

Transcript of The College Admissions Essay Prezi

The College Admissions Essay

aka

Who are you and what is your story?

By Erika Schwartz

erika@youthelevated.com

About Erika

BA from UC Berkeley in Sociology

Teaching SAT prep and tutoring since 2008

College essay coach since 2010

Past Students: all UCs, Harvard, CalTech, U of C, LMU, Chapman, Pomoma

Recent Students: Full scholarship to Amherst, Acceptances to Harvard, UCI, UCSD, UCSB, Berkeley

Enjoys swing dancing and reading in spare time

The College Admissions Essay

Why is the college essay important?

79,000 applicants to UC Berkeley last year

College admissions officers were asked, "How many amazing personal statements do you remember?"

5 total! 3 good ones and 2 really bad ones

"...if we have for whatever reason any negative impressions, a good personal statement can overturn our initial view of the applicant"

"We receive thousands of applicants that are very impressive in terms of statistics, but we want to see what kind of person lies behind those numbers"

"After reading hundreds, if not thousands, of essays that pretty much say the same things in the same ways, a distinctive essay is like a breath of fresh air"

The essay isn't everything!

Other factors: Grades, extracurricular activities, test scores, letters of rec, class rank, school reputation, legacy

But it is very important!

So, what is the purpose of the essay?

The application itself is the bones...the essay shows your personality!

You want the essay to show:

- The weird thing that makes you unique
- What makes you interesting and quirky
- Your sense of self
- Your reasons, motivations, purpose
- Something new they can't get from your application
- Introspection
- Maturity
- Impact and Initiative
- The way you are a leader
 - Remember, there are different ways to be a leader!

We want the admissions officer to say to themselves,

"I like this kid. They would be an asset to my school!"

No rules, just guidelines

"Drama is anticipation mingled with uncertainty"

-William Archer

- Have you created anticipation?

- Have you made me wonder what will happen next?
- Have you made me what to know how it will all conclude?
- Have you made honest conflicts that create doubt of what the outcome will be?

How do we do that?

Create a good story

What does a good story have to have?

A likeable character who learns something, who makes a change for the better!

"There isn't anyone you couldn't love once you've heard their story."

-Mary Lou Kownacki

The Hero's Journey

- Status Quo
- Inciting Incident/Status Quo Change
- Raising of the Stakes
- Moment of Truth
- New Outcome/Status Quo Change

What's the inside story?

What's the outside story?

Star Wars

Outside Story: The universe is being taken over by the forces of evil

Inside story: A young man learns to believe in himself

What does this mean for you?

UC Essay Topics (Pick 4 of 8)

1. Describe an example of your leadership experience in which you have positively influenced others, helped resolve disputes or contributed to group efforts over time.

Things to consider: A leadership role can mean more than just a title. It can mean being a mentor to others, acting as the person in charge of a specific task, or taking the lead role in organizing an event or project. Think about what you accomplished and what you learned from the experience. What were your responsibilities?

Did you lead a team? How did your experience change your perspective on leading others? Did you help to resolve an important dispute at your school, church, in your community or an organization? And your leadership role doesn't necessarily have to be limited to school activities. For example, do you help out or take care of your family?

2. 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.

Things to consider: What does creativity mean to you? Do you have a creative skill that is important to you? What have you been able to do with that skill? If you used creativity to solve a problem, what was your solution? What are the steps you took to solve the problem?

How does your creativity influence your decisions inside or outside the classroom? Does your creativity relate to your major or a future career?

3. What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time

Things to consider: If there's a talent or skill that you're proud of, this is the time to share it. You don't necessarily have to be recognized or have received awards for your talent (although if you did and you want to talk about it, feel free to do so). Why is this talent or skill meaningful to you?

Does the talent come naturally or have you worked hard to develop this skill or talent? Does your talent or skill allow you opportunities in or outside the classroom? If so, what are they and how do they fit into your schedule?

4. Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant educational opportunity or worked to overcome an educational barrier you have faced

Things to consider: An educational opportunity can be anything that has added value to your educational experience and better prepared you for college. For example, participation in an honors or academic enrichment program, or enrollment in an academy that's geared toward an occupation or a major, or taking advanced courses that interest you — just to name a few.

If you choose to write about educational barriers you've faced, how did you overcome or strive to overcome them? What personal characteristics or skills did you call on to overcome this challenge? How did overcoming this barrier help shape who are you today?

5. Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement?

Things to consider: A challenge could be personal, or something you have faced in your community or school. Why was the challenge significant to you? This is a good opportunity to talk about any obstacles you've faced and what you've learned from the experience. Did you have support from someone else or did you handle it alone?

If you're currently working your way through a challenge, what are you doing now, and does that affect different aspects of your life? For example, ask yourself, "How has my life changed at home, at my school, with my friends or with my family?"

6. Think about an academic subject that inspires you. Describe how you have furthered this interest inside and/or outside of the classroom.

Things to consider: Many students have a passion for one specific academic subject area, something that they just can't get enough of. If that applies to you, what have you done to further that interest? Discuss how your interest in the subject developed and describe any experience you have had inside and outside the classroom — such as volunteer work, internships, employment, summer programs, participation in student organizations and/or clubs — and what you have gained from your involvement.

Has your interest in the subject influenced you in choosing a major and/or future career? Have you been able to pursue coursework at a higher level in this subject (honors, AP, IB, college or university work)? Are you inspired to pursue this subject further at UC, and how might you do that?

7. What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?

Things to consider: Think of community as a term that can encompass a group, team or a place — like your high school, hometown or home. You can define community as you see fit, just make sure you talk about your role in that community. Was there a problem that you wanted to fix in your community?

Why were you inspired to act? What did you learn from your effort? How did your actions benefit others, the wider community or both? Did you work alone or with others to initiate change in your community?

8. Beyond what has already been shared in your application, what do you believe makes you stand out as a strong candidate for admissions to the University of California?

Things to consider: If there's anything you want us to know about you, but didn't find a question or place in the application to tell us, now's your chance. What have you not shared with us that will highlight a skill, talent, challenge or opportunity that you think will help us know you better?

From your point of view, what do you feel makes you an excellent choice for UC? Don't be afraid to brag a little.

Common Application Essay (Choose one)

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. [No change]

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? [Revised]

3. Reflect on a time when you *questioned* or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your *thinking*? What *was the outcome*? [Revised]

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. [No change]

5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or *realization* that *sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others*. [Revised]

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?* [New]

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.* [New]

Have you faced serious challenges?

What may qualify as serious challenges?

- Death of a parent or best friend
- Learning or physical disability
- First to go to college
- Worked during high school to support family
- Crossed US border illegally

- Had to learn English while adapting to a new culture
- Took on huge responsibilities at home due to absent/ill/overworked parent

Here's how you write about it:

1. What's the challenge I faced? (25%)

- "My life changed forever when..."

- Breaking point

- Turning point

2. What did I do about it? (50%)

- Be specific!

- How did things get better?

3. How did it make me a better person? (25%)

- Turn the difficulties into strengths

- Show what you value at the end

Victor vs. Victim

Victors:

- Make the best out of their situation
- Make an impact on their community (whatever that may be)
- Take initiative

Do's and Don'ts of the College Admissions Essay

Don't

- Use "buzzwords". Ever.
- "My passion is...my example of leadership is...I took initiative when"
- Write something for someone else's approval
- Use clichés

- "But at the end of the day", "think outside the box", "every cloud has a silver lining"
- Over dramatize a story
- Write all about someone else
- Try to be manipulative the reader's emotions
- Talk about the time you did something troublesome, how hard you worked in a class and got a certain grade, or how you want to make a lot of money
- Philosophize about freedom, love, death, etc

Do

- Show you've invested your time in something worthwhile
- Be honest and sincere
- Use detailed descriptions
- Show, don't tell
- Show the strengths of your personality
- Be the hero of your story
- Revise, revise, revise

We want the admissions officer to be able to say, "This person is _____" (one or two qualities)

Such as...

- Curious
- Courageous
- Tenacious
- Introspective
- Resilient

How? Write your essay backwards!

Think of the quality you want to show, then think about a time when you showed that quality.

Interviewer: How much rewriting do you do?

Hemingway: It depends. I rewrote the ending of Farewell to Arms, the last page of it, 39 times before I was satisfied.

Interviewer: Was there some technical problem there? What was it that had stumped you?

Hemingway: Getting the words right.

— Ernest Hemingway, *The Paris Review Interview, 1956*

“Your eloquence should be the servant of the ideas in your head. Your rule might be this: If a sentence, no matter how excellent, does not illuminate your subject in some new and useful way, scratch it out.”

— Kurt Vonnegut, *How to Use the Power of the Printed Word*

Closing in on our goals

- Is the story compelling?
- Does it show you to be a hero?
- Does it touch the heart?
- Is it relatable?
- Would you want to hire this person?

Final Goal:

To be admitted

So the story should be interesting, but also effective and focused on the goal of being admitted

Who should help you revise? Choose revisers carefully!

English teacher:

- May see 100's of essays over the course of a week
- May not have time to find the compelling story of your student
- May focus on grammar instead of story effectiveness for goals

Your friend who is a good writer:

- May be able to help with a story
- May miss the overall goal of admissions

Your auntie who wants to help:

- May not be familiar with the overall goal of admissions
- May not give you objective feedback because she doesn't want to hurt your feelings

Takeaway:

"Is your student showing themselves to be an asset to the school?"

Have further questions? Please contact erika@youthelevated.com