

# The 5-Step Personal Essay Writing Guide: "Community Service"

Community service is a great topic for college admission and scholarship essays. Both colleges and scholarship organizations love to read how you are involved in your school or neighborhood. They want to see that you do more than study and look for students with a variety of experiences, skills and interests. When writing keep in mind that it is important to not only share how you've been involved with community service but also what kind of impact you've made.

## STEP 1: Think Before You Write

Before you begin writing, answer at least three of the following questions to figure out what to share in your essay:

1. Which community service activity has meant the most to you? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. When and how did you first get involved with this activity? \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

3. Who have you helped, and in what way, through your community service?

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4. What types of skills have you used or developed through your community service?

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5. How has your community service experience made you think differently about others or yourself?

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\_\_\_\_\_

6. How has your community service influenced your plans for college or work in the future?

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\_\_\_\_\_

Which of the above questions was the easiest to answer? \_\_\_\_\_

Which question gets you started on the best stories you can tell? \_\_\_\_\_

Choose one to two main points to use in STEP 2 of this worksheet. Also, weave in some of your other great answers and stories into your essay in STEP 3.

## STEP 2: Start Your Essay with a Clear Focus

Your essay needs to be focused like a laser beam, so begin by telling your reader, “THIS is what I’m going to tell you about.” Here are three examples of how to start an essay:

*I became involved in collecting toiletries for the homeless after seeing a KHON news special that made me realize how even the smallest items that we take for granted can really help homeless families.*

*I learned from organizing a Key Club car wash to raise money for hurricane victims how important it is to communicate effectively to help raise awareness and get the community involved.*

*Volunteering as a Little League assistant coach has taught me a lot about training boys to work as a team. This experience has also made me decide to pursue a career in youth sports.*

What will be one or two main points of YOUR essay?

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## STEP 3: Build Your Story

The heart of your essay will be the stories and details you use to support your main point. Good examples also bring your main point to life and make your essay memorable. Notice how the example builds up the essay:

### **Focus of essay:**

*Tutoring third graders in math has been a rewarding experience because it has taught me to be creative and has helped me to decide to become a math teacher in the future.*

### **Details:**

*Kids have a hard time understanding why they should learn about numbers and math. I need to show them how math helps in the real world.*

*Kids like the idea of having money to spend, especially in places like candy stores, so I came up with a shopping game that gets students to add and subtract while they pretend to shop*

*It feels great to see a student who has struggled with a problem finally get it. This is what I love most about teaching kids.*

*I have decided to become a math teacher and want to go to college to major in Education and minor in Math.*

*I used to think that math would be the most boring subject to teach, but through my work as a tutor, I discovered how much fun it can be.*

## STEP 4: End Strong

End your essay by shining a new light on the main point you started with, or leave the reader with something interesting to think about. Here are three examples:

*Since getting involved in helping the homeless, I learned that for a time one of my relatives was homeless. When you have a house it's easy to take it for granted, but all it takes is some bad luck for you to lose it. This is why I feel it's so important that we all try to help those who have no home to go to.*

*As hard as it was to motivate others to volunteer and help out with our fundraiser, it was worth it in the end. We raised over \$1,000 for the hurricane victims. Now when we see news coverage of that terrible disaster at least we know that we have done our small part to help.*

*The reward for being a coach has nothing to do with winning games. The reward is seeing everyone working as a team and enjoying the game. Win or lose, as coach you're always proud after each game.*

## STEP 5: Hear It Out

Try to put down your draft for a day so you can look at it with a fresh eye. Read your essay **out loud** and ask yourself and helpers (teachers, friends, relatives, essay coaches) the following questions:

- Does it start with a bang? Does the first sentence make you want to read more?
- Do you know from the beginning what the essay is going to be about?
- Were you able to follow the story? Did you get lost anywhere along the way? Did it follow a logical order, or skip back and forth in a confusing way?
- Were there questions that came up that didn't get answered?
- Were there any words that you heard too many times? (Try to avoid using the same word twice in the same sentence.)
- Was it interesting? Were there parts that could be livened up?
- Was it too long? Which parts should you cut out?
- Is it too short? What parts should have more information?
- Does it end on a high note?

Go back and try to rewrite some parts to make your essay better. If you get stuck, go back to **STEP 1** on this worksheet and re-do some parts. Good luck!

