



# OBICOACH TIP SHEET

## Flex Essay Workshop

"The goal of your essay should be to **help separate your application from all the others** that have similar qualifications — and to make you more memorable." (quote from LiveCareer website)

"Think less about what you think we want to hear and **more about what you want to say.**" (Gary Clarke, Director of Undergraduate Admissions, UCLA)

**"Be an individual.** In writing the essay, ask yourself, "How can I distinguish myself from those thousands of others applying to College X whom I don't know—and even the ones I do know?" It's not in your activities or interests. If you're going straight from high school to college, you're just a teenager, doing teenage things. **It is your mind and how it works that are distinctive. How do you think?** Sure, that's hard to explain, but that's the key to the whole exercise." (excerpt from US News and World Report article by Lynn Jacobs)

"This essay is different than an English paper. Think of your life as a full length movie. **Each essay you compose is a slice of your life, a scene from your movie.** The college admission essay is less about what you say, and more about how you capture that story." (Dr. Cynthia Colón)

**"Treat it as an opportunity,** not a burden. The essay is one of the few things that you've got complete control over in the application process, especially by the time you're in your senior year. Use it to tell us a part of your story." (from Carlton College essay tips)

- Readers have stacks of essays to read, be as **concise** as you can. **Be clear, concise, correct.**
- Use your own voice
  - Make sure YOU shine through in your essay
  - Write **from your heart, your core**
- Follow the rules of the essay, word length etc.
- Be likable
  - The reader will be thinking about whether they want you as part of their campus community. Would you make a good roommate? Would they like you as a lab partner? Would you make interesting conversation during late night dorm discussions?
  - Make sure you don't come off as a braggadocio.
- Let the writing flow
  - Don't expect perfection.

- Use the active voice. The essay will sound more compelling and sentences will be shorter. In other words, you can use “I”, “we” and “me”.
- Write with passion and intensity. Say it like you mean it!
- Topic selection
  - Can work really well to use a simple, drab topic but to write about it in an interesting way. The essay doesn't have to be about earth-shattering topics.
  - Write about something that is important to you, anything that has been impactful on your life
  - Show your personality
  - Anticipate the reader's questions and answer them
- Pitfalls to avoid
  - Don't just write what you think the admissions officer wants to hear. Be authentically you. Better to reveal what is important to you rather than trying to impress the admissions officer.
  - Resist the urge to inflate the truth. Be honest about your experiences and your authenticity will come through.
- It is okay to show vulnerability
  - Make sure it sounds like your own voice
  - Focus on one aspect of yourself or experience. Don't try to pack in your entire resume or you will sound scattered and incoherent. Colleges know that you can't show them everything about yourself in one essay; it is a glimpse into you.
  - Don't repeat what is already revealed about you in your application. Add something new for the reader to learn about you.
  - “Don't just recount, reflect.” Tell us why this had an impact on your life - why it is important. Maybe give an opinion.
  - Be careful with being funny. Often admissions readers won't share your same sense of humor. Tread lightly in this area.
  - Be accurate. If you write something you aren't sure about then go check it out to make sure you got it right.
  - Avoid long, complicated sentences and fancy vocabulary words. Save those for academic writing.
- Do not use slang, text speak, emojis etc.
- Proofread
  - Have at least one other person proofread. Ask counselor, teacher friends or family if it sounds like you and to give feedback.
  - Check carefully for typos and grammar/spelling errors. Have someone else look at it also to catch those types of errors.
  - Ask yourself, does the text flow? Are the ideas presented in a logical order? Does it sound uniquely like you?