



## Application essays and personality

*Which of these is it most important to show about yourself in your university application essay?*

- Ambitious
- Brave/ Courageous
- Creative
- Curious
- Diligent/ Hard working
- Efficient
- Energetic
- Extrovert
- Flexible
- Humble
- Idealistic
- Independent/ Self-sufficient
- Logical
- Mature
- Open-minded
- Organised
- Patient
- Proactive
- Punctual
- Responsible/ Dependable
- Resilient/ Determined
- Sociable
- Sympathetic
- Systematic
- Well-rounded

*Put the best adjectives above in order from one to ten, with the most important thing to show in an application essay at the top.*

*Compare your answers with someone else if you can and negotiate a new list that both agree on.*

*Choose one of the adjectives near the top of the list and tell or write a story that illustrates that personality trait. If you are working with someone else, when you have finished they should guess if your story is true, partly based on the truth, or totally made up.*

*Choose one of your true stories and work together with your partner to add details to make it as interesting and relevant as you can, including evidence for any positive statements you make about yourself but avoiding boasting.*

*If your story includes positive personality adjectives, try taking them out and see whether the essay works better without them or can be changed to do so.*

*Which of these negative personality words do you think it is okay to mention as a weakness?*

- Emotional
- Moody
- Disorganised
- Obsessive
- Unsociable

*Brainstorm other negative personality adjectives and choose three more that might be okay to mention.*

*What could you say to mitigate the ones that you do think are acceptable to mention?*

### **Suggested answers - Comments on the personality adjectives**

- Ambitious – This can be a negative word if it means “over-ambitious”, especially in some cultures, but in certain countries and for certain subjects it can be seen as a good thing, especially if it basically means “motivated”
- Brave/ Courageous – Physical bravery isn’t relevant. If it means “proactive” and “resilient”, it could be a good thing.
- Creative – Always positive.
- Curious – This is an important point that people rarely mention, especially if it means a desire to ask questions and find things out.
- Diligent/ Hard working – This is important but basically taken for granted in someone applying for a top university. Too much emphasis on this might make you seem that you lack creativity or other positive aspects.
- Efficient – Time management is important for studying, but make sure it doesn’t make you seem inflexible.
- Energetic – This is obviously a good thing, but not all cultures share the idea that you can do anything if you try hard enough and you might also want to also show proof of some innate talent.
- Extrovert – You don’t want to seem like a party animal, but some mention of this can help offset any impression of being a stay-home swot with few social skills.
- Flexible – This is very important, and more so in English speaking countries than in some other cultures.
- Humble – This isn’t really relevant to your studies, but explaining positive things about yourself without boasting is certainly important in your application.
- Idealistic – If you can tie your principles to your future studies it could be good, but make sure you don’t seem like someone who will be preaching to everyone you meet or that you are inflexible.
- Independent/ Self-sufficient – This is very important at university, especially in Northern European and North American cultures and especially for post-graduate studies. If you come from one of those places, you might not need to spend too much time on this as it will be taken for granted.
- Logical – This is an important factor, especially for some courses, but is difficult to talk about in an interesting way and back up with evidence. Instead, you should try to make sure that your essay is organised in a logical way, therefore showing this trait.

- Mature – This is only really important to show if the course will especially need maturity or they might think you lack it, e.g. if you are young or will be moving to a more challenging place than where you come from.
- Open-minded – This is very important both in your studies and in your interactions with other people on campus and in your future working life. You might want to especially emphasize this if your culture has a reputation (however undeserved) for the opposite.
- Organised – See Efficient above.
- Patient – This is only really to certain professions or to moving to a less developed country, and there is a danger that emphasizing it could make you seem quite passive.
- Proactive – This is important, especially in some cultures such as America and some courses such as MBAs, but there is a thin line between this and pushy/ bossy.
- Punctual – This should be taken for granted so there is no need to mention it. Mentioning something so unimportant might also make it seem like you have few positive things to talk about.
- Responsible/ Dependable – This is unlikely to be relevant to your studies.
- Resilient/ Determined – This is very important to show, almost certainly one of the top ten.
- Sociable – You only need to emphasize this if the rest of your essay doesn't mention human interactions very much.
- Sympathetic – This is unlikely to be relevant to your studies.
- Systematic – This is only relevant to certain subjects like Maths, and even for such people overemphasizing this might make it seem like there is a lack of social skills.
- Well-rounded – This is important but difficult to show in a short essay without adding unnecessary details.