

Essay Writing Tip Sheet

Vocabulary: One common way that students unknowingly undercut their own essays is with vocabulary choice.

- Be careful of minimizing the educational program – it is more than a “trip”.
- Be specific and avoid generalizations and monoliths: For example, spending a semester in Tokyo will help you to get to know Japanese culture, however saying you will come to understand “Asian” culture is not accurate.
- Avoid the obvious: For example, “experiencing the culture” is expected during an education abroad program. What specifically about this culture do you hope to better understand and how will you pursue that goal?
- Use vocabulary you are comfortable with – it is better to use a word you know than to attempt to elevate your essay with unfamiliar terms and use them poorly.

Realistic Goal Setting: While setting high standards and lofty goals for yourself is a useful life practice, for the purpose of this essay it is better to be realistic about what you can accomplish during the time you will be abroad. For example, students at an intermediate level of language acquisition will not become fluent after six-weeks abroad. However, six-weeks abroad may lead to more comfortable speaking in front of groups, and improving specific tenses that were previously difficult. Realistic and specific goals indicate that you have a good understanding of the content of your program as well as reasonable expectations for yourself.

Personalize the narrative: Be sure to personalize your essay so that we can best understand why YOU specifically will benefit from your education abroad: Are there classes that are particularly exciting to you or relevant to your academic and professional goals? Do you hope to explore a specific local resource? Perhaps the paintings of an artist you have studied, or texts at a local library you can’t see anywhere else. Or maybe you are a heritage seeker visiting the place your family is from, hoping to learn more about your own history. And be careful to keep personal details relevant to the prompt.

Quality: Be sure to spend time proofreading your essay before submitting it. Spelling and grammatical errors can undermine the strength of your essay. Reading your essay aloud may also help you notice mistakes you previously overlooked. Additionally, writing and submitting your essay in one sitting is not advised – consider writing a first draft and then revising it on another day. Consider asking a friend or classmate to read your essay, or even better – reach out to [The Writing Center](#).

Length: We do not have hard minimum and maximum limitations, but we typically see successful essays fall into the 250-500 word range. Having a very short essay may keep you from making a well-supported argument, but an overly long essay may also weaken your arguments as the points can get lost in the midst of too much information. Keep the content focused and your points concise.