# Some Guidelines and Reminders about the Long Application Essay

**Timeliness:**

The long essay, as the name implies, requires more time with the task of writing. Do your composing in small doses over time: progress, step away, revisit, progress some more. Each time you start the next effort, read your work aloud to yourself (better yet, have someone read it TO you), and revise on the spot. HEARING your work gives you a sense of the *voice* you’ve developed. Listen for *tone*, choppiness in sentencing, pronoun overuse, cumbersome sentencing, and creeping boredom.

**The Big “Do Nots”:**

Remember that you are answering a guiding question in this effort.

* Do not lapse into a listing of resume items, all the sports you’ve played, your academic standout moments, pets you’ve owned, your favorite things in the world (unless they ask you!) Such lists will likely be a part of other sections of the application. In this essay, your task is to develop impressions and understandings about yourself for an uninformed reader. Look at the definition for *anecdote* and the samples that follow. We will be speaking about the power of a well-told anecdote or two in the writing of this essay.

* Humor, well-chosen and used moderately, can add an enjoyable dimension to your writing. Do not, however, lapse into creating an essay where humor is your objective over thoughtful and reasoned revelations about yourself. Limit your humor to a well-formed and meaningful extended metaphor, self-deprecating observations, clever word uses (avoid those clichés!), or a pertinent, witty observation. If you enter the dark cellar of shock humor (to get attention), bad and stale puns, or jokes that push to the edge of inappropriateness and intolerance, you risk having your essay dismissed outright.
* Do not overlook the quality of your written text! Conventions count when your writing must make an impression. Do not overuse contractions; remember to use an apostrophe in possessive nouns; punctuation errors (especially misused or unused commas) can change the meaning in a sentence; run-on and fragment sentencing screams “lazy”! Spelling counts! If you are unsure whether the spelling is correct, look up the word. Ask an editor! Your folks or a willing friend can always help you verify a spelling. Think about subject/verb agreement, verb tense consistency, parallel structure in sentencing, inexact word choices (watch those homonyms!), and end mark punctuation. Remember! You are NOT TEXTING!

**Tone:**

Your *attitude* towards your subject, the process, or the answer that you create is locked up in the *tone* of your essay. What follows here is a listing of *tones*—some to work toward the others to avoid. Let your tone be a natural one; however, catch yourself on unintended tones by reading your essay aloud or by having it read to you.

**AVOID:** bragging, the dismissively critical, whining, haughtiness, aggressiveness, intolerance, the word “hate” in any statement, excuse making, blaming, colloquial negations like “sucks,” “stinks,” or “lame,” hurtful sarcasm, and insincerity.

**Work for:** genuineness, a measure of awe and wonder, hopefulness, the tone of what’s possible, gratitude and appreciation, humility (genuine, not contrived!), caring and generosity, rightful pride, tolerance and openness, respectfulness.

**Some Vocabulary Suggestions:**

An essay like this must show your best efforts in all aspects of the writing. Consider this short list of “words to avoid if possible.” There are many alternatives to each word—think about your *intended meaning* and try to make the word choice fit. Most of the words are descriptors or quantifiers; you can do much better than any of these word choices:

* “a lot” “a bunch” “tons” (as in *tons of work*) “kind of” “sort of”
* The Exhausted Seven: *great, nice, awesome, cool, important* (unless you say WHY), *boring*, and *whatever* (as a sweeping dismissal)
* “always” “never”—use these adverbs sparingly, if at all; the true frequency usually lies somewhere in between.