

00:01 Hi, everyone.
00:02 Welcome to the Suffolk University Essay Writing Workshop.
00:05 My name is Dan Connolly.
00:06 I'm the managing associate director
00:08 of Undergraduate Admissions.
00:10 I have been working at Suffolk for a total of 10 years,
00:14 but I've been in college admissions for almost 20.
00:17 So quite a bit of time,
00:18 quite a few essays I've read in my life.
00:19 And with me today is my colleague, Cameron.
00:22 Hi there, I'm Cameron Coelho.
00:23 I am an admission counselor at Suffolk University
00:25 and I've been working here for around eight months now.
00:29 So basically brand new to the business, which is great.
00:32 We've got two different perspectives.
00:34 Hopefully we're gonna be able to share a lot of information
00:36 that will be helpful for you
00:38 as you go through the college admissions process.
00:40 I'm sure the idea of writing an essay is very stressful
00:43 and could be daunting.
00:45 So hopefully today's gonna give you
00:47 a little bit of confidence
00:49 before you take on that assignment.
00:51 Definitely, yep.
00:52 A little bit about Suffolk though, before we dive into it.
00:54 So for those interested in possibly applying
00:56 to Suffolk later on, besides the university,
00:59 I wanna go over some of the quick facts, if you will,
01:02 about Suffolk and Downtown Boston.
01:05 So we've got approximately 4400 undergrads,
01:08 about 1,000 graduate students,
01:10 and about 1,000 law school students.
01:12 So we're considered medium in terms of size
01:15 when you look up those view books or guidebooks.
01:18 When it comes to location, as I mentioned, Downtown Boston,
01:21 so right in the middle of the city,
01:22 right by the Boston Common,
01:23 right by the State House for Massachusetts,
01:28 right by Faneuil Hall and the aquarium,
01:30 so right in the middle of everything.
01:32 We also have a second location in Madrid, Spain as well.
01:36 So you've got those opportunities to study abroad,
01:39 of course, through that campus.
01:41 But then there's 36 other countries where you can study too.
01:44 So you're not just limited to Spain,
01:45 but of course it makes it very easy to do that.
01:48 We've got 70 plus academic programs,
01:50 so something for everyone, we think.
01:52 Most popular major for freshmen is undecided,
01:55 so you don't have to know what you wanna do.
01:56 But certainly there's lots of choice here
01:58 and that's kind of the name of the game.
01:59 You can jump between programs, you can have double majors,

02:02 you can do double minors.
02:03 Lots of opportunity to customize.
02:06 And I'm gonna have Cameron talk a little bit
02:07 about the application process
02:09 when it comes to the types of ways you can apply to Suffolk.
02:12 Yeah, so there are two different ways
02:14 that students can apply to Suffolk University,
02:16 so there's two different deadlines.
02:18 The first one is Early Action,
02:19 that is usually around November 15th.
02:21 The second one is Regular Decision, around February 15th.
02:24 And the biggest difference between those two
02:25 is if students apply Early Action,
02:28 then all students get their decisions on the same day
02:30 and you also know earlier.
02:32 And then with the way Regular Decision works,
02:35 we send out decisions on a rolling deadline basis.
02:39 Great.
02:40 So yeah, so we will get started.
02:43 So first, we started, we sort of wanted to start off
02:47 with letting students know that the most important aspect
02:50 of the essay is that admission counselors
02:52 really just want to learn about who you are.
02:55 The essay really gives you an opportunity
02:57 to show a unique side of yourself
03:00 that we maybe might not have seen otherwise
03:03 based on other parts of your application.
03:05 So yeah, so these are some topics that students in the past
03:08 have written about
03:09 in order to portray their authentic selves.
03:12 So some people use influential stories in their life,
03:15 some transformative moments
03:16 that they maybe have experienced,
03:19 their passions, their motivations,
03:20 and also sometimes students
03:21 write about how others in their lives have impacted them.
03:28 So these are some helpful steps
03:29 that Dan will sort of go through really quickly.
03:32 So brainstorming.
03:36 There can't be enough said about brainstorming
03:37 and the value in this process and by doing that.
03:41 It's not gonna come to you right away,
03:44 the idea for your essay.
03:45 Sometimes you gotta workshop it.
03:46 You gotta come up with these ideas, throw it on paper,
03:48 see what you're comfortable writing about.
03:51 You've gotta be able to, once again,
03:53 as Cameron mentioned in that last slide that, you know,
03:56 have that personality and have that passion
03:58 come through in some capacity.
04:00 So doesn't always come naturally.
04:02 Sometimes it takes a couple, you know, moments
04:05 to really ponder what might make the most sense for you.
04:09 But that's the whole point of brainstorming

04:12 is to get it on paper, to figure out,
04:14 all right, what would you be comfortable taking on?
04:16 And what do you think you could write about
04:17 and share with the different colleges you're applying to?
04:21 That, I can't say enough about.
04:23 So when it comes to the Common Application essay prompts,
04:27 we're gonna show those a little bit later on
04:29 and what those were this past year.
04:31 They could change for next year.
04:32 And so always important to look at what those prompts are
04:35 from year to year, but we'll share a few of those.
04:37 But the bottom line, once again,
04:40 is you wanna pick out something
04:41 that you're gonna be comfortable writing about.
04:44 That's the most important thing
04:45 'cause it's gonna be your personality,
04:48 it's gonna be specific to you.
04:51 What else do you wanna add, Cameron?
04:54 I would say a really important thing to remember
04:56 is to definitely take your time.
04:58 Don't be afraid, again,
04:59 to try out several different subjects.
05:01 Definitely seek out guidance from others,
05:04 share it with others, write several drafts,
05:07 and don't be afraid to start over, yes,
05:08 if you're not happy with what you have at the moment.
05:13 Yeah.
05:14 Yeah, after talking to a lot of students,
05:15 you'll see that they've written their essay
05:17 probably a couple different times
05:18 in a couple different ways.
05:19 And as we've been mentioning, you know, you might say,
05:22 you know, "I like this topic,"
05:23 and you start writing about it
05:25 and all of a sudden you might get to one saying,
05:26 "You know what, I don't wanna write about this anymore."
05:28 It's okay, it's okay to start over and start from scratch.
05:30 So review, review, review.
05:32 It's what we always say.
05:33 It's one of the big themes throughout this presentation
05:35 is gonna be going it over the old fashioned way,
05:38 having others look at it.
05:40 That's the best way to really put together
05:43 the best piece of work possible.
05:44 You wanna put your best foot forward
05:46 with this writing sample and that's the way to do it.
05:49 Definitely.
05:51 Okay.
05:52 So your essay really allows you to demonstrate
05:56 your writing ability, but also your personality.
05:59 These are just some important factors
06:01 that we want students to keep in mind
06:03 while they're writing their essay.
06:05 For one, it's always really good to be concise.

06:07 You wanna be as concise as you can
06:09 so that you can make your essay clear
06:11 and understandable for admission counselors.
06:14 So I sort of have just an example of two different sentences
06:18 and how they're saying the same thing
06:19 but in different ways.
06:21 So first sentence is a student could say,
06:23 "When thinking into the near future,
06:25 my initial thought is that I want to thoroughly enjoy
06:27 whatever it is I choose to do and make a career out of it."
06:31 Or you could say, "When I think of my future career,
06:34 I want to love what I do."
06:35 So those messages are very similar,
06:37 but one is a little more wordy than the other.
06:40 So it sort of just shows that being as concise as you can be
06:44 is really helpful, 'cause it also gives you more freedom
06:47 to include different ideas as well.
06:50 But yeah, so also being free of errors
06:53 and having it flow nicely is very important.
06:56 The best way to do that, to sort of figure out
06:59 if it flows really nicely is to read it aloud sometimes.
07:02 That way you can sort of hear
07:03 whether or not the essay flows smoothly
07:06 the way that you want it
07:07 or if something doesn't sound right.
07:09 So that's a really important tip.
07:13 Having one theme is very important,
07:14 talking about the same subject.
07:16 Remembering your audience.
07:18 So I've definitely read a few essays
07:20 where I've read a very impressive and interesting essay,
07:24 but the subject can be a little too objective
07:26 and it might sound like it's more of a school project
07:29 for a teacher about a different subject
07:32 that doesn't necessarily pertain as much to you.
07:35 So the essay should definitely have your own personal voice
07:38 in it and should be about topics that pertain to you
07:41 about your life.
07:43 But yeah, and be creative.
07:44 But don't feel pressured to do something super creative
07:47 or write something that's never been written before.
07:50 Being creative, we put this on here
07:52 'cause we just want students to know that that is an option,
07:55 to be creative if you choose to be.
07:58 I had one essay where they wrote a poem and that was fine.
08:01 Just you could tell the student was very comfortable
08:02 in writing it.
08:04 It did a great job of, once again, hitting their personality
08:08 and touching upon a topic they felt really comfortable with
08:11 and the format they used was in terms of poetry.
08:15 So certainly something you can think about.
08:18 It doesn't have to be within certain boxes
08:21 or confines of what everyone else has done, so.
08:24 I would say that is pretty creative.

08:27 Okay.
08:29 So one of the big things that we'll see
08:32 in our positions as admissions counselors is the list.
08:37 So in the essay, we'll see students
08:40 wanting to talk about lots of different things.
08:42 Once again, you don't have a lot of space.
08:44 It's, you know, page and a half, two pages at the most.
08:48 Not a lot of room to fit everything you want in there.
08:50 So one of those big things that we ask students to avoid
08:54 is coming up with lists of whether it's activities
08:58 or accomplishments, whatever it might be.
09:01 You wanna stick to a theme.
09:03 So maybe that theme is being involved.
09:05 Maybe that's your theme.
09:06 You wouldn't wanna then talk
09:08 about each individual thing you've been involved in.
09:11 It's gotta be, as Cameron mentioned earlier on,
09:14 you wanna be concise, you wanna be to the point,
09:16 you wanna use that word count to the best of your ability.
09:21 And by doing those lists,
09:22 you're gonna find yourself going in directions
09:24 that don't keep it on track.
09:25 So avoid those lists.
09:27 Yeah, even just one small anecdote
09:30 from one activity that you do can be enough.
09:33 It doesn't have to be a total summation
09:35 of all the things that you do,
09:37 especially 'cause there will be,
09:38 if you use the Common Application,
09:40 a place to list your activities.
09:42 So we'll already see them as well.
09:44 Yeah, that's a good point, Cameron.
09:45 And in the Common App and also if you use the Suffolk App,
09:48 there's a place to list those activities or upload a resume.
09:52 That's your chance really to go into detail
09:54 about each of those accomplishments
09:56 or, once again, activities.
09:57 But as we mentioned earlier on, the theme,
10:00 if you wanna talk about how involved you are,
10:02 it's why being involved is important.
10:04 That's the best way to kind of bring it together.
10:07 Now, being too objective, that's something,
10:09 as Cameron mentioned a little bit earlier too.
10:13 You know, there's ways to view something in a way
10:18 that allows you to put your own personal spin on,
10:22 maybe it's a current event
10:23 or something happening in your life.
10:25 But that's the key, you wanna put your personal approach
10:30 or voice, as we mentioned here in the slide,
10:33 to any of those topics.
10:34 So, you know, as much as we like to read about, you know,
10:39 research or whatever it might be,
10:40 you wanna make that connection to you as a person.
10:44 Anything you wanna add to that, Cameron?

10:46 No, I think you hit it pretty spot on, yeah.
10:51 Now the other thing, one of the big mistakes we see
10:55 is, we've already listed, but probably the biggest
10:58 is when a student writes about
11:00 how someone has influenced them
11:02 or someone who's been influential in their life.
11:05 There's usually too much time spent on the other person.
11:09 So we learn a lot about that other person,
11:11 whether it's a grandparent, a relative, a friend,
11:13 or whoever it might be.
11:14 We hear a lot about that person
11:16 and then it's very little time that's saved
11:19 for the person writing the essay.
11:21 So, you know, when you're picking a topic like that,
11:24 don't take the focus off of you.
11:26 Once again, this is your chance to have your personality
11:28 come through in the writing.
11:29 We're gonna learn a little bit about it
11:31 from the activities, from recommendations,
11:34 but that essay's our chance
11:35 to get to know you in that detail.
11:37 So when you talk about that influence,
11:40 you've gotta blend it in to, once again,
11:42 how that person has impacted you,
11:44 not how that person has been influential,
11:47 if that makes sense.
11:50 So I've read probably 20,000 essays in my career.
11:55 Cameron, what would you say for you?
11:59 I would say a little less than that. (laughs)
12:03 I would say less than 1,000
12:04 but maybe 800 to, around there, maybe 800.
12:08 And that sounds about right.
12:12 The one part I would say with a topic
12:16 is I think students get caught up
12:18 by the topic being the impressive part of the essay.
12:23 The truth is, when you have the volume of essays
12:26 being written to each school, I mean,
12:29 once again, we're reading close to 1,000 each
12:33 for applications each season,
12:35 you know, the topic isn't what we're gonna remember.
12:38 It's gonna be how that person wrote about the topic.
12:41 So, you know, I will sometimes say
12:42 with the other admission counselors
12:43 about how there's always someone
12:44 who's gonna have a better topic,
12:46 it's gonna be more impressive.
12:47 There's, you know, you're never gonna top the next person.
12:49 So it's not, once again, it's not the idea of it.
12:52 It's how you write about it,
12:53 how you make that connection to you as a person.
12:55 So for me, one of my favorite essays of all time
12:58 was about a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.
13:00 The student, that's all they would eat
13:02 was peanut butter and jelly sandwiches

13:03 for most of their life.
13:05 But then when they entered high school,
13:06 they started to try out new food
13:09 and they started to get involved in more
13:11 than just going home after school.
13:13 They got involved in student government,
13:15 community service, they got a part-time job.
13:17 So with the new food,
13:19 they also got involved in their community
13:22 and helped shape this person into the person they are today.
13:26 So once again, that was very creative.
13:28 It was really well done.
13:30 So just an example.
13:31 Started off with a sandwich,
13:32 turned into something much bigger.
13:33 So Cameron, you've got a favorite too, right?
13:36 Oh yeah, yeah.
13:37 I read an essay where a student wrote about a goldfish
13:41 that she won in a contest,
13:43 which doesn't seem like the most impressive thing
13:45 right off the bat, but it was actually really amazing.
13:48 She brought in really important themes from her life
13:51 about lessons and responsibility.
13:53 She related it to other things that are important to her.
13:56 So yeah, that was definitely
13:57 one of the most memorable ones that I've read.
14:01 So once again, topic,
14:03 try not to get caught up on the topic too much
14:05 as it is finding a topic
14:07 that you could put your personality into
14:10 and your own voice into.
14:14 Okay.
14:17 So these right here are the Common Application's
14:21 essay prompts of this past year.
14:23 So these prompts can be a really great place
14:26 for students to start off.
14:28 It has a lot of the themes
14:29 that we've already been talking about as well
14:31 throughout this presentation.
14:33 But important thing to note
14:34 is that, if you can see there on the bottom,
14:37 the Common Application does allow students
14:39 to write an essay on any topic of your choice as well.
14:44 So there's a lot to choose from,
14:45 but there's also a lot of freedom as well.
14:49 Anything you wanna add, Dan?
14:50 I was just gonna say with the topic of your choice
14:52 that that's the one I always recommend.
14:54 That way you can have the freedom
14:57 to be able to write about what you want
14:59 and not feel confined to the prompt.
15:00 But once again, those prompts are helpful
15:02 because if you are stumped with what to do,
15:05 I mean, this can really help with that guidance, so.

15:08 Really can help with the brainstorming.
15:10 (chuckles) Okay.
15:13 So yeah, that concludes this presentation.
15:17 If you have questions, feel free to reach out.
15:20 We are available Monday through Friday.
15:23 There's some Saturdays we're open too.
15:25 Going to our website,
15:27 checking out the visit calendar if you wanna come visit.
15:30 Certainly Boston is a super exciting city,
15:33 always something going on,
15:34 and being where we are in Downtown Boston
15:36 can make a whole day out of it.
15:37 But feel free to reach out,
15:39 we've got the contact page too, written there.
15:43 If you don't wanna write down that web address,
15:45 you can just go to the website,
15:46 click on Undergraduate Admission, then click on Contact Us,
15:50 and you can see who your admission counselor is.
15:52 We split up the whole country amongst our team.
15:55 So you can actually meet one-on-one
15:57 with an admission counselor.
16:00 Yeah, well thank you so much.
16:02 We really wish you the best of luck
16:04 in your whole college search process.
16:07 And thank you again. (chuckles)
16:09 Thank you, have a good day.
16:11 Have a good day.