

Ten Tips for Writing a Competitive Essay

1. Read the question clearly and follow instructions (focus)
 - a. This is the most important thing you can do to help yourself in an essay writing competition. Before you invest a whole lot of time and effort into crafting a memorable piece of writing, make sure you have read the question twice...and you understand what has been asked of you. You may not be impressed with the examiner's choice of question, and you may have a lot more to say about the failures of government, but if you have been asked to speak on the student's contribution to society, please do not change the subject! Moreover, the chosen topic is to be the focus **throughout** your essay. Do not think that because you have 'dashed' the examiner two examples, you can now move on to write a dissertation on your own topic of choice. Your English may be flawless, but you will not do well.
2. Have an organized approach
 - a. Once you have understood the question, take some time to plan the structure of your essay. If you have spare paper, make a brief outline. Good structure includes an introduction, several paragraphs beginning with topic sentences, and a conclusion. Beginning each paragraph with a topic sentence will give your reader an idea of what you will discuss in that paragraph. Group similar topics or examples together to improve your essay. Try to vary the way you start your paragraphs. Using 'as a student I can also...' before each example will make your writing repetitive and tedious.
3. Introduction
 - a. Rewriting the essay question does not substitute for having a good introduction. An introduction can be in the form of a parallel story to pull the reader in and catch his interest (as in the sample essay). It can explore the relevance of the essay question, or establish the writer's point of view and some of the points to expect in the coming essay. This is the first impression that the reader will have of you and your essay. Make it strong.
4. Give enough examples
 - a. This is the meat of your essay. The examiner needs to see that you have been able to think of enough points to support your position, especially if it is a debatable topic. Let us say that I have an exam coming up but I have forgotten the date. One friend tells me it is on January 18th and another friend says it is on January 27th. I am still not sure when my exam is. But if seven more people tell me it is on January 27th, I will be more convinced that they know what they are talking about. Therefore, the more supporting points you have for your thesis, the more convincing your entire essay will be.

5. Elaborate on your examples
 - a. Your examples should not be one line statements. It is not enough to say that a student can contribute to society by helping businesses around campus. This will get your reader interested, and the next question he will ask in his mind is 'how will he help?' Your job is to answer that question without being asked. If you then follow your statement by saying 'the student can volunteer at a local pharmacy to help dispense drugs, take blood pressure and blood glucose readings', your example is more specific and detailed, and shows more thought.

6. Be creative
 - a. Whenever one gets an essay question to write, there are simple examples that will come to mind first. These may be the most obvious examples, and they are more likely to be mentioned by everybody else writing the essay. In a parking lot of one hundred red cars, the one blue car will stand out. Train yourself to spend an extra three minutes trying to come up with examples that are unique, as these will make your essay more memorable.

7. Make it personal
 - a. When possible, give examples that relate to activities that you are personally involved in – this again will add something different to your essay beyond the generic examples given by every student.

8. Know your audience
 - a. Remember the purpose of your essay. If you are writing for a pharmacy scholarship, it is nice to give some examples that pertain to that field, showing your reader that you consider yourself a part of the profession even though you are still a student.

9. Watch your grammar and spelling. Proofread!
 - a. Bad grammar, poor spelling and messy handwriting distract the reader from enjoying your essay. After several hours of reading lengthy papers on the same topic, an examiner's patience wears thin. Make your essay as easy to read as possible in these aspects. There is nothing more frustrating than trying to decipher an essay that has apparently been submitted in code, because the writing bears no semblance to the English alphabet. If you become the cause of your examiner's poor eyesight, his countenance will not shine upon you. You may have brilliant life-changing points to make, but if no one can read what you have written, the world will be none the wiser. Take the time to write clearly and legibly, and cross things out neatly if you need to do so. Avoid using abbreviations without explaining them, and avoid use contracted forms (write 'he will' instead of he'll; and 'do not' instead of don't). Keep the point of view consistent throughout your essay. Do not switch back and forth between 'one/you/he or she/I' as the subject of your sentence; decide ahead of time which one you will use and stick to it.

10. Conclusion

- a. An essay with an introduction and no conclusion is unbalanced. Your conclusion should summarize your essay, drawing on the major points you made in your writing. This is your final impression. Finish well!