



# College Essay Workshop



Junior Seminar

# Presenters

- ❖ School Counseling Department
- ❖ Junior Seminar Teachers



# **What are the essay questions? - 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.**
- 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 and motivate you?**

# What are the essay questions? - Common Application

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.

# Seven Qualities of a Successful College Essay

Each family will be assigned to read one of the Seven Qualities. Families will report out to the class and explain the quality and how to accomplish it.

1. Introspective
2. Student Voice
3. Descriptive
4. Honest
5. Unconventional
6. Well Written
7. Meaningful

# What are colleges looking for?

→ What makes **YOU** stand out?

→ What makes you different from other students applying to the same colleges with the same GPA and SAT scores?

→ **Authenticity**; it should sound like you

→ **Well written and grammatically correct**



# Writing a strong college admissions essay

Assistant Director of Undergraduate Admissions  
Brown University



**Khan Academy**

# What are colleges NOT looking for?

- Your resume
- A stock 5 paragraph essay
- Your entire life story
- Overconfidence
- An essay that focuses too much on someone else
  - A very long essay
- Topics that are extremely personal



# Common essay mistakes

Associate Director of Undergraduate Admissions  
Georgetown University



Khan Academy

# How Long Should It Be?

- Max 650 words
  - Construct a tight narrative
  - Choose your words to maximize input
- 
- Supplemental essays are about 250 words



# SHOW Don't Tell

## TELLING

I was really nervous and  
thought I might be sick . .

.I totally messed up my  
performance.

## SHOWING - Use Sensory Detail

As I hesitantly walked on stage, my stomach churned anxiously feeling as if I would lose my lunch before the music even started. I crept over to the piano and slowly sat on the bench apprehensively placing my fingers on the ivory keys. I was so overwhelmed by the blinding lights and the large crowd that a frozen feeling took over my body. After mustering up enough courage to begin my solo, a sound so sour screeched from the piano! In my catatonic state, I had placed my fingers on the wrong keys! My performance was completely sabotaged by my nervousness!

# What is Sensory Detail?

Details that appeal to the senses

- **sight**--*her brown hair hung down to the middle of her sloping back*  
(instead of: *long brown hair*)
- **sound**—*ice pinged against the window*  
(instead of: *the ice hit the window*)
- **taste**—*the lemon's tartness made my lips pucker*  
(instead of: *the lemon is sour*)
- **touch**—*the grainy sand brushed through my toes*  
(instead of: *the sand is between my toes*)
- **smell**--*there was a must that radiated from the locker room*  
(instead of: *the locker room smelled*)

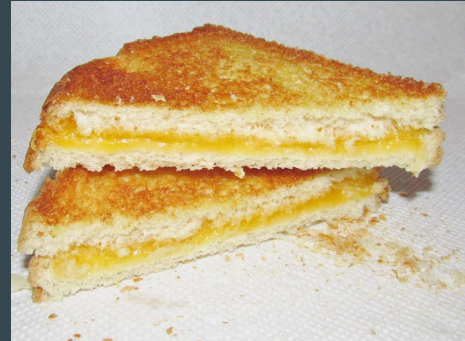
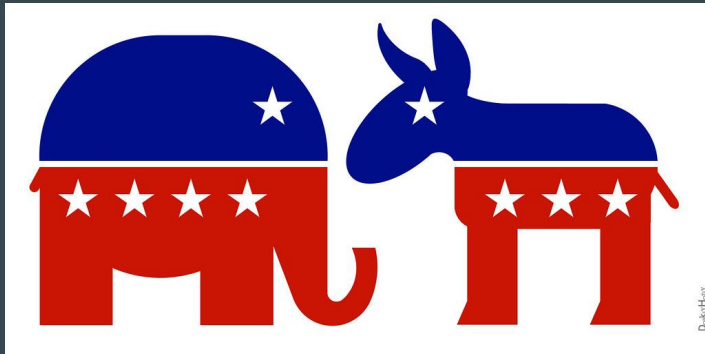
# Start With A Strong Hook

WEAK

I have a passion for politics.

STRONG

I first became politically active the day the cafeteria outlawed grilled cheese and tater tots.



# College Essay Planning Worksheet

Click this [link](#) to access a planning worksheet you can use when you write your essay this summer or next fall. It is set to view so you will need to make your own copy.

# Where do I start?

- Engage in brainstorming
- Choose your prompt
- Generate 1-3 main ideas
- Create a brief outline
- Write and rewrite
- Proofread/Edit
- Don't rush or force the process



# Brainstorming Exercise

Make a list of 21 details from your life. They should be interesting facts that describe some small, random part of who you are.

Don't overthink it

*Confused? Need  
inspiration?*

Check out an example on this [link](#)..

**Thank you!**

**Remember! We are here for help!**

**If you need any assistance, please speak to your School Counselor, Junior Seminar, English or Social Studies teachers.**

# Evaluating Sample College Essays

Working with a partner, you will evaluate sample college essays using the rubric provided. Take notes, discuss, and be ready to share your analysis.



# College Application Essay Checklist

Here is a copy of the college application essay checklist we just used to evaluate the sample essays. Apply it to your own essay when you write it this summer or next fall. It is set to view so you need to make a copy.

