

**Doorway
to College™**
Foundation

A young woman with long, dark, straight hair is smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a bright pink long-sleeved sweater and has a black backpack strap visible over her shoulder. She is leaning against a red brick wall. The background is a blurred hallway with a warm, golden light.

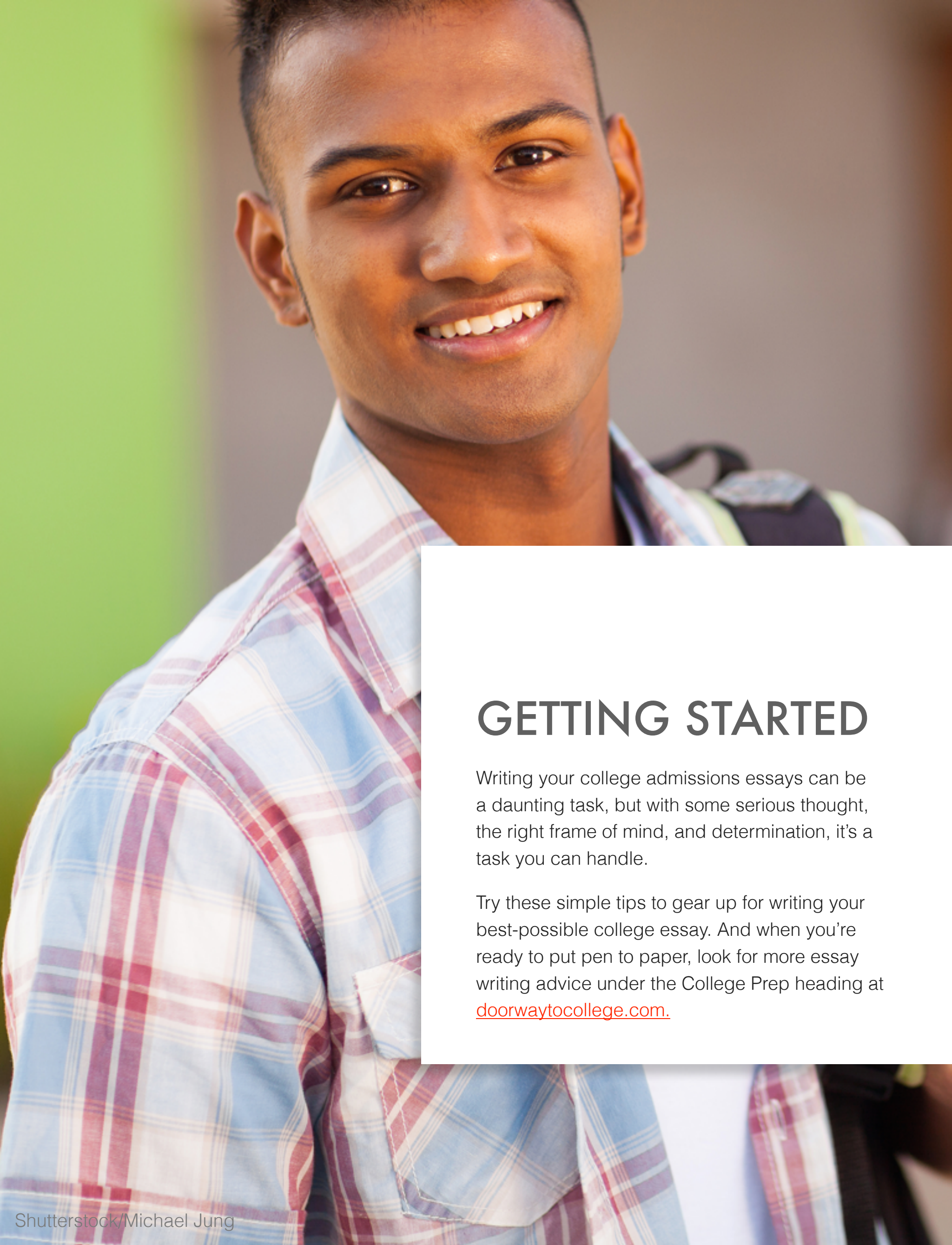
COLLEGE ADMISSIONS ESSAYS 3 PREWRITING TIPS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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GETTING STARTED

Writing your college admissions essays can be a daunting task, but with some serious thought, the right frame of mind, and determination, it's a task you can handle.

Try these simple tips to gear up for writing your best-possible college essay. And when you're ready to put pen to paper, look for more essay writing advice under the College Prep heading at [doorwaytocollege.com](https://www.doorwaytocollege.com).



TIP 1: DO SOME NAVEL GAZING.

Getting ready to write your essay doesn't start on the day you finally sit down with your laptop and the essay instructions. That's because your essay is about *you*. And the *you* in the essay began the day you were born.

What have you done in the years you've had on this planet? Have you traveled? Have you mastered a unique skill? Have you taken an inner journey that helped shape who you've become?

What are you curious about? What have you learned? What can you teach? What insights have you gained? What do you passionately want to find out?

Long before you touch your keyboard, start thinking about questions such as these. The answers form the backstory of your personal narrative. You can't include it all in your essay, of course. But understanding who you are and what has shaped you is essential if you want to engage your readers and make them want to know more about *you*.

Once you figure out who you are and what you love about yourself, it kinda all falls into place.

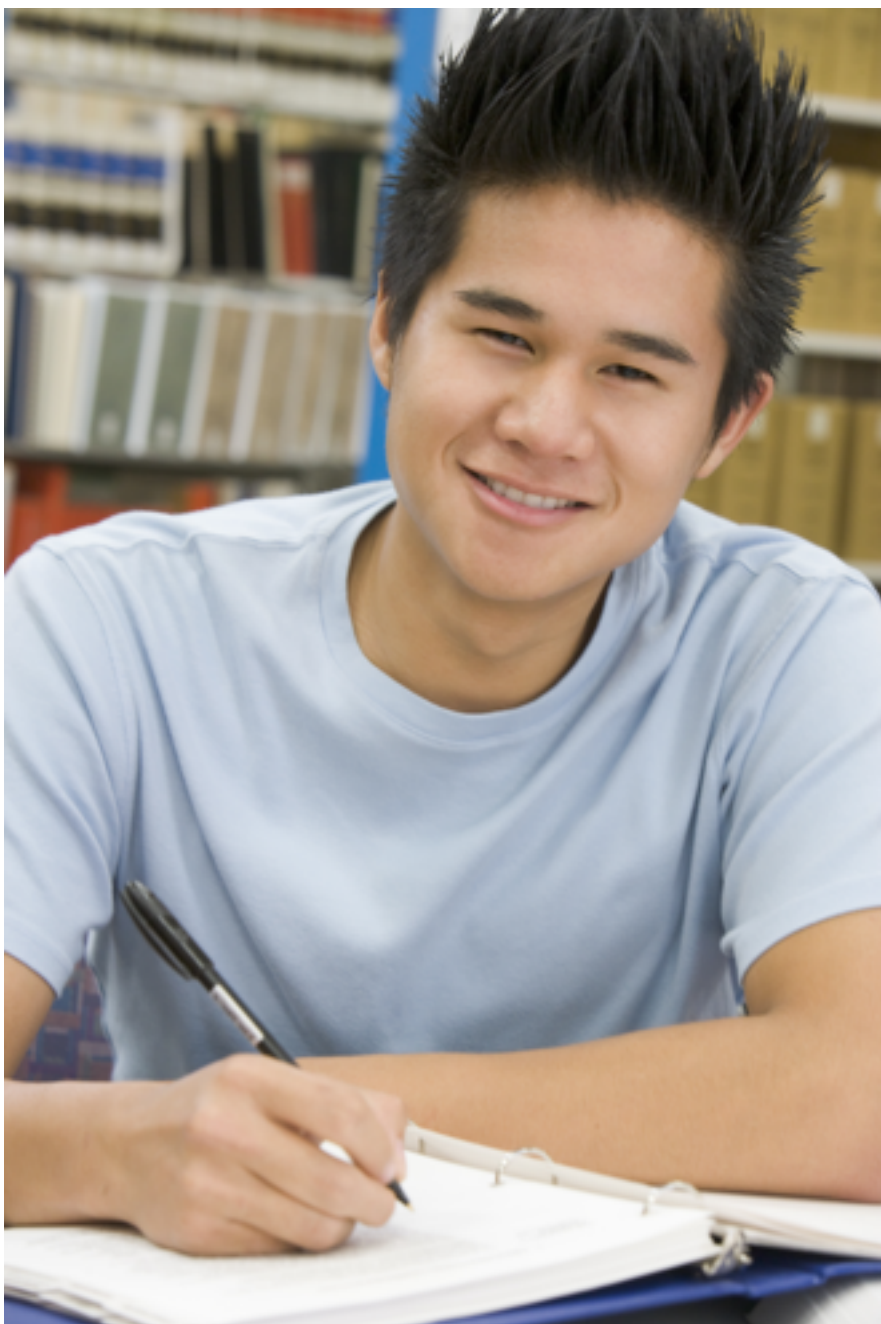
— Jennifer Aniston

One way to do this is to spend some time alone with your journal, processing thoughts about your experiences, values, hopes, and dreams. The following activities can help get your ideas flowing.

WRITING WARM-UP

Directions: Use the following prompts to initiate a freewriting activity in your journal. Choose a couple of prompts that you feel drawn to, but also a couple that you resist. (Strong emotions either way will likely lead you to a powerful story.)

Write in longhand (rather than on a computer), and try to write nonstop for several minutes. Don't worry about spelling, capitalization, punctuation, or grammar. Just let your ideas flow onto the page.

- What would you do or be if money were no object and you knew you could not fail?
 - If you had to describe who you are and what is important to you in 90 seconds or less (your personal "[elevator speech](#)"), what would you say?
 - Who are your heroes? List the top three to five people you admire most. Which of their characteristics have won your admiration? What do they have in common? Which of their qualities would you like to emulate?
 - How do you want to be remembered? What do you hope people will say about you at the end of your life? Write the speech that you hope someone will make about you at your 100th birthday party.
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- What various roles do you fill in your life? Son or daughter, sister or brother, student, co-worker, friend ... List them all in their order of importance to you.
 - What are your values? What matters most to you? List your top 10 values in order of importance.
 - Write your [personal mission statement](#).
 - How do you enjoy spending your time? When you have nothing else to do, what do you do just for fun? What activities make you feel engaged, excited, challenged, intrigued, curious, free?



TIP 2: GET IN A POSITIVE FRAME OF MIND.

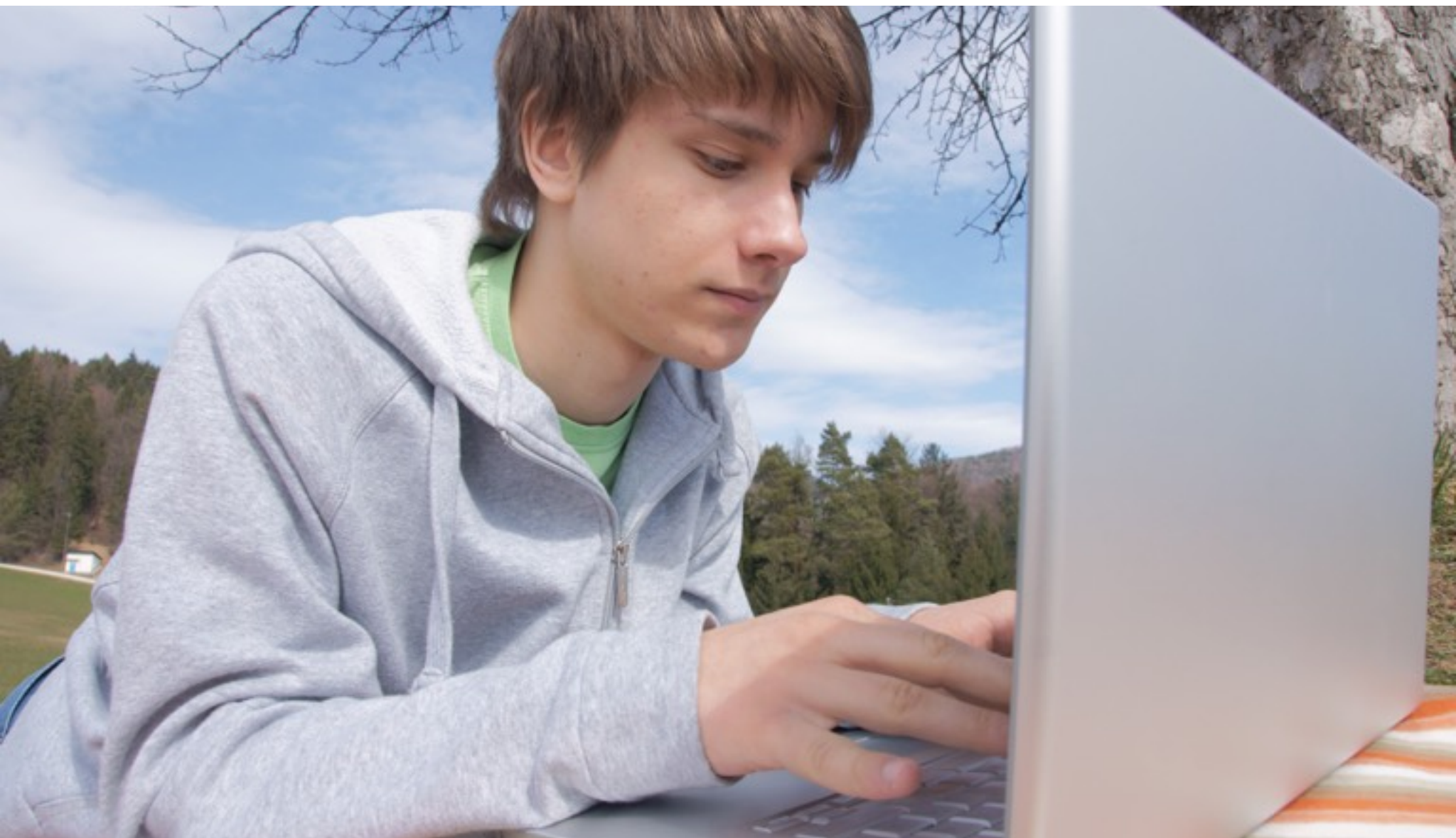
Few people think writing a college application essay is going to be the most fun they've had all week. But starting out with a negative attitude isn't going to make it any easier. Also, it's important that your writing express a positive tone and attitude if you want to make a good impression on those college admissions counselors. So before sitting down to write, put yourself in a positive frame of mind.

What makes you happy? Talking with friends? Reading an exciting novel? Going for a run? Shooting hoops? Meditation? Yoga? Whatever it is, indulge yourself for a little bit before you start to tackle your essay. (This isn't an excuse to procrastinate, so set an alarm for when you intend to get down to work.)

By starting with a positive outlook, you'll find it much easier to begin the task ahead. Instead of talking yourself *out* of doing the work, you'll talk yourself *into* getting it done and doing it well. And you'll be more likely to sell yourself with a voice that is upbeat and appealing.

A positive mind finds a way it can be done; a negative mind looks for all the ways it can't be done.

– Napoleon Hill



TIP 3: SET A DEADLINE TO GET STARTED – AND HONOR IT

Procrastination can be your biggest enemy when it comes to doing a difficult task. But there's no getting around this one. If you want to go to college, and you plan to apply through the Common Application, you have to write a personal essay.

In fact, you'll very likely need to write a different essay for every school you apply to. That takes work. Determination. Discipline. And deadlines.

If deadlines motivate you, then pull out your calendar and set a due date for yourself. Choose a deadline you can live with based on your schoolwork and other commitments. Then, working backward from that ultimate deadline, set intermediate deadlines for completing the various stages of the writing process: planning, drafting, getting feedback from others, revising, editing, and proofreading. Breaking up a large task into smaller steps will make it more manageable.

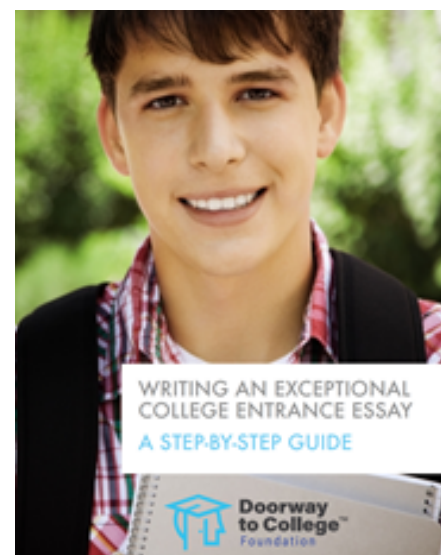
A dream doesn't become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination and hard work.

– General Colin Powell

Plan on each step taking longer than you think it will. And if you intend to ask teachers, parents, or other advisers to review your writing and offer feedback, give them a heads-up well in advance. Don't wait until the last minute to make such a request.

You'll stress a whole lot less if you start and finish early than if you wait till the last minute before it's due. And you'll write a better essay if you give yourself more time.

If procrastination is an issue for you, remember that the best way to deal with this problem is simply to launch into writing. Just the act of getting started will motivate you to continue. When you are setting deadlines, don't forget to make a date with yourself to begin.



For more tips and strategies for prewriting, and all the other stages of writing your college admissions essays, check out our new ebook at www.doorwaytocollege.com/exceptional-college-essay.

About Doorway to College Foundation

Doorway to College Foundation strives to demystify the college application process in its many forms. We give parents and students the information needed to be fully informed and prepared for the challenges and changes that lie on the horizon. For more information about products and services from Doorway to College, including study skills, college admissions information, and test prep, visit us at www.doorwaytocollege.com. Call 877-927-8378. Or write to answers@doorwaytocollege.com.

