

COMMON APPLICATION ESSAY WORKSHOP

**“Don’t bend; don’t water it down;
don’t edit your own soul according to the fashion.
Rather, follow your most intense obsessions
mercilessly.” ~ Franz Kafka**

THE BASICS

- ❖ Seven options – you must select just one!
- ❖ 650 word maximum
- ❖ All questions have equal value
- ❖ Select a question that is relevant to your individual experience/circumstances

GOALS OF THE COLLEGE ESSAY:

- Advance your candidacy. After reading your essay, does admissions feel you are more compelling than before?
- Reveal what makes you human – something from your heart.
- Be likable and memorable.
- **Maintain authentic teenage voice.**
- Provide truths instead of facts:
- Fact: I never got to watch TV.
- Truth: Growing up in a household with unstructured play and limited technology has helped me expand my imagination and figure out who I am.

ADVICE FROM STANFORD, DUKE, PENN, HARVARD & GEORGETOWN

- Avoid Group Think
- It is a False Narrative to Believe that Perfect Scores Guarantee Admission to competitive schools
- Develop your OWN intellectual interests – you'll be more interesting and competitive – we don't want 500 4.5 GPA engineers!
- Focus on the ESSAYS
- Avoid Perfection – Strive for Excellence in an Intellectual area of Your Choosing

HOW IS THE COLLEGE ESSAY LIKE SPEED DATING?

First Impressions – how long do they take to make?

Time before a decision is made to move ahead or move on

Which questions will best showcase my talents?

- ❖ What are you doing & why?
- ❖ Dreams/Values/Aspirations
- ❖ What/who has shaped them?
- ❖ Failures/Challenges
- ❖ Major milestones

- ❖ **FINAL PRODUCT:** What does Admissions know about you after reading your essay?

COMMON APPLICATION #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. (Very similar to UC #8)
 - Identity: your fundamental nature
 - Background: cultural, ethnic, medical, economic, familial
 - Story: circumstance, not really fixed in time
 - Make it clear & compelling
- Finn Brunton/ Blake Nelson

COMMON APP #1 – SAMPLE- SHORTENED FOR PURPOSES OF THIS WORKSHOP

- “Ever since I was little I had a connection to the arts. I swear I was born with a crayon in my hand. No matter where I was, in my spare time I would draw...While other kids would be on their iPads, I would be drawing cowboys, pirates, ninjas and tikis...Instead of crayons, now I use pens, acrylic paint, clay, film, digital media and even baking to express myself...Even if my methods and mediums have changed, the motives are still the same; creating a piece that captures a setting or theme. Even though I still draw cowboys, I look at it more as capturing the tone of the Wild West...I love exploring theme and culture, to capture feeling and setting of my art, be it on paper, on screen, or on a plate.”

COMMON APPLICATION #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? (very similar to UC #5)
 - Specific event in time
 - Impact of challenge – how did others see you? How did you see yourself?
 - Be reflective, examine emotions
 - Articulate the lessons learned
 - Demonstrate your maturity, humility, & resilience
- Miles Lim

COMMON APP #2 – SAMPLE- SHORTENED FOR PURPOSES OF THIS WORKSHOP

- “In competitive mountain biking there are no times outs, substitutes, half times, or referees. It’s just you and the bike. Cyclists push the limits, knowing that one small mistake could take it all away...After smashing my face into solid cement and fracturing three different parts of my nose and jaw freshman year...seeing numerous specialists and having extensive testing, I was left with the empty hole in my life. Seeking a challenge off the mountain, I took on a class that pushed me to the bring. Being the slow-reading dyslexic that I am, AP Lit was a tough route. I got my first flat tire when we read *The Scarlet Letter*. It was a struggle to keep pace with the class; Hawthorne’s six-line sentences were a bouquet of complex diction. The content was hard...I stuck with the challenge and persevered through hours of research & interviews...The dedication and insanity that enabled me to succeed in cycling earned me an “A” in a class I would have never imagined a victory in.”

COMMON APP #3

- Reflect on a time when you questioned a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
 - Know your beliefs/ideas
 - Relate an incident – defend a principle
 - Action: what concrete steps did you take to defend your idea or belief? No action? Then what?
 - Construct a story. What pivotal moment propelled you to act?
- Ex: Vegan at 16, parents are farmers

COMMON APP #4

- Describe a problem you've solved or would like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma – anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.
 - Be descriptive, vivid, paint a picture
 - Meaningful: intrinsic meaning to YOU
 - Sarah Sheviakov –science

COMMON APP #4 – SAMPLE- SHORTENED FOR PURPOSES OF THIS WORKSHOP

- “If curiosity killed the cat, I’d be dead by now. I feel I need to know everything about the way the world works. I want to know what it feels like to fly; I want to know how a space ship works; I want to know how brain cells store memory...Adventuresome by nature, I’m never the last person to try something...Last summer, I was privileged to work at the Exploratorium...I dissected cow’s eyes and sheep’s brains and discussed the underlying scientific principles of the exhibits with museum visitors. I could see science in every part of my life, from the patterns of light filtering through leaves to the phosphorescent stars on my ceiling...I am not easily intimidated by things I do not yet understand. More and more, I realize that I want to be involved in the future of space and physics.”

COMMON APP #5

- Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
 - Transition: pivotal, a change from one state to another
 - In what ways are you different?
 - Catalyst that moved you forward
 - Elaborate: who sees you differently? Why? How do you see yourself?
- Scott Young - chess

COMMON APP #5 – SAMPLE- SHORTENED FOR PURPOSES OF THIS WORKSHOP

- “My first victory. I recalled my final move, how it made my grandfather sigh, shake his head and look up at me, his eyes screaming and congratulating me all at the same time. With my heart racing, I watched him reach for his king and let it fall. I expected balloons to fall from the ceiling and confetti to fill the room, but instead all that filled the room was silence...At the age of nine; I beat my grandfather at chess...Luck had nothing to do with this victory; luck is the residue of design. I relate my patience, hard work, determination and positivity to the mysterious aspect of life that allows me to achieve my version of success. The best way to predict the future is to create it.”

COMMON APP #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?
 - When you have free time, how do you CHOOSE to spend it?
 - Origami
 - Puttering on a car engine, robotics, science research project
 - Writing a novel in a coffee shop
 - Posting 'how to' videos about bicycle maintenance or hair braiding
- Sam Martin- rock climbing, Leo Krashinoff - computers

COMMON APP #6 – SAMPLE- SHORTENED FOR PURPOSES OF THIS WORKSHOP

- “For as long as I can remember, I’ve loved to build things. When I was a child, I would create wild adventures and plotlines to explain all of the madness that would ensue on the playground every morning. As I grew, my friends and I would build grand islands where we would hold out against monsters in a last stand to save all of the Lego world we had spent hours working on. I would draw out inventions and fictional worlds where my dreams could be lived out...ideas that would never be tangible – until I discovered a proper outlet, that is. It came to me in bytes, logic gates, and hexadecimal. My ideas were made of code. I had just discovered the wonder of computing.”

COMMON APP #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
 - Model UN essays
 - Design your own six-week college class
 - Red

BEST PRACTICES #1

- Honesty
- Risk-taking
- Self-revelation
- Imagination

- TEEN VOICE – Show your character & personality

- **No one can tell your story, so tell it yourself. No one can write your story, so write it yourself.**

BEST PRACTICES #2

- Essay prompts are designed to gain insight into what makes you tick
- It's a response meant to allow the reader to enter your world, not an English paper
- Have multiple people review (i.e. your counselor, person you don't know well, Lisa, teacher)
- Write in 1st person (I and my statements)
- Keep it professional (no crime, therapy, sarcasm, quotations, philosophical questions, drug use or profanity)

POWERFUL ESSAY TIPS!!

ESSAYS THAT DO

- Share YOUR voice
- Show GRIT
- Show passion
- Answer the ENTIRE prompt
- Are specific
- Compelling for reader
- Are w/in word count
- Are written, revised, revised...finalized

ESSAYS THAT DON'T

- Are written by your mom
- Are passive
- Say passion
- Reveal others v self
- Are repetitive
- Use clichés
- Are too long
- Have spelling & punctuation errors

WAYS TO GENERATE IDEAS & PLACES YOUR TALENTS SHINE!

- Special Talent – community theatre, a Capella, blog
- Causes: clean air, freedom, equality, justice, human rights, animal rights, economics, scientific discovery
- Special project, job (earning college funds) or internship
- STEM, robotics club, chef, dog walking business, environmental action
- Athletics, dance, martial arts
- ROCK – talent show, collaborating, daily news
- COMAcad/SEA-Disc – editing or directing video, writing screenplay, internship, 'greening' a business
- Mock Trial – researching case or presenting in court
- Community Service – contributing to others, travel
- Time Capsule
 - Books, Photos, Trips
 - Trinkets
 - Avocado
- Box of Important Memories
 - People
 - Places
 - Artwork, Projects
 - Pets

ADMISSIONS COMMITTEE & ADVICE FROM REPS

- Let's take a look at an admissions committee:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-OLIJUXwKU>
 - ADVICE:
 - <https://www.tamdistrict.org/Page/8944>
Johns Hopkins
<https://apply.jhu.edu/application-process/essays-that-worked/>

THINGS TO AVOID

- I FELT SO PASSIONATELY PASSIONATE ABOUT MY PASSIONS!!!
- Bragging about growing up in Marin
- Somewhere in a sedentary cemetery in Sacramento
- I took 7 english classes in High School (Argh!)

CHOOSE THE PROPER TONE: TRIM THE FAT!

- I now propose to elaborate upon the circumstances surrounding the collision.
- **Let me tell you how I crashed my car.**
- I can't stand Physics.
- **Physics is a mystery to me.**

SHOW – DON'T TELL

“DON'T TELL ME THE MOON IS SHINING;
SHOW ME THE GLINT OF LIGHT
ON BROKEN GLASS.” ~~ ANTON CHEKHOV

- INVITE THE READER INTO YOUR WORLD
- THE HOOK: WOULD YOU WANT TO READ THE FIRST SENTENCE?
- CAPTURE YOUR ESSENCE, NOT YOUR FACTS
- MAKE YOUR LAST SENTENCE MEMORABLE

INDEPENDENT EXPLORATION

THIS IS STUFF YOU DO ALONE, IN A PEACEFUL AND REFLECTIVE SETTING

- The best writing is rewriting!
- Read models
- Write ideas/outlines for at least three-four of the prompts (10-15 mins each)
- It will be messy – that's OK
- Read your essay aloud (to a friend, the dog, the mirror...)
- Revise them again
- [Common App Writing Tips](#)

UNINTERRUPTED WRITING TIME IS ESSENTIAL 😊

WRITING IS A HABIT – DO IT FREQUENTLY

- **Wednesday tutorials in fall** to assist with ideas, draft reviews, etc!
- We will polish them together for submission
- You will be **CALM & ZEN** compared to str***ed if you wait 😊

RESOURCES/SAMPLES, ETC.

- Johns Hopkins University: <https://apply.jhu.edu/application-process/essays-that-worked/>
- College Essay Guy: <https://www.collegeessayguy.com/blog/common-app-essay-examples>
- College Vine: <https://blog.collegevine.com/how-to-write-the-common-application-essays-2019-2020/>
- Keep in mind that all of these have FREE resources & advice, but they also want to sell you their services (except Johns Hopkins). You DON'T need to buy anything. We will help you (Counselors & Lisa & Drake teachers)

