

## Language Do's and Don'ts for Application Essays

### Don't

**DON'T Use Slang:** By the very definition of the word, slang is language that not everybody understands. You want the admissions officer to understand you. Using slang cannot help your chances of admission, but it can hurt.

**DON'T Use Violent or Hostile Imagery:** Your hatred of the school bully may be justified, but don't write about how you want to slash his tires. Consistent negative imagery can inaccurately portray you as a bitter, hostile person. That's not someone who will contribute positively to campus life and probably not someone the admissions committee will want attending their school.

**DON'T Overuse the Passive Voice:** The passive voice puts people to sleep. Remember, these admissions officers read hundreds of essays per week. Your essay needs to be energetic and colorful if you are going to keep them engaged. Write about how "I saved my friends life when I was seven years old" not about how "my friends life was saved by me when I was seven years old."

### Do

**DO Choose the Best Verbs:** A common mistake people make is thinking good writing means using a lot of adjectives and adverbs. On the contrary, one of the keys to good writing is to maximize the effectiveness of your verbs. Write about how you "hustled past the leader of the race" not about how you "ran quickly and aggressively past the leader of the race." The first phrase is far more compact and it conveys a more vivid image.

**DO Show Some Personality:** The essay is your opportunity to sell yourself to the admissions committee. What makes you unique? Are you funny? Quiet and Introspective? Use language in the essay that best expresses your personality.

**DO Use the Thesaurus (Carefully):** You shouldn't repeat the same word too often in your essay and particularly not twice in the same sentence. It sounds awkward. Use the thesaurus to avoid this problem. You have hundreds of thousands of words to choose from. But be careful that you don't use a word that doesn't make sense in the context of your sentence. Simply flipping through the thesaurus and then replacing the word "good" with the word "congenial" might not work. In fact, it might jump out at an admissions officer as an obvious thesaurus substitution. The best way to use the thesaurus is as a memory jog for words you are already familiar with, but might not think of off the top of your head. If you genuinely have to use a word you think is used correctly, but you're not completely sure, make sure someone checks your work before you submit your essay.