

Too Many Cooks in the College Essay Kitchen

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Application season can be a touchy time as nerves rattle and worry percolates with impending deadlines. This is true not just for students, but also for parents who are moving away from their role of manager to consultant. It wouldn't be a college essay season without the question of "how many cooks need to be in the kitchen?" When tackling the Personal Statement and Supplemental essays, a student's ultimate goal is to write their own essays about things that matter to them, told in their voice. Yet, students may flounder at the start, unfamiliar with the narrative form of the personal essay, and may need guidance on writing in a way that may feel more exposed than usual. Helping students balance highlighting what is core to them and specifically about them, while not sounding boastful requires time and a seasoned guide. While some students may have access to an essay workshop, "how-to" books, English class, or essay coach, others may drift as they wrestle with where to begin and what to share. That uncertainty is okay - initially. Grappling with what to write about and how to write college essays is as central as the completed essays, and in some ways more critical. Patience, pondering, and tenacity, are skills needed to write college essays and embracing these skills will empower students. While there may be an inclination for both students and parents to want to collaborate, Adrienne Wichard-Edds' recent article, ["Experts offer four reasons why kids need to own their college essays — and one way parents can help"](#) underscores that the place to come together is around trust; students need to trust their instincts when writing and parents need to trust that their kids are more than capable of writing their own essays. Here are several tips to consider while waiting for college essays to be fully baked.



1. ["We"](#) are not going to college, and "we" will not be writing papers in college. A student's ability to write essays may be one of many litmus tests for college readiness or possibly college fit for a student.
2. "Too many cooks in the kitchen" often leave a student confused and caught in the middle of whose advice to take.
3. Writing college essays is a moment where support is about empowering students to know and trust their instincts and their voice. Remember, a senior has 17 or 18 years of life experience to draw from, not 30. Sharing their insights from their perspective is essential and provides clues to understanding what they want to write about, what they know, and what they value.
4. Unsolicited help, the heavy use of a red pen, and suggestions on what to include from outside editors can often leave an essay over-seasoned, burnt, and inedible.
5. While the possibility of a college outright rejecting essays based on the [DDI rule](#) (Daddy Did It) may be an urban myth, this is not the time to be a test case. Be aware that in [recent years](#), colleges have moved to use technology similar to "turn-it-in.com" to sort out plagiarized writing.
6. An essay's success can sometimes get muddled in with the aspiration of applying to a highly selective school, which may require more complex writing and analytical thinking. If a student struggles to write a compelling essay or is missing the mark in their topic choice or tone, this is most likely the time to pause and reflect on if aspirations align with abilities. A ghost-written essay (which is at the very least [unethical](#)), may foster the idea that essays and applications are all about "getting in," but the bigger question that needs to be answered is if you can't write the essay, will you be able to write successfully in college.

7. In a year when many colleges are test-optional and the option to compare test scores to writing is limited, colleges still have the ability to compare high school courses taken to see if they align with the level of writing in submitted essays.

Even the most exquisite writers have a second set of eyes, a trusted mentor, or an editor review their work before pronouncing it finished. High school seniors writing college essays should be no different, and a "light touch" from a trusted guide can make the difference between a well-written essay and a missed opportunity.

Supporting students during the essay phase of the application process can [take many forms](#), from creating a low-stress atmosphere to helping seniors pivot away from difficult conversations about college. While students do the heavy-lifting when applying to college, family support can lighten the load and is a time for parents to break out the comfort food and create levity balanced with calm.

Have more questions or looking for more support? Email me at dane@collegeu.solutions

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