

Notes from Application Essay Prep. Workshop

Sponsored by: DeAnza College Honor Society

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- Don't wait until the last minute – college servers have been known to crash, or there may be a natural disaster at your own house (power failure, etc.) Plan for the unforeseen. Be prepared well ahead of the deadline and submit early to avoid problems.
- Do not write essay directly onto the application. Those who do have a much harder time revising. Write to a Word.doc first, fine tune it, and then paste into the application. They can tell when an application has been fine-tuned versus one that has been rushed to completion. (Like how your handwriting gets sloppy when you're doing a bluebook test and the time is about to run out.)
- Save your work every 20 minutes or so. Server times out at 30 minutes (or after 30 minutes of inactivity??) and you will lose your work.
- Need great attention to detail at every step.
- Application will ask for your parents' income. Why? It tells the committee the context into which to put the rest of your application. If you have no extra-curricular activities, and your grades are marginal, but you are working two jobs and your parents' income is low, clearly you are helping to support the family. They take this into consideration. Same is true if you are living independently from your parents, have children of your own, etc. Conversely, if you live at home, and your parents are relatively well-to-do, they will expect to see some meaningful activities and a top GPA.
- They know that DeAnza is a strong and demanding feeder school.
- Follow every single direction to the letter. Every detail matters on the application.
- Submit your transcripts from **all** sources, even if only for a couple of PE units during a summer quarter from some other community college. Every detail helps paint the full picture of **you**, which is what they are trying to glean from the application. (Note: transcripts are requested only **after** you have been admitted, but if you have a lot to gather from various different colleges, especially if some have to come from abroad, don't wait to start collecting them – sealed copies!)
- Haas & School of Engineering requirements are different than those for other majors. Check with Transfer Center for all details related to academic requirements for transfer.
- All applications meeting the minimum requirements (including a 3.0 average) will be read and scored.
- Do not include high school activities and awards on your application unless they relate directly to an activity you sustained at DeAnza. (Such as a high school State Championship in a sport in which you are still currently participating)
- Use current information – even receiving an “Employee of the Month” award where you work is of interest to them.

- Applications are reviewed holistically / comprehensively
- **Be sure you are writing to the *current* prompts (they have changed since last year) Combined total word limit is 1000 for two questions – can be divided any way you want, but suggested minimum for the short one is 250. There’s about a 5% margin (in other words you could *probably* get away with 1050 words total) but try to err in the direction of less rather than more because the software will cut you off in mid-sentence if you have too many words. Remember, the word count may be slightly different on their server.**
- For this reason, when you paste in your word-created essay, be sure you *read* it one more time. See what it looks like – fix any formatting glitches, and especially check to see that it has included everything you thought should be at the end of the page.
- When reading Prompt #1 they are looking for interest in and preparation for your major. People sometimes try to sneak in by requesting lightly impacted majors like Scandinavian Studies. If you have taken only business prep classes, but are applying to major in French, they will see right through it. Need to convince them that your intended major is really right for you.
- **(Although I still strongly advise against use of the word “passion”...) they want to *see* passion. Show them, don’t tell them! Demonstrate by examples of what you have been doing.**
- **Ok to tell how others inspired you, but talk about you, not them. 14 lines about your favorite tutor, is 14 lines wasted, and that will work against you.**
- **Prompt #2 asks you to discuss an accomplishment of which you are proud. Avoid buzz words. No point saying “I’m a student leader”. How? What was your path to become one? “As President of the Honors Club I...”**
- **They also want to know what you will bring to the dynamics of the campus. Try to tell your story in a way that makes you jump off the page – sets you apart from other applicants with similar stories. Differentiate yourself from other applicants.**
- **Keep a positive tone, even when you are talking about negative experiences, obstacles or hurdles. Stress what you learned from the experience, and where you will go from here with what you learned. One of his favorite applicants was someone who applied from prison. He had encountered an obstacle in life, was paying the price, and had a plan for how he would use his college education to start a non-profit organization dedicated to helping inmates really understand the value of an education -- how they could make something of themselves & turn their lives around through the power of education, using himself as an example. It was a powerful essay because it focused, with conviction and self-confidence, on a potentially positive outcome, and showed the university that their investment in this student would be well repaid – he would put their education to good use. That’s a very strong selling point!**
- **They expect to see college level writing – not necessarily letter-perfect grammar, but enough of a sample of your writing skills to assure them that if admitted you *will* be qualified. They don’t want to admit someone who will have trouble keeping up with the level of work that is expected, nor should**

you aspire to attend a school where you will have to struggle to make your ideas clear to others. Better to wait another year and apply when you have better mastery of academic language skills.

- Have a lot of different people read your essay and offer suggestions. But bear in mind that if you do, you will probably get five different sets of advice, and some of it may conflict. In the end, it has to be what *you* think sounds best.
- Don't rely on Spell Check. It only knows that "then" and "than" are both correctly spelled, even if you have misused them in your essay.
- All submissions are considered confidential – no one other than the admissions committee will read your work. You can and should be open, honest, and genuine about your feelings, experiences and ideas. They want to get to know the *real* you!

Don't use clichés, and don't rely too heavily on a Thesaurus to make your writing sound more sophisticated than it is. Readers can usually tell when vocabulary sounds unnatural or has been used incorrectly.

- There is also a 500 word comment section. This does not have to be used for another "essay" – no need for complete sentences even. For example, you could just say "Hospitalized for three weeks Winter quarter. Grades slipped – did not want to withdraw so did my best to complete the units. Also the place to mention a physical or learning disability if you have not addressed that in one of the other essays.
- His own GPA originally was 1.7. He dropped out of school, figured out what he wanted to do with his life, and eventually transferred to Cal with a 3.3. Without his unfocused slow start, it would have been a 3.8 but he had a great explanation for that and was able to convince them that he had learned and grown from the experience.
- Use the comment section not to evoke sympathy, but to convey understanding. For example, if your record shows all A's except for C's in Spanish, it would be relevant for them to know if you are hearing impaired and need to read lips – very difficult to do in a foreign language.

Don't copy the prompt as part of what you include with your personal statement. Those words will all count toward your limit, so it will be space wasted. Also, don't waste words with transition statements such as "My interest in Math has been..." This is not an essay for an English class – rather it is an attempt to tell them as efficiently as possible, as much about yourself as possible. (Ed note: that list of characteristics and accomplishments you made? As many of them as possible should make it into your final version!)

- If you are applying to two different campuses and would not be able to have the same major at both, discuss how the two possibilities overlap (such as Anthropology/Ethnic Studies) and how both would match your interests.
- If you have completed more than the required number of transferable units, they will take the best 110 out of your total giving you the highest possible GPA.
- Check your spam filters and make sure you use an accurately-typed valid e-mail address. No sense having them send your admission offer to the wrong person!

- Be sure you read and are familiar with the “Terms and Conditions” of your admission. They will assign you an Admissions Officer who will personally advise you about additionally required credentials. Your registration will be blocked if all your credentials are not in by their deadline.
- If you are not admitted, you **can** apply again, and it is neither an advantage nor a disadvantage to be making a re-application. Do make every effort, however, to indicate how your qualifications have improved since your original application. (Don’t just submit the same application all over again)
- If you are not admitted, appeals letters are generally not very successful, but it can be worth a try. Use the appeal to provide additional information that was not clear or available when you first submitted your app. (You were in the hospital and your sister mistakenly submitted her high school essay on your behalf instead of your well-crafted one!)
- A “W” here and there on your transcript is nothing to worry about and no need to explain. But something like five in one quarter should be explained (you had a last minute opportunity to study abroad and in the excitement, completely forgot to drop your classes) Too many W’s here and there, however, can be a red flag (he did not define “too many”)
- Don’t worry about non-transferable classes – they will calculate two GPAs; one for your transferable units only, and one overall.
- Is it an advantage to take **more** than the required major and pre-rec. classes? Yes – it shows interest **and** preparation for the major.
- Extra-curriculars do not have to relate directly to your major – breadth is important in terms of your interests, but depth is important in terms of the degree to which you participate in things. 2 weeks of an activity is not a solid level of involvement.
- Does not matter if you earn your AA Degree, but it is a cool extra bonus for **you** if you do.
- Avoid taking things pass/no pass in your major.