



# **THE COLLEGE APPLICATION ESSAY**

TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS

# THE BASICS

- **Not all college applications require an essay.**
  - ❖ For example, the CSU's do not require them (including Cal Poly).
  - ❖ Some out-of-state public universities do not require essays. (Arizona State)
- **Some colleges only require one essay, usually the main Common App or Coalition essay.**
- **Many colleges have supplemental questions that are unique to them. These can be short or long essays and should be taken seriously.**



# HOW MANY ESSAYS ARE THERE?

- **The UC's** require each student to write four essays of up to 350 words each. Students get to pick from eight essay prompts.
  - **The Common Application** has one main essay of 650 words. Students pick from seven prompts. This is the place where admissions officers look to discover more about the student's personal qualities and uniqueness.
  - **Supplemental Essays** are required from many colleges that use the Common Application. These usually will vary in length and subject.
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# HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE ESSAYS?

- It depends!
  - on the college and how selective it is.
  - on how your GPA and SAT/ACT scores compare to other applicants.
- If you are applying to a highly competitive major or college, then the essay can be VERY important.
- A great essay rarely compensates for a non-competitive transcript.
- The essay is the place where an Admissions Officer connects with you and decides if he/she likes you. You want your essays to inspire the admissions staff to advocate for you in committee.



# THE FUNCTION OF THE ESSAY

- An application is like a jigsaw puzzle. All the pieces come together to create one coherent picture of the student.
- The essay offers an opportunity for you to express your individuality, so don't just repeat what the rest of the application already shows.



# THE **PERSONAL** STATEMENT

- The main essay for the Common Application and Coalition Application are often referred to as the Personal Statement.
  - There are eight different prompts to choose from for this 650/550 word essay.
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# WHAT SHOULD I WRITE ABOUT?

Think about one of your strongest qualities.

What would you like them to know about you?

What is an experience that you would like to share with the admissions people?



# WHAT DO I WRITE ABOUT?

- ❖ What part of my story is not told in the rest of the application?
- ❖ Don't get caught up in trying to guess what the colleges want to hear.
- ❖ The readers want to know the real you.



# BE ORIGINAL

Admissions Officers read thousands of essays, and if your topic is common, no matter how heartfelt your experience, the reader will just gloss over it.



# WHICH TOPICS ARE OVERUSED?

- hard work and determination
- dealing with a sports injury
- immersion trips
- family member
- playing with Legos



# TOOLS FOR FINDING TOPICS

- ✧ **Defining Characteristics:** Think about your defining characteristics: curious, driven, adventurous, creative, artistic, outdoorsy, social, political, empathetic, articulate, a leader, trustworthy, persuasive, energetic and so on. Ask your friends or family how they think of you. Think of stories that demonstrate these characteristics. Jot down ideas for each characteristic. For example if you are creative, think of times when you were creative. 1) made a Halloween costume out of a box 2) built a tree house 3) entertained 12 kids with no toys 4) made jewelry and sold it on etsy 5) made gifts
- ✧ **Essence Objects** – (Ethan Sawyer) Objects which represent something important to you. An experience, a recipe, a photo, a relationship, a Rubiks Cube, a gift.....

# HOW DO I WRITE THE ESSAY?

- NOT a formal five-paragraph essay. Your thoughts need to be clear and well conveyed.
- The essay is an autobiographical essay in the first person in your own voice. Be natural and respectful.
- These are professional readers! They know what a parent sounds like.
- Readers want to be engaged or surprised. Admissions officers will become bored and irritated as quickly as anyone by essays that are dull, common, or insincere.



# DRAFTS

- ✓ Good essays take 10+drafts. If a topic isn't working well, set it aside for a while and try a different topic.
- ✓ Read your essay out loud to yourself. Does it sound right? Did you forget some details?

# NARROW YOUR PERSONAL ESSAY TOPIC

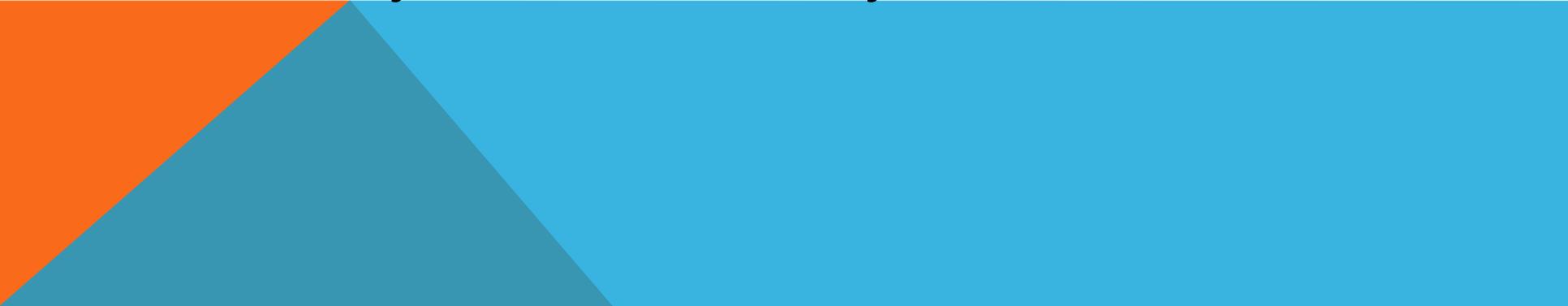
- ❖ Don't try to put in too much information. The best essays are highly focused.
  
  - ❖ The key is to get very specific about your experience; talk more about how it changed you than the event itself.
    - What did you do?
    - Why did you choose that activity/project?
    - What did you learn?
    - How did this experience help you grow?
    - How did you apply what you learned?
  
  - ❖ Use concrete details in your essay.
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# YOU ARE NOT PERFECT

- Remember, Admission Officers are not looking for the perfect person; they know you are a work in progress.
- Show your potential!
- Demonstrate self-analysis, growth or insight.
- Demonstrate your ability to think and analyze.
- Essays should show you learning and growing. Include a moment of revelation, if applicable.



# What works best?

- Your honesty and sincerity are essential.
  - Show your personality. Don't sound flat. Express your joy, excitement, nervousness, or other emotions that you were/are feeling.
  - Let your own voice shine through. Too many edits by others will dilute your voice.
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# THE UC PERSONAL INSIGHT QUESTIONS

- The UC PIQ's (essays) are a GREAT place to start! Those prompts lead to important answers that ALL admissions officers want to know about you.
- The UC essay prompts are straight forward and don't require creative writing. Clear and concise writing is best. Students have to be their own advocates.

# JUST GET STARTED!

- ❖ The hardest part about essays is getting started. Don't think of it as work. Think of it as an opportunity to write about yourself for the colleges that you would like to attend. Many students end up learning more about themselves during this process.
  - ❖ The sooner you start, the sooner you will be done. If you wait until the last minute, your essays won't be nearly as good.
  - ❖ **So get writing!**
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# LYNBROOK ESSAY WORKSHOPS

For Students Only:

September 12 @ 10:45 – UC Essays

September 13 @ 1:05 – Application Tips for Engineering and CS Applicants

September 26 @ 1:05 – Common Application Essay

October 3 @ 1:05 – Supplemental Essays

October 25 @ 1:05 – UC Essays



# SHOW - DON'T TELL

- A successful essay does not simply tell a reader something; it shows the reader. The story needs sensory details. You want the reader to taste, touch, and feel.
- Bring the reader into your essay.

## Example:

- I was Vice President of the Interact Club and successfully ran the fundraising event.

OR

- I was in charge of marketing for our spring fundraiser, so I employed social media, creative and colorful posters, and a talent contest to ensure a sold-out event.

# ONE POPULAR APPROACH

1. Start with a hook; a moment in time where you bring the reader to that moment. It has to be interesting! Briefly describe that moment, starting IN the moment (no lead in).
1. Then give the backstory of how that moment came to be.
2. Then describe: What did you learn from that experience? How did it change you or make you grow? Describe other similar experiences that can validate your growth or awareness.
3. Then look to the present and future: Bring the reader to the present and show how you have applied what you learned or how you will apply it in the future (or both).



# EXAMPLE

