



Parents: How to Help Without Taking Over

We all want our children to succeed; college is critically important. But the truth is, you should not heavily edit your child's application essays, and you most definitely should not write them yourself. You should even step back when it comes to choosing a topic.

So how can you be most helpful and give your child a better chance of getting admitted to a selective college?

- **Offer encouragement.** In this case, you are more cheerleader than coach. No one knows your child better than you. Encourage her to express herself in her own voice, in her own words. Yes, she really can do this. And she can do it well.
- **Be realistic.** An essay should be well-written, but it should sound like it was composed by a high school student. Admissions officers can tell the difference between a heartfelt, well-crafted essay and a submission that is so highly polished it sounds flat.
- **Get a head start.** For many students, the essay is the hardest part of the college application process. Don't wait till September. Senior year is a stressful, exciting time, not necessarily the best environment for students to sit quietly and write about themselves. Start early.
- **Read, but don't criticize.** Read drafts and offer your opinion, but don't go too far. Ask clarifying questions. Engage in a conversation with your child to figure out what he is trying to say about himself. Save the editor's pencil for misspelled words and grammatical errors.

No matter what the prompt, a college essay is not about the job, the vacation, the illness, the book or the influential person; it is about the student – what he or she learned, gained or realized as a result of the experience. As a parent, you can help the most by keeping your child focused on the essay's purpose.

It can be hard to write about oneself, especially when it really matters. We get that. That's why we teach students how to write their essays, using a straightforward, 10-step process. We help kids find their voices. They finish writing their essays feeling empowered, confident in their own abilities, certain of their words. And best of all, they get into their top choice schools!