

# Is an “A” English Paper a College Essay?

By Kim Lifton

Year after year, students present college application essays for review that were written for English class. Most of the essays earned A's.

Unfortunately, an essay written for English class is not ready to submit to a college.

One student submitted a beautifully written piece recounting many fabulous trips overseas, offering vivid descriptions of buildings and places and emphasizing how much this student loved traveling. The sentences flowed; the spelling was perfect; the essay had a beginning, middle and end. This student knew how to write.

While this essay was excellent by high school standards, it lacked reflection and needed more focus to catch the attention of an admissions officer.

The application essay is not an English paper; it is an opportunity to show admissions officers who you are, that you will fit in, and that you can write well enough to succeed at their school. The admissions team that is responsible for making recommendations for next year's class reads a lot of applications. So be careful: You don't want to bore them or submit a piece that is simply uninspiring.

Forget about rubrics and grades. Ditch the five-paragraph essay format. Just write something genuine that is reflective, will make the person reading your essay smile and want to know more about you.

The student who wrote about his worldly travels for English class turned his broad story into a more insightful piece about a single night out in Spain when he realized how much culture and community mean to him. Getting there took time and reflection. It was all worth it when he landed a coveted spot at his first-choice college, one of the most competitive public institutions in the nation.

Think of that college essay you write in English class as a draft, just as the student did. He wrote it for his teacher – a person who already knew quite a bit about him. He later revised it for the admissions counselor. Don't assume the college essay you give to your teacher is finished and will cut it for college.

And remember, you don't have to travel to Spain to create a great college essay. Frequently, we learn our enduring life lessons during ordinary moments – the moments when our best and most authentic selves emerge. That's why some of the best college essays we read focus on the most mundane moments.

- Two brothers on a bike ride through their neighborhood
- A talented dancer choosing to drop all but a few of her dance classes
- A boy and his sister stuck in traffic
- A high school junior trying out for the pom-pom team at her new school
- An aspiring baseball player watching his cousin take endless batting practice

**Everyone has a story to tell.**

If more students (and parents!) would relax and let those stories develop, the college essay wouldn't seem like such a stumbling block. Instead, it would be seen as the opportunity it is – a chance to tell people who may never meet you something compelling about you.