

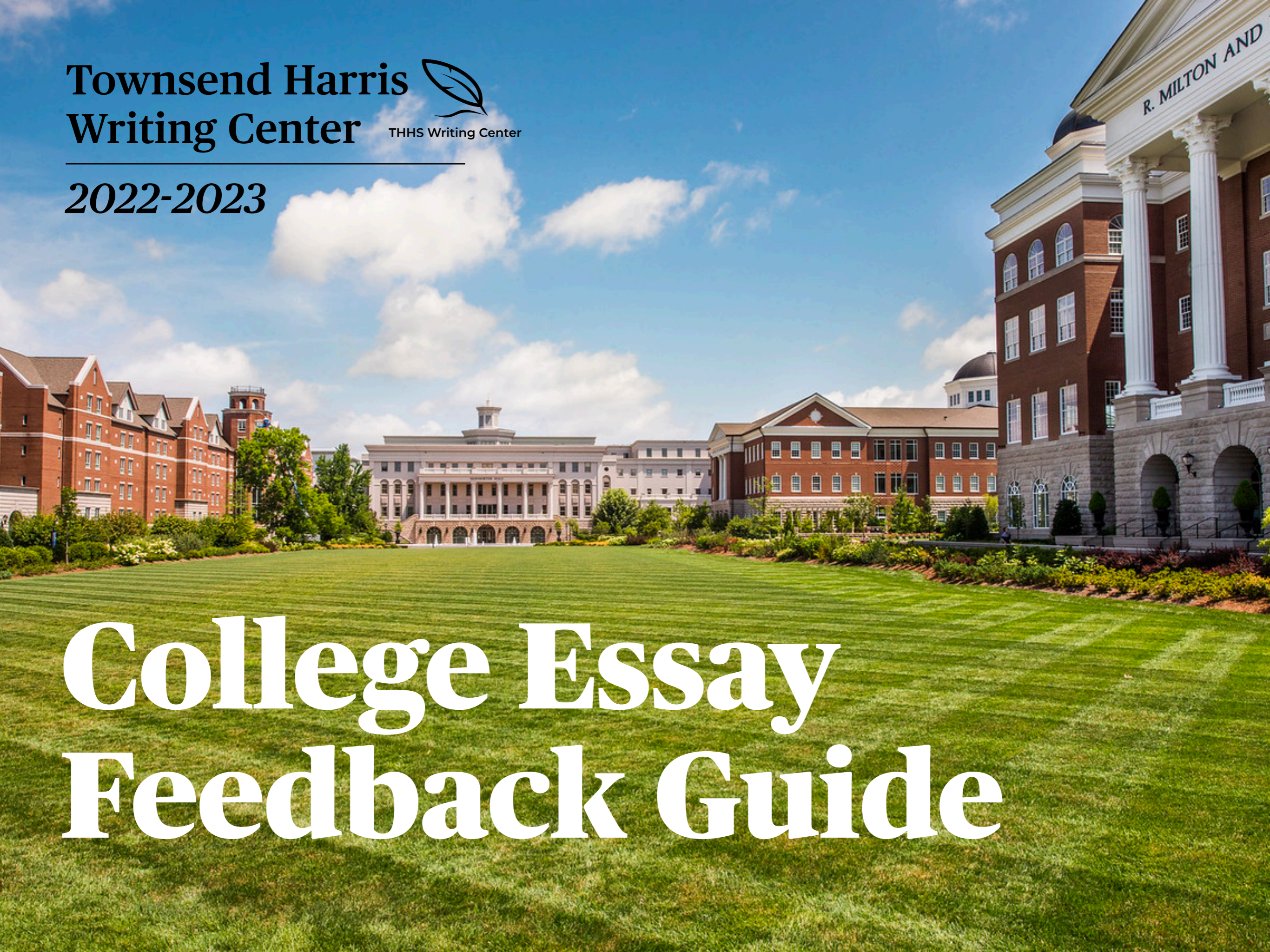
Townsend Harris
Writing Center



THHS Writing Center

2022-2023

College Essay Feedback Guide





THHS Writing Center

Procedures and Expectations

When you meet with your reader, you want to be the one running the show. These are not teachers who are going to tell you “what to fix” or mark up your essay with lots of sentence by sentence edits. Rather, our Writing Center Readers are students who are experienced at readings lots of student work, and they are good “sounding boards” for you during the essay writing process. As such, you should come to the meeting prepared to ask them to react to the elements of your essay that you are most concerned about.

If you don't have specific concerns and want to just ask your reader to provide you with a general reaction (“So, what did you think?) you can absolutely do that. However, if you want more targeted responses, you can use the menu of options on the next page to narrow down the possible discussion topics.

Usually, your session will run about 20 minutes, so to maximize your time please do the following:

1. Once you have a confirmed appointment, **please email a draft of your essay** to your Writing Center reader (their email will be provided to you) by 7 PM the day before the appointment. If you are not ready, you can ask the reader to read the essay during the appointment but that will offer you less time to receive targeted feedback.
2. Prior to your appointment, please read through the “Menu” on the next page and think through which topics you want to ask

about most when meeting with your reader. Have a plan and come ready to ask questions.

3. If after your conference, you'd like to sign up for a follow up, use the same signup process as you did for your first appointment. If you'd prefer to have a different set of eyes, that's fine; sign up with another person.
4. After your appointment, your reader will send you a brief survey. The feedback goes to Mr. Sweeney and won't be shared with your reader. Please fill it out the survey so we can continue to fine tune our process and ensure we are being helpful.

Remember, the process of crafting this essay is ultimately your responsibility. Our readers are here to provide you with something truly useful: an unbiased audience for your work. They can't fix the essay for you but they can give you a sense of what is and what isn't working.

For examples of strong essays from past THHS seniors, you can visit our website (thhswritingcenter.com) and find the “College Essay Help Desk.” There you can read through/listen to some successful past essays. You can ask your reader how your essay compares to those in style, structure, and substance; they will have read them too. Though your essay should be distinct from past essays, it is helpful to have samples to compare.



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Menu for Your College Essay Meeting

When you meet with your reader, please select in advance 2-3 of the below topics to discuss and then prepare some related questions. Think about which of the three essential components (below) you feel least confident in with your draft. Ask your reader to narrow their reactions to that topic and they will engage you in a conversation about their thoughts on it. You can do the same thing with some of the “Common Concerns” on the right. The more questions you have, the more useful the meeting. The readers won’t just begin the meeting by telling you everything they want you to change in the essay; they will begin by asking you what you want to talk about.

Essential Components:

1. **Reactions to the focus.** Does my essay feel like it has a clear focus? Does the focus read as if it is “fresh”—either because it provides a fresh spin on a common idea or because the narrative/focus itself is unique and uncommon?
2. **Reactions to the narrative style.** Does my writing weave together narrative details with ideas and observations? Are there narrative moments and clear moments of storytelling, or is it all “tell”?
3. **Reactions to the authorial voice.** Does my essay show “personality” through the framing of events, the observations, and/or the reflections?

Common Concerns:

1. **Balance:** Is there balance? When working with word limits, do I overwrite/emphasize the beginning at the expense of the middle and the end, or vice versa?
2. **Details about Accomplishments/Achievements:** Do I draw upon the past when necessary but make sure that my present self (or, at least, my high school self) is a major focus?
3. **Meaningful observations:** The statement can draw deep, meaningful conclusions from mundane experiences, or from unique, life-changing events (or anything in between). Big dramatic life moments do not make for better essays; those essays still need unique ways to show perspective on the big story. Where does my essay fit into all this? Do I draw strong conclusions?
4. **Flow/Conciseness:** At 650 words, every moment should be necessary, and every section should build to the end and relate to the overall focus. Does my essay feel like it is using the word count/size of the essay well? Does it flow? Is it concise?
5. **General Grammatical Concerns:** Do I maintain consistent tenses (am I careful shifting between past and present tense)? Do I avoid run on sentences, improper semicolon usage, and too much repetition (do I keep saying the same word/phrase, or using the same sentence structure)?