

The Art of the Personal Essay

Monmouth University Writing Center

The essay should:

- Provide evidence of your achievements not mentioned elsewhere in your application
- Convey what scores and grades cannot convey about you, what makes you different from other applicants
- Describe how certain events have shaped your attitude, direction, and intellectual curiosity
- Give details indicating that you know what it takes to be in the profession or the academic program being sought
- Demonstrate why you are a great candidate for the university's or company's program or position
- Show ways in which you have been responsible, innovative, etc. rather than simply saying that you are responsible or innovative -- SHOW, DON'T TELL
- Consume time and many drafts

Strive for:

- Honesty and thoughtfulness
- Depth rather than breadth
- Appropriate and skilled writing
- Adherence to guidelines
- Complete and targeted response to prompt
- An interesting opening

Tread carefully when:

- Repeating information elsewhere in application
- Discussing what the college or work place can do for you
- Using a thesaurus
- Making overly general statements, such as "I have always wanted to be a..." or "I am an _____ person" (empathetic, open, hardworking, etc.)

Avoid:

- Controversial topics
- Complaining about obstacles