

Nailing your UNIVERSITY ESSAYS

The dos and don'ts

AZNEEF CHOWDHURY

Writing an essay is no easy task on its own. However, when it's paired with the weight of affecting your university applications abroad, things can get messy quickly.

As a student applying to multiple universities abroad, you might have to write over a hundred essays about a variety of things. Not only is this time-consuming, but it can also be immensely stressful. Luckily, being able to anticipate what's expected in your writing and avoiding key mistakes can reduce this significantly.

University applications involve writing on a plethora of prompts, all of which demand you to showcase a different aspect of yourself. One common type of essay for your university application is the personal statement essay, which aims to know more about who you are. What you write here depends on which country you're applying to.

US universities, for example, want you to talk about what the story is behind your application, and what your surroundings have been like. This allows them to judge how you are as a person, and determine if you would bode well with their culture. Simply reiterating your resume in your essay is not a good idea when applying to universities in the US.

Writing personal statements for UK universities, on the other hand, does not involve as much soul-searching as US ones do.

"The UK universities want one personal statement where you give them a brief overview of all the things you've done in your life, and why you want to study in your chosen field or major," says Nuren Alahee, currently studying at the University of New South Wales. "Once you do that, you just send that through to different universities with your transcripts and grades, and call it a day."

The case is also similar with

Australian universities. These universities require a statement of purpose, which mainly covers your academic and extracurricular journey, your reason for choosing the university you applied to, and why you want to enrol in the programme you applied to.

These are the key differences between the essay content of universities in different countries, and knowing them can reduce your troubles tenfold.

Then comes the need to not overcomplicate your essay.

Anxiety can often play a big role in our decisions during this turbulent time of our lives. Essays, in particular, garner a lot of concern and worry, and we end up overthinking the quality and content of the essay. In such circumstances, try to keep your work original while providing an accurate depiction of yourself.

"When I was writing my first university essay, I was really concerned about whether the admissions officers would like it," says Samiur Rahman*, an undergraduate student at the University of Texas, Arlington. "I ended up asking a lot of my teachers and peers to proofread it. I then rewrote the essay six times with their suggestions in mind. What I ended up with was an essay that had no resemblance to my story, which was not what I wanted to show to the universities."

Nuren also has a similar stance.

"When applying, we're all trying to put our best foot forward, but universities can tell when you're trying to portray yourself as someone that you're not," she adds.

English proficiency can also play a big part in our worries. Worrying whether or not your work is linguistically sound can bring a lot of hassle when writing. Luckily, schools do consider this when reviewing your essay. It's important to understand that an easy-to-read, digestible piece of writing will be much more impactful than an essay filled with hard words. If grammar and spelling errors are an issue, tools like Grammarly are your go-to. Taking inspiration from the millions of sample essays floating around on the internet won't hurt either.

To conclude, making sure to stick to the prompt and ticking all your requirements can massively streamline your writing process.

Whilst it's unavoidable to some extent, try not to worry too much about the tiniest of details. Time is of the essence, and knowing what to avoid can allow you to concentrate on other aspects of your application.

**Name has been changed upon request for privacy.*

Azneef is a student at Chittagong Grammar School.

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Bonus tips for your university essays

➔ Your essays play an integral role in deciding whether you're offered admission into a university. Even if you're at the top of your class and have perfect test scores, universities want to know that you're somewhat of a fascinating person.

➔ You have to be a decent writer if you want to get into a top school. Your essays should also illustrate to the admissions committee that you're ready for the extensive writing that university life will undoubtedly throw your way.

➔ Universities don't only look for kids who have had immense personal struggles and worked through it, but rather introspective, kind-hearted, and thoughtful students who will have something to bring to their community.

➔ Essays include not just the one Common App essay but also the supplemental essays that some colleges require. Focus on the details. What are the courses you're interested in? What professors do you look forward to working with? Is it the diverse student body that excites you or the breathtaking campus?

➔ Write it all down. Show the universities that you've done your homework and that you're genuinely interested.

