



Crafting a College Essay

Terms and Definitions

Three steps to crafting a college essay:

Brainstorm: Taking your general ideas and honing in on what makes your story unique in order to come up with the topic of your essay.

Outline: Organizing your essay in a cohesive manner so that the reader is able to follow your ideas.

Draft: The actual process of writing.

Step 1: Brainstorming

Broad Topic: The broad topic is the overarching theme that immediately pops into your mind when thinking about the writing prompt. You can be general at first, but it should only be the jumping point for more specific points you want to make.

- > Example of a broad topic: Family

Circumstance: The situation that makes the broad topic stand out to you as influential. Be more specific.

- > Example of a circumstance: Living in a single-parent household

Unique Point: The parts of your circumstance that make your story uniquely your own. While you may choose to write about an aspect/circumstance that many students may also identify with, your unique point should set your story apart from other students'.

- > Example of a unique point: Learning how to make meals for siblings with only \$20 because mother has to work long hours.

Step 2: Outline

Common Thread: An idea, topic, or theme that is carried throughout your essay. It doesn't have to be explicit — you don't have to explain how every paragraph relates to the common thread. However, it should be prevalent enough to ensure your essay is united.

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- > Example of common thread: Resourcefulness
 - 1st Paragraph:
 - Eldest of 4 siblings, single parent, struggling family
 - 2nd Paragraph:
 - Responsibilities to buy food for siblings with only \$20. Needed to get creative.
 - 3rd Paragraph:
 - Perfected the art of budgeting. Became very resourceful, and was soon able to make entire meals with only \$20.

Step 3: Draft

Detail: Show, don't tell. Add descriptive, concrete and/or interesting details to bring your story to life for your audience.

- > Example of detail: Use concrete details to communicate resourcefulness
 - There is something therapeutic about the smell of spices sautéing in a pan of caramelizing onions, and there is nothing more relaxing after a long day at school than standing over the stove gently coaxing these ingredients. In 30 minutes and for only \$20, I would have a delicious dinner prepared for my family. And there was always enough leftover for when my mother returned from her 12-hour shift at the hospital.

Focus on you: Make sure the focus of the essay is about you and telling your story, not something or someone else in the essay.

- > Example of focusing on you: Watching my mother work long, hard hours just to put a roof over our heads has inspired my strong work ethic. Her example has motivated me to put my full heart into the classroom, and at home to take care of my siblings.

Negative/Positive: It's okay to talk about negative life circumstances, but it's best to focus on how you overcame those situations and what they taught you.

- > Example of being positive: As the eldest of five, I have had to play a parental role at home. I get home from a long day of classes and clubs and head straight to the kitchen to prepare dinner. While this can be stressful at times, my situation has taught me the importance of hard work, and the strong bond of family.

Brainstorming

Fill out this worksheet with broad topics, circumstances, and unique points about your life to help craft your college essay. A broad topic is overarching theme that immediately pops into your mind when thinking about the writing prompt, a circumstance is the situation that makes this broad topic stand out to you as influential, and a unique point is the part of your circumstance that makes your story uniquely your own.

You may use the section titled “Step 1: Brainstorming” to help you complete this chart.

Essay Topic: _____

<p>Broad Topic:</p>	<p>Broad Topic:</p>	<p>Broad Topic:</p>
<p>Circumstance:</p>	<p>Circumstance:</p>	<p>Circumstance:</p>
<p>Unique Point:</p>	<p>Unique Point:</p>	<p>Unique Point:</p>

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