

## **College Application Essay Do's and Don'ts**

*Courtesy of Pat Dannen and Riverdale High School College Counseling Office*

### **Get Ready: Learn by Example**

Read a number of others' essays, good and bad

### **Get Set: Avoid the 9 Deadly Sins**

The Trip and/or Outward Bound (how I broadened my horizons)  
My Favorite Things (a list of fluffy things that tell you I'm nice)  
Miss America (how I will work for world peace)  
The Jock (how I learned the noble value, the great lesson)  
The Three D's (discipline, determination, diversity)  
Tales of My Success (how I overcame adversity to win the day)  
Pet or Relative Death (how I learned to value life)  
Selling and Telling – The Autobiography (I was born at a young age)

### **Go: Drafting Do's**

Tell a Story Only You Can Tell  
Make It a Slice of Life – A Moment in Time  
Provide Rich Detail  
Use Metaphors  
Be Very Selective With Adjectives  
Editing: Spend a lot of time polishing

### **A Good Lead**

The Anecdote (dive into the story, almost mid-stream)  
The Why? (makes the reader ask the question)  
The Shocker (takes the reader off balance)  
The Curmudgeon (refutes conventional wisdom)  
The Split (there are two types of people...)  
The Confession (become the reader's confidant)  
Stating the Obvious (that was hidden)

### **A Good Ending**

Tied to the lead – but without repeating

### **Revising**

Use informal voice  
Make sure the tone sounds like you  
Cut weak and waffle words (clearly, somewhat, rather, kind of)  
Trim fat and simplify!  
Cut (who, what, which, that, thing)  
Swap: Lazy uses of "to be"  
Cut: Needless restatements  
Swap: Vague verbs - become, get, do, have  
Swap: Passive verbs – use active voice  
Prefer punch over perfect grammar