**1) Read the question carefully**

* Read it twice
* Make sure that you understand what is being asked of you. Are you supposed to: analyze, report, summarize, interpret, narrate, write a letter?

**2) Brainstorm**

* Know how you plan to answer before you even begin writing. Think of your topic/story/idea and develop it in your mind first.
* What have been your major accomplishments in life? What skills, or qualities do you possess that are unique? Favorite book and how it has affected you? Unwavering personality traits?

**3) There are no such things as “right” answers**

* Write “from the heart”
* Write how you felt, or how an experience has changed you
* Highlight the positives, even in an instance that was negative in some way

**4) Understand your audience**

* Write for yourself
* Try to avoid dwelling on what they might be looking for
* Make it interesting: use descriptive imagery.

**5) Don’t rush**

* Take your time and do it right
* Write several drafts
* Explain yourself, but try not to be too repetitive

**6) Don’t “Fake It”**

* Tell the truth, even a boring story can be a great essay
* Don’t exaggerate, avoid the *Million Little Pieces* syndrome
* Avoid loaded terms like “always” and “never”

**7) What the admissions board is looking for:**

* To see how you can handle a widely based topic
* This essay is supposed to show your ability to think and write at the college level. That requires higher level thinking ability. This is the purpose of the college admissions essay.
* Get to the point and don’t repeat yourself.

**8) Don’t Make Excuses**

* If you have poor scores on ACTs, SATs, or a low GPA don’t try to *excuse* them, but if you need to instead *explain* them.

**9) Do not fixate on the negative**

* Maybe you feel that a traumatic event from your life has sincerely affected who you are now, but unless the outcome is a positive one it should NOT be the topic of your essay.
* O*nly write about this event* ifyou can turn it into a positive and show how it has made you who you are today. What have you learned from the experience?

**10) EDIT! REVISE! EDIT! REVISE!**

* This essay is short. It needs to carry an impacting and memorable message in just a few words. Greg Downey’s essay wasn’t written in one sitting, I guarantee it!
* Conclusions and introductions are critical. You want to grab their attention and be memorable after they finish reading your essay.
* This is your chance to show that you are capable of writing well.
* Rough Drafts are due next Monday, so plan ahead and get to work =)