Crafting Your College Application Essay

Remember:
- Colleges turn away as many people as they admit.
- Someone with the same scores but a stronger essay may be accepted instead of you.
- If you feel your numbers and scores (SATs, ACTs, etc.) are not strong enough on their own to get you into your school of choice, the essay is the best place to boost points.
- Sometimes the committee reviews your essay before they look at your transcripts.
- Committees often spend only 1-2 minutes reading each essay.
- Know any essay prompts provided by the school.
- Start early. You need to give yourself time to revise and get opinions from others so that you can fine-tune your essay.

Stand Out:
- Grab readers’ attention right away!
- Prove to the admissions committee that you have learned from the past, have acquired the skills to make you a successful student at their school, and will constantly progress in the future with their academic guidance.

Be Original:
- Don’t just tell the committee what you’ve done; show them who you are!
- Show them who’s behind the numbers and scores and what makes you a better candidate than others.

Essential Elements:
- Write clearly, concisely, and in your personal style.
- Choose one idea to answer the application essay question.
- Begin with a hook and sustain that level of interest throughout.
- Incorporate a theme. Let prompts help you with this.
- Make sure paragraphs are well-organized with topic sentences.
- Develop your main idea with vivid images and well-chosen details.
- Show them your ability to think and write, your openness to—and unique way of expressing—new ideas.
- Use transitions and vary your sentence length.
- Proofread carefully. Other readers can be extremely helpful. Visit the Writing Center.
- Revise, Revise, REVISE!

Good Sites to Visit:
- College Board: http://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/essays
- National Association for College Admission Counseling: http://www.nacacnet.org/studentinfo/articles/Pages/Top-Ten-Tips-for-Writing-a-College-Essay-.asp
Outgrowing the Garage

The air is tainted with unnatural fumes of grease, wood, and burnt electrical tape. Oil slicks stain the floor. Thick wooden shelves sag unnervingly close to buckling under the weight of old house paint and power tools. A workbench lies buried beneath papers, rulers, cans, and metal shards. An uncomfortable growl pours from the water heater. Most people wouldn’t describe my grimy garage as pleasant, but I love spending my free time here. It’s where I built a 2 ft trebuchet in sixth grade, a 4 ft trebuchet in seventh grade, and plan to build an 8 ft trebuchet this winter break. It’s where I built a battlebot and slapped an Arduino microcontroller on top to give it intelligence. Ever since I sat watching jets shake the sky and explosions rock the screen in the movie Iron Man as a stunned sixth grader, I’ve spent weekends experimenting in my garage, trying to learn everything I can about engineering and robotics.

Sure, outside of my garage I love wildlife and hiking, history, and weird foods. I love classic rock, jazz, and may be even secretly Katy Perry. Nevertheless, I’ve always had a life plan centered on robotics: go to a great college, learn robotics, build robots, get a Bernese mountain dog, and live happily ever after in a beautiful forest home. It seems strange that I’ve committed myself to robotics so easily despite my many interests, but in reality, robotics combines nearly all of them. Computer science, electrical engineering, and mechanical engineering are crucial to the robot, but combine them with biology, astronomy, music, or ecology, and that’s when robotics becomes amazing. I could help the sick with robots that give surgeons more dexterity while operating. I could help the poor with affordable, robot-made products. I could aid the elderly, replace the limbs of wounded warriors, and keep fire fighters from harm’s way, all with robots. Although these robots may not be the crimson and gold Iron Man suit that first got me interested, I love the realistic and heroic possibilities in the field of robotics.

Almost as exciting as imagining the robots I could build, is imagining where I could build them. I could become a professor and research cutting edge A.I. algorithms. I could become an entrepreneur and bring my creations to market. I could even become an employee for a tech company and devote my self to its latest innovations. Maybe next year around this time, I will even be studying on the Freshman Quad. With the LCSR robotics lab, the minor in robotics, a top-notch engineering program, a beautiful campus, incredible seafood, and what the visiting admissions counselor described as a “vibrant cappella scene,” Johns Hopkins will both make college fun and satisfy my inner nerd. But for now, I will go on working in my garage, competing for space with the family car.

Is this an effective essay? What from the essay gives you that impression?

“We like Elijah’s essay because you really get a sense of his personality—the essay is light-hearted, but still does a good job of highlighting his interest in robotics in a descriptive and entertaining way by comparing it to his fascination with Iron Man. He ties his interests back to opportunities at JHU like the freedom to combine multiple academic fields, research in the LCSR lab, and the a cappella scene. As you are reading his essay, you picture someone who will explore academic programs, student groups, and opportunities on and off campus—you picture a dynamic member of our Hopkins community.”

—Johns Hopkins Undergraduate Admissions Committee