Success Story
Write Your Future Now

MINDI TRIMBLE MENTORING

SHOULD I USE A.I. WHEN WRITING MY COLLEGE ESSAY?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR YOU (THE STUDENT)

What do my schools say is permissible when it comes to AI use?

What do the schools I'm applying to (and application software such as The Common Application) say about the use of AI in college application essays?

Would this AI tool (e.g., ChatGPT or any LLM/Large Language Model) use my data to train?

Is this AI space a "walled garden," a space I can safely use without others learning from my work?

Is the information provided by the AI accurate?

Can it provide resources/URLs of authoritative sources? Can a verified human expert confirm this information?

What have you used AI for in the past, and how has it changed your writing?

For better or worse? What are you learning?

What might you gain from writing a college admissions essay without generative AI? With it?

Never feel pressure to join a trend just for FOMO or the sense that you're "slow," or "behind," or "not up to speed." Human-generated essays are still cool and always will be.

Discuss academic honesty when it comes to AI with your teachers and parents.

What are your thoughts on the rules of academic honesty below?

VALUES CHECK FOR CURRENT AI MODELS

What do the trusted adults in my life think about the use of my data for training?

Are they okay with it? Am I?

How do I feel about AI's use of copyrighted data?

Does the use of these systems, at this stage, fit my values? (Feel free to read and research more, such as "How Tech Giants Cut Corners to Harvest Data for AI.")

See "AI's Carbon Footprint Is Bigger Than You Think."

How do I feel about AI's carbon footprint?

What are authoritative sources when seeking guidance for writing a personal essay?

What is accurate, verified, original advice for writing a college essay? Can this AI source be trusted or does it need to be verified afterwards?

What do my parents/guardians say about this information related to my data's privacy and my informed consent?)

If I put my personal information into the tool, how is it being used?

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WHAT IS ACADEMIC HONESTY? (ACCORDING TO SUCCESS STORY & MINDI TRIMBLE MENTORING)

Never copy more than 2 words in a row

Unless you are quoting someone or a resource—which is not often done in a personal statement anyway. The larger point is you don't want to ever copy more than 2 words in a row from an AI-generated sentence.

How can you say it with new words and a new order?

Reword and rearrange (aka paraphrase)

Common Knowledge vs. Unique Ideas

Common knowledge is information that is easily found, that is already proven, and is not innovative combinations of multiple ideas. For example: the distance between Earth and the Sun. Unique ideas might be your take on why the distance between the Earth and the Sun is important to you as a future NASA scientist.

If it's someone else's idea, give them props. So if AI wrote a sentence, give AI credit. Same with your dad, or your neighbor, or your English teacher....

Give credit where credit is due.

THE 80-95% RULE (FOR YOU, FOR AI/BOTS, FOR TUTORS, FOR COACHES, FOR MOM OR DAD, FOR YOUR COUSIN)

If others encouraged me to follow ideas, did I riff off them and make them my own? Phrase them my own way? Does my coach or tutor take dictation from conversations with me, rather than putting their own words on the page?

Did I generate most of the ideas?

Did I find my own words for most of the essay?

95% or more?

80% or more?

Did I practice critical thinking and come to my own, synthesized insights?

Did I develop my writing craft?

Did I get better at writing skills? Did I revise every single sentence?

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THE SUCCESS STORY & MINDI TRIMBLE MENTORING GUIDE FOR AI USE

Don't ask AI...

- ...to generate your essay topic from scratch. Generate your own ideas.
- ...if your topic is okay without running the answer by verified Experts too (coach, counselor, or expert online resources such as College Essay Guy (look at their suggested topics).
- ...to write whole sentences or paragraphs for you
- ...to read and edit your entire essay unless you and your parents are okay with the Terms of Use (such as using your data to train).

Maybe ask AI...

- ...to give feedback on your top three essay topics (but if you do, make sure to double check with a verified Expert)
- ...to suggest a new structure/outline if you give it an outline (again, weigh the risks of using free AI that trains on your data; are you willing to give away your outline for training?)

Do ask AI...

- "Can you give me 4-5 ways to get rid of my writer's block?"
- "Can you give me 3 to 5 courses in the pre-med major at Northwestern that I might be able to take? Please provide syllabi for those courses."

Only do these with a walled garden, unless you're cool with an LLM training on your essay.

- "Which brainstorming details might show college readiness? Which should I expand? Why?"
- "Can you ask questions to help me be more insightful about my topic?"
- "Can you point out where I need transitions? Please do not write the transitions for me."
- "Can you help me cut this essay down to 650 words?"
- "Can you find comma splices and explain why these are errors, like I'm a 5th grader?"

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