

How Wildewood Approaches the College Essay

Seek Truth: Finding Your Student's Voice

One of the values at the center of Wildewood's Core of Learning is "Seek truth." When it comes to the college essay, this value means something very specific: **helping a student find their own voice in their writing.**

What are you going to write about? This is the question that begins many conversations about the college essay. This question is, however, inefficient (at best). Worse, this question encourages people *other than the student* to start feeding the student ideas about what the student "should" write about. **It's very difficult—if not impossible—for students to find their authentic voice when writing about someone else's idea.**

As experienced writing teachers, we know the questions that lead to students' most authentic and persuasive writing. Those questions are highly individualized, often personal, and at Wildewood, always informed by decades of experience teaching teenagers.

Trait, not topic. At its core, the college essay is not really about a topic. Instead, it is a reflection about who a student has been, who they are now, and who they want to become. Done well, the college essay surfaces a character trait that doesn't reveal itself anywhere else in the application. **The best outcome—one that can influence a college admissions decision—begins with the student's own reflection.**

Trust. Successful coaching on a college essay requires a tremendous amount of trust. Many students have never been asked (never mind been *inspired*) to use their own written voice in a vulnerable space. The college essay, however, requires just that. The college essay is one of the most awesome opportunities for student learning and growth at one of the most pivotal times in their life. **How we support them with that will teach them a lot about how we believe in them. If we do it for them, we are essentially telling our students that we don't believe in them. We are robbing them of an incredible learning opportunity.** Perhaps worst of all, if we write this for them, we rob them of the pride they will feel knowing *they* earned a college acceptance.

Finally, please remember: they can do it! Wildewood's role is to provide the space, process, and trust for the student's voice to surface. They can do it. Plus, once they get to college, they will have to! 😊

