—college admissions officers remember them when they discuss applications ("Remember? He's the kid who broke his leg sky-diving.")
4. Respond to the topic suggested and stay within the length recommended. Imagine yourself as an admissions officer.
5. Use the essay to elaborate on something which is not otherwise evident in reading your application (i.e. a talent, interest, political view, or achievement).
6. Address your weaknesses, by making them implicit strengths.
7. Write a different essay for each school. They are looking for M & M (match and merit).
8. Generally speaking, the admissions office is looking for evidence of 1) academic ability, 2) motivation, 3) creativity, 4) self-discipline, and 5) intellectual capacity, and 6) maturity.
9. Don't procrastinate. Write this essay as though a small part of your life depended upon it. Get feedback and revise or even rewrite your essay(s). There is no excuse for typos, misspellings, or poor grammar—be meticulous in your mechanics.

## **College Applications Letters of Recommendation**

Colleges usually request two letters of recommendation from current teachers. In general, one should be from a Humanities or language teacher, one from a science or math teacher. The exceptions would be if you are applying to a specialty school or department (music, art, engineering, athletics, etc.).

If none of your current teachers knows you well, you may ask someone who taught you last year. Don't go further back than that.

When you ask teachers for letters of recommendation, consider the following:

1. Ask someone who knows you well and who can communicate that knowledge.
2. Ask well ahead of time, and ask whether the teacher feels (s)he can be positive.
3. Provide a stamped addressed envelope, along with the correct forms, filled out fully.
4. On the forms, waive your rights; date and sign the waiver.
5. About a week before the deadline, ask (politely) if the letter has been completed. "Mr. Scrooge, I want to thank you for writing my letter to Skidless U. I'm just checking today to see if my file is complete. Have you had a chance to get to the letter?"
6. If you decide not to apply to a school, please tell the teacher. Keep him/her informed of your progress as well—they now have a vested interest in your application (i.e. acceptance, denial, deferral, wait list, and your final decision when you make it).
6. Give appropriate thanks. Your senior teachers usually spend hours writing these letters on your behalf, and a word of thanks (a real note) or other token of appreciation.