Tips from Dean Strickler

Fall 2015

Greetings from beautiful New London, Connecticut!

Friday, Aug. 28, 2015, was Move-in Day for first-year students at Connecticut College. I’ll bet if you had asked them where they were last year at the same time, they’d say: where YOU are now. And if you asked how it was to write the essay, they’d say it was one of the most challenging parts of the application.

It’s a little-known fact that even the students who absolutely love to write struggle with the application essay. So, if you’ve been biting your nails or tearing your hair out even a little, you’re not alone.

The good news is, I can help. I’ve been in the Admission business long enough to have gleaned a few tips that I think are worth passing along. I also want to recommend our Essays that Worked: real essays submitted by real students who have since matriculated at Connecticut College. These essays are terrific, and if you were wondering what in particular we liked about each one, check back in late September to read the comments that my staff will be adding to their favorites.

Now for my tips.

1. Allow yourself plenty of time to write the essay. Do not wait until the last minute. I know this sounds absurdly simple, but it really does make a difference to be as relaxed as possible when you sit down to write.
2. Choose the prompt that comes closest to something you’d like to write about. The purpose of the prompt is to help you reflect on something that matters to you. Your application will be full of information that illuminates dimensions of you and your abilities, but only the essay gives you a vehicle to speak, in your own voice, about something personally significant. Choose something you care about and it will flow more naturally.
   1. Fallacy: If you haven’t experienced a life-changing event, you have nothing to write about. Wrong. You care about things now. Write about one of them and show us why it matters to you.
   2. Fallacy: If you haven’t had a major international service experience, you’re sunk. Wrong again. If you’ve had such an experience and you feel it says something important about you, great. If you haven’t, just choose something that says something important about you. That’s all.
3. When you’ve written a first draft, let it sit. Then go back to it another day. Ask people you trust for their feedback, but don’t let anyone else tell you how you should write it. This is your story, or some small but significant part of it, as told or reflected upon by you.
4. When you’ve revised it to your heart’s content, proofread with care. Spellcheck isn’t always the most reliable friend, as I have learned on occasion with a quickly typed email that gets sent before it was proofread!
5. Submit it, and treat yourself to something nice — like your favorite film, or a run, or quality time with your dog, or whatever it is that you enjoy.

That’s it for tips. Now you should read the Essays that Worked, and be inspired by their example!

Sincerely,

Andrew K. Strickler

Dean of Admission and Financial Aid, Connecticut College