PLAINVIEW-OLD BETHPAGE CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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English Department

College Essay Guide to Personal Narrative Writing

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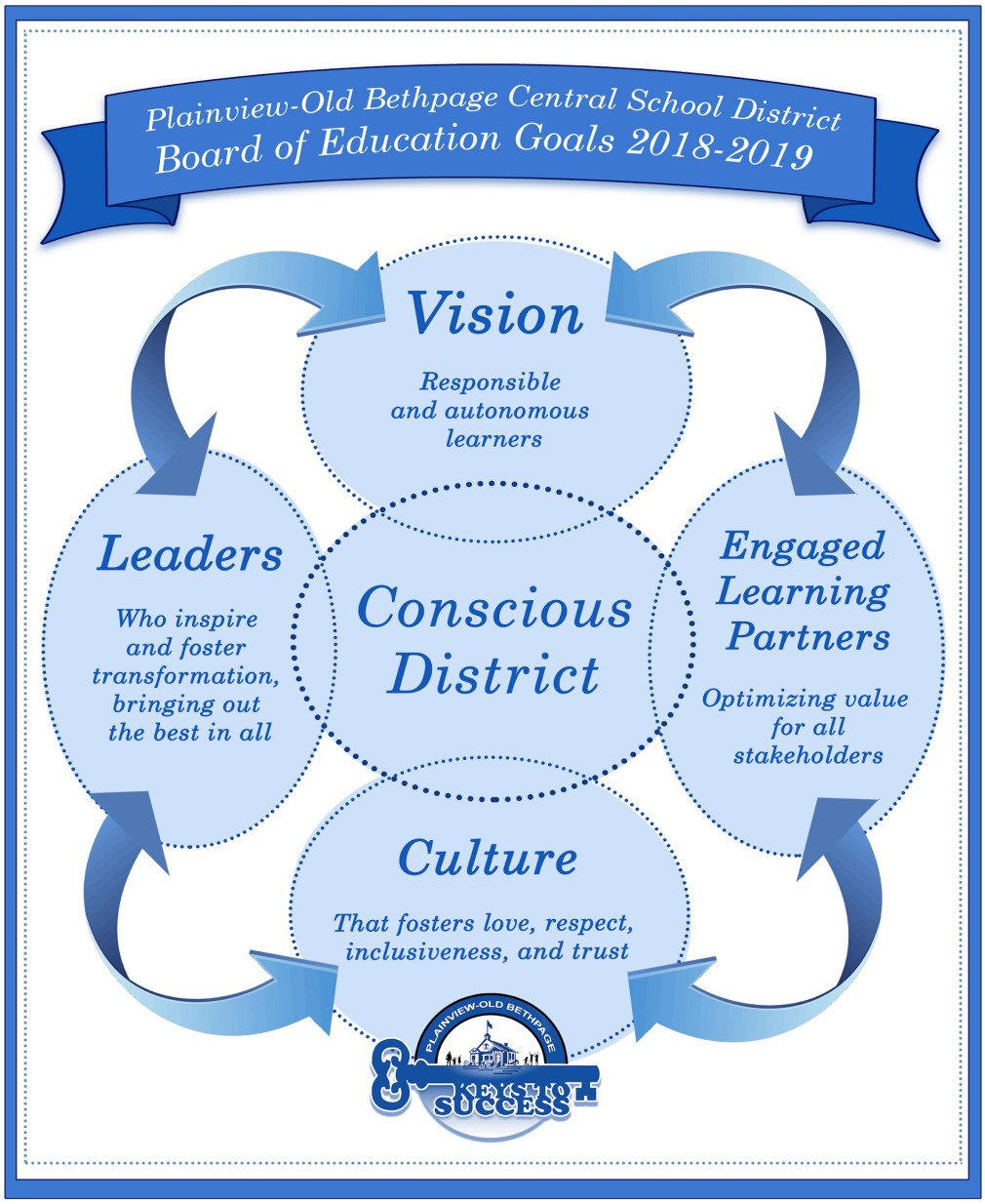
The mission of the Plainview-Old Bethpage Central School District is to provide an academically challenging and stimulating environment for all students, and to enable them to realize their full potential to be happy, ethical and analytical citizens of the world. We do this by:

- **making tolerance, acceptance, respect, honesty and kindness expectations for all students, and for members of the Plainview-Old Bethpage school community;**
- **identifying each student's academic, social-emotional, aesthetic and physical needs, and striving to meet those needs; and**
- **encouraging communication between and among students, teachers, parents, administrators, and community members.**


Plainview-Old Bethpage Central School District
Board of Education Goals 2018-2019
Vision
Responsible and autonomous learners
Leaders
Who inspire and foster transformation, bringing out the best in all
Conscious District
Engaged Learning Partners
Optimizing value for all stakeholders
Culture
That fosters love, respect, inclusiveness, and trust
PLAINVIEW-OLD BETHPAGE
KEYS TO SUCCESS

Overview

- This packet has been compiled to help you through the essay portion of the college application process. Included are general tips for writing and revising your essay, common application essay questions with strategies, a number of sample essays that have been annotated to call attention to the writer's craft, a list of web and print resources that may be helpful to you, and a glossary of terms used in the packet, as well as other appendices that you may find useful.

- You may not under any circumstances copy or otherwise "borrow" from these essays. They are provided as models of good student writing to give you ideas for improving your own essays. Plagiarism is a serious offense; these essays have been submitted to many of the same colleges and universities to which you will be applying.

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Part 1: Why Colleges Require an Essay

- The sheer volume of applications in relation to the number of open spaces makes getting into the college of your choice challenging.
- Many applicants will have the same or similar "paper" qualifications. I.e., they will have the same/similar SAT or ACT scores, the same/similar GPA with the same/similar course loads from the same/similar high schools.
- Many applicants will have similar extracurricular résumés as well.
- The essay gives an applicant the chance to become an individual and win the admissions ticket over a candidate with similar transcripts.
- The essay also shows college admissions officers that you can write an organized, cohesive essay.
- The essay, therefore, also shows college admissions officers that you *can* think, and furthermore how *deeply* you can think.

Part 2: Advice from Admissions Officers

Though the college admissions process may seem to be shrouded in mystery, there are actually many resources that provide an "inside track" to making the most of the opportunity that the personal narrative provides an applicant. Here is a compilation of advice taken "straight from the horses'" (Admissions Officers) mouths.

- **#1 Make sure the essay is about YOU.**
    - "Fight the urge to focus on your athletic practice schedule, the grandparent you admire, or the community service experience from last summer. You may use these people or experiences as launching pads to discuss yourself, but that is all they should be. What kind of teammate are you? Is grandpa the reason you've always got a harmonica in your purse? Did the service trip spark a deep interest in a specific social issue that now drives your academic study? These are better areas of focus than the sport, grandparent, or trip themselves" (Reynolds).
- **#2 Details are what make your story unique.**
    - "It's all about detail: As I see it, you have two options when exploring a topic in your college essay: go broad or go deep. Let me give an example: in writing about your budding interest in art history, you could write that you've always loved visiting museums, and how your art history course in high school solidified the interest. Then you could list your favorite artists. That's going broad. OR, you could geek out about Edward Hopper. You could write about his lonely, minimalist paintings and how they make you feel, and you could tell the reader that you've always admired his talent for telling a whole story with only a few seemingly unimportant characters. You could write about your own storytelling and how it is inspired by Hopper. That's going deep. One is better than the other (I'll give you a hint: it's the second one). By focusing on details, you set yourself apart; many people love museums and could list some artists that they like. Not many have taken the time to geek out about Edward Hopper on paper" (Reynolds).
- **#3 Let *your* VOICE be heard!**
    - "If your friends, family members, and teachers would describe you as silly, outgoing, and uninhibited, why would you submit a collection of essays all written in a formal, subdued tone? The same goes for you, introverts: if you're quieter in person, write a quieter essay! Thoughtfulness, introspection, and an unassuming tone make for great college essays too" (Reynolds)!

    - “Furthermore, your writing doesn’t have to sound like Shakespeare. ‘These essays should read like smart, interesting 17-year-olds wrote them,’ says Lacy Crawford, former independent college application counselor and author of Early Decision. ‘A sense of perspective and self-awareness is what’s interesting’” (Carlotti).
- **#4 Be original, even if that means you focus on something smaller.**
    - “Colleges are tired of reading about that time you had a come-from-behind win in the state championship game or the time you built houses in Ecuador. Get creative!” ~Janine Robinson, writing coach and founder of Essay Hell (quoted in Carlotti)
    - “When my son was applying to schools, I never read his essay. Parents can sometimes do more harm than good with the essay. My advice to students is to first show your essay to a friend and ask, ‘Can you hear my voice in this? Could you pick my essay from a stack of 200?’ The essay doesn’t have to be about something life-changing or confessional. Smaller topics, written well, almost always work best.” ~Stephen Farmer, vice provost for enrollment and undergraduate admissions, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill Farmer (quoted in Wallce and Heffernan).
- **#5 It’s not all about your academic achievements.**
    - "As an admissions officer, I analyzed students' personalities. If I read an admissions essay, and the student came off as arrogant, entitled, mean, selfish, or, on the flip side, funny, charming, generous, witty, I wrote that exact trait in my notes. It's not enough just to be smart at top schools. Students must also show that they'll be good classmates and community builders." ~Angela Dunnham, Former Assistant Director of Admissions, Dartmouth College (quoted in Butterly)
- **#6 Get right to it!**
    - You don’t have a lot of time to get your message across. Not only is there the word count, but admissions officers have so many applications that their initial review of your application is only given a few minutes. They are not scrutinizing your word choice, but rather looking for an overall impression of your personality, writing ability, and thinking.
    - As an admissions evaluator at Brown, we really had to keep up a rigorous reading pace with the regular decision applicant pool. We were expected to read 5 applications per hour, which equates to twelve minutes per application. In those twelve minutes, I reviewed the application, standardized test scores, the transcript, the personal statement, and multiple supplemental essays—all while taking notes and making a decision on the admissibility of the applicant."—Erica Curtis, Former Admissions Evaluator, Brown University (quoted in Buterly)

    - "At Stanford, when reading applications, we did use one acronym in particular—SP ("standard positive"), which indicated that the student was solid and had an overall positive application, but unfortunately was just standard."—Anonymous, Former Admissions Reader, Stanford University (quoted. in Buterly)

- Note: If you are interested in learning even more about behind-the-scenes admissions, Tufts has a very interesting blog:
    - "Inside Admissions." *Tufts Blogs Inside Admissions*, Tufts University Admissions Department, admissions.tufts.edu/blogs/inside-admission

Part 3: Tips for Writing

- Start early!
- Be yourself! This is your chance to distinguish yourself from other applicants who have the same or similar academic qualifications as you.
- Be original! These admissions officers are reading *thousands* of applications. Trite or overused topics like "the big game" or "my summer job" will be more difficult to make unique.
- Write a draft and then set it aside for a few days before attempting to proofread or revise.
- Use vivid and precise language; don't be too basic, but don't "thesaurize" your essay either. Loading your essay with SAT words makes it sound stilted and unnatural.
- *Your* voice should shine through—after all, this essay is supposed to be showing these admissions officers who *you* are (not who your parent, tutor or teacher is).
- Show, don't tell! Narratives "work" better than lists, especially for questions that ask you to "tell about yourself" or "talk about someone who has influenced you".
- Keep your audience in mind. These officers are spending about two minutes on your essay; you need to hook them with an interesting lead sentence and introductory paragraph. Don't restate the question!
- Stick to the word limit (if there is one). See above re: time constraints.
- REVISE! Revision is not the same thing as proofreading. Revising literally means "seeing again"—you should make big changes. (See Tips for Revision)
- PROOFREAD! Your essay should be as technically perfect as possible. Nothing turns off a reader more than careless errors in spelling, usage, grammar, or punctuation.
- Show your essay to someone you trust to tell you the truth before sending it in.

Part 4: Tips for Revision

- **Spend quality revision time trying out different "hooks" to gain your reader's interest.**
    - Introductions are often the most difficult paragraphs to write. Remember, these admissions officers are reading hundreds of essays; yours must stand out from word one. Rhetorical questions and famous quotations *can* work, but keep in mind that many people use these techniques. Your goal is to stand out from the crowd. Try grabbing the reader's attention with a one-word opening sentence, an "in the middle of the action" beginning, or a bit of dialogue that adds intrigue. Avoid clichéd openings like dictionary definitions. Show the various forms of the intro to a parent, teacher, or friend to get feedback before determining which one is best.
- **Be as personal and concrete as you can.**
    - You want to write an essay that only you could have written. Check your essay for generalizations, lists, and too-broad topics. Narratives and specific examples work best.
- **Use vivid, active verbs often as possible.**
    - Try to get rid of most of your "to be" verbs: is, are, am, was, were, etc. While you are at it try to replace "seems" and "feels" also.
- **Replace bland nouns with specific nouns.**
    - For example, trade "shoes" for "lime green Nikes" or "lunch" with "half-smushed peanut butter and jelly sandwich". Never use "things" and "stuff" when you could be more specific.
- **Beware of ambiguous pronouns.**
    - Every pronoun you use should have a clear referent. Be especially aware of "it," "this," and "that," which can often be vague or confusing. Also, if more than one male or female name has been mentioned, a simple "he" or "she" may also cause confusion.

- **Vary your sentence length and sentence structure.**
    - Intersperse short declarative sentences with longer complex and compound sentences. Notice and revise repetitive sentence structures such as subject-verb-object. Avoid using "I" over and over again as the first word of sentences. **DO** use intentional repetition to bring home a point, as in the famous "I Have a Dream" speech.
- **Check for redundancy**.
    - Don't use two adjectives in a series that mean the same thing as in "gorgeous, beautiful" or an unnecessary adjective in front of a noun or verb as in "fast sprint." When in doubt, choose a vivid verb or specific noun over an adjective or adverb.
- **Write everything you can think of.**
    - Don't just stop writing when you reach the word limit or get tired. Your essay needs a powerful ending. **You can always prune later**. Make your last sentence count. A stand-alone sentence can sometimes be the most effective concluding paragraph. Don't summarize or repeat information; the essay is short enough that the reader will not have forgotten any details.\
- **DO NOT rely on spell check to catch errors.**
    - Spell check only notices when a word is spelled incorrectly, not when you have used the wrong word in a given circumstance. There, their, and they're and other common usage problems will not be corrected. Likewise you may not catch typos like "form" instead of "from" or "if" instead of "or". Reading your essay aloud can help you catch these as can showing it to someone else. We often read what we meant to write when we proofread ourselves because we know what was intended. Try reading backwards to catch spelling mistakes. A second set of eyes can be invaluable!

Part 5: Who Should Help You?

- You should help yourself. That said, don't go for help to anyone until you have read through this packet and sketched out some ideas IN WRITING at the very least.
- Use Appendix 3 — the Self Evaluation Form section included in this packet.
- If you are still only at the idea phase (I just can't think of anything to write...), try talking to your friends about events in your life that were significant, talk to parents, siblings, and former teachers, coaches, and administrators.
- If you have drafted an essay, you might want a parent, older sibling, friend, your CURRENT English teacher or a former English teacher to read it over and offer suggestions. The first draft is NOT the time to **edit**; it is the time to **revise**. See the Glossary of Terms for explanation.
- Make an appointment. No matter whom you work with, and especially if you want to see your CURRENT English teacher, make an appointment and keep it! Your approach to the task will influence others to behave the same way. Please realize that a teacher must serve his or her current students with course-related questions or make up work before helping a former student with a college application essay. However, if you are flexible and serious about revision, your teacher will make the time to help you. in remedial If you are serious, they will be serious.

Part 6: The Teacher's Role

- Your English teacher can be a powerful resource in the writing of your college essay, but remember, this is your application process, not his or hers. Also, your English teacher has a caseload of students who need him or her for remediation during 10th period. This is why you should 1) ask your teacher if he or she can help you, and 2) MAKE AN APPOINTMENT and keep it.
- Your teacher is not responsible for proofreading and editing your paper—that is your job. According to Randy Cohen (The Ethicist/NY Times Magazine), "A teacher may read students' essays but not write them" and should "...eschew anything as hands-on as editing or proofreading..."
- Keep the readers of your essay to a minimum. Too much advice, no matter how well-intentioned, can leave the writer more confused than before.

Part 7: Using Electronic Media Successfully

- Save multiple versions of your essays in Google docs so you can bring your essay with you wherever help is available.

- Use sensible file names, e.g.: InfluentialPersonBrownU.doc, InfluentialPersonSUNY.doc, InfluentialPersonDraft.doc. This way, you will know which version of an essay to open and where each is going.

Part 8: Structure of Essay

- There is no single structure that works best. This will depend a lot on the question you are answering and on your own writing style. For instance, a traditional five-paragraph essay may work just fine for an issue-based question whereas a narrative describing a significant experience may include more short paragraphs and dialogue. Write what feels right for the occasion and get several second opinions. The bottom line is that the essay needs to follow a logical progression, must flow, and must stay focused on answering the question at hand. No matter what style you write in, you need to introduce your topic, develop it with concrete details, and reflect on it in a conclusion.

    - For more detailed information about what should go into each paragraph in a traditional essay, see Appendix 1 of this packet.

Part 9: Idea Generation

- **Where will my ideas come from?**
    - Dig out those old photo albums, diaries, and journals to help refresh your memory about seminal events in your life. Also, consider looking over last year's essays from all of your classes. These assessments reflect your learning over the first three years of high school; your success or failure on them leads to insights about the kind of student you are. Explain why you failed/passed/wrote what you wrote. Consider creative writing assignments as well. Ask your former English teachers if they have those writing samples we all give at the beginning of the year.
- **Outside the Box:**
    - The standard college essay questions can be refined by you to become uniquely personal. What words could you replace with synonyms to change the perspective of the question? For example, "What *person* has had the greatest impact on your life?" could be reworded as "What *creature* has had the greatest impact..." opening up a whole new avenue of experiences for you to write about. Sometimes we don't think to use stories of our pets, or even an inanimate object such as a "blankie" because we are afraid to seem immature or silly, but as a young adult, you now have the perspective to see your own growth from these early childhood experiences—this can be very revealing of who you are now.
- **Write Positively About Something Negative:**
    - Are you the kid who used to, or who is known to have "puked" in kindergarten? Pain and tragedy can reveal character in a "show, don't tell" way. Don't make the thrust of such an essay the pain of the experience, but the insights gained as a result.
- **I Have Writer's Block…**
    - If you have an idea about what you want to write about, but can't think of a way to start writing it, grab a recording device and a close friend or family member who remembers the incident and tell that person about the event. Make sure before you begin recording that:
        - 1) the recording device is working properly, and
        - 2) the person is prepared to ask probing questions about the event: who else was involved, what was the worst/best aspect of the event? How did that make you feel? What did you learn? If you had it to do all over again, what would you do differently? etc. Then listen to the recording and transcribe some or all of what was discussed.

Part 10: Common Application Essay Topics Analyzed

(See Appendix 5 — Questions You Should Answer)

Choosing a Common App prompt can be challenging. Thankfully there is an option for topics that do not fit neatly into one of the six specific prompts. Option 7 is a topic of your choice. This is becoming a popular choice, since writers need not worry if they are answering the prompt fully or adequately.

- The Common Application Board of Directors has announced the 2024-25 essay prompts.
    - The word limit on the essay will remain at 650.
    - For additional information, please visit the following website:
        - https://www.commonapp.org/blog/common-app-announces-2024-2025-common-app-essay-prompts
    - As per the College Board:
        - "Through the Common App essay prompts, we want to give all applicants - regardless of background or access to counseling - the opportunity to share their voice with colleges. Every applicant has a unique story. The essay helps bring that story to life," said Meredith Lombardi, Associate Director, Outreach and Education, for The Common Application.
- 2024 / 2025 Essay Prompts:
    - #1: Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
    - #2: The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
    - #3: Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
    - #4: Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?
    - #5: Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
    - #6: Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?
    - #7: Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.

The "Tell Us about Yourself" Essay

- Common App questions #1, #3 and #6 fit into this category. Whether it is your background (#1) or your beliefs (#3) or even something that just lights a fire in you (#6), this essay category is a chance for you to stand out from the crowd. You are not just a name with a GPA and resume, but a three-dimensional human being with a back-story, interests, and future goals. Use these prompts to show that off--so not repeat what can be found elsewhere on your application. No lists of achievements (or failures for that matter) here--just YOU as you truly are.

- **Pros:**
    - You know a lot about yourself! No faking it necessary!
    - Your personality, style, and voice can really shine!

- **Cons:**
    - The topic is very broad and you may have a hard time boiling it down to a concrete, focused essay.
    - You may be afraid to "brag" about yourself, or, the converse, you may sound like you are bragging.

- **Tips:**
    - Focus on an emotionally significant experience that shows off your most important qualities (for example, diligence, loyalty, good judgment); do not write a laundry list of activities and qualities.
    - Remember that modesty does not mean that you can't truthfully discuss your good qualities.

The "Turning Point" Essay

- Common App prompts #2, #3 and #5 fit into this category. Each of these prompts asks to reflect on personal growth spurred by some event, person, or internal process that resulted in an "evolved" or "new" you.

- **Pros:**

    - Everyone has been influenced by someone or some moment in some way at some time in his or her life.

    - Like the "you" essay, there is no need to research here. You already know about this person or event and their influence.

    - It is often easier to write when something is closer to your heart, rather than a forced academic topic.

- **Cons:**

    - If the event is too recent, you may not have enough perspective on its effects.

    - You may find it difficult to balance the event itself with your personal growth. The essay is still primarily about YOU, not who or what changed you.

    - You may confuse having gone through a difficult time with a quality that makes you a good candidate. If an event is sad or traumatic, make sure that you show the outcomes more prominently than the sadness. The essay is not a "pity party;" do not overwhelm your reader with the sad details.

- **Tips:**

    - Be careful not to focus so much on the person or event that changed you that your own introspection and growth are lost or simply stated in the last paragraph, You should really explore the internal process that changed you. One of the indicators of maturity is the ability to look back at events in your life and see them with new eyes, using hindsight (which is always 20/20) to evaluate *how* you overcame or changed a belief, not simply see that you *did* change.

The "Issue" Essay

- Common App Prompt #4 fits this category best. This type of question asks you to write about a social, political, local, national, or international issue that is important to you. The tricky thing about this type of essay is choosing your "issue"—you need it to be something that you know a lot about and you need to understand that your choice of topic will say something about you. For example, global warming makes you an environmentalist, the economy makes you politically minded, as does the Arab-Israeli conflict, Syrian refugees makes you a humanitarian, etc. Do not choose this topic unless you actually care about an issue or have worked on solving a problem.

- **Pros:**

    - This can be a chance for you to display your knowledge and passion about something. But remember that the purpose is not for *you* to moralize or educate *an adult* on the issue. The purpose is not to prove that it *is* an issue, but rather *why the issue is important to you.* **It is a personal essay, not a social studies project.**

    - Your choice can reveal your values, ideals, and beliefs.

    - You may be able to work in your chosen major/profession and why going to X college would be so helpful.

- **Cons:**

    - If you are uninformed about your topic you risk sounding ignorant.

    - If you do research to make sure you are informed, you must be careful not to plagiarize.

    - If you are well informed, you may sound preachy or bombastic.

    - This is not a forum to solve the world's problems. Don't presume that you know better than the reader and/or experts in the field.

- **Tips:**

    - Stick with something you know well and have some experience with. If you volunteer at a retirement home, maybe elder care/rights is a good choice (you can talk to staff, etc.). If you are a member of DECA, then by all means something economic/business oriented may work well. If you are a member of METMUNC, then go for something global, etc. Scan your résumé for ideas; make your club affiliations work for you.

Part 11: Tackling Supplemental Essay Prompts

- In addition to the Common Application essay, you will potentially have one or more supplemental essay prompts from the specific schools you apply to. These are often designed to separate "qualified" candidates from candidates that are a "fit" for the campus community or for "rounded out" the graduating class for your year. In other words, sometimes a rejection from a specific college is not because you are not "good enough" to get in, but that your interests, proposed major, etc. did not meet the shape of the class the admissions team was putting together.
- That being said, many of the topics are similar from school to school, such as the "Why us?" "Why your major?" the "Activity" essay and the "community" essay. You can pretty much count on those. Other schools get more creative, so you will need to as well.
- One thing that all supplementals have in common is their brevity. They are almost always 350 words or less. Some may be 400 or 500, but they tend to be significantly shorter than your common application essay. This may seem easier, but it can be more challenging to write something meaningful and not generic in only 250 words. You also want to be sure that you are not just using the same topic as the Common App and making it shorter unless that school does not use the Common App at all. No one wants to read the same essay twice. This is your opportunity to show more of who you are and why their school tops your list.
- **Tips*:***
    - If you are really groaning at the thought of supplementals for a particular school, re-evaluate how likely you are to attend that school if accepted. If it is not likely and you are running short on time, energy, or interest then maybe you should cut your list by one.
    - Think about using personal narrative assignments from your coursework and/or early attempts at the Common App prompts as material that can be re-worked into a supplemental essay.

- Take Michigan as an example of the common supplemental topics:
    - Required for all applicants (approximately 250 words):
        - Everyone belongs to many different communities and/or groups defined by (among other things) shared geography, religion, ethnicity, income, cuisine, interest, race, ideology, or intellectual heritage. Choose one of the communities to which you belong, and describe that community and your place within it.
    - Required for freshman applicants (500 words maximum):
        - Describe the unique qualities that attract you to the specific undergraduate College or School (including preferred admission and dual degree programs) to which you are applying at the University of Michigan. How would that curriculum support your interests?
    - Required for all applicants (approximately 150 words):
        - If you could only do one of the activities you have listed in the Activities section of your Common Application, which one would you keep doing? Why?
- Maryland loves short prompts that require quick and witty responses:
    - To tell us more about yourself, please complete the following sentences using only the space provided (160 characters):
        - If I could travel anywhere, I would go to…
        - The most interesting fact I ever learned from research was…
        - In addition to my major, my academic interests include…
        - My favorite thing about last Tuesday was…
        - Something you might not know about me is…
- Emory (all prompts have a 150 word limit)
    - If asked to write a 150-word tweet to tell the world who you are, what would you say? (Yes, the actual Twitter character limit would likely be shorter than 150 words, but thanks for indulging us.)
    - Which book, character, song, or piece of work (fiction or nonfiction) represents you, and why?
    - If you could witness a historic event first-hand, what would it be, and why?

Here is a breakdown of the pros and cons of common supplemental essay categories:

The "Why I Want to Go Here" Essay

- This essay is required at some schools. Sometimes it appears as a "mini-essay' question requiring a 100–200 word answer. Don't take it lightly. Anything you have to "write" on the application beyond filling in informational blanks is an essay. The committee will be looking at the content as well as form and style. There is really one golden rule here: **do your homework.** What we mean by this is look at the college's website, check out their course offerings, their faculty, their extracurricular offerings, etc. Check out the geographical area too. If there are culturally significant attractions nearby, you can throw that in as a side benefit—especially if they relate to your major. For instance, in New York City, the MOMA if you are an art history major or the New York Philharmonic if you are a music major. If you are heading for Washington DC as a Poli Sci major, the availability of government buildings and museums, etc. If you had family members or friends who attended the college/university you may mention it, especially if you have visited campus, but **beware** the essay needs to be about how **you are a good fit for the school and vice versa.**

The "Why I Want to Major in _____" Essay

- Like the "Why I Want to Go Here" essay, this requires that you do some homework on the school's website. Check their Major requirements, pre-requisites, and course offerings. Be prepared to refer to their specific program, including internship opportunities. It would be really embarrassing to say that you want to major in something that the school doesn't offer! You can also include narrative elements in this essay by telling about a moment or incident which brought you to your decision about your major/career path. For instance, you may relate a personal experience with illness leading you to the medical field, a favorite book leading you to English, student government leading you to Political Science, etc.

- **Pros:**
    - It's about you, so you are an expert!

- **Cons:**
    - You need to do some research about the specific school.
    - You may be tempted to simply list qualities, rather than write an interesting essay.

The "How I Will Contribute to Diversity" Essay

- This one can be tough if you are like the majority of the other students in your school culture (Caucasian, "All-American", middle-of-the-road person). Thankfully, many colleges realize this and have opened the question up to include experiences that have taught you the value of diversity as well as diverse interests. On some applications, this question is phrased as "A range of academic interests, personal perspectives, and life experiences adds much to the educational mix. Given your personal background, describe an experience that illustrates what you would bring to the diversity in a college community, or an encounter that demonstrated the importance of diversity to you."

- **Pros:**
    - Again, this is about YOU—a subject about which you are an expert!
    - This essay is just begging the admissions officers to see you as a DIVERSE individual—not a cookie-cutter image of a college applicant.

- **Cons:**
    - You may be "reaching" for a topic if you come from a "standard"—whatever that means—background.
    - You need to read very carefully around issues of race, gender, ethnicity, and creed. Choose your language carefully, but be honest about your experiences. You may need to show the prejudices and bias that exist in the world.

- **Tips:**
    - You cannot change who you are or what kind of family you were born into. Don't despair! Think of your outside interests—maybe you like to go antique hunting or refurbish old cars. Think of your extracurricular skills—maybe you can paint murals on campus buildings, etc. Think of experiences you have had with diverse groups, maybe as an exchange student, working in a camp, volunteering your time with a charity, etc. **Remember:** Diversity is NOT LIMITED to race or religion! It is about moving beyond what you are familiar with and allowing it to influence you.

The "Creative" Essay

- This is the type of question that asks you to use your imagination. Some schools ask how you would change history if you could change one thing, or whom you would invite to dinner, dead or alive, and what you would talk about; others ask about characters in literature. You get the idea. You might see this as "Describe a character in fiction, a historical figure, or a creative work (as in art, music, science, etc.) that has had an influence on you, and explain that influence.
- **Pros:**
    - Creative license can be a beautiful thing. You can really have fun with this one.
    - This is a chance to flex your creative and intellectual muscles simultaneously.
    - You can really stand out as an individual here.
- **Cons:**
    - Your choice of topic will say a lot about the kind of person you are. Choose wisely.
    - Tone can be tricky. Humor can backfire on you if you are not adept at it. *Writing* something funny takes a different skill than *saying* something funny
    - Choosing something unconventional is NOT a free pass. You must be able to PULL OFF the topic you choose—including knowing your facts.

Part 12: Essays with Revision

- **The Original Essay**
    - *This is the essay as it was first written:*

What do people want out of life? Is it understanding of the world around them? Could it be truth or acceptance? There are a multitude of applicable nouns that may be inserted to complete the question. Perhaps the real substance of what people want from their lives is the ability to make goals for themselves and be able to reach for and attain those goals.

It all boils down to an individual's personal goals. In my case, my personal goals are my educational goals as well; to do all I can to succeed in life; to know that I am here for a reason and leave my mark on this world through my chosen path. My path was discovered during participation of the Brown Environmental Leadership Lab (BELL) Hawaii program in April of 2007. Marine science and biology had always been what I wanted to study, however, I was unsure of where that part of academia could take me in life. While in Hawaii I found the answer in coral reef conservation. BELL Hawaii had opened a doorway, an opportunity for a path to walk. Striving to preserve a part of our world that holds such unsurpassed beauty for future generations is what life contains in my future.

As an avid outdoorsman and nature lover, traveling the globe focused toward preservation of coral reefs will bring meaning to the high degree of education received in marine sciences and biology. As a widely renowned school for such academic programs, including not only masters and doctorate programs, but research of various topics, especially coral reef ecosystems, UNCW will without a doubt facilitate my life goals. I will go anywhere, meet any challenge head on, and overcome any obstacle to realize my goals.

- **The Revised Essay**
    - *Here is the revised essay:*

What do people want out of life? Some may say an understanding of the world around them. Others may wish for truth or acceptance. In reality, there are a multitude of applicable answers to that question. However, they all boil down to people's ability to make goals for themselves and their ability to reach for and attain those goals.

The specific answer to the question, therefore, all depends upon an individual's personal goals. In my case, my personal goals are the same as my educational goals: to do all I can to succeed in life; to know that I am here for a reason and leave my mark on this world through my chosen path. I discovered the path for doing so during my participation in the Brown Environmental Leadership Lab (BELL) Hawaii program in April of 2007. Marine science and biology had always been what I wanted to study; however, I was unsure of where that part of academia could take me in life. As soon as I dove beneath the clear blue waters of Hawaii I found the answer in coral reef conservation. BELL Hawaii had opened a doorway, an opportunity for a path to walk. My future will be filled with my efforts to preserve a part of our world that holds such unsurpassed beauty for future generations.

As an avid outdoorsman and nature lover, I believe that traveling the globe with a focus on preserving coral reefs will bring meaning to the high degree of education received in marine sciences and biology. Since UNCW is a widely renowned school for such academic programs, including masters and doctorate programs as well as research programs focused on coral reef ecosystems, attending UNCW will without a doubt facilitate my life goals. By accepting me, UNCW will be admitting a student who will go anywhere, meet any challenge head on, and overcome any obstacle to realize his goals, which, after all, is what people want out of life.

- **Commentary**
    - This essay is still far from perfect or professional; however, the few changes that were made do a lot to improve the voice, tone, and flow of the essay. For instance, a well-placed rhetorical question may show thoughtfulness, but three in a row are overkill and show either uncertainty or a hesitant writing skill. The overall organization and cohesion has been improved. Long sentences have been shortened to more digestible separate thoughts. More details about the trip to Hawaii and the BELL program may have made this essay more vivid, but the writer accomplishes the task of explaining his choice in schools and majors.

Here is a REVISED supplemental student essay submitted to The American University

Commentary:
The green text shows changes that were made to her initial drafts to make the essay more lively and show more personal voice. Irene's first draft began with the idea of being called a chatterbox in a simple declarative sentence; in her revised version she made that fact into a bit of vivid dialogue. Her first draft talked a lot about the confidence her World Language classes gave her, so I encouraged her to use some of her world language skills in her essay to spice it up. She kept it simple so as not to alienate a reader with no experience in French or Spanish. The use of Irène as almost an alter-ego is a clever way to show that she was changing and growing. Finally, she concluded the essay with a reprisal of her role as "chatterbox" but changes the connotation of that title. As a general rule any mirroring or framing is an impressive technique.

The scolding of my kindergarten teacher still roars through my brain**, "Irene, you're a little Miss Chatterbox!"** That was my nickname consistently through the year from her—chatterbox. As I matured, I thought about that constantly, and in school, I grew **taciturn.** The years passed, and I would struggle learning, not because the teachers were inadequate, but rather because I was afraid to ask questions when I had them. I was **petrified** of holding the title chatterbox for the rest of my life.

Finally middle school came, and with it, my entry level course in French. Suddenly it was expected of everyone to speak. I picked up French rapidly, eager for an excuse to hear my own voice. Even if all I could say was ***Je M'appelle Irène*****,** I said my new French name with pride. For now I wasn't the chatterbox, I was ***Irène*****,** my newfound identity.

However, repeating ***Irène*** numerous times didn't quench my desire to speak. Especially for only forty two minutes a day. There wasn't enough time, or enough vocabulary, to say a majority of what I felt, and I could only say what was important. Thankfully, there was an easy solution to the problem. To get more time to speak, all I had to do was add more language classes to my schedule.

Soon, it wasn't only French, but Spanish, in my schedule as well. I was the only junior in an entry level Spanish class. Yet, rather than deter me, I was intrigued. I wasn't *Irène* here, rather ***Me llamo Irene*****.** The long "e" in my name could finally be spoken! Even though French and Spanish are each derived from Latin, the differences between them startled me. But even though they were different languages, I could speak them both. I got to hear myself for over an hour a day, which satisfied **me—for awhile.**

Eventually even two periods of language couldn't keep me content. At this moment, my languages taught me my most invaluable lesson. If I spoke, my words wouldn't always be received negatively. I began to proudly put my voice into my classes, and my interest in my classes skyrocketed, along with my grades. This was all from learning two languages and, of course, speaking. I could only think of Bienvenue**! My voice was finally welcome.**

Sadly, my time at high school is almost over, but there is a positive outcome. American University's international opportunities are boundless, and I would be honored by the privilege of studying abroad and broadening my language skills. In addition, Washington, D.C. is the prime location for voicing my political opinions, as it's closest to the source of government. Washington, D.C. is a city where a person is meant to be heard. **So who said it was bad to be a chatterbox?**

Part 13: Sample Essays with Commentary

Real students wrote the following essays. Use their essays and the commentary that follows each one to generate ideas for possible topics and for improving the style and voice in your own writing. Each one is labeled by the school the student decided to attend.

Essay #1: University of Miami

"Number 24, you're next". I look down and feel every hair stand on end as those exact digits stare up at me from my shirt. My heart palpitates with the fear of humiliating myself in front of my classmates, but deep down I know that I am ready. Each step towards the platform grows increasingly heavier as though shackles are clasped around my ankles, tightening their unforgiving grip. The velvet curtains open and there I stand center stage, feeling completely vulnerable, while a glaring spotlight and a hundred beady little eyes watch my every move. Taking in one last gulp of air, I cue the pianist to play my starting pitch. The stage is finally mine.

Ever since I can remember, I have watched individuals perform in jaw dropping admiration, yearning for the day that I would be the one in the spotlight. I have always found an excuse to burst out into song, choreograph a dance, or even re-enact some of my favorite movie scenes, albeit behind closed doors.

One winter day in fourth grade, those closed doors opened. I walked into a room filled with complete darkness, apart from the speck of light coming from the classroom's projector. As I inaudibly sat down next to one of my classmates, the projector displayed a silhouette of a young girl sitting on top of a rock gazing at the horizon. Beneath her, in the depths of the prismatic ocean in enormous blue letters reads Disney's The Little Mermaid.

Butterflies fluttered in my stomach just thinking about auditioning. Nevertheless, I would not allow my trepidations to consume me. I no longer wanted to be perceived as a subservient and soft-spoken little girl but rather as a gregarious and outgoing young lady. It was finally my chance to show people who I truly was.

As soon as the first words spouted from my lips, I broke free—free from the shackles, free from my insecurities, and most importantly, free from my introspective self. My entire persona transformed. I was the wicked sea witch Ursula and I took command of the stage. As though eight tentacles flowed from my body, I had never felt more empowered. I was fully submerged into the character, engrossed in every lyric I sang. I blossomed into a new individual,capable of the inconceivable. In the next instant, it was over. I was brought back to reality, though I left the stage a different person than the one who ascended it.

For most, the Old Bethpage production of The Little Mermaid was a juvenile musical funded by the local elementary school, a charming performance, though surely forgotten by many. Yet, it is that same show that will always remind me of my first, and certainly not my last encounter, with the theater. As the leading antagonist, Ursula, I have learned to be comfortable in my own skin and to always be willing to take risks even if it means venturing into uncharted territory, as I did the day that I went on my first audition. More importantly, theater has taught me to see beyond my own insular views, to be a better communicator, and to appreciate everything that life has to offer.

As I reflect on that first audition, I realize that theater is everything to me; it is fused within my identity. I would not trade acting—the audition process, the angst, the rejections, the prolonged rehearsals, and the aches and pains after countless hours of singing and dancing—for the world. Even though I may not pursue theater as my primary major, the techniques and experiences that I have acquired and will continue to gain will always be by my side, helping me persevere in any given circumstance. Just as actors can touch the minds, hearts, and souls of those sitting in the audience, I too will make my mark in this world whether it be on or off the stage.

Commentary:

This writer uses an anecdote to draw her reader in. She uses present tense to increase the intensity of the moment. She then transitions to a more traditional narrative style in which the events unfold in chronological order. The high level of detail makes a somewhat common experience of being involved in drama more specific and personal. Her voice is genuine and reflects her honest, generous, and thoughtful personality. This essay shows personal growth as well as the ability to apply the lessons from one aspect of her personality and experiences to another. She is not applying to the drama department, but it is easy to see how her work ethic, determination, and confidence will fuel her pursuit of her chosen career path.

Essay #2: Pittsburgh (Chancellor's Scholar)

I could never have imagined that a fight for the freedom of two rubber ducks would motivate and bind a community.

During the summer before my senior year, I worked as an in-bunk counselor at the sleepaway camp I attended as a child. In addition to typical summer camp activities, this community emphasizes repairing the world and making a positive difference to society in any way personally possible through charity and deeds. Some of my best memories were when I learned from the counselors I most admired. With this in mind, I quickly found my voice in my bunk of nine-year-old boys, balancing goofiness and fun with responsibility and discipline.

I knew my campers looked up to me and that the camp expected me to use my position to model the camp's positive values. We had two rubber ducks that we had named and kept as bunk pets; however, they were soon stolen from us by another bunk. I capitalized on this stroke of luck in receiving an opportunity to teach my campers in a fun way. After securing my supervisor's approval, I introduced my bunk to the world of activism. I asked the boys whether they knew anything about social action and we soon hatched a comprehensive plan to free our ducks. We brainstormed about what we could do to get them back. I organized a march around camp during our free period and helped the boys make signs. We began a letter writing campaign to the bunk that had stolen the ducks, and we even staged a sit-in. It was gratifying to see the boys take this initiative seriously. They became extremely passionate about freeing our ducks and began to think of their own ideas of how to collaborate to persuade the other bunk to return the ducks.

This spontaneous informal activity taught the bunk a few lessons. Aside from the general social activism component, I drew parallels to the issue of human trafficking. While "in captivity", the ducks were kept in a backpack, locked away with little human contact or oxygen. In our protest, we argued that the ducks' living conditions with us were much more humane. In our bunk, the ducks had names, a place to stay, and the adoration of many campers. The mission to reclaim the ducks defined our bunk culture and was a unifying force. All the boys rallied behind a common cause, giving some who were otherwise incompatible a reason to work together.

The campaign ended with the peaceful migration of the ducks back to our bunk but the boys didn't immediately let go of the experience. I overheard them proudly savoring their accomplishment and collaborating to safeguard the ducks from any further harm. I knew that in a lighthearted manner, I made a lasting impact by inspiring my camp community to be comfortable standing up and speaking out about a wrong that needed to be made right. I am proud that I left them with knowledge and experience of social activism as well as good memories of a fun lesson that fit the bill of applying the camp's values to their personal lives.

Commentary:

The rule of NEVER writing about camp does have a few exceptions. In this case, the student's story takes place at camp, but is not ABOUT camp. It is about social activism, commitment to a cause, and creative problem-solving. It tells more about the student himself and his values than the widely shared experiences of kids who go to or work at camps. This essay is well-written without being fancy. He uses his experiences with MetMunc to inform some of his word choice and succinct methods-based structure. The essay reflects the student's true voice--direct and confident. He does not try to "impress" the reader with style or vocabulary; he simply shares a true piece of himself.

Essay #3: Hamilton College

It was a warm spring day in 2010, and the sun was shining through the fire exit window right onto my ancient, scratched up wooden desk. State exams were just one month away, and my entire third grade class was ready to show our skills to the alleged "crotchety old people" who were grading our exams. On this particular day, we were practicing for the math exam. I have always been stronger in math, so I was actually excited, admittedly more excited than an eight year old should probably be about standardized math practice. Nonetheless, in the eyes of my third grade self, this was my time to shine. As soon as my teacher doled out our practice problems, I got to work. I had just finished one of the problems and went to ask one of the teachers if my answer was correct. She told me that my answer was correct, but I wouldn't get any credit for it because I showed my work in the wrong place. She then took my paper, held it up in front of the entire class, and said, "This is exactly what you are not supposed to do." I was mortified.

At this point in my life, my understanding of perfection was textbook definition: no mistakes, no failures, no exceptions. In my eyes, anything less than a 100 was a disgrace. Especially being around a sister on the spectrum who struggled with school, I didn't want to create any more work for my parents. So instead of asking my mom for help with my multiplication tables, I was beating myself up for a 92 on a spelling quiz. I poured myself into countless hobbies like origami and embroidery just for the sake of knowing them. From such a young age I spent hours and hours painstakingly studying every last detail of the material, regardless of if it was truly necessary.

Not so shockingly, this made me miserable. I barely spent time with the few friends I bothered to have, I was convinced my grades were never good enough, and I had basically turned into a walking ball of anxiety. I started to make a conscious effort towards change in eighth grade, when I was so stressed about my first Regents that the sheer sight of a review book caused me to burst into tears. Instead of telling myself that nothing I did was good enough, I began telling myself to just try my best and go with it. I began studying only what I needed to study and actually leaving my house to hang out with friends. Although I didn't notice much of a difference in my grades, I noticed an enormous change in myself. I cared more about the effort I put in than

the grade that I got, and my relationships with friends and family became much stronger since I was able to communicate with them more with all this new time I had. Of course it hasn't been easy, and I would be silly to pretend like there haven't been days where a bad test grade dampened my mood, or wished I'd gotten *just* one more point on a quiz, but rearranging how I lived my life was the most necessary and beneficial thing I have ever done for myself.

I never thought I would say this, I would like to thank my teacher for holding up my paper and saying the phrase that's been embedded into my brain since 2010, "this is exactly what you are not supposed to do." Despite the almost tangible embarrassment I felt that day, it sparked such personal growth and discovery within myself that I don't think either of us could have comprehended at that time in my life. My perception of perfection is no longer some Merriam-Webster monstrosity; it's the result of me tackling a challenge to the best of my abilities.

Commentary:

This essay is an example of the "setback" essay which ultimately turns into real growth for the writer. It incorporates some vivid essential details which also helps create imagery. Furthermore, the essay showcases the writer's voice and personality. More specifically, it reveals important personality traits: maturity, honesty, and reflection. There is reflection throughout the essay, but it really comes together near the concluding section. The "setback" turns into something valuable for the writer wherein the essential growth that came with it helped the individual become a more vibrant and confident version of themselves.

Essay #4: Stony Brook University

Founding Father: Frank Lloyd Wright

I knew Frank Lloyd Wright before Washington, and Falling Water before the White House. While an odd concept to some that I knew about architecture before history, it was unknown to me this was not the norm of most children. My father taught me about great historical buildings and architecture throughout my entire life, and instilled in me a passion for innovation. He told me of magnificent structures such as the Great Wall of China, which we built out of sugar cubes, but when I created alone, my weapon of choice: the humble popsicle stick. After one trip to a craft store, I set myself off to begin what I thought would be the project of a lifetime: to build the Eiffel Tower out of popsicle sticks.

Stick 1: The beginning

Pour. Glue. Stick. Analyze. I repeat these four steps with elegance as my thoughts and motions coalesce to form my perfect structure. After stick number one, the sticks began to continuously increase in quantity. I would feel immense satisfaction from every piece of wood I would lay down. One on top of the other. Hour after hour. Day after day. I believed that this would be my Vitruvian Man, my Mona Lisa, my landmark contribution to society. I would pursue my Eiffel Tower long after stick one, and it became ritual to be called to bed, wash my hands of copious amounts of glue, await sleep, dreaming of the tower I would one day construct.

Stick 1,457: End in sight

I had connected all of the legs, and continued vertically, carefully laying down popsicle sticks one on top of the other in complex geometric patterns, sitting for up to 30 minutes deciding where to lay even just one popsicle, as if it were to determine the outcome of the entire tower. After careful analysis, sitting cross legged until I was numb, I thought: “the sides are not correct”, “I should stop”. There would be three stick 1,457’s.

Stick 2,671: The steepest climb

Stick 2,671 would be the last. This stick marked the final piece of my tower; it marked my second wind. Reaching 2,671 allowed me to reflect on my progress, looking upon the dried glue marks on previous sticks, indicating progress since I had built that portion days or weeks ago. I would run my hands over each leg assuring all sticks were straight, remembering how this was version four of the specific leg, and complete perfection. It was a melancholy moment to reach this stick, as it marked the conclusion of my architectural pursuit.

It was complete, and I looked at my Eiffel Tower with immense pride, almost iconoclastically. But like Sisyphus, as I had rolled my rock to the top, it was immediately thrown down to the bottom of my hill. While reflecting on my recent accomplishment, I was distracted by the pile of discarded attempts, thinking about time wasted building multiple models of seemingly “perfect” towers. Inevitably, I justified failures to appease my perfectionist ideology.

The point of my project though was not to make a new me at that time, to advance myself as a professional popsicle stick architect, but to mold who I would become. Passion for innovation would not only translate into popsicle sticks and architecture, but a love of neuroscience as a research student. The popsicle sticks would turn into neurons, and the glue would turn into glial cells, shaping the brain images I researched to treat Bipolar Disorder in Stony Brook Hospital. I would examine brain images with the same intricacy I analyzed my popsicle sticks, ensuring all was faultless. Even when the tower is not perfect, the discarded pile of sticks would show me that you cannot waste time to make sure every stick's position was exactly perfect. One must continue on from that stick, appreciate its flaws, and pursue the unknown.

Commentary:
The writer takes a more creative and unconventional approach to the personal narrative. The juxtaposition of the childhood pastime of recreating great architectural structures with popsicle sticks to the writer’s ultimate dream of studying neuroscience works quite well here. The majority of the essay describes the process of building these structures, yet ultimately, the writer’s goal is not to become an architect, but a neurosurgeon. The vivid description of the process helps to highlight the personality traits of the writer: ingenuity, confidence and tenacity. The “step” process used also creates intrigue for the reader who is curious about what’s to come in the narrative. Additionally, the skillful allusion of Sisyphus further explains the tenacity needed to complete the task, even in the face of difficulty. All of these elements help to form an essay that inspires and captures the voice of a gifted writer and future neurosurgeon.

Essay #5: New York University

A single spotlight radiates down on the empty stage, slightly reaching the tips of my fingers as they cling onto the barricade placed before me. The hundreds of bodies surrounding me are nothing more than a few old friends—we've reconnected over a common interest. Before we have time to fill each other in on the past few years, a familiar saxophone solo captivates the room. A single clap turns into a roar of cheers as the anticipated act gracefully makes her way onto the stage, with that same lone spotlight now gleaming on her. The wave of cheers flushes every thought out of my mind, yet I know a tsunami is going to hit as soon as the house lights are turned back on. It's on the barricades of these New York City venues that I don't dwell on the past and future, I'm truly present in my thoughts—I'm living in the moment.

Halfway through the set and my favorite song fills the room, causing a catharsis I should've expected. Everything that has built up inside me is released as I cry out my favorite lyrics. My fixation on the performance in front of me blurs the image of the crowd around me—I'm reminded of their existence as they sing along with as much emotion as I do, as if the lyrics have become a plea for help. A feeling of intimacy is created in the sea of people that I can't even see the end of. I'm lost and don't want to be found.

The X's on my hand provide me with a feeling of power, rather than the defeat that comes with the X's on my tests. Nothing can bring me down. The swaying of bodies to the mesmerizing beats invites me in, rather than pushing me away as the abundance of careless bodies in the school hallway do. I'm able to let loose. The sound of off-key voices singing along becomes the most beautiful choir begging me to be their newest member, rather than being just another student in the perfectly in-tune group that I'm a part of each day. It's okay if I'm not perfect. The diverse crowd around me only smiles at me, rather than glaring at me for not being a clone of the stereotypical Long Island girl I'm expected to be. They accept me for who I am.

Nothing compares to the euphoria I feel when squished in a crowd while hearing the songs that mean the most to me in their rawest form. At the end of the night my cheeks throb from the smile that never left my face, even more than my legs or ears do. I'm just that happy. There's sweat dripping down my face, my makeup smeared, and yet I feel more beautiful than ever. It's as if I'm in my own Garden of Eden, my own paradise on earth. Yet as soon as the last chord is played the temptation takes over, I allow all worries to take over me again.

On ordinary days, stress consumes me like a vacuum sucking up the remnants of confetti that fell during the encore. I'm constantly concentrated on a fear of the future, as well as being haunted by the past, yet in those few hours of live music blasting through a mediocre sound system it's as if I'm born again—pure, and not yet affected by the troubles of the world. These late nights are the best medicine, curing me of the everyday stresses. It's here that I'm my present self, my best self, not consumed with anxious thoughts. I'm the most "me" I'll ever be.

"Life is made of small moments like these." -Above & Beyond

Commentary:

This essay reads like prose-poetry, She is adept at creating a scene through imagery and in-the-moment present tense. Notice that the imagery is not simply visual: she incorporates the physical feelings and sounds just as vividly. However, painting a scene is not enough to make the essay successful. She simultaneously weaves her internal monologue throughout the description before completely switching to a more reflective tone in the final paragraph. Though both going to a concert and experiencing anxiety are common high school experiences, the reader is left with a sense of this student as a unique, introspective, and talented applicant.

Essay #6: University of Pittsburgh

I am going to be a doctor.

"*How do you know you're going to be a doctor?*"

I am a science student, dreaming up projects for the school science fair, conducting experiments like testing the effects of soda on human teeth, and reading numerous books about everything from monstrous insects to the outer reaches of our solar system. For my 11th birthday, my grandparents presented me with *Anatomy and Physiology for Dummies*. Now before you think that my grandparents were forcing me to become a doctor against my will, I believe they gave me that book as a joke, along with various other toys. Within the ensuing two weeks, I had read that book cover to cover (only understanding every other word) and hadn't even touched the other toys. That book opened my eyes to an entire new world that lived inside me.

As a sports-loving kid, with disappointingly little athletic talent, I discovered that medicine was my way into the big leagues. While most Yankee fans my age idolized the greats like Derek Jeter and Mariano Rivera, I idolized Steve Donahue and Dr. James Andrews. I constantly had to explain to my friends that Steve Donahue is the longtime athletic trainer for the New York Yankees, and Dr. James Andrews is the most talented orthopedic surgeon in the history of baseball, saving countless pitchers' careers. Ever since I could remember, I've wanted a world series ring and being the team orthopedic surgeon for the New York Yankees is how I'm going to get one.

I also realized that in order to be a doctor I'd need to be compassionate, understanding, and patient. Starting in the fall of 8th grade, I became a buddy for Plainview Challengers, and have been volunteering with them ever since. I teach baseball to children aged four and older, all of whom have various degrees of mental and physical disabilities. I've spent countless Sunday mornings teaching those kids how to run the bases, throw to first, and how to be a part of a team. The experience has been extremely rewarding, and has given me the tools to be able to work with people of all different capabilities. Nothing has tested my patience more than telling a six year old boy to run to first over and over again, even while he was too busy celebrating the hit. I had to encourage those who didn't have confidence or complete understanding, in a calm supportive voice, explaining the task, until finally they completed their goal.

"*How does any of this have to do with my accepting you into our prestigious university?*"

I am fully aware that most students applying to a pre-med program have superb grades, and I am no exception, but my passion for medicine goes way beyond the classroom. I have a subscription to the New England Journal of Medicine. In my spare time, I play around with their interactive cases just to utilize the knowledge obtained during the anatomy and physiology course I took junior year. My favorite book is *The Emperor of All Maladies*, which is a biography about cancer, describing its origins, impact on history, and the advances in medicine, from the

first chemotherapy treatments, to gene therapy techniques of the modern age. I read that book with my feet in the sand on a tropical island. Not many 14 year olds have done that. Not many 16 year olds spent two and a half hours every week during their junior year, interning at a physical therapy office just because they found the musculoskeletal system fascinating. While most kids' favorite show on ESPN is "Sportscenter" mine is "Sports Science". I have a drive and a desire to learn as much as I can about the human body, and I will pursue every opportunity to work alongside others to make this my reality.

I am going to be a doctor.

Commentary:

This essay begins with a good "hook" that is also used in the ending. This technique provides the reader with the idea of coming full circle; it's always a nice touch to end the way in which you began. From the details of the essay, the writer's ambitions and drive is clearly evident. The details provided help to reveal the path and defining moments that helped to shape the writer's future goals. While there are a number of accomplishments listed, it's not doing so in a boastful manner. This is important especially when writing about oneself, because unfortunately, it's sometimes a pitfall of personal writing. Additionally, the writer's voice radiates clearly throughout the essay; yet, another essential aspect of the personal narrative. The question and answer format for the essay is creatively used to reveal all the important details important in creating meaning, and overall essay "appeal."

Essay #7: Savannah College of Arts & Design (SCAD)

Dear past-self,

I'm writing to let you know that I'm sorry. I know this doesn't make any sense, but I let you down. And coming to terms with that has not been an easy task. It is one that still hurts if I let it consume my thoughts for too long. I am still learning to accept this.

I understand that this isn't what you planned—having it all mapped out in your princess notebook of who you would someday grow up to be. I know you said you would keep up this act, but walking on a tightrope with trembling legs isn't as easy as it used to be and my heart has grown weary. Please don't think that this decision was a hasty one—one made after a bad game or a heartbreaking loss. In fact, this has been the most drawn out decision of my life. It has been the up-all-night tossing and turning, pregame jitters, college meetings, and Google searches of coaches' emails kind of decision. Believe me when I say I tried. Trying to convince myself that playing was what I wanted, what *we* wanted. I know this was your dream, but it is not mine. And, for that all I can do is to try and make you understand how I got here.

Don't get me wrong, I love soccer, or at least that's what I've been telling myself and the people around me for the longest time. I mean, who am I if not the girl who learned how to kick a ball before I could even read and write. While school soccer has always brought my joy and confidence, the competitive atmosphere of club soccer has been a suffocating one. One filled with times of stress, of uncertainty, of whether or not playing in college is "the right fit."

After years of trying to please you and everyone but myself, of trying to fit into the perfect mold that they wanted to place me in, I have to do this for me. The thing is that you and I aren't the same. We are planets orbiting in the same galaxy, but millions of miles span between us. Leaving soccer in the rearview mirror of my fast moving life never seemed right until now.

Without soccer, a world of endless possibilities is at my fingertips. The old me would have jumped out of my skin for fear of the unknown path that lies ahead of me, but I am learning to accept that things were never meant to last forever. Life is not stagnant—it is ever changing.

Ending soccer after fourteen years of playing almost every single week, if not more, will hurt. But it is the new horizons I seek in which I am willing to give up the sport that has always seemed to define me. It is the free time on weekends and school nights that I had previously never known. Time dedicated to reading again, getting lost in the stories like I used to as a child, or moments spent painting. This is the time that I desire—that I crave. Time that was formerly spent worrying about practices and games ahead of me, hoping I would once again ignite and foster the passion that you used to have. I cannot get that time back, but I *can* choose how to spend the seemingly endless hours that span before me. I have spent years loving this sport, but I have finally accepted that while it has consumed so much of my past it does not dictate my future. A life without club soccer can be a fulfilling one if you let it. Despite the voices in your head, *you* can do this, *we* can do this, *I* can do this.

All my love,

Me

Commentary:

This is a compelling application essay. Sure, the letter format is out of the ordinary, but that is not what makes it so effective. The finest quality of this essay is the honesty in its voice. It shows many of the traits admissions officers look for: self-awareness, reflection, courage, and personal growth. She uses multiple figurative phrases to convey her emotions such as the "planets" in orbit and the "rear-view mirror" in a fast paced life. These are not forced or belabored; they simply convey her voice as she is struggling to explain her evolving identity and goals. There truly is no "formula" or template for the "perfect" essay. Revealing something about who you are as a person that cannot be seen on your resume is the best plan.

Essay #8: New York University (NYU)

Black Tiger Spring

The first words that ever graced my lips were in Chinese, yet at the age of sixteen I was barely conversational in the same language.

I was born in New York to two proud Chinese immigrants, and raised in Jinan, China, from age one to three by doting grandparents. I returned every summer to dip my sandaled feet in the waters of the Black Tiger Spring, eat hawthorn flavored Bing GongSi popsicles, and breathe in the *tèsè*, or characteristic, scent of the air that lingered in my memory for years. My roots were undeniably intertwined with the Chinese soil.

The continuous stream of time carried the once parallel lines of myself in opposite directions. I gradually felt the gap between my classmates and me increasing. As one of the few Chinese kids in my town, I felt like an outsider, and impressionability infected me like a tumor. Traditional Qipaos made me an outcast, my ethnic nose became a disfigurement when boys ridiculed me, and speaking the tongue that my parents considered home was an embarrassment. At eight years old, as part of my rebellion in the midst of my parents' divorce, I cut my roots and stopped speaking Chinese.

By high school, I could no longer read, write, or speak it, but I could understand enough to handle basic conversations. My paternal grandparents had lived with us since my return to America. Neither of them spoke English, so my practice of Chinese was limited to our communications. I would sit beside my grandma and listen, responding with physical reactions, unable to form the very same words I was able to understand. But with her, the woman who'd raised me, laughed with me when I dropped dishware, learned to make pizza because I liked it, this one-way conversation was enough.

Then last November my grandma suffered her third stroke. Her previous two had left her unscathed, but, like an earthquake, this one left cracks in its wake. She returned from the hospital with a heavy tongue, and her muffled words were nonsensical when they reached my yearning ears. I felt myself desperately grasping for any familiar sound, any noise that would resonate with me. Instead, all I heard were dark clouds of incoherency. Although she was trying to comfort me, the more she spoke, the more it burned.

In that moment, the everlasting hourglass of excuses ran out. If I didn't learn Chinese now, I would lose not only my roots, but also my grandma.

I spent the next months studying maniacally. Everything was second to my pursuit of Chinese. I spent hours translating speeches, copying an endless stream of words from my ear. I felt the flowers of my roots bloom inside when I first read a complete sentence. And I realized I had been pronouncing the word bathroom wrong for years—it's *CèSuǒ*, not *TèSuǒ*.

I traveled back to China on my own for the entirety of August. While I had sought a reconnection to my grandma, what I found was a reconnection to my own self. I returned to my parents' hometown, to the Black Tiger Spring, to the icy sweetness of those hawthorn popsicles, and to the familiar scent of my grandmother's condominium. Nothing had changed; it was all still there, waiting for me.

Sitting in the shade of the willow tree, I felt tied to this place and everything it represented. No matter how much I had refused my heritage, my roots held me firmly to this ground. To reconnect with my family, to reclaim the joys of my childhood, and to return the pieces of my parents' past, forgone to give me a future—this was always my responsibility, and now I wanted to embrace it.

When I returned to America, and to my grandma's arms, she told me my Chinese had improved immensely.

"*Xièxie*"—thank you—I told her, with a smile, and we began to talk.

Commentary:

This essay has many admirable strengths and characteristics of the personal narrative. It begins with an opening that leaves the reader to wonder why the writer stopped speaking Chinese. Once you continue reading, the explanation is slowly revealed with flashback and self-reflection. It is always wise to write about past events with a fair amount of self-reflection in order to illustrate the personal growth that admissions officers are looking for in an essay. Moreover, the other great strength of the essay is the imagery and description the writer includes whether about the visit to China or the time spent with the ailing grandmother. There is something poetic about the way these events are described; this helps to reveal the writer's talent for descriptive writing. Because this essay is about re-learning a lost language, it skillfully places words in Chinese throughout to create authenticity, while showing the progress the writer is making with learning. In closing, while the essay writes about the grandmother's influence, much is learned about the writer as well; clearly, what is easily evidenced is an appreciation for culture and language that is essential to one's identity.

Part 14: Print Resources Bibliography

50 Successful Harvard Application Essays: What Worked for Them Can Help You Get into the College of Your Choice. Amazon, Amazon, www.amazon.com/50-Successful-Harvard-Application-Essays/dp/1250127556/ref=sr_1_fkmr0_1?keywords=50+Successful+Harvard+Application+Essays,+Second+Edition:+What+Worked+for+Them+Can+Help+You+Get+into+the+College+of+Your+Choice,+5th+Edition&qid=1565381594&s=books&sr=1-1-fkmr0. *Summary from Amazon. com:* "With talented applicants coming from the top high schools as well as the pressure to succeed from family and friends, it's no wonder that writing college application essays is one of the most stressful tasks high schoolers face. Add in how hard it is to get started or brag about accomplishments or order stories for maximum effect, and it's a wonder that any ever get written."

100 Successful College Application Essays: Third Edition. Amazon, Amazon, www.amazon.com/100-Successful-College-Application-Essays/dp/0451417615/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=100+successful+college+application+essay&qid=1565378400&s=books&sr=1-1 *Summary From Amazon.com:*: "These are the essays that helped their authors gain admission to Harvard, Yale, Brown, Columbia, Wellesley, Pomona, and other outstanding schools—followed by invaluable comments by experts in admissions, placement, and college counseling at some of the best learning institutions around the country."

Conquering the College Admissions Essay in 10 Steps, Third Edition: Crafting a Winning Personal Statement. Amazon, Amazon, www.amazon.com/Conquering-College-Admissions-Essay-Steps/dp/0399578692/ref=sr_1_2?crid=1XQ9VMHLPA5F2&keywords=conquering+the+college+admissions+essay+in+10+steps+by+alan+gelb&qid=1565382016&s=books&sprefix=conquering+,stripbooks,144&sr=1-2. Summary from Amazon.com: "A consistent top-seller in the college prep category, *Conquering the College Admissions Essay in 10 Easy Steps* has been revised to include extra information on supplemental and waitlist essays. This much-needed handbook will help applicants win over the admissions dean, while preparing them to write better papers once they've been accepted."

Fiske Real College Essays That Work (Fiske College Guides). Amazon, Amazon, www.amazon.com/Fiske-Real-College-Essays-Guides/dp/1402295766/ref=sr_1_3?crid=15FVSPHG5MHKA&keywords=fiske+real+college+essays+that+work&qid=1565382253&s=books&sprefix=fiske+real+,stripbooks,155&sr=1-3. S*ummary from Amazon.com:* "Top College Essays That Show You What Works
Take the stress out of writing your essays! Every fall, thousands of aspiring students just like you spend hours staring at a computer screen, searching for a clever opening line or life-changing experience. It doesn't have to be that hard—we'll help you push past writer's block and find a topic that works for you!"

The College Application Essay, 6th Ed. Amazon, Amazon, www.amazon.com/College-Application-Essay-6th-Ed/dp/1457304287/ref=sr_1_4?crid=1BKUPSCSA44U6&keywords=the+college+application+essay&qid=1565382614&s=books&sprefix=the+college+applic,stripbooks,140&sr=1-4. Summary from Amazon.com: "This popular guide helps students write essays that win admission. Winning college application essays take admission officers beyond the numbers and shows them what the students really care about, how they think, and who they really are. But even the best of students can be daunted by the task."

"The Write Way into College: Rising Above GPAs and Test Scores with Memorable Application Essays." *Amazon*, Amazon, www.amazon.com/Write-Way-into-College-Application/dp/1632991837/ref=sr_1_1?crid=1BF4ZTBSW5F6T&keywords=the+write+way+into+college&qid=1565381366&s=books&sprefix=the+write+way,stripbooks,139&sr=1-1. *Summary from Amazon.com*: "Competition to get into colleges is fierce. Many applicants have solid GPAs and test scores, and similar leadership and volunteer experiences—so how do you rise above the crowd? In *The Write Way into College*, author Jody Cohan-French shows you how to set yourself apart and present your unique potential through compelling application essays. As Jody says, "The key is to tell your story and reveal something distinguishing or memorable about yourself."'

Part 15: Web Resources

- **Accepted.Com**
    - Accepted.com is a website that offers free sample essays and general tips for applying to college. They also offer an editing service for a fee. While the free information is very useful, we strongly advise against using any service that is unethical and borders on plagiarism. Please be very careful in selecting any resource that is willing to write your essay "for you."
        - http://www.accepted.com/college/sampleEssays.aspx
- **Johns Hopkins University: Essays That Worked**
    - This web resource includes student essays that were chosen by the admissions committee at Hopkins that "worked" in terms of effective narrative writing which clearly reveals the writer's personality, values, talents, etc. They are organized by the graduating class year. Clicking each year will provide you with an impressive collection of essays to review as models. After each essay, the committee offers a review of the essay's strengths.
        - https://apply.jhu.edu/application-process/essays-that-worked/
- **Hamilton College: Essays That Worked**
    - Similar to the Johns Hopkins web page, this one from Hamilton College also showcases outstanding essays which were ultimately admitted to the college.
        - https://www.hamilton.edu/admission/apply/college-essays-that-worked/2014-essays-that-worked
- **More Sample Essays: Trash, the Library and a Worn, Brown Table: The 2019 College Essays on Money from *The New York Times***
    - From *The New York Times:* "Each year, we ask high school seniors to submit college application essays they've written about work, money, social class and related topics. Here are five that moved us"
        - https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/09/your-money/college-application-essays-money.html

- **The Khan Academy: Writing A Strong College Admissions Essay**
    - This web resource includes video links (some from college admissions officers who provide authentic feedback) and advice on the college essay process, which also includes student essay samples.
        - https://www.khanacademy.org/college-careers-more/college-admissions/applying-to-college/admissions-essays/v/writing-a-strong-college-admissions-essay
- **The College Board**
    - The College Board offers *many* valuable resources for students preparing for college. This link takes you to a page of solid Dos and Don'ts. Also see the related articles and sample essays offered by the College Board.
        - http://www.collegeboard.com/student/apply/essay-skills/9406.html
- **"How To Conquer the College Admissions Essay" from *The New York Times*, August 2, 2017**
    - This article provides excellent guidance for writing the essay, while also providing a list of mistakes that should be avoided.
        - https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/02/education/edlife/college-application-essay-admissions.html
- **"Admissions Officers Discuss 3 Common Essay Topics" from *US News & World Report***
    - "A college essay topic doesn't have to be unique to be a good choice for applicants, experts say."
        - https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/2018-07-09/what-admissions-officers-think-of-3-common-college-essay-topics

Part 16: Glossary of Terms

- **Active Voice vs. Passive Voice**
    - A sentence written in active voice makes the subject the doer of an action. For example, "Johnny threw the ball". A sentence written in passive voice places the doer of the action after the verb or leaves the "doer" out completely, which eliminates responsibility. For example, "The ball was thrown by Johnny," makes the ball the focus of the sentence, not Johnny. "The ball was thrown," eliminates the "doer" altogether.
- **Direct Characterization vs. Indirect characterization**
    - Direct characterization states *directly* the qualities of the character/person. For example, "I am tall" or "I am good at math".
    - Indirect characterization *shows* by example and *implies* the quality. For example, "Dunking the ball is no problem for my 6' frame" or "I answered each question on the calculus test correctly."
- **Em-dash and Hyphen**
    - The em-dash should never be confused with a hyphen. Em-dashes look like this— Hyphens look like this -. Em-dashes are used to introduce an "aside" or parenthetical, interloping phrase. For example: I love—or at least don't hate—writing essays. Think of the em-dash as replacing commas or parentheses. Hyphens separate two parts of a compound word like em-dash, well-spent, or pet-friendly. One dash on a keyboard is a hyphen, not a dash. Most versions of MS Word will autocorrect two dashes to look like an em-dash.
- **Fragment**
    - A fragment is an incomplete thought, a non-sentence. These are technically grammatically incorrect—they (notice the em-dash!) are subjects without verbs, verbs without subjects, or sometimes simply adjectival phrases. They *can,* however, be used stylistically for emphasis or to set a certain tone. For instance, "The boy with the blue shirt" is a bad fragment. "I wasn't just angry. I was livid. Boiling. Out of control." The last two phrases here are fragments, but they work for emphasis.
- **Framing**
    - Framing is a narrative device in which the writer sets the stage for the essay with a particular idea or scene and then returns to a "mirror" image at the end.
- **Hook**
    - A hook is something catchy that pulls the reader into a piece of writing. Hooks can range from rhetorical questions to famous quotes; dialogue to a mysterious description. Basically, a hook reels the reader in and makes him/her want to read more. It goes beyond restating the question as an opening line.

- **Hyperbole and Understatement**
    - Hyperbole is purposeful exaggeration for effect—sometimes comical, sometimes dramatic. For example, "A pimple on my chin on the day of the prom? My life could not get any worse."
    - Understatement is the opposite. For example, "Among his minor accomplishments, Thomas Edison invented the light bulb."
- **Idiomatic Phrase**
    - There are two kinds of idiomatic phrases: phrases that just "sounds right" one way but not another, usually involving a preposition, and phrases that would not make sense to a speaker of another language, but makes perfect sense to native speakers. For example, for the first type, think of we "dream *of*" being rich, not "dream *for*" but we can't really say *why* or for the second type, think of something like "bite your tongue".
- **Misplaced Modifier**
    - A misplaced modifier occurs when an adjective, adverb, or phrase is placed somewhere in a sentence that can cause confusion. For instance, "I *only* have eyes for you" makes it sound like the person only has eyes and no other body part. What he means is "I have eyes for *only* you" meaning she is the only one he wishes to look at. This can also occur at the beginning of a sentence: "As an avid reader, the book series appealed to my aesthetic sense." This sentence makes it sound like the book series is the avid reader. It should read "As an avid reader, I was drawn to the book series."
- **Motif and Extended Metaphor**
    - A motif is a recurring idea or image that helps to unify an essay, for instance, multiple references to the weather in a metaphoric sense or describing your cultural heritage as a tossed salad and referring to your _____ aunts as tomatoes and your _____ grandparents as the croutons.
- **Participial Phrase and Dangling Participle**
    - A participle is a verb form. A participial phrase is a phrase containing the verb form, for instance "dancing down the aisle". You DO NOT want your participle to dangle! The "-ing" form needs to latch onto a noun or pronoun. Make sure the closest noun/pronoun fits the bill; it must answer *who* or *what* is doing the action in the phrase. For instance, "Dancing down the aisle, the bride and groom were the picture of happiness" NOT "Dancing down the aisle, the photographer took pictures of the bride and groom." The latter makes it sound as if the photographer was doing the dancing!

- **Plagiarism**
    - Any thought or idea that is NOT ORIGINAL to you or considered COMMON KNOWLEDGE must be properly documented using MLA form or another accepted form of documentation such as APA or Chicago Manual of Style. This includes summarizing and paraphrasing as well as direct quotations. If you have any further questions, please consult your English teacher.
- **Proofreading, Editing, and Revising**
    - Editing is the process by which the writer corrects typos and grammatical errors.
    - Proofreading is the process by which the writer rereads the essay carefully looking for places that need editing and/or revising.
    - Revising is the process by which the writer makes radical changes to the style or substance of the writing. This frequently requires "pruning" or "trashing" whole sentences—or even paragraphs—in favor of ones that work better.
- **Repetition**
    - The repetition of a word or phrase for effect—sonic, dramatic, emphatic, comic, etc.
- **Rhetorical question**
    - A rhetorical question is one that neither requires nor expects a response. Often the answer is implied in the phrasing or tone of the question itself?
- **Sentence Variety**
    - Sentence variety refers to two things: sentence structure and sentence lengths. If all of your sentences are the same subject-verb-object formula and about the same length it is a little like eating plain oatmeal for breakfast every day—fine, but BORING! Add some spice by beginning or ending with phrases and interspersing long complex sentences with short direct ones.
- **Thought-shot**
    - A thought-shot lets the reader into the writer's head *at the time of the incident.* For instance, in a narrative essay if the coach says "Fifty more laps" the thought-shot might be *Was she kidding? Did she think we were machines?* Thought-shots almost always appear in italics to separate them from actual dialogue without having to add "I thought to myself".

Appendix 1 — Paragraphing Tips

- **Body Paragraphs**
    - The correct format for presenting evidence or support for your topic is within *body paragraphs*—the fundamental units in essay writing. Each paragraph should represent and develop a single distinct idea. The body must supply ample evidence in support of your thesis or topic.
    - Just as an essay, as a whole, needs clear and cohesive organization, your paragraphs must also be organized around a central theme. This theme is always stated in a *topic sentence*, which is most often the first sentence in that paragraph.
    - Body paragraph sentences can express different types of information. For example, they can provide reasons for a particular point of view, concrete details, specific examples, facts, statistics, or incidents and anecdotes. Individually or together, these sentences will function in a paragraph to support and prove the topic sentence and thesis statement.
    - After you have written enough sentences to support the topic sentence of your paragraph, you should write a concluding sentence that not only summarizes the main point of the paragraph, but also serves to transition to the idea about to be expressed in the next paragraph. This process is repeated for each paragraph within the body of your essay.

Appendix 2 — Modern Language Association (MLA) Format

- The MLA is the accepted standard when it comes to the proper formatting of formal writing. Your essay needs to adhere to the principles set forth by the association.
- The following is a list of some of the essentials:
    - **Paper:**
        - Type your essay on white, 20 lb. 8-1/2 by 11-inch paper.
    - **Spacing:**
        - Double-space your paper.
    - **Margins:**
        - Use one-inch margins all around the text of your paper. Some word processing application, such as Microsoft Word®, use 1.25" margins as the default; these should be changed. Paragraphs should be indented half an inch; this can be accomplished, in Word® by using one tab space, or going to Format→Paragraph→Special→First line, and setting this to 0.5.
    - **Headers and Footers:**
        - Be sure to supply the information that each college asks for in the headers and footers of the essay. Standard information for headers is your name and Social Security number. Use the footer for page numbers. To format headers in Word®, go to View→Header and Footer. This will allow you to type the information directly into these areas.
    - **Titles:**
        - Center your title on the line below the heading line and begin your paper immediately below the title. The title should neither be underlined nor written in all capital letters. Capitalize only the first, last, and principal words of the title. Titles might end with a question mark or an exclamation mark if that is appropriate, but not in a period.
    - **Other guidelines:**
        - Do not make a title page for your paper unless specifically requested.
        - Use either underlining or italics throughout your essay for highlighting the titles of longer works and providing emphasis.

Appendix 3 — Self Evaluation Form

- **Starting Points:**
  - Does the essay have a title? If so, do you think that it is a good title or an undesirable one? If not, create one. Look within the body of your essay for a phrase that might hint at the topic of your essay without giving the content away.
  - If you had to place a "topic" on this essay, how would you label it?
  - Does this essay concern a topic that could be touched upon by any number of potential applicants? What would you say is your unique take on it?
  - What are the three strongest impressions that you would like your reader to receive from reading this essay?
- **General Structure:**
  - What is the paragraph structure of the essay? Could it be organized in a different format that could make it clearer or more stylistically appealing?
  - Did you use transitions appropriately? Give examples:
  - Did you use imagery often and does this make the essay clearer and more vivid? Give examples:
  - Is your sentence structure varied or do you use sentences that are all stylistically similar? Give examples of different styles:
- **The Introduction:**
  - How does the introduction engage the reader? Is the reader's attention kept from the beginning to the end of the introduction?
- **The Conclusion:**
  - How does the conclusion provide a sense of closure to the reader?
  - What is the final reflective thought found within the conclusion? Do you think its placement was effective?
- **Points of Reflection:**
  - How did you "Why^3? That is, explain how you stripped away the top layers of an issue and got to the true heart of the matter or issue. Put in another way, what was the goal of the essay? Did you achieve the goal?
  - Is every single sentence crucial to the essay? This MUST be the case. Give any examples of information you believe might be irrelevant:
  - Whether you discussed an unfortunate experience or the best summer of your life, is the thrust of the essay its effects? Is there just the right amount of development of the recognition process?
  - How does this essay show that it can be directed towards any audience? Is there anything about it that could "put off" a potential reader?
  - What are two things that make this essay stand out and different than the thousands that they will potentially receive?
  - Why couldn't anyone else have written this essay?

- Circle every time you use the words “I, me, or my.” Was it used sparingly and effectively? See where you can change your voice between passive and active. Try to make the action of the sentence the focus and not yourself.
- Did you avoid overusing the verb “to be” in all its different forms: is, are, were, am, was, have been?
- What’s the best part of the essay?
- Will an admissions officer remember your topic after a day of reading hundreds of essays? What will the officer remember about your topic? What will the officer remember about you? What will his or her lasting impression be?
- What’s the worst part of the essay?
- How would an admissions director fill in the following blank based on the essay: “I want to accept ___ to this college because our college needs more _____.”
- Give any examples of information that is readily available if the reader were also to see your résumé and transcript:
- Is the essay in full MLA format? If not, what needs to be changed?
- What do you see as the area that needs to be worked on first?
- Are you sure that your own personal voice has not lost after the essay has been revised for the millionth time? Do you still feel that these words and ideas are true to who and what you are? If not, explain to someone else what your essay is about, and then have that person read it to see if you achieved your goal (*see Appendix 4 Peer Evaluation Form*).

Appendix 4 — Peer Evaluation Form

Personal Narrative/College Application Essay Peer Evaluation

- **Starting Points:**
    - What is the title of the essay? Why do you think that it is a good title or an undesirable one?
    - If you had to place a "topic" on this essay, how would you label it?
    - Does this essay concern a topic that could be touched upon by any number of potential applicants? What would you say is the unique take on it?
    - What are the three strongest impressions that you receive from reading this essay?
- **General Structure:**
    - What is the paragraph structure of the essay? Could it be organized in a different format that could make it clearer or more stylistically appealing?
    - Did the writer use transitions appropriately? Give examples.
    - Did the writer use imagery often and does this make the essay clearer and more vivid? Give examples.
    - Is the sentence structure varied or did the writer use sentences that are all stylistically similar? Give examples of different styles.
- **The Introduction:**
    - How does the introduction engage the reader? Is the reader's attention kept from the beginning to the end of the introduction?
- **The Conclusion:**
    - How does the conclusion provide a sense of closure to the reader?
    - What is the final reflective thought found within the conclusion? Do you think its placement was effective?

- **Ending Points:**
    - How did the writer "Why^3? – That is, explain how the writer stripped away the top layers of an issue and got to the true heart of the issue or idea:
    - Is every single sentence crucial to the essay? This MUST be the case. Give any examples of information you believe might be irrelevant:
    - Whether the writer discussed an unfortunate experience or the best summer of his / her life, is the thrust of the essay its effects? Is there just the right amount of development of the recognition process?
    - How does this essay show that it can be directed towards any audience? Is there anything about it that could "put off" a potential reader?
    - What are two things that make this essay stand out and different than the thousands that they will potentially receive?
    - Why couldn't anyone else have written this essay?
    - Circle every time the writer used the words "I, me, or my." Was it used sparingly and effectively? See where you can change the voice between passive and active. Try to make the action of the sentence the focus and not the writer him / herself.
    - Did the writer avoid overusing the verb "to be" in all its different forms: is, are, were, am, was, have been?
    - What's the best part of the essay?
    - Will an admissions officer remember the topic after a day of reading hundreds of essays? What will the officer remember about the writer's topic? What will the officer remember about the writer? What will the lasting impression be?
    - How would an admissions director fill in the following blank based on the essay: "I want to accept ___ to this college because our college needs more _____."
    - Give any examples of information that is readily available if the reader were also to see the writer's résumé and transcript:
    - Is the essay in full MLA format? If not, what needs to be changed?
    - What do you see as the area that needs to be worked on first?

Appendix 5 — Questions You Should Answer

The goal of each essay is different. Use these questions to help you meet the goals of your specific essay. For example, if the essay asks you to describe a dilemma you resolved, make sure you describe HOW you resolved your dilemma.

The "Tell Us About Yourself" Essay

- What makes me different from my classmates?
- How do my classmates and peers see me?
- What I do reveals who I am. Therefore, what have I done that is significant to me, altered my view of the world, triggered an epiphany, changed another person's behavior, etc?
- What dilemma have I faced or what difficult choice have I made?
- Although I am similar in many ways to my classmates and peers, how am I different? How do I stand out from the group, even if in a negative way?
- What awards or recognitions have I received beyond school?
- What special skill or secret talent do I hold (appropriate to the audience) or what is the most unusual thing about me?
- What is the weirdest vacation I've been on?
- What is the strangest, worst, best piece of information my parents have ever revealed to me?
- What nicknames have my classmates given me? Are these accurate, why? Why not?
- What incident about me does everyone remember? For example, am I the kid who puked during the school play? Whose shorts ripped in gym? Who tripped while accepting an award?
- How did I respond to this incident at the time? How do I deal with others bringing up the incident?

The "Influence" Essay

- Who influenced me?
- Describe this person physically, mentally, relationship to, age, background, etc (Think characterization.)
- What specifically and thoroughly did this person do to me, for me, with me?
- Why did this person behave this way?
- Why did I need this person to help me?
- How did this person or his or her behavior make me feel?
- Do I still feel this way?
- Where is this person now?
- When did this event(s) occur?
- What was I like before I was influenced by this person? Am I the same or different now? Describe why I am the same or how I am different.

The "Why I Want to Go Here" Essay

- What special program(s) does this college offer that I am passionate about?
- Who specifically is on the faculty that I want to study under? Or what is special about the faculty, in general?
- What unique extracurricular activities does this college offer?
- What attractions, cultural centers or activities are available in the geographic region of the college that I am interested in?
- What will I bring to the college? How am I a good fit for the school and vice versa?

The "Experience that Changed You/Overcoming an Obstacle" Essay

- Spend a lot of time describing how you overcame an obstacle; don't save it for the end.
- What was the problem I needed to solve?
- Why was this a problem?
- What preceded the problem? What brought about the negative situation?
- Who helped me solve the problem?
- Who else was involved?
- How did I solve the problem? What was my thought process?
- How did the idea for resolution come to me?
- Did the solution work out exactly as I had planned? Why or why not?
- Looking back, what could I have done differently?

The "Why I Want to Major in _____" Essay

- Is my chosen major offered at the college I am applying to?
- Do I meet the Major requirements, in other words, am I qualified to enroll in this college's program?
- What internship opportunities does the college offer in my chosen Major?
- What incident(s) in my life led me to discover my interest in this Major?
- Who or what else has influenced me?
- When did I first display a talent for the field I hope to study in?
- Do my peers see me majoring in this area or are they surprised? Why or why not?
- Does my résumé correlate with my desire to major in this particular field?

The "How Will I Contribute to Diversity" Essay

- How could I describe the "typical" student at my high school?
- How am I like this description? How am I different? Are these differences based on gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, age, physical/intellectual/psychological abilities or disabilities, extraordinary experiences, either positive and / or negative?
- How is my family "typical" of others in the community? How are they atypical?
- Do I have opinions about those who are different from me? How do I account for these attitudes?
- How do I feel about my differences? Do my differences make me a target, help me hide out, allow me to achieve greater success, allow me to "get away" with consequences, undermine my success?
- What about being similar to my community members is reassuring? What about being similar is disturbing?
- What would I like to do about my cultural circumstances? How will the college I wish to attend help me achieve these goals?

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