

WRITING 101

WRITING STRATEGIES • ADMISSIONS AND SCHOLARSHIP ESSAYS • PEER EDITING

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Your guide to college and career planning

The College Foundation of West Virginia (CFWV) offers a website, cfwv.com, with free tools and information to help students like you get ready for college, succeed on campus and prepare for a career.

The site offers a career interest survey, information on degree programs and majors at all of West Virginia's colleges and universities, a résumé builder, sample career interview questions and dozens more resources.

[Cfwv.com](https://cfwv.com) offers you the opportunity to sign up to receive text messages, which serve as general college reminders and advice, to make sure you are transitioning well into college life.

WRITING 101

You already know that writing is an important element of the college experience. In fact, the writing prompts for many college students begin before college itself does through the essays required for many scholarship applications. Additionally, you will need to write at some point in almost all of your college classes. The writing may vary from short, one-sentence responses to lengthy essays that will heavily affect your final grade. Not everyone likes writing, though, and some people claim that writing is their least favorite activity. The good thing is that you don't necessarily have to enjoy writing to do it well.

The Writing 101 Guide is for people who simply have to write, whether they enjoy or loathe the writing process. Providing you with tips and guidance, you can craft an excellent document whenever you need. You will learn how to grab your reader's interest, analyze your audience, mold your message based on its needs, and how to master the standard five-paragraph essay. The guide also includes writing prompts to help you get your creative juices flowing.

While it may seem like a lot of information, remember not to let the guide intimidate you. The best way to improve your writing is through – you guessed it – practice! Write about anything and everything you can just to write. That's practice! Use the tips and tricks outlined in this guide and you will be writing like a pro in no time!

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INTRODUCTION TO WRITING 101

What?

Highly Selective Application Process

A college or university is considered highly selective when they admit fewer than 25% of their applicants. A school's degree of selectivity may change from year to year due to the applicant pool becoming smaller or larger. To compete for a spot in a highly selective school's freshman class it is important to pay attention to details. Your academic success in high school, GPA, course rigor, standardized test scores, letters of recommendation, interview, application, and most importantly your essays or personal statements are the items that admissions staff will focus on when determining eligibility and acceptance into some of the nation's top schools.

Scholarship Writing

Scholarships enable individuals who are pursuing postsecondary education to apply for money they will NOT have to pay back. Often your grades, extracurricular activities, test scores, or your family's current finances are used to determine if you will win a scholarship. However, more times than not, an essay is also required to win the scholarship. The strength of the scholarship essay is important, as it is what can set a student apart from the rest.

Why?

Why Do I Need a Writing Sample?

When applying for admission to a highly selective school or applying for a scholarship, you will most likely need to provide a writing sample or an essay to highlight what about you stands out above the rest that isn't made available in the standard application. There is a great deal of information about YOU that might not have found a proper space in your actual application. You want your essay to be memorable and engage the reader. This will help you stand out from the crowd. Additionally, institutions and scholarship committees will ask for a writing sample to allow you to demonstrate your writing skills and show your ability to organize thoughts and information.

When?

When Do I Need to Begin the Practice?

Many students do not begin applying to schools or for scholarships until early in the fall semester of their senior year. Often students are still applying for scholarships into the spring semester of their senior year. Nonetheless, it is never too early to start working on your essay writing skills. In fact, starting early, in the spring of your junior year or the summer before your senior year is a fantastic time to start drafting your essays. This will provide you with ample time to proofread and edit your essays. Practice does indeed make perfect.

Who?

Who Will Be Reading My Writing Sample?

The admissions committee or the scholarship judges will be reading your writing samples or essays. Many of them will be educators, university employees, prominent businessmen and businesswomen, or individuals who have developed the specific scholarship. Remember, they are human. They have their own hopes, dreams, and goals; they are able to recognize those in others. When you are writing, make sure to appeal to these traits and give the audience a real idea as to who you are. You want your essay to be memorable and to have the right tone.

Where?

Where Should I Write?

Write where you feel most comfortable. It's important to eliminate any distractions. The library, an office, your room, or

a classroom after school can offer you the solitude that you need to write the best essay possible. The important part is to make sure that you are comfortable and aren't being distracted.

How?

How Do I Do This?

This workbook will help you figure out the HOW! Be sure to follow the steps one at a time, complete the exercises, follow the advice, and by the end you will have a fantastic application or scholarship essay.

The most important bit of advice is to share who YOU are. Use your own voice to share YOU. Are you able to overcome adversity? What are your major successes to date? How will you enhance the university or program to which you are applying? Are you prepared? Are you organized? Everyone already knows that it will take a lot of hard work and dedication to become a doctor. Share your personal story, thoughts, and find a creative way to put specific aspects of you not covered in the application into the spotlight. Don't be afraid to capitalize on similarities you may share with the college you are pursuing. At times institutions may be looking to increase enrollment in specific programs, STEAM majors, for example. If this happens to be your intended major, don't be hesitant to share your plans to pursue a degree in that particular field, as well as your intentions after graduation.

It's very important that your essay be organized. Document your grades, activities, achievements, but not only document your successful statistics, add commentary or narrative to enhance the successful statistics. Commentary or narrative can be especially impactful in an essay, particularly if there is a story, a lesson, or a significant life experience that makes you stand out. For example, if you are perhaps a first-generation college-going student, from a rural or urban area, or an Appalachian, then include this information in your narrative. These details will help paint your unique story.

Remember to always double space, use a legible 12-point font, and keep your margins to one inch on top, sides, and bottom. Essays should be between two and three pages in length.

Notes:

THE WORKBOOK

What will you be asked to write about? Because your audience wants to know more about YOU, the prompts that most colleges or scholarship organizations will ask will indeed be more personal in nature. Take a look at some of the potential questions that you may have to answer.

Sample College Application/Scholarship Essay Writing Prompts

Many applications, whether they are for enrollment or scholarship award, will ask you similar questions. Below is a list of common questions. You should be able to respond to most of these in fewer than 500 words.

- Describe a significant interest or experience that has special meaning for you.
- How have you grown over the years?
- Why do you want to spend the next 4-6 years at a particular University or College?
- What do you plan to do with your college degree?
- What are your long-term career goals?
- What sets you apart from the rest?
- How would others characterize you?
- What is an Epiphany? Have you had one? Describe it.
- What are your biggest dreams?
- Do you have a life philosophy? Please share it.
- How did your perspective of life change as a result of difficulty?
- Have you ever struggled for something and failed? How did you respond?
- Evaluate a significant experience, risk taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.
- Can a person change their direction?
- What does a college education mean to you?
- Write about a significant book, character, or theme.
- Who has been most influential on you?
- Describe the world that you come from – for example, describe your family, community, or school. Tell us how this world has shaped your dreams and aspirations.
- If you could automatically and irrevocably change one fact or facet in the development of human history, what would that change be and why did you choose this particular fact/facet?
- Discuss a historical figure that inspires you.
- Describe a solution to a problem.
- Discuss an influential book or article which has changed your outlook.
- Discuss something that you've done that has made a difference in your community.

Exercise One

Pre-Write to Determine Purpose

Pick five of the above essay prompts and in two to three sentences explain why a scholarship- or college admissions committee might pose each of those particular questions or prompts. Why do they want to know this about you? What makes this a sound and proper essay topic or question? What will your response reveal about YOU?

1

2

3

4

5

Exercise Two

Pre-Write to Determine Focus

You have determined WHY a scholarship- or an admissions committee might ask a specific question. Now it is important to find your focus. Of the five questions or prompts that you worked with in Exercise 1, which one stands out the most? Which do you believe you can answer most honestly, that best highlights you?

Question or Prompt:

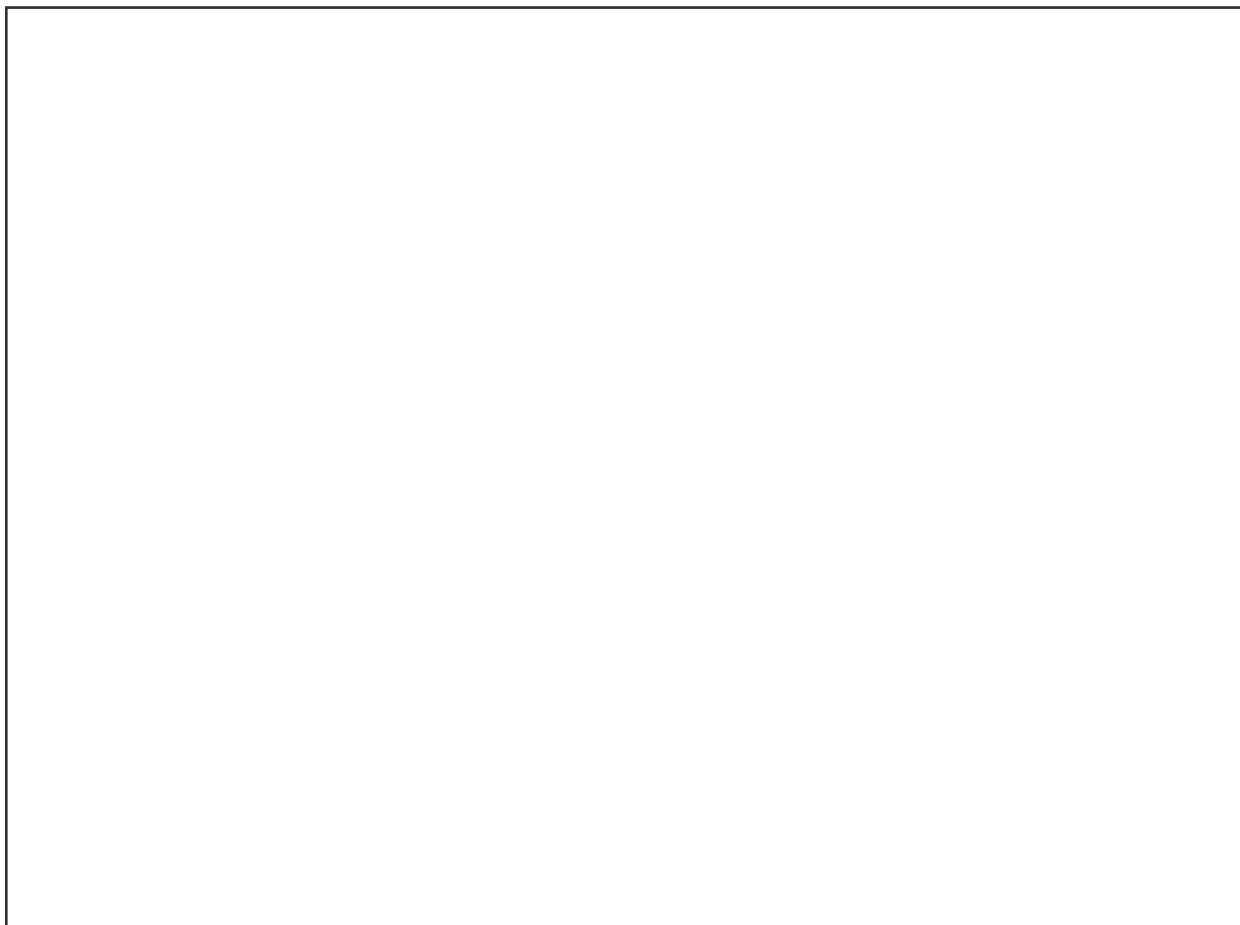
Why did you choose this question or prompt?

Do you believe that you can write a solid, sound, interesting essay about this particular subject? If your answer is no, please review the other questions and select a new prompt to write about.

Exercise Three

Free Write

It's time to free write. Look at the prompt to which you will be responding. Use this space to begin free writing. Any idea that comes to mind...jot it down. Write down anecdotes, stories, and memories. Draw pictures. Use statistics. Let your brain run wild and capture as much of it on paper as you can. Let your brain start to develop ideas.



Using a highlighter, highlight only the most important details of your free write. What stands out above the rest? What material from your free write do you think you can use for your essay? Highlight it and let the rest go.

P– Point

- » What is the main idea of your paragraph?
- » What are you trying to prove?
- » What is the big idea?
- » Stated in one complete sentence.

D – Discussion

- » How can you expand on your main idea?
- » How can you prove your statement?
- » Can you explain what you are wanting to state?
- » Stated in 3-5 sentences.

E – Example

- » Can you provide at least one solid example that explains your main point?
- » This can be a quote, experience, statistic, etc.
- » Stated in 1-2 sentences.

C – Conclusion

- » Restate your main point.

T – Transition

- » Use a transition word to begin a sentence that will bridge this point with your next point and paragraph.

Content

- I know what I mean, but when others read my paper, will they know what I mean?
- Is my message intriguing and meaningful?
- Do I show more than I tell?
- Do I provide information and interesting facts and tidbits?
- Will my audience be captivated?

Organization

- Is my paper going in the right direction? Does it read smoothly?
- Does every word, sentence, and paragraph add to the whole of the paper?
- Does the material hook the reader and keep the reader hooked?
- Is it built properly like an architect builds a building, firm foundations, good interior construction, and just the right amount of accessory?

Voice

- Are you in your writing? Is it individually yours?
- Will your audience be able to tell who the person is behind the words?
- Will your audience be engaged?
- Was your writing written to be read?

Word Choice

- Are your words vivid or boring?
- Are you using language that brings it to life?
- Are you making your audience say, “I wish I would have said that!”?

Sentence Fluency

- When you read your paper, does it have a rhythm?
- Is your paper powerful?
- Read your paper out loud; how does it sound?
- Is your writing crafted, and not merely assembled?

Conventions

- Did you use MARK (see next page) on all of your sentences?
- Is it mechanically correct?
- Is your paper readable to a broad audience?

MARK

MARK is part of the Kansas Writing Strategies. It helps to ensure that you are using complete sentences and that your mechanics are sound.

Make sure that you are correctly using your infinitives and prepositional phrases. Identify them first. Make sure that you are using sentence variety. Are they all simple sentences, or are you also using compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences too?

Ask “Is there a verb?” Make sure that every sentence in your essay has a verb.

Root out the subject. Ask Who or What _____?

Key in on the beginning, ending, and meaning. Does your sentence have a capital letter at the beginning and punctuation at the end? Read the sentence; does it make sense?

Peer Editing Guide

Have a friend, teacher, or trusted individual provide a peer edit for you. Give them a copy of the rubric and ask them to read and respond. If specific elements are missing from your essay, take time to draft again. (PDEC/T)

P: What is your partner’s point? What are they attempting to prove?

D: Are there 2-3 legitimate discussion statements? Yes No

What are they?

D1: _____

D2: _____

D3: _____

E: What example did your partner use for their argument?

E: _____

C: How did they restate their main point? How did they conclude the paragraph?

Or

T: How did they bridge their ideas from one paragraph to another?

Notes:

Exercise Seven

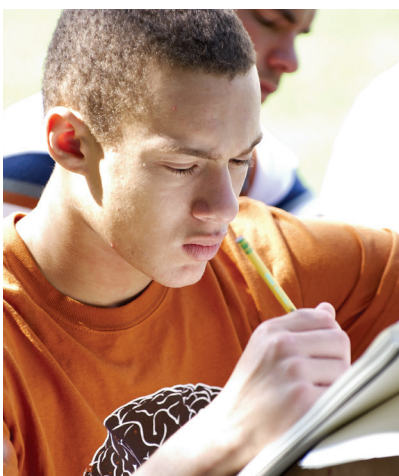
Finalizing and Publication

If you believe that you have written the best possible version of your story that you can at this time, then it is time to finalize the essay. Reread your work once again and look for any mechanical errors. Are your subjects and verbs in agreement? Is punctuation correct? Are your paragraphs organized appropriately? Did you dot your i's and cross your t's? If so, now is the time to make it final!

Congratulations!

TAKE “15 TO FINISH”

To complete a four-year degree in four years or a two-year degree in two years, you must earn an average of 15 credit hours per semester. Research shows that students who take at least 15 credit hours are far more likely to graduate than those who take fewer than 15. And it may sound surprising, but students who take 15 credits tend to do better academically than those who don't. Experts think it's because students who take 15 are able to use their time more efficiently and make more connections on campus through the increased class time. So when you build your schedule, make sure you're taking at least 15 credit hours toward your degree. It will save you time and money — and increase your likelihood of graduating.



About the College Foundation of West Virginia:

The College Foundation of West Virginia (CFWV) offers free college- and career-planning resources, including cfwv.com, a free website to help students and families plan, apply, and pay for education and training beyond high school. CFWV is coordinated by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission in conjunction with the West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education and the West Virginia Department of Education.

