



THE GREAT COLLEGE ESSAY PROJECT: WRITE YOUR WAY IN

**A student-directed lesson plan, adapted
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Grades: 11-12

Type: Narrative

**Commitment: 1 session, approx. 2 hours and
30 minutes**

Presented by 826 National and Reach Higher



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to The Great College Essay Project! The goal of this lesson is for you to write a compelling personal statement for consideration for college admissions. This packet is designed to support you as you brainstorm and develop an excellent rough draft. Simply follow the steps below and refer to the other documents included as directed!

This lesson is appropriate for students who are starting from scratch on their college or scholarship essay, so don't worry if this all feels brand new to you! Common App prompts are provided in your student packet (included in your lesson download) if you plan to apply through that resource. The brainstorming time and helpful tips included in today's lesson may also help you with any additional prompts.

GETTING READY

Before you get started on your essay, let's make sure all your tools are assembled. For today's brainstorming session, you will need:

- **The Great College Essay Project: Write Your Way In Student Packet:** ([link](#)) This is the worksheet where you will be recording your ideas as you brainstorm. It also includes Common App essay prompts and a sample essay you'll reference in today's writing.
- **The Great College Essay Project: All About College Essays:** ([link](#)) This packet includes tips on writing a strong essay, pitfalls to avoid while writing, and several bonus sample essays.
 - A timer or a watch to keep track of writing time.
 - A computer or a notebook for you to do some writing!

LET'S BEGIN!

Welcome, student! Let's start by identifying our purpose for the day: to ensure that you finish today's lesson with a first draft of a high-quality, compelling personal statement to submit to colleges for admission consideration. It's good to remind yourself that there are many ways to write a compelling personal statement, not just one, and the method that you will use today is both an effective and easy approach for a variety of prompts.



STEP 1: STUDENT INTERVIEWS (10 MINS)

First, get ready to write about yourself using the student interview questions provided on page 6 of The Great College Essay Project Packet (**Document 1**). You will first answer a series of questions about your life. These questions are many and varied, designed to give you an array of topics that might inspire compelling writing. For instance, a nickname could reveal an important background or identity. The last thing you posted on social media could inspire thoughts about a problem you wish could be solved.

Give yourself ten minutes and try to complete as many of these questions as possible. This time will go quickly, so feel free to skip around and to focus on the questions that really resonate with you. Try to keep your pen or pencil moving the entire time.



STEP 2: START WITH A STORY: PERSONAL CONNECTION TO A PIECE (15 MIN)

Everyone loves a good story, but what kind of story should you tell? College admissions officers want a clear picture of who is applying, and people often write best when they have a personal, meaningful connection to the subject matter.

After admissions counselors read your essay, you want them to feel definitively that you are a great fit for their school. They are reading hundreds and hundreds of essays. How will you stand out? Make them laugh, make them cry, make them feel something!

Now, take a few moments to read the beginning of the sample personal statement found on page 5 of your Student Packet (Document 1) written by prospective student Kelly. What are the strengths of Kelly's essay? Try to identify what stood out to you and how you reacted as a reader. Some reflective questions you might ask yourself: Where does Kelly get your attention? How does she do it? What does she paint a clear picture of who she is? How does she make you feel?

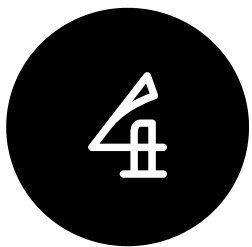
You, too, will start with a story. Your interview responses may provide inspiration and material for the story you want to write about. Use your interview responses, along with the prompt you wish to respond to, to narrow in on the story you want to tell.



STEP 3: INDEPENDENT WRITING (20-25 MIN)

Now you will draft your personal story. Don't worry too much about making it perfect. Focus on getting your ideas down! As you write, keep the following goals in mind. You should:

- Write about ONE important and interesting moment. This moment doesn't have to be grand or even particularly unique--the key thing is that you zero in on a small moment in your life that you feel strongly about.
- Write in a way that gets the reader to picture what was happening. You can achieve this through clear description or telling dialogue, action, and thinking.



STEP 4: MAKING IT FIT: HOW DOES THE STORY RELATE? (10 MIN)

Hopefully you've put your writing time to good use! Remember, a story alone does not meet the requirements of college admissions essays. You must also show how your story relates to your chosen prompt. Connecting these two ideas will most likely be the largest part of your essay. For example, try going back to Kelly's essay. Pay special attention to the middle of her essay. See if you can identify where in the essay Kelly clearly connects the story to her purpose and career path. How does her initial story connect with her career path? What words, transitions, or other devices does Kelly use to connect the dots? Where does her voice come through?



STEP 5: INDEPENDENT WRITING (20-25 MIN)

You will now write the second part of your essay, keeping the following goals in mind. You should:

- Show how your story relates to the prompt.
- Answer the prompt with one or more reasons.
- Use transitions to help flow from one part of your writing to the next.
 - “I share this story because...”
 - “This is why...”



STEP 6: “I AM THE GREATEST” (20 MIN)

You’re nearly there! Finishing strong is just as important as starting strong. The last words of an essay are very powerful; these words are what you leave the admissions team with, so they should make your readers feel like you deserve a spot. Though it may feel weird to talk highly about yourself, it’s OK! We can learn from the boxer Muhammad Ali who was always very good about owning his worth. We’ll let him speak for himself:

“I am the greatest. I said that even before I knew I was. I figured that if I said it enough, I would convince the world that I really was the greatest.” -- Muhammad Ali

“When will they ever have another fighter who writes poems, predicts rounds, beats everybody, makes people laugh, makes people cry, and is as tall and extra pretty as me? In the history of the world and from the beginning of time, there’s never been another fighter like me. Eat your words! Eat your words! I am the greatest.” -- Muhammad Ali

Now, return to Kelly’s essay and read her final paragraph. Consider its strengths as a conclusion. What is revealed about this student? How does the ending connect to her purpose for writing/prompt? What words or phrases are used for a powerful effect?

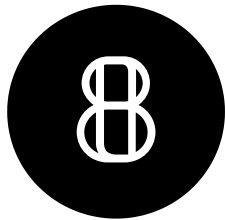


STEP 7: INDEPENDENT WRITING (20-25 MIN)

Now you will write the conclusion of your essay. Try to write with confidence and to keep the following goals in mind. You can:

- State the wonderful things you plan to do in college and afterwards.
- Include the adjectives you wrote about yourself in your student interview.
- Say “You should admit me because...”

As you finish your first draft, take a look at the Writing Checklist on page 13 in your Student Packet (Document 1). Make sure you are meeting all your goals!



STEP 8: CONCLUSION

Congratulations! You’ve reached the end of today’s session and have completed a first draft you can feel excited and confident about. Before moving forward into revision (or, better yet, a well-deserved break!), take a few minutes to reflect on the writing you’ve just done. Asking yourself a few reflective questions will make your goals even clearer when you come back to this essay to revise and make it stronger!

Ask yourself:

- What surprised you while writing? What challenges did you encounter and how did you work around them?
- Are you still struggling with these challenges?
- What’s your favorite line from your essay?
- What is something you want to focus on during revision?

Take a moment to jot these thoughts down! They will provide you with a game-plan for the next time you look at your draft. And now, congratulate yourself on your hard work! You have what it takes to write a strong college essay and to reach higher in college and beyond.