

## From Inspiration to Inspiring: Writing a Stellar College Admissions Essay

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_

**A Place to Begin:** Any story is only as good as the way in which it is told. Anyone can tell a story... we tell stories all the time; we are surrounded by them, swarmed by them perhaps, but what makes a story special? Consider any of the works that we have read all year. What if Angelou just said, "I survived some pretty rough shite; but I have a son." What if Fitzgerald had just written, "Gatsby was a greedy bastard who wanted Daisy but couldn't live up to her expectations." What if Vonnegut has simply quipped, "They firebombed Dresden. Damn."

These stories are compelling not just because of WHAT they are saying, but because of HOW they are told. You have been analyzing how authors shape the "what" with the "how"--how they create meaning through the strength of their writing. Shortly, it will be your turn.

Your goal in a college essay--according to The Common Application-- is to: "find a home within the essay prompts, and... use the prompts as a starting point to write an essay that is authentic and distinguishing." The Common App. hopes that, "These prompts are designed to elicit information that will strengthen the other components of the application." Colleges have to make a horribly difficult decision with very little information. They have test scores, GPAs, and lists of extracurriculars, but they only have a few moments where they get to see YOU. Essays and letters of recommendation are crucial because it is in these places that you get to show the college who you really are. It is in these places where you can distinguish yourself.

So now, you are going to tell a stellar story. I have chosen the word "stellar" for a reason; not the trite BS of you becoming a star or something like that, no, you will show your brilliance, something of yourself, something of your very being that makes you beautiful, unique, powerful. Now for the best news: since the topic is YOU, it is difficult to fail, you just need to find the right angle through which you will refract that brilliant light right back at the admissions office. You can blind them--in the best way. I know you can!

**Directions:** Take a moment to consider the story you chose. How was it told? Create a representation (drawing? map? list?) of how it's structure below:

Now, jot down some notes. What elements give this story a unique voice? Remember, this isn't WHAT it is about, but HOW it is being told (devices, etc).

Share these thoughts with a peer.

**Directions:** Read \_\_\_\_\_ example essay. How was it told? Create a representation (drawing? map? list?) of how it's structure below:

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### **2017-2018 Common Application Essay Prompts**

**Directions:** Now consider the following prompts. You will be choosing ONE of these to write about. Remember to choose a prompt that will allow you to exhibit elements of your personality which are "authentic" and "distinguishing." You need to choose one for which you can write about something interesting, in an interesting way, with an interesting voice!

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. Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd 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.
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.*

## **Drafting:**

- 1) Brainstorm several prompts (for content).
- 2) Choose the prompt for which you have the most interesting (unique) response.
- 3) Plan the structure of your essay.
- 4) Consider a "draw-in" device.
- 5) **WRITE YOUR DRAFT**
- 6) All drafts must be:
  - \*TYPED**
  - \*NO MORE THAN 650 WORDS (NO LESS THAN 300)**
  - \*INCLUDE THE PROMPT #**
  - \*PRINTED**

First drafts are due next class. You will be peer editing then (bring 2 printed copies). You may schedule an appointment to have me read and discuss your draft with you next week.