

**Application essays which is better?**

*In each case below, decide (with a partner if you can) which of the two options is better (or least bad):*

Strange or clichéd

Boasting or missing out achievements

Very short or very long

Detailed examination of few points, or lots of information

Mainly about your past, mainly about your present, or mainly about your future

Editing it yourself or getting other people to edit it for you

Writing an interesting story and drawing conclusions from it, or writing a story to illustrate a particular point

Only using simple language, or using complex language but not all of it correctly

Simply written, or with lots of complex language and slightly difficult to follow

Using words from your own language such as names of foods and then translating them (e.g. “tom yum, which is a very spicy Thai soup”), using those words and trying to make the meaning clear from context, or only using English translations or explanations

Personal or written in an impersonal style

Focusing on your strengths and achievements, or focusing on overcoming weaknesses and difficulties

Focusing on difficulties, or focusing on overcoming those difficulties

A chronological account of your life, or a couple of important moments or people from your life

Chronological or non-chronological

A book which influenced me, or a person who influenced me

Lots of flashbacks, two flashbacks, or just one flashback

Lots of examples to illustrate and give evidence for each point, or one or two for each

A standard essay on an original topic, or an original essay on a common topic

### Suggested answers

- Strange or clichéd – These are both bad, but clichéd is probably marginally worse as “strange” can be another way of saying “original”
- Boasting or missing out achievements – The former is probably worse. The latter is okay as long as you include a couple of important achievements.
- Very short or very long – Very long is probably worse, as people reading essays don’t have time to read very long pieces and you will need to be succinct in your academic writing on the course.
- Detailed examination of few points, or lots of information – The former is better, even though this will inevitably mean missing out something that you wanted to include.
- Mainly about your past, present or future – It depends, but you will certainly need to mention the future and not concentrate too much on the past.
- Editing it yourself or getting other people to edit it for you – You should probably do both, but with you editing first and not automatically accepting what other people say.
- Writing an interesting story and drawing conclusions from it, or writing a story to illustrate a particular point – Both fine. You could try both and see which makes a better essay.
- Only using simple language, or using complex language but not all of it correctly – The former is probably worse, as it can make your ideas also seem simple and will be very dull to read. In the latter case, you can get someone to proofread or edit it afterwards.
- Simply written, or with lots of complex language and slightly difficult to follow – The former is better.
- Using words from your own language such as names of foods and then translating them (e.g. “tom yum, which is a very spicy Thai soup”), using those words and trying to make the meaning clear from context, or only using English translations or explanations – It depends. Try them all each time and see which works out better while staying within any word limits.
- Personal or written in an impersonal style – Personal is usually better, but it can depend on the essay question.
- Focusing on your strengths and achievements, or focusing on overcoming weaknesses and difficulties – A combination is probably best.
- Focusing on difficulties, or focusing on overcoming those difficulties – The latter is much better.
- A chronological account of your life, or a couple of important moments or people from your life – The latter is much better. You shouldn’t include any details which aren’t relevant to your application, and the former would also be boring to read and probably written in quite basic language.
- Chronological or non-chronological – As long as the non-chronological time frame chosen is easy to understand and not pretentious, the latter is probably better. The former tends to lead to spending too much time on irrelevant details.
- A book which influenced me, or a person who influenced me – Both fine.
- Lots of flashbacks, two flashbacks, or just one flashback – The first is the worst. One is usually enough, but there is no need to limit yourself if more make a better essay.
- Lots of examples to illustrate and give evidence for each point, or one or two for each – The latter is probably better.
- A standard essay on an original topic, or an original essay on a common topic – Both fine.