

Memoirs, Memes and Memories: Writing Personal Narratives for College Applications

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The bane of every college applicant:
the admissions essay.

Holy Trinity Episcopal Academy

- Pre-K through 12th on two campuses
 - *394 enrolled in the high school
 - *Class of 2020 - 104 students
- College Office Structure
- AP English Language Teacher: 5 sections of Juniors and Seniors

HT College Counseling - Programming

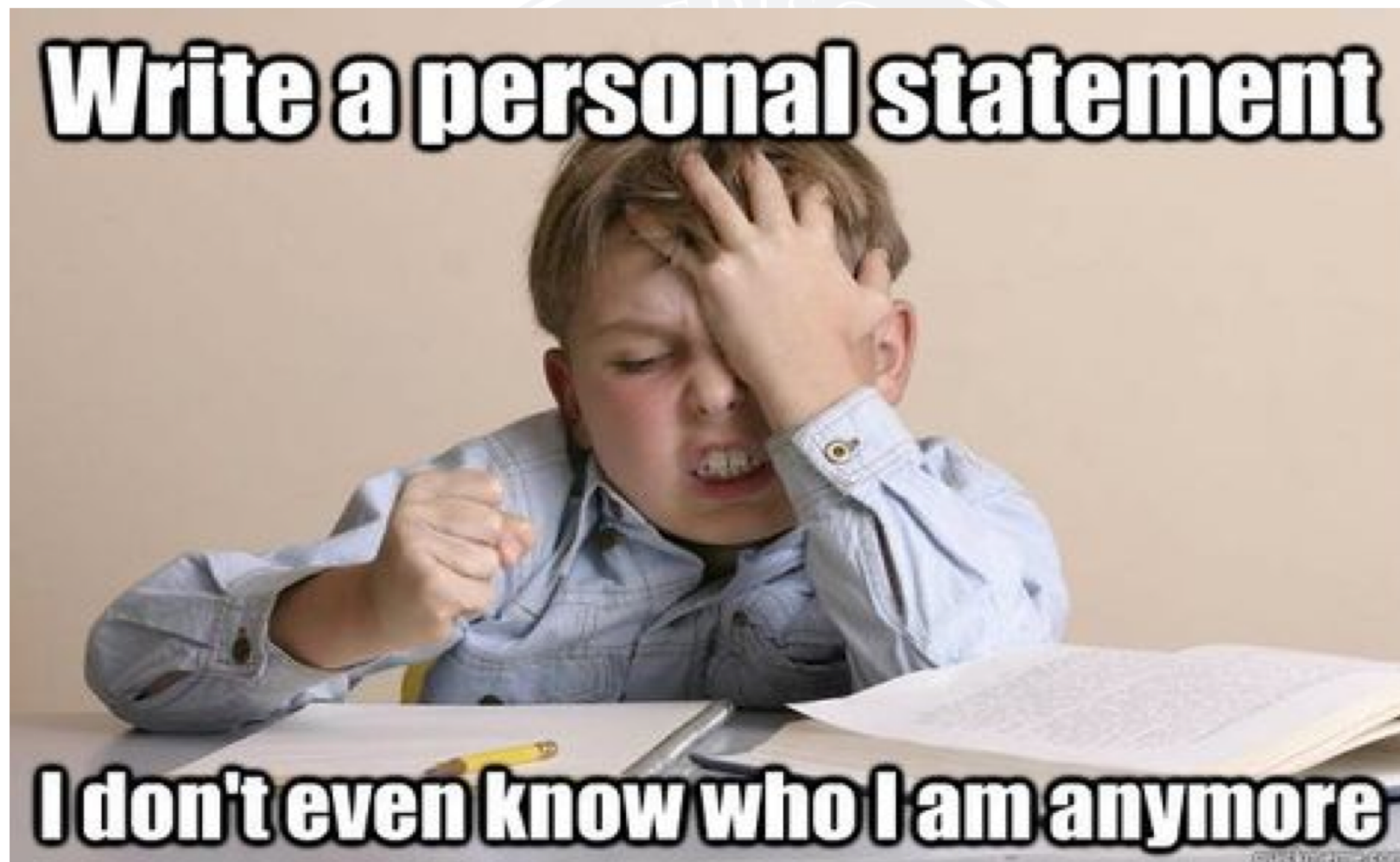
- Retreat Days
 - *grade level specific; 2/year per grade level
 - *personal development and college related programs
- Family Conferences
 - *Juniors: Summer and Spring
 - *Seniors: Fall
- Application Boot Camp
 - *Week-Long Session for Rising Seniors
 - *College Representative Involvement

HT College Counseling--Programming

- Senior Work Sessions
 - *Working Lunch Tuesdays
 - *Several scheduled work times after school
 - *Morning work session during Fall Break

College Counseling/English Department Collaboration

- Resume Development
 - *Fall of 10th grade
 - *Retreat Day-initial instructions
 - *Assignment in English classes
- Essay Writing
 - *Spring of 11th grade
 - *Retreat Day--initial instructions
 - *Assignment in English classes



Writing/Collaborating in English classroom

- Seniors and Juniors in AP or Honors English classes work to write a narrative/memoir essay as the basis or start of college essay in the first quarter of school.
- Use of Anchor or main texts to serve as models for the students



Writing/Collaborating in English classroom

- AP Language teacher uses *On Writing* by Stephen King as a summer read as mentor/anchor text to the unit. The unit will take approximately the first 3-4 weeks of the school year to teach.
- I have the kids write, conference with me, the teacher, and peer edit. In all of this instruction as the AP Language teacher, I use the text(s) to teach basic analysis, text annotation, and the rhetorical triangle, appeals, and basic rhetorical devices.

When you begin editing your first draft



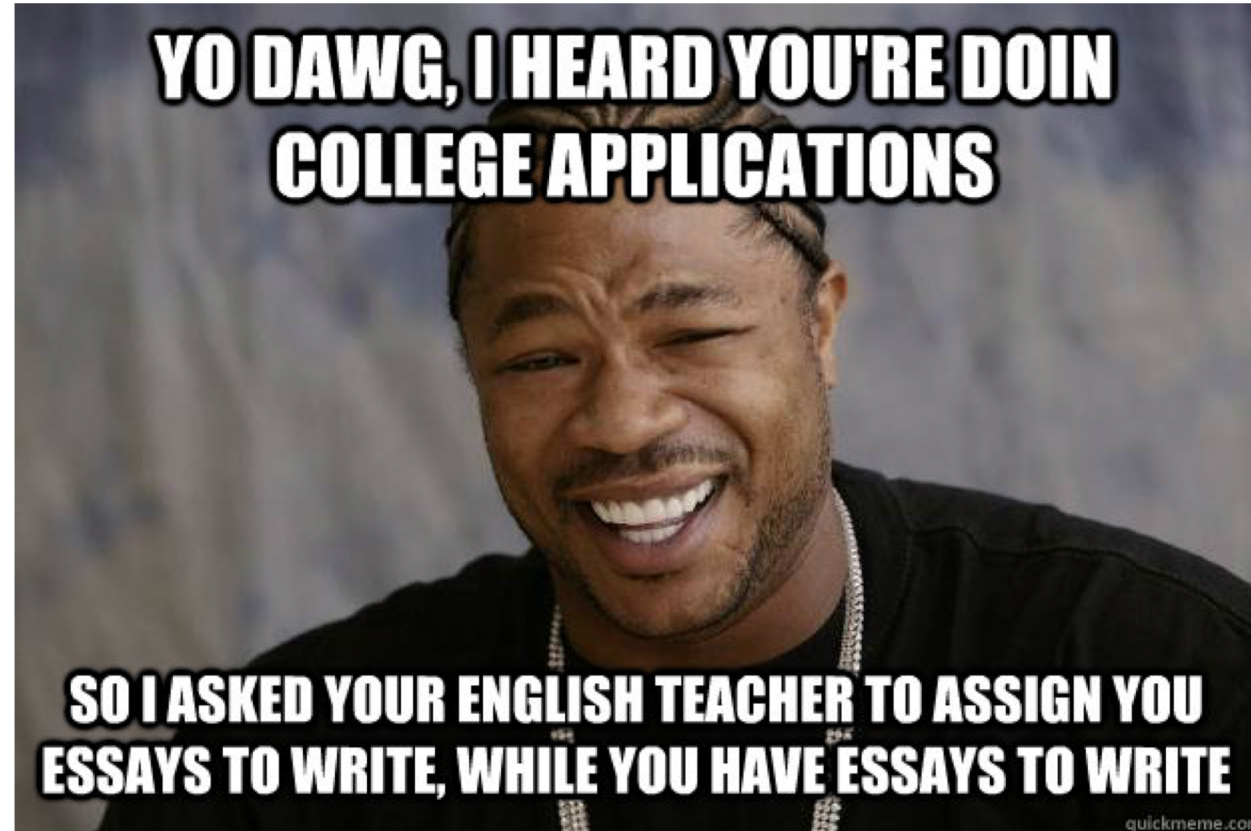
Writing/Collaborating in English classroom

- Students create a personal timeline of events big and small to help get the creative ideas/memories down
- Students read and annotate a variety of memoir texts: satirical, sentimental and a typical narrative.
- Discuss the elements that the texts have to tell a story
- Students are given more memoirs to read in Literature Circles to present to class and share
- Discuss Common App prompts and relation to telling a story

Jay Hendrich's Blog: "How to Write a Winning College Essay"

<http://www.arguelab.com/blog/2018/9/5/how-to-write-a-winning-college-essay>

1. ***What's your Hook?***-Admissions officers also look for a student who will add something to the campus.
2. ***Don't Express Yourself***- Not a therapy session. It is an act of persuasion.
3. ***Relieve their Boredom***- Admission officers read thousands of essays need something to stand out.
4. ***A winning essay isn't an essay***- The college essay is mislabeled. It's really a story. It should have a main character — you, presumably — a setting, some sort of conflict, and suspense.
5. ***It's all about the epiphany***- Admissions people look for students who learn and grow, so your essay should show you learning and growing.
6. ***Make yourself miserable***- The process is hard and daunting but that is what being a writer is all about.



Student Samples

“This time, I felt a special kind of intensity. I was so fierce, so fired up, that I had actually broken a sweat. It started at the top of my forehead and slowly, ominously worked its way down the side of my face. As my solo ripped away, I didn’t even begin to take notice. I had been “hyper focused” on my music. Nothing, and I mean nothing, was going to stop me from seeing my name with a superior next to it on the judge’s sheet: my dream. Nevertheless, that evil bead of sweat couldn’t have cared less. It inched closer and closer to the side of my mouth, mocking me throughout the entirety of its sinister trickle. As it began to slip past my nose, it did itch a little bit, probably as a little warning before the massive sting that was about to come. When that sweat hit the corner of my mouth, the stars aligned. The timing was utterly perfect. It happened as I was about to hit the highlight of my piece, in the altissimo range of the saxophone no less. Basically, disaster struck.”

Student Samples

... “Amid this elated atmosphere of golfing excitement, my golf coach found me and my mom one day. “I told your daughter many times, but your wooden golf clubs are totally rotten. If only you got new, high-technology clubs, your daughter’s performance would be unbelievably enhanced,” he told us. I glanced over at my mom as my coach had just made a proclamation even I had never mustered the courage to tell my mom. With not even the slightest flinch, a stern reply followed, “You know nothing about my clubs” as she swiftly turned away....

Writing/Collaborating in English classroom

- Allow time for drafting, revising and editing before turning in
- For Juniors I gave feedback but it wasn't as detailed as it was for Seniors.
- Juniors after AP exam or for part of their final had time to revise and get more feedback from teacher in May.

For lesson plan, anchor texts email spedicini@htes.org I can share the google folder.

Possible Issues that can arise with collaborating

- Communication about expectations
- Strict examine of prompts vs storytelling
- Getting everyone on board, students, teachers, advisors

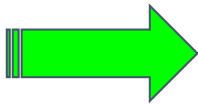
Bringing It All Together

- College Advisor Input and Review
- Value of College Office/Teacher collaboration

How important is the Essay/Writing Sample?

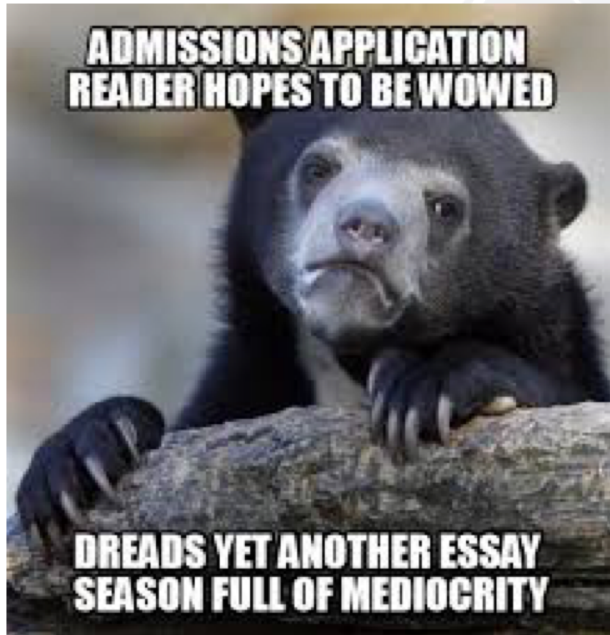
TABLE 7. PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACTORS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS: FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN, FALL 2017

Factor	N	Considerable Importance	Moderate Importance	Limited Importance	No Importance
Grades in All Courses	173	80.9	10.4	5.8	2.9
Grades in College Prep Courses	171	70.8	17.5	8.8	2.9
Admission Test Scores (SAT, ACT)	172	52.3	30.8	14.5	2.3
Strength of Curriculum	170	51.2	29.4	12.9	6.5
Essay or Writing Sample	168	16.7	36.9	20.8	25.6
Counselor Recommendation	167	10.8	46.1	28.7	14.4
Student's Demonstrated Interest	168	15.5	21.4	34.5	28.6
Teacher Recommendation	168	7.1	46.4	29.2	17.3
Class Rank	172	9.3	27.9	36.0	26.7
Extracurricular Activities	169	3.6	34.9	40.8	20.7
Subject Test Scores (AP, IB)	166	4.2	28.9	28.3	38.6
Portfolio	167	5.4	7.2	27.5	59.9
Interview	168	3.6	14.3	29.2	53.0
Work	169	1.8	17.8	41.4	39.1
SAT II Scores	166	6.6	3.0	19.9	70.5
State Graduation Exam Scores	168	1.8	8.3	17.9	72.0



SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2017–18.

College Admissions Essays CAN be...



- *Authentic
- *Differentiators
- *Cathartic

College Preparatory Schools



Don't forget to complete your survey!

