

College Essay Essentials



PRESENTER: JAMES GIORDANO
GIORDANOJ@ADMISSIONSANDAID.COM
WWW.ADMISSIONSANDAID.COM

MATERIAL SOURCED FROM:
ETHAN SAWYER
[“THE COLLEGE ESSAY GUY”](#)

Downloads



- Follow this link to download files.
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1-sEVALgrbWuaqxWoRVAID1Hsnaw0_yoT?usp=sharing
- https://www.dropbox.com/sh/spfig2019e1mguc/AA_DikwOwz8xMpIADnqFv465La?dl=0
- <https://www.admissionsandaid.com/seniors.html>
- Please have a pencil and paper available

Q & A



- **Q: How do I begin to write my essay?**

A: If you're reading this, you've already begun. In this guide you'll find some ideas on how to brainstorm and structure your essay.

- **Q: How long should my essay be?**

A: It depends. Your main Common App essay can be up to 650 words, while the essays for the University of California (UC) schools are around 350 words each, and your supplemental essays will vary.

- **Q: How many essays will I need to write?**

A: Around 15 is average. You'll likely write a main personal statement for your Common App, perhaps some separate essays if you're applying to public schools (the UCs require four, for example), plus you'll write supplements for most selective schools, which number anywhere from 6-20, depending on the number of schools you apply to.

- **Q: What should my essay be about?**

A: In a word, you.

Q & A



- **Q: What are college admissions officers looking for?**

A: They're looking for the answers to these three questions:

1. Who is this person?
2. Will this person contribute something of value to our campus?
3. Can this person write?

- **Q: How do college admissions officers evaluate my essay?**

A: Each school has its own criteria and different readers will prefer different elements. Michael Gulotta (Associate Director of Admissions at American University) for example, looks to the essay to assess a student's writing ability. But Rick Diaz (Regional Director of Undergrad Admissions at SMU) is less interested in writing ability and more interested in a student's story.

- **Q: So which is more important: your story or your writing skill?**

A: Both are important. A good story, well told. That's your goal.

Q & A



- **Q: When should I start writing my essay?**

A: Today. Right now.

- **Q: How do I structure my essay?**

A: You'll learn about two options in this workshop: [Narrative Structure](#) and [Montage Structure](#).

- **Q: How much do essays matter?**

A: It depends on the college, but generally between 10%-30%. Essays tend to matter more for small schools, or schools who look at applications holistically.

- **Q: If my grades are bad, can I get into Harvard with a great essay?**

A: Nope. Schools look at your GPA, course rigor and test scores more than anything. When you're being compared to other students with similar GPA/SAT scores, that's when the essays can make or break your chances. Harvard is great, but there are a lot of other awesome schools too. For a list of Colleges That Change Lives, Google "Colleges That Change Lives." (Really.)

- **Q: Can a bad college essay negatively affect my application?**

A: Yes.

Common App 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.

WARM-UP EXERCISES – VULNERABILITY TRAINING



- **Why am I asking you to be vulnerable? A few reasons:**
 - Vulnerability is one (of four) qualities of an excellent personal statement (in fact, it's the “personal” part). I'll share the other three qualities as we go...
 - Vulnerability is a great life-skill to learn, and
 - It's one you can get better at as you practice.
 - Being vulnerable means simply “laying it all out there”. Letting a complete stranger in on your innermost personal truth, truths that you may not even be aware of.

Option #1: “If you really knew me...”



This one is simple: Begin with the phrase “If you really knew me...” and share something that you wouldn’t normally share with someone. Be brave! Go as deep as you’re willing to go.

- Open a blank doc and type “If you really knew me...” then finish the sentence.
- Bonus points: Record a video of yourself and send it to a friend or post it on social media (#vulnerability). If sharing with a friend, try sharing something that this person really doesn’t know about you. The point of this exercise is to allow yourself to be really known.
 - If you really knew me you would know that I believe that everyone has a path and purpose in life and if you pay attention that plan/purpose will become evident at some point.
 - If you really knew me you would know that I never quit at anything that I do.

Option #2: “I love...”



This one's fun too. And simple: Set a timer for one minute and make a list out loud of things you love by finishing the phrase “I love...” repeatedly until the minute is up.

Two rules for this game:

- Don't think ahead to what you're going to say while the other person is going. Focus on the person doing the “I loves...”. In other words, be interested.
- If you run out of things to say, just keep going, stream-of-consciousness style, even if you're worried you'll say the wrong thing. There is no wrong thing. In other words, be brave.
- Open a blank doc and type I love repeatedly followed by something that you love.
 - I love the beach
 - I love dogs
 - I love helping people
 - I love being with my children

Option #3: Gratitude check-in



For this one, take turns sharing something you're grateful for. Get as specific and as personal as you can. Again, remember that the goal is to help others get to know you better.

- If you're working on your own, you might choose to record a video of yourself and share with a friend or on social media with #gratitude (inspire the world!).
 - I am grateful for my family
 - I am grateful that I am healthy
 - I am grateful that I have so many friends and family that I could depend on to be there for me if I ever needed it.

Option #4: Celebrations



- This is like the “Gratitude Check-in” above, but instead you’re something that you’re celebrating.
- “I am celebrating...”
 - I am celebrating that I have two wonderful children that I am able to spend a lot of time with.
 - I am celebrating that people are finally starting to wake up to the injustices in this world.

Vulnerability



- The purpose of these exercises is to help you to feel comfortable with exposing your vulnerabilities. Opening up this way, particularly in a college essay, can allow the reader a glimpse into the real you. Remember that the purpose of the college essay is to reveal attributes, characteristics, and personality that is not readily evident in your college application.
- Think of it this way...On the common app it lists all of your activities and leadership roles in those activities. What it doesn't list is “why those activities?”
- This will take a combination of research, self-reflection, and time...

Brainstorming – Essence (page 3)



- This should be the only brainstorming exercise you'll need to write your personal statement.
- In order for it to work, though, you'll need at least 15 minutes, and a quiet place. The exercise will require your full attention.
- You can use a computer or laptop, though you may have better results when you write this assignment by hand.

Brainstorming - Essence



- I want you to imagine a box.
- In this box is a set of objects.
- Imagine that each one is one of your essence objects.

What do I mean?

- Each object represents one of your fundamental qualities.
- Thus, each object is more than just an object.
- For example, in my essence object box I would place my red Warriors football jersey from when I was 9 years old.

Brainstorming - Essence



- Why would I place a football jersey in a box containing my essence objects?
- First, football is the foundation for all of the qualities that make me a good counselor today. Overcoming adversity, mental toughness, pride, family, friends, leadership, etc.
- Second, growing up in a single parent household, football was the one activity that my father was involved in. Between the ages of 1-7 I had very little contact with my father. In fact, our entire relationship all the way through college revolved around football. My brother, who did not play football, had very little contact with my father. It is honestly the one memory that I have of my father that I cherish.
- Third, football allowed me to go to a college that I would not have been able to attend. It is also where I met my wife.

Brainstorming - Essence



- The second object I would place in my box is a decorative tray from Brazil.
- This object was left to me by my Uncle Randy who was so influential in my life. Before he had it, it hung in my grandparents house in Montauk, NY, where I spent every summer from age 7-16.
- So this object represents so much happiness and joy in my life and is connected to so many special places, people and memories.
- My uncle is also the single greatest influence on my personality and characteristics.

Essence Object



This is my Brazillian decorative tray and my Uncle.



Brainstorming - Essence



- I want you to make a list of 20 objects. You are infinitely complex and creative and could come up with a thousand—I'm asking for just 20.
- **Important:** Don't write what the objects mean to you as I have just done. I just want you to write the objects. So my list would begin like this:
 - Red Warriors Football Jersey
 - Decorative tray from Brazil
- Just write the objects with a couple details that describe each, no commentary needed yet.
- If it helps, put on some music. Let your mind wander.

Brainstorming - Essence



20 QUESTIONS TO HELP WITH THE OBJECTS EXERCISE

1. What's a food that reminds you of your family?
2. What's something that reminds you of "home" (whatever "home" means to you)?
3. What's an object that represents one of the people who raised you?
4. What's an object that reminds you of something you find fascinating?
5. What's an object that reminds you of a tradition or ritual in your family?
6. What's an object that represents a secret, or something not a lot of people know about you?
7. What's something really nerdy/geeky that you love?
8. If your house was on fire and you could save just three (non-technology) objects, what would they be?
9. What makes you feel safe?
10. What's your actual superpower? What are you really good at?
11. What's something you're known for among your friends?
12. What do you want to be when you grow up?
13. Something that represents a way that you identify?
14. Something that represents a community you're a part of?
15. What's a nickname you have?
16. What's something you could teach someone else to do?
17. Name three objects from your room.
18. What's the moment you left childhood behind?
19. What's your favorite photo?
20. What's a dream or goal you have for the future?

Brainstorming - Essence



- **ONCE YOU'VE WRITTEN YOUR LIST OF ESSENCE OBJECTS**
- Survey your list. Which essences are missing? Is every aspect of you there?
- Think more abstractly. Think of qualities not yet represented on the list. How could you phrase those qualities in terms of objects? For example, if you keep lists, perhaps a post-it note? Are you easily angered (lighter fluid)? Good at lots of things (a Swiss Army Knife)? Or sharp (an Exacto knife)?
- Write down three more objects.

Brainstorming –The purpose of the Exercise



- T.S. Eliot once said: “The only way to express emotion in art is through an objective correlative.” What’s an objective correlative? It’s an **object** to which you **correlate** emotions, memories, and complex meanings. It’s an object that’s more than an object.
- *Every object in your essence object box is an objective correlative for some important, complex part of you.*
- Now survey your list. Does it feel pretty familiar? It should. *Your college essay should feel that familiar.*

Brainstorming – Essence - Conclusion



- Just to clarify, I'm not saying all of the objects on your list will end up in your final draft, but some of them might. And chances are good that you will at a minimum write about the “essences” those objects represent.
- The point is this: if you've taken the objects exercise seriously and have described a unique set of objects, you should have the material for a compelling personal statement. In fact, you should have the material for dozens of personal essays, but right now we're just writing one.
- The question of course is which one? Which essences or objects should you choose?

Brainstorming – Values (PAGE 4)



- *Exercise: Select the 10 values you connect with most (2 minutes). Of those 10, choose 5 (1 minute). Then your top 3 (30 Seconds). Write them down*

Personal Development	Family	Faith	Success	Nature
Recognition	Excitement	Communication	Independence	Objectivity
Accountability	Travel	Interdependence	Variety	Leadership
Inspiration	Adventure	Efficiency	Community	Wisdom
Music	Laughter	Stability	Patience	Respect
Helping Others	Entrepreneurship	Humor	Challenges	Strength
Peace	Wonder	Truth	Autonomy	Flexibility
Diversity	Health And Fitness	Order	Loyalty	Financial Stability
Expertise	Love	Excellence	Courage	Empathy
Vulnerability	Close Relationships	Religion	Selflove	Belonging
Global Awareness	Humility	Beauty	Ritual	Equity
Hunger	Art	Meaningful Work	Purpose	Resourcefulness
My Country	Responsibility	Trust	Privacy	Decisiveness
Sleep	Safety	Selfexpression	Freedom	Competence
Productivity	Wealth	Fun	Quiet	Collaboration
Intuition	Creativity	Rationality	Compassion	Spirituality
Culture	Knowledge	Democracy	Cooperation	Social Change
Healthy Boundaries	Inclusion	Selfcontrol	Growth	Honesty
Second Chances	Curiosity	Balance	Authenticity	Mindfulness
Listening	Gratitude	Adaptability	Practicality	Grace

Brainstorming – Values



- Now select your number 1 value. Why is this value so meaningful? How does it manifest itself in your life?
- Write down a couple of things in your life that represent these values.
- Do the values that you selected connect to one of your Essence Objects?
- Start looking for correlations and connections. What are your values and how do they relate to your life and experiences (the objects and people in your life)? Where do they come from? Why do they matter? How have they impacted your life, your education, your extracurricular activities?

STRUCTURE | FOUR TYPES OF COLLEGE ESSAYS



A

Student **has** faced significant challenges and **knows** what s/he wants to study.

B

Student **has not** faced significant challenges, but **does know** what s/he wants to study.

C

Student **has** faced significant challenges, but **does not know** what s/he wants to study.

D

Student **has not** faced significant challenges and **does not know** what s/he wants to study.

FOUR TYPES OF ESSAYS EXERCISE



- While we don't have enough time in this workshop to complete the exercises connected to the Essay Types, you may want to go ahead and complete them independently. See the "Guide to all four essays" handout.

STRUCTURE | FOUR TYPES OF COLLEGE ESSAYS



- It's also important to note that these categories are fluid and it's possible to move from one to another. A student who has faced significant challenges but doesn't know what s/he wants to study (Category C), for example, may discover, through a process of research or counseling, what s/he would like to study and so move to Category A. Similarly, a student who has not faced significant challenges and does not know what s/he wants to study (Category D) may discover, through self-reflection or counseling, that s/he has indeed faced significant challenges, and so move to Category C. I recommend reading all the examples; you never know what might resonate.

STRUCTURE | FOUR TYPES OF COLLEGE ESSAYS



First, ask yourself two questions:

1. Have you faced significant challenges? (You define "significant.")
 2. Do you know what you want to study?
- Based on these two answers, take a look at the chart in the previous slide and see which essay approach might work for you.
 - ***You can write a great essay whether you've been through challenges or not, and whether you know what you want to study or not.***

The question is: How?

STRUCTURE | FOUR TYPES OF COLLEGE ESSAYS



The answer: Find the right structure.

A good college essay should either:

- go **deep**, discussing one moment that fundamentally changed your life, or
- go **wide**, discussing many different elements of your life.
- The **Narrative Structure**, will help you go deep, while the **Montage Structure** will help you go wide. We'll discuss both structures in the next two sections.

STRUCTURE | Examples of Challenges

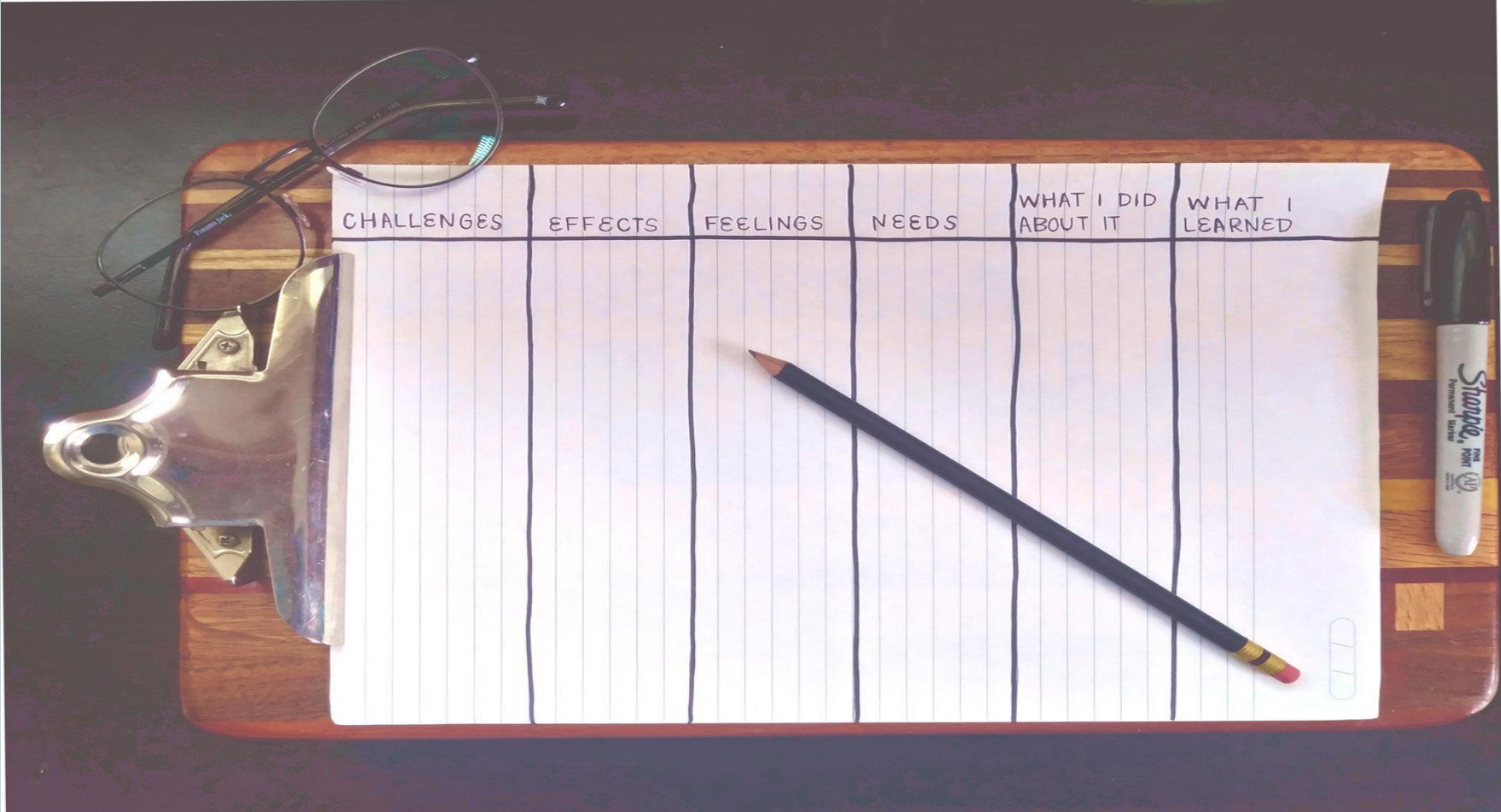
- Discrimination based on being a minority (race, sexual orientation, nationality, etc.)
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Joblessness or unemployment
- Moving a lot and having no real place to call home
- Abuse

- Having to work to pay for groceries
- Parents or siblings fighting a lot
- Parents not being home a lot
- Racism
- Crime
- School or neighborhood violence
- Illness (you or someone close to you)
- Failure

- [Being afraid to come out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, transgender](#)
- Having an extremely shy personality
- Natural disaster (hurricane, earthquake)
- Car crash
- Riots
- Home invasion or break-in
- Fire
- Cruelty
- Destructive behavior/ bullying/cyberbullying
- Peer pressure
- Lack of access to educational resources

- Ignorance
- Physical injury
- Physical disability
- Mental illness
- Sibling rivalry
- Getting rejected
- A learning difference or disability
- Sexism
- Controlling behavior from family or friends
- Aggression
- Parents not supportive of your dreams
- War

Challenges (Feelings and needs) pg.5



Challenges Activity



- Instructions (see feelings and needs worksheet): Take out a blank sheet of paper and turn it sideways (landscape view) and write along the top these words:
CHALLENGES - EFFECTS - FEELINGS - NEEDS - WHAT I DID ABOUT IT- LESSONS LEARNED - SKILLS & VALUES - (OPTIONAL) FUTURE OR CAREER
- 1. **In the “Challenges” column, list any major obstacles you’ve faced in your life--anything from major health or family issues to experiencing racism or violence. Things that were meaningful that shifted things for you. Spend at least 3-4 minutes on this first column. The more these challenges affected you, the more productive this exercise can be.**

Challenges Activity



2. In the second column, list the Effects (aka repercussions) that you experienced as a result of each challenge you've listed. How did each challenge impact you?

- **Important:** Don't yet name the emotions you felt as the result of the challenge, as those will go in the next column. Instead, simply list how your world changed due to the item in the first column. Try to isolate the specific external factors that prompted an emotional response Here's an example. "Moved around a lot growing up" might go in your challenge column. You might label the effects as "hard to make friends" or "didn't speak the local language. Save the feelings you had about not making friends or not speaking the language for the next column.
- The purpose of this column is to **differentiate** your experience of the challenge you named in the first column (e.g., divorce or moving around a lot) from anyone else who might have experienced a similar challenge.
- Spend at least 3-4 minutes on this column. See if you can write down 3-4 effects for each challenge.

Challenges Activity



3. In the third column, name the Feelings that each effect elicited.

- You can name the main emotion you felt or several different emotions. If you had difficulty making friends, for example, maybe you felt *afraid*, *isolated*, or *vulnerable*. Maybe some part of you even felt *relieved*. Don't worry if the feelings you write down contradict. Mixed emotions are normal and noting them can actually make for a more interesting, nuanced personal statement.
- What did you feel? Spend 3-4 minutes on this column. See if you can list 3-4 feelings for each challenge you experienced.
- And, because it can be difficult to think of feelings on the spot, a list is on pg.5 to give you some ideas.

Challenges Activity



4. In the fourth column, write the word “Needs.”

- Consider that each emotion you feel has an underlying need that can help you understand *why* you feel what you feel. Ask yourself what need may have been underneath each feeling you wrote down. Perhaps underneath a feeling of *isolation*, for example, was a need for *connection*, or beneath a feeling of *vulnerability* was a need for *safety*. Spend a little extra time with this column, as it’s the heart of this exercise.
- Based on the emotions you’ve listed, what need was or is underneath each one?
- And, again, because it can be difficult to think of needs (for some of us it’s something we rarely think about), there is a list of needs in the handout.

Challenges Activity



5. For the fifth column, “What I did about it,” consider the steps you took to meet the needs you wrote down.

- Maybe to meet your need for *connection* for example, you decided to join cross country or the robotics club. Or maybe to meet your need for *safety* you shared your feelings with your parents or a counselor and that helped you feel better; so you’d write down “talked to a counselor.”
- I know this is a big question, but ask yourself: *Why do I do Activity X? What deeper need is it meeting for me?* If you’re still in process (i.e., haven’t done anything yet to meet those needs), what *could* you do?
- Spend 3-4 minutes on this column.
- Can you link your needs to a particular extracurricular activity that you participated in. It may have been a subconscious thing, so you may have to dig deep and draw correlations that may not be that evident.

Challenges Activity



6. In the sixth column, “Lessons, Skills, & Values,” ask yourself: *What did I learn from all this?*

- And what did that lesson lead to, if anything? Maybe, for example, you joined cross country (what you did about it) and that taught you to value your health and nutrition (values), which led you to start a blog (outcome). Or maybe joining robotics taught you to code (skill), which led you to create your own board game (outcome).
- For ideas of what to put in this column, take a look at the list of “Values.”
- List 3-4 values you’ve developed based on each of the activities you’ve listed in the previous column.
- Spend 3-4 minutes on this. Normally this column ends up being really full.
- What values or superpowers did you develop to get your needs met.

Challenges Activity



7. The final column, “Future or Career” is optional, but can be interesting to consider.

- Here, write down the name of something you’d like to do in the future. This could be career-focused, like “doctor” or “engineer.” It can also be more broad, like “fight injustice” or “be an amazing mother.” Then write down some of the values and skills you’ve gained that you believe will serve you in making these goals happen.

Challenges Activity



- The final activity is to begin to draw connections and look for common threads or themes. Literally draw arrows from one thing to another. This will become your roadmap for your college essay.

STRUCTURE | FOUR TYPES OF COLLEGE ESSAYS



Common challenges

Note: I'm not saying you shouldn't write about these, but it can be more difficult to stand out with these topics. In order to use common challenges as an essay theme you must provide a bridge to a larger theme. In other words use these challenges to introduce a bigger picture:

- Divorce
- Dealing with death of dad/grandfather/sister/etc.
- Adjusting to a new school
- Adapting to a new culture in a new country
- Sports injury
- Anxiety
- Failing to meet someone's expectations

The task of the college essay is to shape the student's life into a coherent narrative.

STRUCTURE | NARRATIVE STRUCTURE – Types A and C



- Here's the structure that most American films use. Learning this may change the way you watch films (it did for me). It's a structure as old as time and storytellers have been using it for thousands of years. Joseph Campbell called it the monomyth or Hero's Journey. I'll refer to as **narrative structure**. Its basic elements are:
- Status Quo
- Inciting Incident/Status Quo Change
- Raise the stakes
- Moment of Truth
- Outcome/New Status Quo

STRUCTURE | NARRATIVE STRUCTURE



STATUS QUO

- Life as is. The hero, our main character, is living his/her normal life.

INCITING INCIDENT/STATUS QUO CHANGE

- One day, something happens. A boy discovers he is a wizard (Harry Potter). A girl falls down a rabbit hole (Alice in Wonderland). A murder happens (almost every mystery). You get the idea. In short, the hero is called to adventure.

STRUCTURE | NARRATIVE STRUCTURE



RAISING THE STAKES

- Things get more dangerous and important.
- In small dramas, the events become more important inwardly, to our main characters' personal lives, threatening to change them forever.
- In action movies, events become more important outwardly, escalating until not only our characters' lives are threatened, but the country, the world, then (in big budget films) Civilization as We Know It.
- In some films, the character's inward journey (what s/he must learn) and outward journey (what s/he must do) are intertwined. See: Star Wars, Avatar, The Dark Knight.

STRUCTURE | NARRATIVE STRUCTURE



MOMENT OF TRUTH

- The climax. The moment of highest tension. The character must make the Ultimate Choice or fight the Ultimate Battle.
- Will Beauty kiss the Beast and save his life? (Beauty and the Beast)
- Will Neo realize—and accept—his role as The One before it's too late? (The Matrix)
- Will Frodo destroy the Ring and save Middle Earth? (Lord of the Rings)

OUTCOME/NEW STATUS QUO

- The result.
- See [this handout](#).

MONTAGE STRUCTURE – Types B & D



● **WHAT IS A MONTAGE?**

- Montage is a technique that involves creating a new whole from separate fragments (pictures, words, music, etc.). In filmmaking, the montage effect is used to condense space and time so that information can be delivered in a more efficient way.
- Take the classic “falling in love” montage, commonly used in romantic comedies. We don’t see every single interaction; instead, we see: he surprises her at work with flowers, they walk through the park, they dance in the rain, they pass an engagement ring store and she eyes a particular ring. You get the idea.
- A few images tell the whole story. And you can use this technique for your essay. But which essences should you choose? That’s up to you. (It’s art, remember, not science.)

MONTAGE STRUCTURE



FIND A FOCUSING LENS

- Why choose a focusing lens? You can't discuss every single aspect of your life; you can, however, show us a few important points through a single lens or metaphor. And it need NOT be a future career--it could be many things.
- What type of focusing lens might you use to write your essay? A sport? A place? An art form? A hobby? Ask yourself: what's something I know really well?
- Someone used swimming, another used winning Hamilton tickets. Be creative.

MONTAGE STRUCTURE



PART ONE: ESSENTIAL QUALITIES (see handout)

- At the top of a blank sheet of paper in the center of the page write down the name of the career you're likely to pursue.
- **IMPORTANT:** If you don't know what career you'd like to pursue, you may either write down a placeholder career (i.e. something that you're interested in) or leave this blank (if you really don't know).
- Side note: if you have a clear idea of your career, you're writing a Type B essay, and if you don't know then you're working on a Type D essay. (This distinction is not important--I'm only pointing it out so that you know what I mean when I use those terms.)

MONTAGE STRUCTURE



- Underneath the name of the career (if you wrote one) write “Qualities of an excellent [Write your career here: doctor/teacher/businessperson, etc].”
 - If you did not write down a career, just write the words “Qualities I Possess.”
- If you did write a career, make a list of the qualities necessary to excel in whichever field you’ve chosen. If, for example, you want to study business, you might consider “ability to work well with others” and “leadership skills” on your list.
 - If you did not name a career, refer to your Values Exercise and write down 5-6 values that you’d like to demonstrate in your personal statement
- Either way, list at least five qualities along the right side of the paper. We’ll call this your “tell” column (more on this later).

MONTAGE STRUCTURE



PART TWO: HOW I'VE DEMONSTRATED THESE QUALITIES IN MY LIFE

- On the left side of your page write at the top “How I’ve Demonstrated These Qualities in My Life.”
- For each quality in your “tell” column, write down a specific moment/example from your life that SHOWS that you have developed this quality. (For example, if you wrote “ability to work well with others” in your right hand column, write in the left hand column a specific instance that shows you work well with others—the time you worked with a large group to organize the Dance Marathon at your school, for example. Or if you’ve written “good listener” in the right hand column you might describe how while volunteering at the hospital you found that the patients often felt comfortable sharing their life stories with you.)
- Keep going until the left hand column is filled with examples of the qualities named in the right hand column. Remember: the left hand column will be “show” and the right hand column will be “tell.”

MONTAGE STRUCTURE



Qualities of a Great Endodontist (See sample Essay)

- Desire to help others
- Detail focused
- Interested in how human body works
- Curiosity

How I've Demonstrated These Qualities

- After-school math tutoring
- Designing my own shoes
- Taking apart machines
- Always asked questions as a kid

MONTAGE STRUCTURE



- Eventually you are going to write one paragraph on each element on the left hand column (this is your show).
- Important: You won't want to explicitly reveal (that is, "tell") the qualities in the right hand column or how they connect to your future career until the last or second to last paragraph... see the Endodontics essay example from earlier to see what this looks like. Why? If you say at the beginning of your essay, "I've always wanted to be a doctor" and then say "...because I am a caring, hard-working and detail-oriented individual" and then you give examples of each of those, then the essay will be kind of boring." A good guiding rule is this: show first, then tell.

MONTAGE STRUCTURE



What if I don't know what I want to do in the future (for Type D Essays):

- That's okay! Keep in mind that you don't have to use your future career as a focusing lens--you can use anything!

Here are some...**TIPS FOR FINDING A GOOD FOCUSING LENS**

- 1. Make it visual.** Storytelling is a visual medium. Use a lens that will help conjure images in the reader's mind. I've had too many students try to write "soundtrack" or "mix-tape" essays in which their favorite songs provide the soundtrack for their lives. The problem with writing this type of essay, however, is that the reader can't hear the music (and often doesn't know or have the same emotional connection to the songs referenced).
- 2. Use something you know a lot about.** Know how to cook? Use food. Play chess? Use that! Use your essence objects list for ideas.
- 3. Find a focusing lens that allows you to "go wide."** Use a metaphor, in other words, that will allow you to discuss several different aspects of who you are.

The Final Test



- Did your essay demonstrate to a college that you will make a valuable contribution during college and beyond?
 1. Core Values: Things that are so important to you that you would go to war for them. Are they coming through.
 2. Vulnerability – Can I FEEL the writer coming through?
 3. Insight – “So What Moments” – 5-7 of these in an essay usually found at the end of paragraphs. Reveal something about yourself that is unusual.
 4. Craft – Go through each paragraph and word and ask “Is this necessary?”

The Final Test



- **Read the essay aloud to someone**
 - Now that I have read my story do you feel closer to me?
 - What have you learned about me that you did not already know?

Your essay is like a painting and you are both artist and critic.