

THE GREAT COLLEGE ESSAY TEST

Is your essay great? The criteria below will help you decide. And, as with all the resources on my website, these are not the only qualities of a great essay—these are just a few qualities that I have observed in essays that I find to be great. How might you use these criteria? Read your essay aloud, or have someone else read it aloud, then ask these questions:

1. Core Values (aka Information)

- a. Can you name at least 4-5 of the author's core values?
- b. Do you detect a variety of values, or do the values repeat?
 - * Examples of NOT varied values: hard work, determination, perseverance
 - * Examples of more varied values: autonomy, resourcefulness, healthy boundaries, diversity

2. Vulnerability

- a. Does the essay sound like it's mostly analytical or like it's coming from a deeper, more vulnerable place? Another way of asking this: Does it sound like the author wrote it using mostly his or her head (intellect) or his or her heart and gut?
- b. After reading the essay, do you know more about the author AND feel closer to him or her?

3. "So what" moments (aka Important & interesting connections)

- a. Can you identify at least 3-5 "so what" moments of insight in the essay?
- b. Are these moments kind of predictable, or are they truly illuminating?

4. Craft

- a. Do the ideas in the essay connect in a way that is logical, but not too obvious (aka boring)?
- b. Can you tell that the essay represents a series of carefully considered choices and that the author spent a lot of time revising the essay over the course of several drafts?
- c. Is it interesting and succinct throughout? If not, where do you lose interest? Where could words be cut or which part isn't revealing as much as it could be?

If you're feeling bold...

Give your essay to someone else and ask him or her to evaluate it based on these elements.

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