

The 5-Step Personal Essay Writing Guide: "Academic and College Goals"

Colleges and scholarship organizations are curious about what you hope to gain by going to college. Sharing what you want to study and how your education fits into your future makes an impressive essay. Even if you are not completely sure what you will major in, you can still write about the subject areas that interest you. As much as possible, try to show how your college education will help you to achieve your own personal goals. Think about why you are going to college and what you want to accomplish. To help you brainstorm, answer a few of these questions:

STEP 1: Brainstorm Your Academic Goals

1. What will be your major in college? If undecided, what majors sound interesting enough to be a possible choice?

2. How will college studies prepare you for your future career? What do you expect to do or learn?

3. What are you most excited about studying in college? Any new things you are especially looking forward to?

4. Which subjects and activities have you enjoyed and excelled at, in high school?

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: Uncover Your Main Point

Your essay needs to have a strong main point. You need to tell your reader: “THIS is what I’m going to tell you about.” Here are four examples of how to start your essay with a strong main point:

My goal is to be a police officer. Therefore, I plan to major in criminal justice, which will prepare me for the police academy.

I have always been good at languages. This is one of the reasons why I want to be a Chinese language major in college. I am excited about studying Chinese at the college level and I hope to someday use my skills in international business.

In high school, my favorite class is history. I plan to continue to study it by becoming a history major with a focus on early Polynesian history.

I’ve always been fascinated with the stars but my school does not offer any astronomy classes. This is one reason why I want to study astronomy in college and learn more about the universe and how planets are formed.

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

STEP 3: Construct Your Story

Your essay needs stories and details to support your main point. Good examples also bring your main point to life and make your essay memorable. Notice how the following example builds up the essay:

Focus of essay:

I have three goals for college. First, I want to earn my degree in accounting. Second, I want to learn more about business. Finally, I’d like to improve my math skills.

Details:

I’ve always loved business and math. In high school I was a member of the business club as well as the math team. Although I enjoy math, it is not my strongest subject. I want to take more math classes so that I can improve my skills. I may want to become an accountant in the future, so I want to major in accounting and possibly minor in business. I have read that the college also has a business club for students. I’m looking forward to joining it.

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 four examples:

Although some people think physics is boring, I find it extremely interesting because you can use the principles in physics to explain much of the world. I don't know of any other subject that promises to explain the mysteries of the universe.

After earning my business degree, I plan to return to my hometown and start my own business. The skills that I learn in college will be extremely useful in helping me to establish my business.

I am really looking forward to going to college to be able to learn how to think critically and express my opinions better. One of the things that I have enjoyed in high school has been the debates that we've had in our social studies class. I know that these debates will continue in college with my classmates.

My dream to become an architect begins with college. By majoring in architecture and design I will be fulfilling a lifelong dream.

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?
- Does the essay focus on what you want to learn in college?
- 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!

Personal Statement

Opening Paragraph:

Remember to include your main point from STEP 2.

Main Body:

Here is where you get to add details to support and illustrate your main point. Remember to go back to STEP 1 and STEP 3 to find good stories and details to include in your essay.

Conclusion:

End strong by adding something for the reader to think about. See STEP 4 for ideas.
