**Tips for writing your Personal Statement / College Essay**

**Tell a story**

* Your story should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. This is not an academic essay. Avoid the five-paragraph structure.
* Often, the strongest essays come from the smallest moments.
* Use anecdotes, vivid description, and dialogue (when appropriate).
* Use your opening and closing sentences to grab your reader and leave them with something to think about, respectively.
* Your story needs to be about who YOU are. You may use other characters but only if they illustrate points about you. You need to be the main character in this essay.

**Do not rehash your resume / application**

* This is your chance to share something that readers would NOT already know from your application. For example, if it is apparent from your application that you are a strong athlete, and you choose to write about sports, the point of the sports story should not be that you are a strong athlete because they already know that. You should only write about sports if you can tell a story that shares something about you that your reader doesn’t already know.

**Make a proportional point**

* You point should be scaled to your 17-18 year old life experiences. Avoid grand pronouncements or hyperbole. Acknowledge that you have room to grow. Do not present yourself as someone who has figured it all out.
* Focus on one central message and build off of it. A narrow and precise message is generally most effective.

**Take an original approach**

* There are no dull topics – just dull treatments. Let your creative juices flow like a stream but avoid the raging river; admissions officers are not averse to seeing some imagination.
* If you choose a common topic (like sports), you will have to work extra hard to make your essay unique.
* If you choose a risky topic (like the kissing essay), make sure that you run it by multiple people with different perspectives and personalities.

**Write clearly, precisely, and concisely**

* Your essay should demonstrate a command of standard written English, use of flawless grammar and proper syntax, and the ability to construct harmonious and varied sentences.
* The common application essay word limit is 650 words. Use them carefully.

**Write an authentic essay that conveys your true voice and experiences**

* Avoid using the thesaurus. Use the most expressive and precise words that are part of YOUR vocabulary.
* Do not try to present yourself as someone other than who you truly are in an attempt to impress. You want to find a college that is a good match for the real you, and presenting yourself as you are in your essay is an important step in making that happen.
* The college essay requires that you “humbly brag.” You are special and unique; as uncomfortable as this may make you feel at times, you need to use this essay to convey that message.

**Revise, Revise, Revise**

* Look at your essay multiple times over an extended period of time.
* Share your essay with a variety of people with different perspectives. Ask them if it effectively reflects you, your personality, and your unique strengths.
* Read your essay out loud. Have someone read your essay out loud to you.

**Establishing a rhetorical framework for your essay**

Start by doing a thorough SOAPS analysis for your essay

Answer and reflect on the following questions and ideas in your spiral notebook.

**Speaker**: This is the most important thing to consider. What are you trying to convey about yourself through this essay? Which elements of your personality are you trying to highlight? Take your time to think and write carefully about this element.

**Occasion:** You are applying to college. We know that, but what else? What are some of the important details that surround this process for you? for example: you are trying to get noticed by an athletic coach; you are trying to use this essay to offset test scores or grades that you are concerned about; you want to go to school in a different region of the country; you want to go to a school with a specific academic focus, etc.

**Audience:** There may be some overlap here with occasion, but think carefully to see if there’s anything you want to add here. Your audience is the college or colleges to which you are applying, but what else is relevant? If you are applying to a broad swath of schools, it will be hard to be precise here, but if you already had your sights set on a specific school or kind of school (i.e. small liberal arts college, large university, music conservatory, schools with a specific major or program, etc.), use this category to articulate that.

**Purpose:** Again, there an obvious answer here – you want the college to admit you to their school, but you should use this category to articulate the central message that you are trying to convey through this essay. This is less about you, personally, and more about the important idea that connects to your story.

**Subject:** Finally – you get to pick the story that you will tell. It is important that we save this step for last because you want to select a story that allows you to accomplish all the objectives that you have set forth so far. Think carefully about everything that you have considered up to this point, and try to select a moment (or a series of small moments) that you can write about to effectively and successfully achieve the rhetorical challenge that you have established for yourself.

Next, write the essay

* Consider this the first draft of many. Put your draft in your shared folder and label is with your last name and “college essay.”
* When you are done with your first draft, re-read it and include notes for yourself (and for me) using the comments feature in google drive. Things to note: areas that you think are especially strong, areas that need help, areas that need to be expanded, situations that need to be clarified, questions about grammar and syntax, questions about tone and humor, questions about whether something is conveying what you want it to convey, etc. Try to tackle a few of these issues before you share your essay with anyone, but feel free to leave questions and things to consider in the comments to work on later.
* When you feel ready, find a classmate to share your essay with. Read the essay out loud to your classmate AND have the classmate read the essay out loud to you. Note spots that come to your attention as needing revision, additions, subtractions, or corrections.
* Next, ask your classmate to write down for you (have them do this in YOUR notebook on a new sheet of paper, so they don’t see your SOAPS analysis) what they perceive to be a rhetorical triangle (speaker, audience, purpose) for your essay. Your classmate should put at least three notes on each point of the triangle. Let your classmate do this without telling them ahead of time what you were thinking about. Afterward, go over it together. If your classmate is noticing very different things from what you intended, that is a red flag for you and something you need to think about.
* Once you are ready to go over your essay with me, write your name on the board. If you are going to miss any school between now and 6/21, note that next to your name on the board. While you are waiting to meet with me, keep working on the essay or complete the peer editing step for other classmates.

**2017-2018 Common Application Essay Prompts (word limit – 650 words)**

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.