

The Great College Essay Project: Student Packet

Hello College-bound Hopeful!

Thank you for letting us be a part of your college application journey. This document is meant to act as a guide as you write a great first draft to go along with your college/scholarship application. *There is more than one way to write a strong essay*, but we like this way as it's effective and easy to approach for a variety of prompts. Keep in mind the following about your essay:

The essay needs to be compelling.

There are many students applying to college, and you want to stand out.

The essay needs to be focused.

You have a limited number of words (between 250-650 for Common App prompts) to tell your story.

The essay needs to be well-written.

A well-written essay can give the impression that you will be a good student.

There are four sections of our workshop today:

1. The Student Interview
2. Part One: Start With a Story
3. Part Two: Making It Fit
4. Part Three: I am the Greatest!

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After completing the student interview, please check in with a teacher for feedback and guidance on the next section. Please have the teacher initial that you had a conference before you move on. **If at any point you have a question or need help, don't be afraid to ask.**

| Workshop Stage | Teacher Initials |
|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Student Interview | |
| Part One - Start With A Story | |
| Part Two - Making It Fit | |
| Part Three - I Am The Greatest | |

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Common App Overview

The essay demonstrates your ability to write clearly and concisely on a selected topic and helps you distinguish yourself in your own voice. What do you want the readers of your application to know about you apart from courses, grades, and test scores? Choose the option that best helps you answer that question and write an essay of no more than 650 words, using the prompt to inspire and structure your response. Remember: 650 words is your limit, not your goal. Use the full range if you need it, but don't feel obligated to do so. (The application won't accept a response shorter than 250 words.)

Common App Prompts:

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. 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.
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.

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Other College Application Questions:

1. Why do you want to attend this particular university?
2. Tell us about the most significant person, experience, or circumstance which has shaped your life so far.
3. Describe the world you come from - for example, your family, community, or school - and tell us how your world has shaped your dreams and aspirations.
4. Some students enter college having already chosen a course of study, others have not yet narrowed their fields of interest. If you have decided on an area of study, what led you to this decision? If you have not yet determined your academic path, what steps do you plan to take in making that decision?
5. From a financial standpoint, what impact would this scholarship have on your education?
6. State any special personal or family circumstances affecting your need for financial assistance.

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Sample Student Essay

by Kelly, University-Hopeful

I was 14 years old when my Great-Gran turned 94. The entire family gathered at her nursing home to celebrate her. She was small and frail, and confined to a wheelchair, but she was still full of fire. When no one was looking, she called me over with a wave. “You want to see what I got?” she asked me. I nodded. Looking around furtively, she reached behind her back and pulled a lead pipe, six inches long and heavy, from beneath her wheelchair cushion. “I might be 94,” she said, “but they won’t catch me slipping!”

My Great-Gran was always good for a laugh, giving advice about love and life you wouldn’t expect to hear come from a little old lady. At other times she would be serious, sharing stories of pain and grieving. No matter the topic, her words and delivery were always on point. She was a storyteller. She is no longer with us, but she left behind an incredible group of strong and bold women to follow in her footsteps. My grandmother, my mother, my aunts, cousins, and I, all have a little Great-Gran in us.

I have grown up under women who have shown me how to use their words to make people laugh and cry. I’ve heard enough memories to fill up a dozen novels. I’ve known for a while that I’d like to be a writer, and I’m seeking the opportunity to explore that career path. A degree in creative writing would help me hone my voice and craft. It would allow me to learn and grow under a distinguished faculty, and alongside other hopeful storytellers. It would help me create works that would make my Great-Gran proud.

Because I have my Great-Gran in me, I too am always good for a laugh. Because I have my Great-Gran in me, I too can share stories of pain and grieving. And because of my Great-Gran, I am a storyteller.

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Student Interview

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--|
| Name: | |
| Nickname(s): | |
| How did you get that nickname? | |
| What school do you attend? | |
| What's your favorite thing about school? Why? | |
| What's your least favorite thing about school? Why? | |
| Do you participate in any extracurricular activities? | |
| What is your family like? | |

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| | | |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| | Does your family have any interesting traditions? | |
| What is your favorite..... | | |
| | color? | |
| | ice cream flavor? | |
| | pizza topping? | |
| | song? | |
| | book? | |
| | place you have visited? | |
| Who is someone who means a lot to you? | | |
| | Why is this someone important? | |
| | Share one experience you had with this person that was meaningful. | |

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| | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--|
| <p>Without looking, what was the last thing you posted about on social media?</p> | | |
| <p>Is there anything you feel like you're REALLY good at? What is it?</p> | | |
| <p>Is there anything you'd like to get better at?</p> | | |
| <p>What college do you want to attend?</p> | | |
| | <p>Why do you want to go to this college?</p> | |
| | <p>What do you want to study at college?</p> | |
| | <p>What career are you interested in pursuing? Why?</p> | |

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| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--|
| List 10 adjectives about yourself. | |
| When is one time you've felt..... | |
| joy? | |
| sadness? | |
| proud? | |
| disappointed? | |
| different? | |
| Are you applying for any scholarships? Which ones? | |

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Part One: Start With a Story

People love a good story! A story is a great way to engage and connect with the reader from the start. Admissions counselors read hundreds of essays. You have to grab their attention right away.

You want to:

- Tell the story of ONE interesting and important moment.
- Write in ways that gets the reader picturing what was happening, using descriptions, dialogue, action and thinking.

Read the intro to Kelly’s essay. Notice the interesting moment she selected, and how she described it.

I was 14 years old when my Great-Gran turned 94. The entire family gathered at her nursing home to celebrate her. She was small and frail, and confined to a wheelchair, but she was still full of fire. When no one was looking, she called me over with a wave. “You want to see what I got?” she asked me. I nodded. Looking around furtively, she reached behind her back and pulled a lead pipe, six inches long and heavy, from beneath her wheelchair cushion. “I might be 94,” she said, “but they won’t catch me slipping!”

Now write your story!

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Part Two: Making It Fit

The story alone does not meet the requirements of the essay. You must show how the story fits the prompt you selected.

You want to:

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

Read the middle part of Kelly’s essay. Notice how the beginning story supports her explaining why she has chosen her particular career path.

My Great-Gran was always good for a laugh, giving advice about love and life you wouldn’t expect to hear come from a little old lady. At other times she would be serious, sharing stories of pain and grieving. No matter the topic, her words and delivery were always on point. She was s storyteller. She is no longer with us, but she left behind an incredible group of strong and bold women to follow in her footsteps. My grandmother, my mother, my aunts, cousins, and I, all have a little Great-Gran in us.

I have grown up under women who have shown me how to use their words to make people laugh and cry. I’ve heard enough memories to fill up a dozen novels. I’ve known for a while that I’d like to be a writer, and I’m seeking the opportunity to explore that career path. A degree in creative writing would help me hone my voice and craft. It would allow me to learn and grow under a distinguished faculty, and alongside other hopeful storytellers. It would help me create works that would make my Great-Gran proud.

Now write your second part!

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Part Three: I Am The Greatest!

This is your final chance to say why you're the greatest.

The last words of the essay are just as powerful as the first, and should leave the admissions team feeling like you deserve a spot.

You *can*:

- State the wonderful things you plan to do, in college and/or after
- Include those interesting adjectives about you from your interview
- Say, "You should select me because..."

Read the final part of Kelly's essay. Notice how she talks about her strengths, and leaves a strong impression.

Because I have my Great-Gran in me, I too am always good for a laugh. Because I have my Great-Gran in me, I too can share stories of pain and grieving. And because of my Great-Gran, I am a storyteller.

Now write the final part of your essay!

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| Writing Checklist | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Part One: Start With a Story | |
| <i>Did you....</i> | |
| | ...tell the story of an important or interesting moment? |
| | ...write in ways that got readers to picture what was happening and brought the story to life, using one or more of the following: description, action, dialogue, and thinking? |
| Part Two: Making It Fit | |
| <i>Did you</i> | |
| | ...use transitions to help readers understand how the two parts fit together? |
| | ...support how the story related to the prompt with one or more reasons? |
| Part Three: I am the Greatest | |
| <i>Did you</i> | |
| | ...use words to describe who you are? |
| | ...say what contributions you will make to the school and/or the world? |
| | ...say they should select you? |