The subject of the essay is YOU!

Think of the essay questions on a college application as prompts to get you started, not necessarily as questions you have to answer literally. Regardless of the question, an admission committee cares most about getting to know you and learning how you will fit in on our campus academically and socially. Whatever topic you choose, use it as a way to organize your thoughts as you write about your character, your aspirations, and what is important to you. Perhaps you will tell us about the influence your mom or dad has had on you, but keep the focus on you. Remember, your mom or dad isn’t applying to college – you are.

Two Remember your English Comp class.

You’ve learned a lot about writing in school; now you get a chance to use it to show the admission committee what you know. Start with a thesis – what do you want to say about yourself? Outline your thoughts. It will keep your essay organized and easy to follow. Write a draft and set it aside for a day. When you come back to read it, you’ll have a fresh mind. Have someone else read it, but don’t let them change it too much. Before you finish, proofread very carefully because grammar and spelling count. And please make sure that if you use the name of the college you’re applying to in your essay that you send the right essay to the right college.

3. Talk to us.

The essay is your opportunity to talk directly to the admission committee. You can help us get to know you by sharing your story in your voice. Don’t try to be too formal or sound smart (and don’t get caught in the thesaurus trap – use your words, not those that you had to look up). Be yourself. You can even write in the first-person (e.g., “I” or “me”). Tell us something that only you can tell us, and write with the same excitement and passion as if you were talking with a group of friends. This is an essay about you, so it’s really OK to sound like you’re bragging – just don’t be arrogant. Your parents or counselor may be able to help you think of ideas … but don’t let them write it for you. We know pretty quickly if an essay is written by an adult trying to be a high school student!
Understand your audience.

Who is really going to be reading this? Well, it will likely be several people, most of whom you don’t know. So consider your audience and what we’re looking for. The committees for admission, scholarships, or even honors programs, can be made up of recent college graduates, nearly retired faculty and every age in between with a variety of interests and opinions. Keep in mind, we aren’t looking for students who are like us, but you shouldn’t insult someone who is not like you.

We read thousands of college essays every year. The opening paragraph of your essay should grab our attention and help us to know what to expect. We read pretty fast, so keep your story organized and concise to help get your point across.

The one thing we all have in common is that we love our school. We want to admit ambitious students who will take advantage of the many academic and social opportunities on our campus. We must feel confident in your ability to contribute positively to our community.

No. 5 Now, get started ...

Give some careful thought to what you want to say about yourself. Is it something that you haven’t been able to say in the rest of your application? Or is it something you want to highlight with more detail? As soon as you know you want to apply to a particular school, read the essay requirements – even before you fill out the application form, if possible. Consider all of the essay prompts, and write down two or three possible topics for each one. Pick several you like best, and think how you might write about each one. In fact, make a short outline for your top three. When you’re done, you’ll have a good feeling for which one gives you the best opportunity to showcase what you will bring to a college campus.

Start a list of essay topics on your phone. Great ideas can come at any time, and you don’t want to forget them!

Questions?

Great! We’ve got answers. Your Admission Counselor will be your personal guide through the application process and will be your advocate when it comes time to present your application to the Admission Committee. Get to know yours at smu.edu/counselor. And don’t forget, your high school counselor is also a wealth of knowledge and is there to help guide you and answer your questions. All you have to do is ask!

Find more helpful information for your college search at smu.edu/5tips.