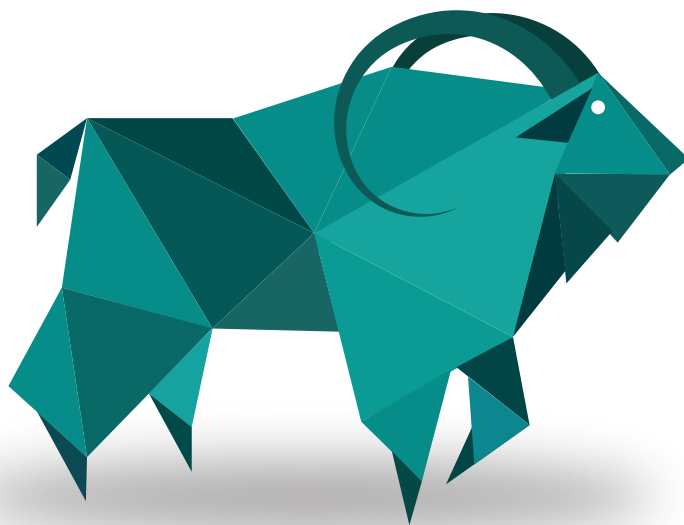




TestInnovators
Prep for Success

ISEE Essay Strategies

by Test Innovators



The ISEE Essay

The essay section is the only unscored portion of the ISEE. A copy is sent to schools along with the score report.

Students will be asked to write an essay in response to the given prompt. Essay prompts will look like this:

If you could take a class to learn anything, what would you choose to learn about, and why?

How schools use the ISEE essay:

The way in which each admissions department uses the ISEE essay varies from school to school, but the following are the main essay elements that will be evaluated:

1. Topic choice
2. Organization and structure
3. Use of examples and details
4. Writing mechanics (spelling, punctuation, grammar)

Tip

Some schools will compare student application essays with the ISEE essay. If the application essays are written very differently from the ISEE essay, schools may disregard the application essays entirely based on an assumption that these may have been written by someone else (a parent, tutor, etc.)

Make sure that you write your own application essays! Parents, guardians, and others can help with the editing process, but the writing should be your own!

Essay Strategies

Topic Choice

Try to choose a topic that showcases something you care about and are familiar with. Remember to write in a way that shows you in a positive light, and that highlights part of your personality. This is your chance to show the school who you are outside of school!

For example, imagine that you are given this prompt:

If you were granted the power to move anywhere in the world, where would you decide to live and why?

Make sure to pick a topic that is personally important to you! Is there a place you have visited that has meant a lot to you, or a place where people that you care about live? Make sure to choose something you know about, care about, and can tell stories about.

Essay Structure

For the personal essay, you should have a clear, focused topic that directly answers the given question. It should be structured much like essays you may have written in school, with an introduction, two or three body paragraphs, and a conclusion.

In the introduction, state your topic and then introduce your two to three reasons—these will be the topics of your body paragraphs. In the body paragraphs, include specific examples from your experiences to support each reason. Then, in the conclusion, rephrase your main points and offer something new to the reader, such as describing how this topic will affect your actions in the future.

Time Management

With limited time to write, managing your time effectively is incredibly important. Start by spending the first 2-5 minutes outlining your work. After you have a plan, go ahead and get writing! This is where you will spend the bulk of your time. You'll need to watch the clock, and save yourself 2-5 minutes at the end for review.

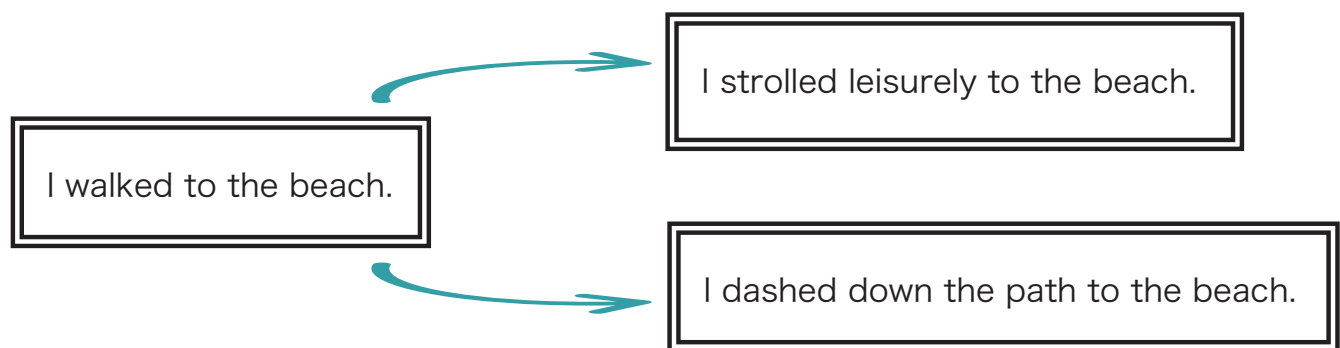
2-5 minutes	Plan
15-20 minutes	Write
2-5 minutes	Revise

Revision

Editing and reviewing at the end is a crucial step in creating a polished writing sample.

Try to catch any grammar, spelling, capitalization, or punctuation mistakes, and change "weak" words to "strong" ones.

Here's an example of writing stronger, more visual sentences:



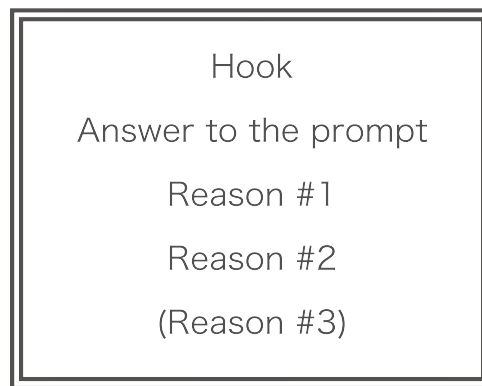
Neatness and organization matter! You want your writing to be as smooth and polished as possible. Make sure you write slowly enough that your handwriting is legible.

Essay Components

The Introduction

The purpose of the introduction is to clearly communicate to the reader what you are going to talk about in the rest of the essay. Your introduction should generally be four to five sentences long. The first sentence is a “hook,” which is a question, description, or anecdote that captures the reader’s attention. The second sentence should restate the question and answer it. The last two to three sentences should provide an overview of your reasons.

Use this as your guide to the sentences in your introduction:



Here's a sample introduction:

As I gazed up at the clear skies and the majesty of Mount Tongariro, I knew that New Zealand was the most amazing place I had ever been. My visit there taught me that, if I had the power to move anywhere in the world, I would want to move to New Zealand. Moving to New Zealand would allow me to spend more quality time with my aunt, uncle, and cousins, who live there. If I moved to New Zealand, I would also be able to hike and explore the amazing, beautiful outdoors.

The Body

The body paragraphs of an essay explain how your reasons support your topic, as well as providing specific details and examples to make your reasons concrete. As much as possible, these reasons should come from your own life and interests.

If you are writing about a place you'd want to move, for example, tell about an important visit you had there. Describe the scenery and the sights and sounds! Use words that appeal to the reader's senses: sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste.

Make sure that your details and examples stay on topic and don't become too longwinded. Your body paragraphs should be about 5-7 sentences long, so make sure to include only relevant information.

Here are sample body paragraphs:

Although my parents and I live in New York City, much of my extended family lives in Wellington, New Zealand. Last summer, we traveled there to visit them. I got to spend time with my cousins, Grace and Alex, who I hadn't seen in years. While we all felt a little shy at first, we soon discovered how much we have in common. My cousin Grace and I both love to skateboard, and Alex and I both were teaching ourselves Japanese! We had a great summer exploring the city together as well as hiking with our parents. If I moved to New Zealand, I would be able to enjoy their company the whole year, not just for a summer.

Because I have spent most of my life in a large city, I am always grateful for opportunities to spend time outdoors. In New Zealand, I was awestruck by the incredible natural beauty that the islands had to offer. One of my favorite trips that we took was to the Tongariro National Park. In the National Park, we rented mountain bikes and biked through the forest, under the watchful eye of Mount Tongariro. It was a truly spectacular experience. If I moved to New Zealand, I would take trips to so many more amazing locations.

The Conclusion

Your last paragraph, the conclusion, wraps up everything you've written about in your essay. In the conclusion, make sure to take 2-3 sentences to restate your topic and reasons. It is very important to use new words and phrases here, so that you don't repeat yourself.

Lastly, give the reader a positive closing statement. This can be a description of your growth, something you have learned related to the topic, or your future plans.

Here's a sample conclusion:

My visit to New Zealand last summer truly solidified that it would be my dream place to live. I valued the time I spent with my family there, and I would love to be able to spend more time learning and growing with my cousins. I also discovered my passion for the outdoors and would be excited to spend time exploring new places. Of course, my family is not moving away from New York any time soon, but that doesn't mean I can't start planning my next New Zealand trip!

Essay Writing Checklist

Topic Choice

- ☐ Is this topic something you know a lot about?
- ☐ Is this topic something you care about?

Specific Details and Examples

- ☐ Do you provide specific details for each of your reasons?
- ☐ Do you have enough examples to fill your body paragraphs?

Organization and Structure

- ☐ Do you have a 4-5 sentence introduction?
- ☐ Do you have 2-3 body paragraphs that are 5-7 sentences long?
- ☐ Do you have a 2-3 sentence conclusion?

Style

- ☐ Is your writing clear?
- ☐ Is your word choice varied?
- ☐ Did you include one or two strong vocabulary words?

Mechanics

- ☐ Did you indent your paragraphs?
- ☐ Is your handwriting neat and legible?
- ☐ Did you check your spelling, capitalization, and punctuation?

Full Sample Essay #1

Prompt: If you were granted the power to move anywhere in the world, where would you decide to live and why?

As I gazed up at the clear skies and the majesty of Mount Tongariro, I knew that New Zealand was the most amazing place I had ever been. My visit there taught me that, if I had the power to move anywhere in the world, I would want to move to New Zealand. Moving to New Zealand would allow me to spend more quality time with my aunt, uncle, and cousins, who live there. If I moved to New Zealand, I would also be able to hike and explore the amazing, beautiful outdoors.

Although my parents and I live in New York City, much of my extended family lives in Wellington, New Zealand. Last summer, we traveled there to visit them. I got to spend time with my cousins, Grace and Alex, who I hadn't seen in years. While we all felt a little shy at first, we soon discovered how much we have in common. My cousin Grace and I both love to skateboard, and Alex and I both were teaching ourselves Japanese! We had a great summer exploring the city together as well as hiking with our parents. If I moved to New Zealand, I would be able to enjoy their company the whole year, not just for a summer.

Because I have spent most of my life in a large city, I am always grateful for opportunities to spend time outdoors. In New Zealand, I was awestruck by the incredible natural beauty that the islands had to offer. One of my favorite trips that we took was to the Tongariro National Park. In the National Park, we rented mountain bikes and biked through the forest, under the watchful eye of Mount Tongariro. It was a truly spectacular experience. If I moved to New Zealand, I would take trips to so many more amazing locations.

My visit to New Zealand last summer truly solidified that it would be my dream place to live. I valued the time I spent with my family there, and I would love to be able to spend more time learning and growing with my cousins. I also discovered my passion for the outdoors and would be excited to spend time exploring new places. Of course, my family is not moving away from New York any time soon, but that doesn't mean I can't start planning my next New Zealand trip!

Full Sample Essay #2

Prompt: What is something you have accomplished that has made a great impact on you?

Last spring, when the winners of the yearly essay contest were announced at an assembly, I felt nervous but had no expectation of winning. Imagine my astonishment when the principal called my name—I had won an award for the best essay in the school district! More than any other piece of schoolwork, the process of writing this essay made a great impact on my goals and values. It has helped me become more confident in my writing abilities, cementing my desire to someday become a journalist. Additionally, since I had worked very hard on my essay, this accomplishment has taught me that hard work truly does pay off.

Although I have long enjoyed writing, I never thought that I was good enough to become a professional writer. I was enthusiastic about my writing, but always found fault with my work. Last year, when the essay contest was first announced, I felt passionate about the topic, Water Conservation, and conducted research for months to finish my essay. Although it was difficult at times, I surprised myself by my determination and persistence throughout the process, which showed me that perhaps I can pursue writing as a career. Someday, I hope to become a journalist, reporting on and arguing for important issues such as water conservation.

Writing my Water Conservation essay also taught me how important it is to be studious even with subjects that I enjoy. Because I enjoy writing and it comes easily to me, sometimes I don't put in the effort that I should. For the essay contest, however, I spent countless hours honing my argument, organizing my ideas, and making sure that my sentences were strong and vibrant. Even though I was tired from my homework and swim practice, I took the time to work hard on and complete an essay that I believed in. When I submitted my work, I felt truly proud of my writing and satisfied that I had created a meaningful essay.

Because of this positive experience last year, I have grown as both a writer and student. In my classes this year, I have approached my writing assignments with gusto, learning from each mistake, and trusting that I do have the capabilities to be an accomplished writer someday. I have also applied the work ethic I learned through writing the essay to my other classes at school. I can't wait to see the rest of my hard work pay off! Although I may never win another award, I can rest in the satisfaction of working hard and doing what I love.

Examples of Student Essays

Read through the following essays and note strengths and weaknesses. Note any mistakes, including topic choice, details and examples, structure, style, and mechanics.

Prompt: If you could gain one new skill, what would it be and why?

If I could gain one new skill, I would want it to be photography, so that I could take a picture of something amazing and never seen before. Why would you want to do this? Well, for three reasons. The first being that photography is an incredible way to capture images of objects that are not just boring, the second reason is that people would appreciate the photographs I would take. Now, and this is the most important reason. I would want to share my many photographic experiences with other people to not only appreciate the moment but to be a part of it.

As a photographer, I would take pictures of all kinds of amazing objects. A good photographer knows how watch their surroundings to find cook things to take pictures of, I also think that I would be a good photographer because I love to be aware of my surroundings. As easy as it can be to not watch around you or pay attention to the beauty of life. That is one of the primary things that a photographer must do. I also enjoy looking at beautiful photographs taken by professional photographers. For example, horses, whales, and the beauty of the ocean.

In conclusion, these are the reasons that I would be a professional photographer, taking a picture of something amazing.

Notes: _____



Edited Student Essay

Prompt: If you could gain one new skill, what would it be and why?

If I could gain one new skill, I would want it to be photography, so that I could take a picture of something amazing and never seen before. ~~Why would you want to do this? Well, for three reasons. The first being that~~ Photography is an incredible way to capture images of objects that are not just boring, ~~the second reason is that p~~People would appreciate the photographs I would take. ~~Now, and this is the most important reason. I would want to share my many photographic experiences with other people to not only appreciate the moment but to be a part of it~~ could experience what I had seen through my photographs.

This introduction rambles and goes on too long. An introduction only needs to be four good sentences.

The student should pick and describe one particular amazing thing they'd like to photograph, so that the essay is more specific.

This sentence is confusing. This possible revision helps to clarify the student's meaning to the reader.

As a photographer, I would take pictures of all kinds of amazing objects. A good photographer knows how to watch their surroundings to find ~~eeeek~~ cool things to take pictures of. I also think that I would be a good photographer because I love to be aware of my surroundings. ~~As easy as it can be to not watch around you or pay attention to the beauty of life.~~ That is one of the primary things that a photographer must do. I also enjoy looking at beautiful photographs taken by professional photographers. For example, horses, whales, and the beauty of the ocean.

This body paragraph should be split into two: one for each main reason. This one long paragraph goes off-topic. It should also include more details and fewer generalizations.

Watch out for sentence fragments!

We finally get some examples here. These should come earlier.

~~In conclusion,~~ These are the reasons that I would be a professional photographer, taking a picture of something amazing.

The conclusion is too short and should do more. How would the student learn or grow from being a photographer?

The student repeats the word "amazing" too many times. Make sure to vary vocabulary words.



Prompt: Who is a historical figure you would like to meet, and why?

Out of all the famous people in history, I think that I would most like to meet George Washington Carver. George Washington Carver was an inventor, who was very dedicated to his work and to helping farmers. He was a botanist, and I care a lot about botany and plants, so he would be a good person for me to meet.

George Washington Carver was born in Missouri, and became interested in plants at a young age, much like me. I remember learning in class that he even had a mini garden as a child, where he nursed sick plants back to health. Can you believe that?

I also have a garden, where I plant tomatoes, beans, and lettuce. Sometimes, the lettuce gets eaten by slugs, which is a real bummer.

In my report I did on him for Mr. Shanahan's class I also learned about how George Washington Carver invented many peanut products for people to use from the crop. He invented peanut butter, for example, and fuel made out of peanuts. He also invented many other products and was a very dedicated researcher. I would like to grow up to become a researcher as well.

One of the things that I really like about George Washington Carver is that he pursued everything that he did out of a desire to help people, not to make money. All of his work helped farmers to survive in areas where the land was not producing many crops anymore.

He never even patented his ideas because he wanted them to be free to others. Now we have George Washington Carver Day.

Overall, my desire to be an inventor and my love for plants means that I have a great enjoyment of George Washington Carver. I would meet him and talk about his inventions for at least a day.

Notes: _____
