

COLLEGE ESSAY WRITING

To inspire you....before you write.

<https://youtu.be/2INObulaKN4>

Tell your story.

The brain loves stories. When you tell a story out loud it triggers memories, emotions, and the listener wants to take action. This process of mental mirroring happens naturally in conversation, but is often lost in writing. -from <https://www.story2.com/essaybuilder/>

Read these first lines of sample college essays. Did they catch your attention?

I'M CREATING A LANGUAGE.
IT'S NAMED "ELVISH,"

"GET AN ABORTION."

HOWEVER, I RECENTLY FOUND OUT THAT
"ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT"
WAS REVIVED FOR ANOTHER SEASON.

I FELT
SO SMALL.

AT THE DRUM CIRCLE,
WAITING FOR THE FLAG CEREMONY TO BEGIN

FANTASY IS AN EXQUISITE FORM OF

TORTURE.

THUS, MY RISE TO THE HIPSTER IDEAL BEGAN.

I WAS NO VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN.

BEHIND MY MASK,
I AM A CRIMINAL.

TORTOISE= AMERICA

AN EXQUISITE MANIFESTATION

OF DREAMS,

DREAMS THAT LEAVE ME
YEARNING FOR MORE.

I DEVELOPED AN
INTEREST IN
RAP MUSIC.

THIS ONE IS MINE :)

THE TIDE IS RISING, MY SHIP IS PACKED, AND I AM READY TO SET SAIL.

THE COMFORT ZONE-

I WAS ABOUT TO LEAVE IT.

BEHIND MY MASK,
I AM A SINNER.

I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN LESS
THAN ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT
CPR CLASSES.

MY MOTHER
IS A WILD
HORSE.

THIS WAS A MATTER OF
LIFE AND DEATH.

MY SOUL WILL BURN IN HELL

I BEGAN TO PARTICIPATE
IN SOCRATIC SEMINARS.

A PUPPET HIDDEN,
A WALKWAY LONELY,
A PAIR OF SCISSORS CHEATING,
A STONE OPENING,
A LEAF FLOATING,
A DOOR SHINING.

I SAT THERE,
PERTURBED AND BURNING
WITH RADIANT SKEPTICISM.

I COULD ONLY HOPE
SHE WOULD SEE MY
PLEADING EYES.

SHE WAS NAKED,
AND I WAS

SCARED.

The good, bad, and ugly of essays:

Here are samples of essays from students who are “on the other side” of the process. They have been accepted to and are in college! Read a few to see the variety of writing styles. Review some comments from college admission counselors who read and commented on the essays.

<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/essays/sample-college-application-essay-1>

<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/essays/sample-college-application-essay-2>

http://collegeapps.about.com/od/essays/a/student-teacher_2.htm

http://collegeapps.about.com/od/essays/a/EssayYouthBoard_3.htm

<http://www.conncoll.edu/admission/apply/essays-that-worked/michelle-b-lee-18/>

<http://www.conncoll.edu/admission/apply/essays-that-worked/morgan-elliott-19/>

<http://admissions.tufts.edu/apply/essay-questions/past-essays/common-application-essays/>

<http://gawker.com/this-personal-essay-will-get-you-into-columbia-478217730>

Advice from a College Admissions Dean, Connecticut College

- Allow yourself plenty of time to write the essay. Do not wait until the last minute. I know this sounds absurdly simple, but it really does make a difference to be as relaxed as possible when you sit down to write.
- Choose the prompt that comes closest to something you’d like to write about. The purpose of the prompt is to help you reflect on something that matters to you. Your application will be full of information that illuminates dimensions of you and your

abilities, but only the essay gives you a vehicle to speak, in your own voice, about something personally significant. Choose something you care about and it will flow more naturally.

- When you've written a first draft, let it sit. Then go back to it another day. Ask people you trust for their feedback, but don't let anyone else tell you how you should write it. This is your story, or some small but significant part of it, as told or reflected upon by you.
- When you've revised it to your heart's content, proofread with care. Spell check isn't always the most reliable friend.
- Submit it, and treat yourself to something nice — like your favorite film, a favorite meal, ice cream a run, quality time with your dog, or whatever it is that you enjoy.

Essay Advice from Application Readers/Admission at Carleton College

https://apps.carleton.edu/admissions/apply/essay_tips/

- **Treat it as an opportunity**, not a burden. The essay is one of the few things that you've got complete control over in the application process, especially by the time you're in your senior year. Use it to tell us a part of your story.
- **Take the time to go beyond the obvious.** Especially if you're recounting an event, take it beyond the chronological storytelling. Include some opinion or reflection.
- **Don't try to take on too much.** Focus on *one* event, one activity, or one "most influential person." Tackling too much tends to make your essay too watered down or disjointed.
- **Brainstorm the things that matter to you.** Don't be afraid to reveal yourself in your writing. We want to know who you are and how you think.
- **Write thoughtfully and with authenticity.** It'll be clear who believes in what they are saying versus those who are simply saying what they think we want to hear.
- **Be comfortable showing your vulnerability.** We don't expect you to be perfect. Feel free to tell us about a time you stumbled, and what happened next.
- **Essays should have a thesis** that is clear to you and to the reader. Your thesis should indicate where you're going and what you're trying to communicate from the outset.

- **Don't do a history report.** Some background knowledge is okay, but do not re-hash what other authors have already said or written.
- **Answer the prompt.** We're most interested in the story you're telling, but it's important to follow directions, too.
- **Be yourself.** If you are funny, write a funny essay; if you are serious, write a serious essay. Don't start reinventing yourself with the essay.
- **Ignore the urge for perfection.** There's no such thing as the perfect college essay. Just be yourself and write the best way you know how.
- **Tell us something different** from what we'll read on your list of extracurricular activities or transcript.
- **Proofread, proofread, proofread.** There's a difference between "tutoring children" and "torturing children" and your spell-checker won't catch that.
- **Keep it short.**
- **Limit the number of people** who review your essay. Too much input usually means your voice is lost in the writing style.
- **Appearances count.** Formatting and presentation cannot replace substance, but they can certainly enhance the value of an already well-written essay.

Writing in your voice.

<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/application-essays/>

The voice you use and the style in which you write can intrigue your audience.

The voice you use in your essay should be yours. Remember when your high school English teacher said "never say 'I'"? Here's your chance to use all those "I"s you've been saving up. The narrative should reflect your perspective, experiences, thoughts, and emotions. Focusing on events or ideas may give your audience an indirect idea of how these things became important in forming your outlook, but many others have had equally compelling experiences. By simply talking about those events in your own voice, you put the emphasis on you rather than the event or idea. Look at this anecdote:

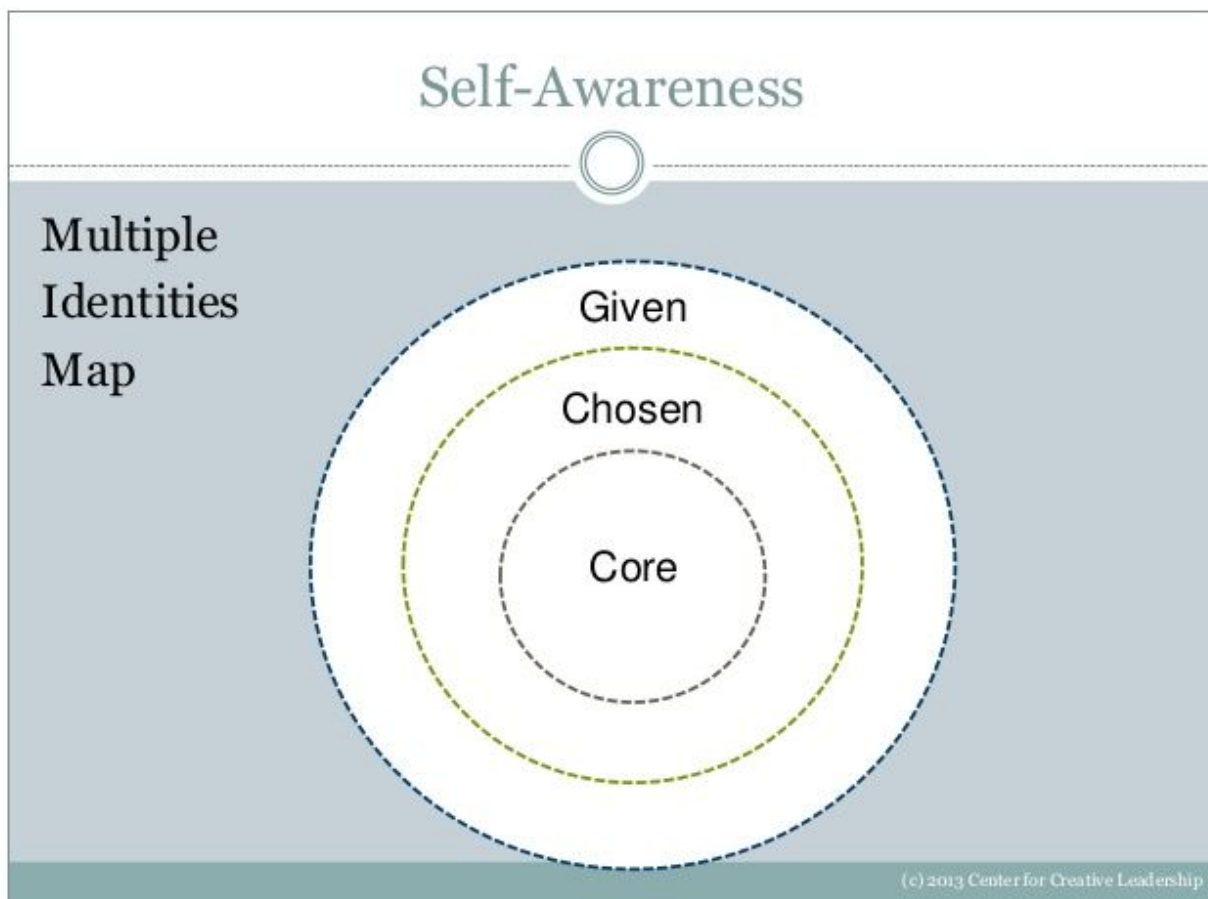
During the night shift at Wirth Memorial Hospital, a man walked into the Emergency Room wearing a monkey costume and holding his head. He seemed confused and was moaning in pain. One of the nurses ascertained that he had been swinging from tree branches in a local park and had hit his head when he fell out of a tree. This tragic tale signified the moment at which I realized psychiatry was the only career path I could take.

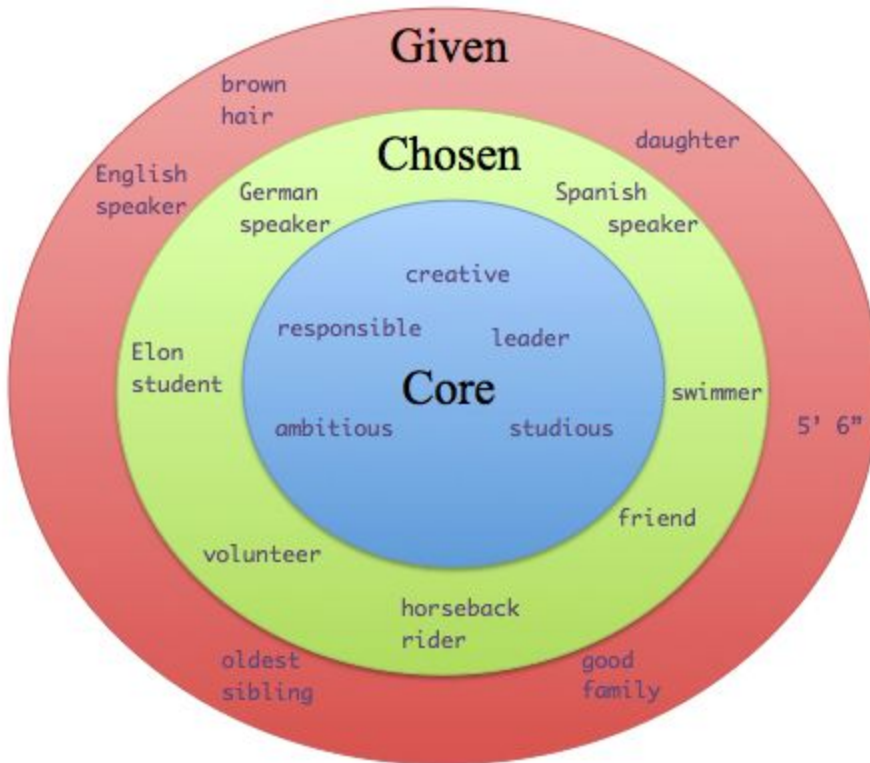
An interesting tale, yes, but what does it tell you about the narrator? The following example takes the same anecdote and recasts it to make the narrator more of a presence in the story:

I was working in the Emergency Room at Wirth Memorial Hospital one night when a man walked in wearing a monkey costume and holding his head. I could tell he was confused and in pain. After a nurse asked him a few questions, I listened in surprise as he explained that he had been a monkey all of his life and knew that it was time to live with his brothers in the trees. Like many other patients I would see that year, this man suffered from an illness that only a combination of psychological and medical care would effectively treat. I realized then that I wanted to be able to help people by using that particular combination of skills only a psychiatrist develops.

Developing an Essay Idea/Topic

Use a Social Identity Map or Mind Map to think about experiences you have had, who you are and where you come from so you can perhaps pull an idea out.





Using this as an example, once you complete the circle, you may find that an idea presents itself. For instance, maybe I would write about riding horses, speaking 3 languages, etc. Tell a story from one of your core or chosen circles.