

Worksheet: planning your Common App essay

Step One: Brainstorm your essay focus & story

Make a list of times in your life which have defined/changed you as a person, or made you question a belief/point of view.

Make a list of moments in your life when you have overcome a problem or setback. What did you learn from the experience?

Make a list of topics, ideas or interests that you find compelling or captivating. Why do they engage you?

Write about a talent, or a personal quality you possess. Why is it important to you? Can you think of reasons you would feel incomplete without it?

Step Two: Listing your achievements

Make a list of activities/occasions where you've demonstrated leadership/entrepreneurial spirit. Think about what you learned from them

List some occasions/activities where you feel you've demonstrated resilience or hard work. Think about any major obstacles you had to overcome.

List some examples of occasions where you've demonstrated that you're a team player, or learned about the value of teamwork.

List some examples, or activities where you feel you've demonstrated community service

List some examples of how you might demonstrate a global perspective. Have you done any travelling/studying abroad which is relevant to your essay?

Make a list of any other extra-curricular activities or work experience which may be relevant to your essay.

Example Common App essay

When a mobile phone rings at four in the morning, it usually means trouble. The girl at the end of the phone line, breathing hard into the receiver, I identified as my sister, half way through a Spanish language program in Barcelona. In between muffled sobs and short, Tem panicked breaths, vendam I could decipher fragments of her sentences; "Mummy and Daddy," she spluttered, "terrorists... the tube... bombs exploding in London."

Swinging open the door of my sheltered dorm room, I dashed through the corridor, veering towards the lounge. My sister, intermittently coherent, was acquainting me with the morning's events. It was the 7th of July, and four suicide bombs had detonated in London. The city itself, typically a bustling, urban jungle, had been paralysed; tourists, office-workers, and residents were trapped like foxes in their holes.

Each day, I was used to reading and talking about current events. Understanding world events is my passion. Evaluating their importance is my responsibility. Today, however, these same events were threatening to tear my life apart.

Ignorant of the welfare of our family, Kate bravely bid me farewell, and promised to call with any news. Flicking through the television channels, I witnessed a decelerated replay of a double-decker bus spewing its insides onto the pavement. I scanned the map that appeared on the screen, metaphorically searching for my family and friends. Seated in the dusty lounge of the National Debate Institute, where I had been polishing my Lincoln Douglas debating skills, a wave of vulnerability swept over me. Even in rural Maryland, where we had been debating the respective merits of Platonic and Stoic ideals, there was no bubble of safety, no privilege of isolation. My ivory tower was under attack.

Every bomb scene served as a reminder of the knife edge we all live on. Every bomb blast was a battle cry. For what cause would four young men destroy themselves? I tried to imagine how any religion could not only condone but encourage these actions. I thought about how our Western culture had become irredeemably intertwined with other cultures, all of which seemed mutually uncomprehending. Wasn't achieving a greater level of cross-culturalism meant to be a good thing?

On the television screen, I stared at the victims staggering away from the destruction. A tourist from Michigan on a shopping trip; a Brazilian mechanic mistaken for a terrorist; an Afghan in London to escape the Taliban. Wars half a world away were following them.

Collapsed on the sofa, I realised that the mission I had chosen, to convince my school community to connect with the rest of the world, to some extent was no longer necessary. July 7th, like September 11th, would do the job for me. I got through that day, as did my family, physically unscathed, but emotionally charged. We all have a

Step Three: Writing A Compelling Essay

List five examples of storytelling technique which the writer uses to tell a compelling story, particularly at the beginning & end of the essay

List five examples where the writer uses descriptive language & vivid imagery

List five examples where the writer shares their personal passions & interests

In 650 words, write a draft of your own Common App essay. Make sure you tell a personal, compelling story and make use of descriptive and vivid imagery.

