

# ACADEMIC AND COLLEGE **PLANNING NIGHT**

*PLUS OPEN HOUSE*



THE  
**BEAR CREEK**  
SCHOOL



# Writing the College Essay

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## What is a college entrance essay?

- A response to a specific prompt from either The Common Application or a particular university
- Example 1: Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what lessons did you learn? (Common App.)



# What is a college entrance essay?

- A response to a specific prompt from either The Common Application or a particular university
  - Example 2: Alice falls down the rabbit hole. Milo drives through the tollbooth. Dorothy is swept up in the tornado. Neo takes the red pill. Don't tell us about another world you've imagined, heard about, or created. Rather, tell us about its portal. Sure, some people think of the University of Chicago as a portal to their future, but please choose another portal to write about. (University of Chicago)

## What is a college entrance essay?

- *Example 3: Our families and communities often define us and our individual worlds. Community might refer to your cultural group, extended family, religious group, neighborhood or school, sports team or club, co-workers, etc. Describe the world you come from and how you, as a product of it, might add to the diversity of the University of Washington.*

# How should an applicant structure a college entrance essay?

- Tell a story
- Describe a scene
- Explain a process
- Define a key idea
- Explain the causes and effects of an event or change
- Recount examples

# What topics should an applicant address?

- *Personality*
- *Abilities and talents*
- *Struggles and recoveries (especially finding resources independently in order to recover)*
- *Responsibility*
- *The past AND the future*
- *Virtues*
- *Extracurricular activities*
- *Volunteering*

# What structures and topics should an applicant avoid?

- A list of accomplishments
- Duplicating information available in other parts of the application
- Moments too intricate or awkward or personal to capture in a limited space (from 200 to 600 words)
- Confessions without redemption or resolution
- Incomplete or confusing explanations – evidence ALWAYS requires analysis



If the essay only conveyed one idea well, it should be . . .

- College readiness
- Unique personality
- Growth as an individual
- Passion for a subject area (related to an intended major)
- Potential to contribute to the future college or even THE FUTURE

# What effect should the essay have on the reader?

- Maintain interest from beginning to end
- Convey a sense of writing style (and thereby college readiness)
- Vividly immerse into an event or scene
- Memorably tell the story

THE BOTTOM LINE: college admissions officers give an essay two to three minutes to make the right impression

# How does an applicant make the essay memorable?

- *Personal statements – the reader should get a sense of who the applicant is*
- *An original, unique beginning*
- *A powerful ending – build to a crescendo*
- *A command of English to the point of style (diction, syntax, figurative language)*

# Brainstorming: a Handy List of College Virtues

- *Determination*
- *Long term commitment*
- *Diverse interests*
- *Leadership skills*
- *Initiative*
- *Perseverance*
- *Maturity*



# Brainstorming: Areas Where Uniqueness Appears

- Ethnicity
- Socioeconomic status
- Disadvantage
- Heritage
- Talents/niches
- Faith
- Service
- Leadership
- Friendships
- Accomplishments
- Mistakes and failures

# Writing the First Sentence: Seeds of Ideas

- “It was the one place I . . . .”
- “My experinces with \_\_\_\_\_ could have taught me \_\_\_\_\_, but they actually . . . .”
- “While I loved \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ (a trait) was not enough for me to succeed. I needed \_\_\_\_\_ (a different trait) . . . .”

# Writing the First Sentence: Seeds of Ideas

- “Many \_\_\_\_\_ have preconceptions about \_\_\_\_\_, but really . . .”
- “Living with \_\_\_\_\_ is/is not \_\_\_\_\_.”

# Additional Resources

- Vanderbilt has lots of advice for students. I like their info because it's easy to follow:

<http://admissions.vanderbilt.edu/vandybloggers/category/the-college-essay/>

- MIT also has helpful suggestions:

[http://mitadmissions.org/blogs/entry/the\\_college\\_essay\\_yogurt\\_editi](http://mitadmissions.org/blogs/entry/the_college_essay_yogurt_editi)



# Additional Resources

- CollegeBoard has 2 essays with critiques – very interesting –  
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<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/essays/sample-college-application-essay-1>

<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/essays/sample-college-application-essay-2>

The background features a stylized landscape with wavy, layered bands of color. The top portion consists of various shades of blue, transitioning from a light, almost white blue to a deeper, more saturated blue. The bottom portion consists of various shades of green, transitioning from a light, pale green to a vibrant, dark green. The overall effect is a soft, abstract representation of hills or waves.

*Evaluating some samples . . .*

## *Sample 1*

Money management and Kenya: two things that have probably never been connected in anyone's mind except mine. I have been working most of my life to prepare myself to be an excellent component in a hedgefund. It is a goal I have had for a long time, but I didn't realize what I was doing wrong until I went to Kenya in 2011.

## Sample 1 (continued)

Now, please bear with me through this next cliché “missions trip that changed my life” sentence, for it is genuinely necessary to my overarching point. When I was fourteen, I went on a trip to Kenya with one of my dad’s best friends. It was an amazing trip . . .



## Sample 2

I never thought that I would join the ranks of those wearing their suits to school on Friday afternoons. I never thought that I would be one of “those people,” arguing intellectual topics during lunch (when I could be taking a nap). I never thought reading news articles would cease to be a chore and, instead, perhaps, become a relaxing pastime. I never thought I would get such a thrill from joining the debate team.

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