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HOW DO COLLEGES USE ESSAYS

The application essay is an opportunity for students to introduce themselves and their lives to the college, to present a single recommending trait or feature from their years of existence," writes Sarah Myers McGinty, a private educational consultant and university supervisor at Harvard Graduate School of Education.

She added, "'What can I show about myself in this essay?' is the critical question."

The importance of the application essay can be seen in that "...both students and admission officers ranked the essay as the fourth most important component in the admission process," she said.

Typically, the GPA or Rank, difficulty level of courses taken, and SAT or ACT scores or extra-curricular activities make up the top three categories of evaluative data admission personnel consider.

McGinty's data showed the importance of the essay as the fourth piece of data commonly considered.

"There was some agreement," she said after surveying college admission officers, "that the top four criteria for an essay are correctness, organization, specific details, and an individual or distinctive style.

"Students don't need to write amazing dialogue, choose a topic of international interest or break the reader's heart. They need correct, organized and specific essays that make clear who they are," she concluded.