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# The College Application Essay

— *workshop* —

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# Create + Share College Folder in Google Drive

- Create a new Folder in your Google Drive.
- Name it “First - Last Name-College Folder”
  - For example “Brooke Maroth-College Folder”
- Share the folder with [catherine.maroth@ocps.net](mailto:catherine.maroth@ocps.net) and your school counselor
- Put all documents for college in this folder!
  - Personal Statement, Supplementals, Resume, College Planning Worksheets

# What is a college application essay and why is it important?

- Many colleges will require students to submit an essay along with their application.
- Along with your main essay, many colleges will ask for additional supplemental essays as well.
- Colleges take a holistic approach to admission meaning they review all aspects of your application.
- The main essay (and supplemental essays) are important because your essay reveals something crucial about you that your grades and test scores can't—your personality.
- The essay can give admission officers a sense of who you are, as well as showcasing your writing skills.
- Test optional-essays are even more important
- **The essays are probably the most difficult part of the college application process.**

# The College Essay Matters!



1. Make it unique
  - Write your personal essay in your regular, everyday voice.
  - Typically a narrative essay works best for the college application essay.
  - The personal essay is the only place in your entire application where the admissions officers have the ability to hear your own voice.
2. It's time to be a little self-centered (not arrogant)
  - Often your instinct is to write about something else - an experience, another person, a favorite activity - rather than your personality, passions, or quirks.
  - When writing about a person or experience, bring it back to you and how it changed or affected you.
3. Detail!
  - Show instead of telling-use examples!
4. Ask a couple of people to proofread! Peers AND Professional Educators
5. Start early!
  - Most college applications will be due between August and November of your senior year.
  - Prioritize now and work on it over the summer

# Brainstorming Activity from The College Essay Guy

1. Write down the name of the career you're likely to pursue.
2. Write "Qualities of an excellent \_\_\_\_\_ (doctor/teacher/lawyer/etc)"
  - Make a list of the qualities necessary to excel in whichever field you've chosen.
  - For example, if you want to study business, you might consider "ability to work well with others" and "leadership skills".
3. Write "How I've Demonstrated These Qualities in My Life"
  - For each quality you listed for the career, write a specific moment/example from your life that SHOWS that you developed this quality.

## How I've Demonstrated These Qualities

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

## Qualities of a Great Endodontist

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

# The College Essay Guy: Essence Objects

- Imagine a box.
- In this box is a set of objects
- Imagine that each one of these is an “essence object” for you
- Each object represents one of your fundamental qualities.
- So each object is more than just an object.

*Make a copy of the brainstorming activity and save it in your new college folder:*

<http://bit.do/cchsessay2>



**The** OBJECT'S BOX:  
**Essence**  
**Objects**  
**Exercise**

# More Brainstorming Ideas from The College Essay Guy

- [Essence Objects](#)-Make a list of 20 objects-each object represents one of your fundamental qualities
- [Values Exercise](#)-From a list of values, select 10 that you connect with most, then your top 5, top 3, and finally your top value.
- [21 Details List](#)-Make a list of 21 details from your life: interesting facts that describe some small, random part of who you are.
- [Everything I Want Colleges to Know About Me](#)
- [Timeline of My Life](#)-Chart the major events of your life: any major challenges, any moves, births/deaths in family, anything that has shaped or changed you. Make room for “before I was born” (ex. my parents came to the US) and “after college” (ex. I will invent the cure for cancer)



# Common Application 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.

# Sample Supplemental Essays



- The Stanford community is deeply curious and driven to learn in and out of the classroom. Reflect on an idea or experience that makes you genuinely excited about learning.
- Virtually all of Stanford's undergraduates live on campus. Write a note to your future roommate that reveals something about you or that will help your roommate — and us — know you better.
- Describe an example of your leadership experience in which you have positively influenced others, helped resolve disputes or contributed to group efforts over time.
- Every person has a creative side, and it can be expressed in many ways: problem solving, original and innovative thinking, and artistically, to name a few. Describe how you express your creative side.
- What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time?

# Essay #2: <http://bit.do/sampleessay2>

My childhood left three months ago on a plane to Austria.

It was a sad day, the end of June, when my baby cousins moved away. They had lived nearby for almost five years, and now they were moving to a country too far to visit with any regularity. My cousins were a fundamental part of my life; when they were not with me, they were on my mind. A week had never gone by without a visit from them and I doubted my life would be the same without them. They brought back the untroubled days of my childhood, through games, adventures, and silliness; and yet they helped mature me from an at-times selfish teenager into a responsible, mature adult.

My aunt and uncle moved to New Jersey from Boston, with their 1-year-old daughter Yasmeen, in the winter of 1998. They lived in an apartment on the side of our house and I was ecstatic to have our family, especially a baby girl, so close to us. Yasmeen had close friendships with each of my sisters, but I knew the one that developed between us was the strongest. As she began to walk on her own and talk in full sentences I realized the extent of my influence upon her. I would notice her syntax and mannerisms mimicking mine. I also noticed when she'd copy some of my more unpleasant actions, argue with her mother after I had done the same. Yasmeen made me realize what being a role model really was.

When Maya was born in 2000, Yasmeen had a hard time adjusting. She was jealous of the attention we all paid to new younger sister, so I did my best to pay attention to her when she might have not been noticed. Once Yasmeen overcame her jealousy, she was able to enjoy Maya's presence in our lives, like we all did. Maya grew up fast, too, it seemed. Each day, they got a little bit bigger, and I tried to take advantage of our times together, doing my best to free my schedule for my two favorite people.

My experience with Yasmeen and Maya has brought me to realize the importance of influential people. I know that I have helped Yasmeen and Maya grow, but "the babies" have made an even greater impact on my own life. They have shown me how to be a parent, a sister, a cousin, a babysitter, a child, and most importantly, a friend. My relationship with my cousins, has made me a better person—a more patient person, with the ability to tolerate endless questions and spilled juice; an exuberant person; able to have fun and be happy with others sometimes, when I'd rather not, for the sake of others; a role model, showing the babies the ethics of life, right, wrong, and in between; and a compassionate person, able to be responsible, forgiving, and loving. Yasmeen and Maya made me know that I can and do affect people's lives and emotions. They are where I leave a lasting impression. And maybe, as they grow they won't remember all the fun times we had, but I do know they'll remember the things I tried to teach them about life and love and family.

# Essay #1: <http://bit.do/sampleessay1>

*The clock was remarkably slow as I sat, legs tightly crossed, squirming at my desk. "Just raise your hand," my mind pleaded, "ask." But despite my urgent need to visit the restroom, I remained seated, begging time to move faster. You see, I was that type of kid to eat French Fries dry because I couldn't confront the McDonalds cashier for some Heinz packets. I was also the type to sit crying in front of school instead of asking the office if it could check on my late ride. Essentially, I chose to struggle through a problem if the solution involved speaking out against it.*

*My diffidence was frustrating. My parents relied on me, the only one able to speak English, to guide them, and always anticipated the best from me. However, as calls for help grew, the more defunct I became. I felt that every move I made, it was a gamble between success and failure. For me, the fear of failure and disappointment far outweighed the possibility of triumph, so I took no action and chose to silently suffer under pressure.*

*Near meltdown, I knew something needed to be done. Mustering up the little courage I had, I sought ways to break out of my shell—without luck. Recreational art classes ended in three boring months. I gave up Self Defense after embarrassing myself in class. After-school band, library volunteering, and book clubs ended similarly. Continued effort yielded nothing.*

*Disillusioned and wrung dry of ideas, I followed my mom's advice and joined a debate club. As expected, the club only reaffirmed my self-doubt. Eye contact? Greater volume? No thanks.*

*But soon, the club moved on from "how to make a speech" lessons to the exploration of argumentation. We were taught to speak the language of Persuasion, and play the game of Debate. Eventually, I fell in love with it all.*

*By high school, I joined the school debate team, began socializing, and was even elected to head several clubs. I developed critical and analytical thinking skills, and learned how to think and speak spontaneously.*

*I became proud and confident. Moreover, I became eager to play my role in the family, and family relations strengthened. In fact, nowadays, my parents are interested in my school's newest gossip.*

*Four years with debate, and now I'm the kid up at the white board; the kid leading discussions; and the kid standing up for her beliefs.*

*More importantly, I now confront issues instead of avoiding them. It is exciting to discover solutions to problems that affect others, as I was able to do as part of the 1st Place team for the 2010 United Nations Global Debates Program on climate change and poverty. I take a natural interest in global issues, and plan to become a foreign affairs analyst or diplomat by studying international affairs with a focus on national identity.*

*In particular, I am interested in the North-South Korean tension. What irreconcilable differences have prompted a civilization to separate? Policy implications remain vague, and sovereignty theories have their limits—how do we determine what compromises are to be made? And on a personal level, why did my grandfather have to flee from his destroyed North Korean hometown—and why does it matter?*

*I see a reflection of myself in the divide at the 38th parallel because I see one part isolating itself in defense to outside threats, and another part coming out to face the world as one of the fastest-developing nations. Just as my shy persona before debate and extroverted character after debate are both part of who I am, the Korean civilization is also one. And just as my parents expect much from me, the first of my family to attend college, I have grand expectations for this field of study.*

# College Essay Resources

**College Essay Guy**-<https://www.collegeessayguy.com/college-essay-resources>

**Johns Hopkins-Essays That Worked**-<https://apply.jhu.edu/application-process/essays-that-worked/>

**CollegeBoard-Big Future Essay Resources**-<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/essays>

**Tufts-Essays That Worked**-<https://admissions.tufts.edu/apply/advice/past-essays/common-application-essays/>

**Hamilton-Essays That Worked**-<https://www.hamilton.edu/admission/apply/college-essays-that-worked/2014-essays-that-worked>

## College Essay Articles

- [College Essay Writing 101](#): This guide lays out the basics of the essay-writing process and includes advice from experts on everything from selecting a topic to editing the essay.
- [10 Tips to Inspire College Essay Topics](#): Teens often struggle with deciding what to write about in their college essays. Experts offer 10 brainstorming strategies that can help students spark topic ideas – see them all [here](#).
- A college essay topic doesn't have to be unique to be a good choice. Read what admissions officers had to say about three common essay topics here.
- [Top College Officials Share Notes on Great Application Essays](#): U.S. News asked admissions officials at some highly ranked [National Universities](#) and [National Liberal Arts Colleges](#) to share insight on examples of standout college essays. Click [here](#) to see what they had to say.
- [How to Write a Supplemental Essay](#): Some colleges ask prospective students to submit additional, though shorter, essays as part of the application process. Some schools ask for just one supplemental essay, while others may require several. Learn more about supplemental essays and how to tackle them [here](#).

# Teacher Recommendation Letter Request

Provide your teacher a copy of your resume as well as a request letter.

What information should you provide to your recommender?

- College Information
  - List of colleges you are applying to that require a letter of recommendation
  - Instructions on how to submit letter (Uploading in Common App, mailing letter, etc)
  - Deadline for each college
  - What you plan to study at college (if you know)
- What strengths, passions, or qualities would you like your teacher to highlight in letter?
- Special projects or memories from class that were significant to you
  - Use specific examples
  - List any stand out projects or instances where you went above and beyond
  - Mention times you contributed to a discussion or had a thought provoking conversation with the teacher
  - Favorite part or memory from that class
- Background Information
  - Describe your background- 1st generation, family, cultural influences
  - What three adjectives would you use to describe yourself? Give specific examples or stories of a time you exemplified each one of these qualities.
  - Discuss an academic interest or passion.
  - Describe an involvement that's had a significant impact on you.
  - What have you learned about yourself since the time you started high school? How have you changed or grown?
  - Describe a significant challenge or obstacle you've had to overcome. How did you do so, and what did you learn from it?

[Additional Resources](#)

[Sample Teacher Letter of Recommendation Request](#)