

### **Top Ten (+6) Application Essay Advising Tips:**

- 1) Does it answer the question/prompt?
- 2) Does it catch the reader's attention? (preferably in the first two sentences)
- 3) Does it focus on the applicant? (not a mentor, or irrelevant details)
- 4) Does it show rather than tell the applicant's strengths?
- 5) Does it avoid praising the University? (they already know they are "prestigious")
- 6) Does it avoid stating the obvious? (I am applying to your program...)
- 7) Does it avoid clichés? ("passion", "epiphany", "the world is my oyster"...)
- 8) Is a common story told in a unique manner?
- 9) Does a hard-luck story avoid excuses, but provide reasons?
- 10) Does it indicate what the applicant will contribute to the University?
- 11) Does it use varied vocabulary?
- 12) Does it avoid repetition?
- 13) If it's in the activity list, leave it out of the essay (dates, etc.)
- 14) Is it true to the applicant's own "voice"?
- 15) Has it been thoroughly proofread? (Do not rely on Spell Check!)
- 16) Is it within the required word limit? (Crucial – no more than 5% tolerance!)

### **And a Bit of Elaboration :**

Regarding #3: An anecdote, or reference to someone important in their lives is fine to set the scene, but the main focus should be on what the applicant gained from the experience.

Regarding #8 – A large majority of students applying for transfer to the UC system come from families where English is not the first language. Although they share a very common story (immigration to a country where everything was new and communication was difficult) each individual should be able to tell that story in a way that is unique to them, and, if they choose to write about it for this essay, hopefully compelling. If that story can provide the reader with insights into the student's motivation, preparation, and current interests/abilities, then it has been well-told. If not, it should be re-written, or a different approach should be considered.

Regarding #9 – Something like a car accident, a serious illness, the need (again, a common story) to interpret for immigrant elders, can be well-utilized and appropriate if it is an explanation for an "off" quarter academically, or has provided the motivation to major in a field the student might not otherwise have considered (Public Health, Medicine, International Studies). If the end result is inspirational, great; if it's only effect is to evoke sympathy, rewrite.

Regarding #10 – Not all prompts ask for this, but it's something an application reader will look for. An unusual talent, interest or ability that will enrich or diversify the student body is always desirable. Any award-winning bagpipe players out there would be well-advised to mention this in their essay ☺

Regarding #12 – This is one of the most difficult concepts for kids to really “get”. If it’s worth saying once, and has been well-said, it is \*not\* worth saying twice. Quite the contrary. Not only does it waste the readers’ time, but it wastes the extremely limited number of words in which the student must convey the most they possibly can about themselves.

Regarding #13 – If the activity list shows dates, the essay can of course refer to an activity, but need not say “During Spring quarter 2006 I was elected to serve as President of the Drama Club” Better: “As Drama Club President, I...” Saves words/saves time ☺

Regarding #14 – Try not to edit away the charm and originality of occasionally non-traditional phrasing. A “desire to gallop forward in the world of business” can seem refreshingly creative compared to “I have a real passion for business”. As long as it is grammatically correct, it’s perfectly OK. A thesaurus or translating dictionary is fine when searching for ways to vary vocabulary, but if the result is a word with which the student is unfamiliar and which sounds out of place, always opt for simplicity.

Regarding #15 – Spell Check does not see the distinction between “then” and “than”, or “through” and “though”. Students should have at least three people proof-read their essay, and then they themselves should read it aloud one more time. Different advisers have different opinions on this matter, but Admissions officers have said that resourcefulness, attention to detail, and ability to utilize available assistance are all being evaluated by the way an essay is presented. It’s a real-world skill, and very valid for students to seek competent advice on this important document.