

## **Brainstorming for Your Personal Statement**

This is where we gather as many ideas or memories as we can on paper. This activity is SILENT and Private. It is also supposed to be highly productive—this means you are furiously writing as much as possible—avoid self-censorship. Any memory or experience can be turned into a good personal statement.

You are simply listing ideas in your notebooks. This is a way to “jog your memories” about events that may not have seemed like life-changing experiences at the time, but now you can see have helped shape who you are or who you’ve become. If one memory triggers another, list it!

## **Natalie Goldberg’s Rules for Writing**

1. Keep your hand moving; don’t pause to reread the line you have just written (that’s stalling and trying to get control of what you’re saying.)
2. Don’t cross out; that’s editing as you write (even if you write something you didn’t mean to write, leave it.)
3. Don’t worry about spelling/punctuation/grammar; don’t even care about staying within the margins and lines on the page.
4. Lose control.
5. Don’t think. Don’t get logical.
6. Go for the jugular! If something comes up in your writing that is scary or naked, dive right into it (it probably has lots of energy.)

**Use the brainstorming questions below: write for 1-2 minutes to as many questions as you want/need to**

- ✓ Is/was there a significant birth in your life?
- ✓ Has death ever affected you?
- ✓ Have you ever moved and/or changed schools?
- ✓ Have you ever felt jealous of others?
- ✓ Have you ever been embarrassed by a teacher?
- ✓ Have you ever been embarrassed by a peer?
- ✓ Have you ever been teased or bullied?
- ✓ Have you ever teased or bullied someone else?
- ✓ Has an older relative/teacher/mentor helped you out of a tough situation?
- ✓ Have you ever offered to help, even when it wasn’t expected of you?
- ✓ When have others made you feel loved or appreciated?
- ✓ Have you ever gotten into a fight?
- ✓ Have you ever stolen anything?
- ✓ Have you ever had anything stolen from you?
- ✓ Have you ever traveled somewhere new that changed how you saw the world?
- ✓ Have there been times when you felt financially limited? How did you know?  
What did it feel like?
- ✓ Have you ever been in a situation when you felt desperate?
- ✓ Have you ever been betrayed?

- ✓ When have you felt victorious? On top of the world?
- ✓ What is something you regret doing?
- ✓ What is something you regret saying?
- ✓ In what accomplishments do you feel the most pride?
- ✓ Have you ever felt lost (physically or emotionally)? How did you "get found"?
- ✓ What memories do you have of summers? Vacations?
- ✓ When was the first time you felt truly afraid?
- ✓ What languages did you grow up speaking or hearing?
- ✓ Have you ever experienced racism, sexism, homophobia, religious and/or cultural persecution?

### **Sifting through Ideas for a Personal Statement**

Now, try another brainstorming technique called a *Write Long*. A *Write Long* is where you pick one of the many memories you just brainstormed and write about it. Using your standard voice, you should write all you can remember about what happened. During a *Write Long*, you should not worry about style, spelling or grammar. The goal is to put down the entire memory.

***Write Long* for ONE of the memories you wrote about in your *Brain Dump*. Choose to write about one which:**

- ✓ You can remember in detail
- ✓ Could say something about your character
- ✓ You feel comfortable sharing with peers, teachers, colleges

### **Questions to consider when you *Write Long*:**

- ✓ What lead up to or caused the event/experience?
- ✓ What details do you remember? Sights, sounds, smells, tastes, feelings?
- ✓ How did you feel during/after?
- ✓ What were you thinking about during/after?
- ✓ What happened after the event/experience?
- ✓ Looking back, how was the experience important? What did you learn? What changed?

You should silently write NON-STOP for 10-15 minutes.

Then try another WRITE LONG for a different memory.

Then try it for yet ANOTHER memory

Look at your *Write Longs* and evaluate:

- ✓ Which topic am I most enthusiastic about?
- ✓ Which topic can I say the most about?
- ✓ Which might others be more interested in reading?
- ✓ Which might address/answer the prompt(s) for the colleges/universities I am applying to?

