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When you apply for college, even small decisions can feel like high stakes. This is especially true for college essays, which often feels like the most personal part of the application. You can agonize over the format of the college application essay: font, fields, even file format. Or maybe you're tormented by how to organize your thoughts as a whole. Should the narrative structure be used? Five paragraphs? In this comprehensive guide, we'll go for everything and others about how to format college essays both at micro and macro levels. We'll discuss minor formatting issues such as headlines and fonts, and then discuss broad formatting issues, such as whether or not to use a five-point essay, and if you should use a college essay template. How to format college essays: font, fields, etc. Some of your formatting problems will depend on whether you will be cutting and inserting your essay into the text box on an online application form or attaching a formatted document. If you're not sure what you need to do, check the instructions for the application. Note that the general application currently requires you to copy and paste the essay into the text box. Most schools also allow you to send in a paper application that theoretically gives you increased control over your essay formatting. However, I generally do not recommend sending in a paper application (unless you have another choice) for several reasons: Most schools will say that they prefer to receive online applications. While this does not usually affect your chances of enrolling, it makes sense to observe institutional preferences in the college application process where possible. This tends to make the whole process go much more smoothly. Paper apps can get lost in the mail. Of course, there may be problems with online applications, but you'll know about the problem much sooner than if your paper app gets distracted somehow and then mailed back to you. In contrast, online apps make sure your content is sourced. No matter how you end up submitting an essay, you should draft it into a word handler. This will help you track the number of words that will allow you to use spell-checking, and so on. Next, I'll go for some of the problems that you might have about the correct format of the college essay application, whether it's copying and inserting into a text box or attaching a document, as well as a few tips that apply anyway. Another plus for online presentation: no stamps required! If you will copy and paste in the text box: The main thing is when you copy and paste in the text box to double and triple checks that everything is transferred correctly. First, make sure that your essay has been rescheduled and not cut off! The number of words can get messed up by wobbly formatting or be counted differently in the text box, so keep in mind that you may need to make small adjustments When you copy and paste, you may lose formatting like bold or pastiche. Sometimes bold and italics also just won't work in the text box, so you may be better off just not using them. Your point interval can get messed up when you copy and paste essays over. So make sure that all of your paragraphs are clearly delineated, either through tabs or through a missed line if the tab doesn't work. The font will probably be standardized, but if it isn't, choose a standard font like Times New Roman or Arial (you probably have limited features anyway) and a normal size (12 pt). If you attach a document: If you attach a document, you should be more concerned about the overall college essay format. Things like margin and distance are becoming increasingly important. Use one-2m fields around. It's standard and easy to read. While a one-time essay is usually acceptable, your essay will be easier to read if it's 1.5 or twice. Clearly delineate your points. One tab at the beginning is ok. Use a font that is easy to read like Times, Arial, Calibri, Cambria, etc. avoid fonts such as papyrus and Curiz. And use the font 12 pt. You can include a college essay headline with page number and app id. Don't include your name unless you specifically asked for it. Often, you need to submit your college essay in a specific file format. The app can only accept certain versions of Word files (i.e. only .doc, not .docx), .rtf or .pdf files. So just make sure you save the file in the accepted format before you download it! I recommend .pdf files whenever possible because they are not possible and always look the same. Want to write the perfect college application essay? Get professional help from PrepScholar. Your dedicated PrepScholar Admissions Advisor will craft your perfect college essay from scratch. We learn your background and interests, brainstorm essay topics, and walk you through the process of compiling essays, step by step. After all, you'll have a unique essay that you'll be proud to present to your best college choice. Don't leave your application to college for a chance. Learn more about PrepScholar Admission now: Formatting Guidelines that apply no matter how you end up sending an essay: If it's specifically requested, you don't need a title. It will just eat in your word count. Avoid cutesy, overly conversational formatting choices like all CAPS or unnecessary characters or, God forbid, emoticons and #hashtags. Your college essay should be professional, and nothing too cutesy or casual would depart as immature. Keep them out of your essay! How to structure your college essay Maybe you're less concerned about the micro-level college essay format as and more concerned about the macro-level format of how to structure your college admission essay. Is there any secret secret A formula that will make writing easy and clear to express all your strengths in a reverent admissions committee? Sadly, no. However, the good news is that college essays are actually a good opportunity to play with structure a bit and break out of a five-point essay. (You are certainly not prohibited from writing a five-paragraph essay, but this is by no means guaranteed to be the best college essay structure.) A good college essay is like a sandwich where intro and conclusion slices of bread and everything that happens between them sandwich toppings. A sandwich without bread is a bad sandwich, but a good sandwich can have any number of things between slices of bread. So you need a clear introduction that gives a pretty clear idea of where you'll go in the essay and a conclusion that completes everything and makes your main point clear. However, as you approach the middle part up to you. You could structure the essay more as a narrative related to an important experience from your life. You can use an extended analogy where each paragraph is part of the analogy. You want to widely stick to the wisdom that every item should have an identifiable core idea, but college essays are definitely a great chance to break out of a five-point essay. For more in-depth tips on how to structure essays, check out our expert step-by-step guide to essay resolution. Mmm, delicious essay... I mean a sandwich. Why College Essay Patterns is a bad idea You can see college essay templates online that offer guidelines on how to structure essays and what to say in each paragraph. I strongly recommend not using the template. This will make your essay sound canned and soft-two of the worst things a college essay can be. It's much better to think about what you want to say and then talk about how to better structure it with someone else and/or do your own practice outlines before you sit down to write. You can also find tons of successful sample essays online. Looking at them to get an idea of different styles and themes is good, but then again, I don't recommend a close template for your essay after sample essay. You will do your best if your essay truly reflects your own original voice and experience, which is most meaningful to you. Most college entrants are high school seniors, and most college application counseling there is directed at them. But what if you don't fall into this narrow category? Our e-book on how to prepare and apply to college as an unconventional student will walk you through everything you need to know, from coursework you should have under your belt, how to get letters of recommendation when you are not a high school student. College Application Essay Format: Key Takeaways There Are Two Levels You can worry about: micro micro headlines, fields, etc.) and macro (the overall structure of your essay). Tips for the micro-level of your college essay format app: Always draft an essay into text processing software, even if you'll copy and paste it into the text box. If you copy and insert it into the text box, make sure that formatting the translations properly, your paragraphs are clearly delineated, and your essay is not cut off. If you attach a document, make sure your font is easy to read, your margins are standard 1-inch, essay 1.5 or twice, and your file format is compatible with app specifications. There's no need for a title unless otherwise stated, it will just be there in your word count. Tips for the macro level of your college application essay format: There is no super-secret college essay format that will guarantee success. In terms of structure, it is most important that you have an introduction that makes it clear where you are going and a conclusion that concludes with the highlight. For the middle of your essay, you have a lot of freedom, just as long as it flows logically! I advise you not to use the essay template, as this will make your essay sound stilted and unoriginal. Also, if you use a college essay template, how do you get rid of these medieval eccentrics? What's next? Still feeling lost? Check out our general guide to a personal statement or see our step-by-step guide to writing the perfect essay. If you're not sure where to start, consider these tips for the attention-grabbing first sentences in college essays! And don't forget to avoid these 10 college essay mistakes. Want to improve your SAT score by 160 points or your ACT score by 4 points? We have written a guide for each test about the 5 best strategies you should use to have a chance at improving your score. 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