

CREATING WINNING ESSAYS



composition from a prompt.

Time Required: Time varies, continue for at least two Advisory Meeting Times

Content Standards: Students will complete school with the academic rigor and preparation essential to choose from a wide range of substantial postsecondary options, including college.

Indicators (Students will...): Compose a well-developed

GOAL: Students will write and critique a college application essay.

Activity Statements:

Students will learn the process for writing an outstanding essay for college admissions.

Materials:

1. The College Admission Essay: What Makes it Great? Handout 1
2. Sample College Essay Questions
3. Personal Statement: Strategies for Supporting Students Case Study III Joe Fulfillment (taken from the UC Conference 2007)
4. Personal transcript: Case Study III: **Joe Fulfillment**
5. College Essay Rubric Worksheet

Procedures & Discussion:

The essay section of your college application is very important. Your essay is your chance to directly tell the admissions committee who you really are. It is your opportunity to stand out from all other applicants. It is the only part of your application that you have full control over. Your GPA, SAT scores, and your class rank are pretty much set by now. A good essay can give you the extra boost needed for admission. It can also give admission representatives of who you are and what you could potentially bring to the institution.

In this lesson you will learn how essay relates to your college application. You will read an example essay and grade using a college essay rubric worksheet. You will also get a glimpse of the student's academic background and determine if the essay makes the applicant stand out. Last, you will understand the importance of writing to the prompt because inevitably, you will be judged based on your ability to write and answer the question posed.

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Activities

1. Sample College Essay Questions – **20 minutes**

- Explain to the students that regardless of what the questions in the application are, they all are looking for similar information.
- Explain to them further that the point of this lesson is to understand the essence of what these questions are trying to get them to reveal about themselves.
- Distribute copies of Personal Statement: Strategies for Supporting Students Case Study III to all students in the class. Give them **five minutes** to read the document in silence.
- Ask students to read Case Study III (Joe Fulfillment) and have students give their take on his essay. For example, did they like it? If so, what did they like or dislike about the essay? Did it answer the question?
- Ask students to consider his academic record. Did the essay give readers a better understanding of his academic record. Would you like to know more?
- De-brief the document with the students. Remind them that all of the previous work they have done up until now was designed to provide them with the personal insights they need to write an essay that provides likeability for the student, but also gives perspective. In particular, the following work will be helpful to make reference to:
 - Identifying short-term, mid-range and long-term goals
 - Researching career paths and majors
 - Addressing challenges in their lives
 - Defining their purpose
- Clarify that if they encounter a “You” question, this work alone will provide them with everything they need to say about themselves. If they encounter a “Why Us” question, the only additional work they may need to do is demonstrate that they know a few specific things about the school and program they are interested in that makes them unique. The only question that may require some significant extra thinking is a “Creative” question. Such a question may require some further research, and a structured strategy for communicating their point of view. Assure the students that in this lesson they will learn that strategy.
- Open up the discussion for questions from the class.

2. Choosing a College Essay Topic – **15 minutes**

- Clarify for the students that regardless of whether they encounter a “You,” “Why Us,” or a “Creative” question all colleges infer similar information about applicants from the choice of topic and the personal information they choose to share.
- Distribute a copy of The College Admission Essay: What Makes It Great? to every student in the class. Let the students know that this document clarifies what colleges infer from the topic choices they make when writing an essay. Go through the document with students.
- Pause to see if any students have questions so far.

3. Analyzing Sample College Essay Questions – **20 minutes**

- Explain to the students that one of the best ways to begin an essay is by looking at some high quality completed models. Explain to them further that in order to gauge the quality of a completed model they must have some common criteria of quality.

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- Distribute a copy of the College Essay Rubric. Let the students know that they will be using this rubric to analyze a sample college essay. Give the students **five minutes** to look the Rubric over, and ask any questions for clarification.
- Distribute a copy of the Sample College Essay Questions to every student in the class. Select one with the class, and read it together, aloud, with the students.
- Use the Rubric to score the essay together. Use case study III to score the essay. Facilitate the conversation, such that students are explaining why they made the assessment they did.

4. Writing a Draft Essay – **30 minutes**

- Explain to the students that, so far, you have shown them:
 - What to expect when writing a college application essay.
 - What information about the applicants' preferences, values, thought processes and writing skills colleges abstract from reading these essays.
 - How to analyze the quality of a completed essay.
- Explain to the students that it is time for them to write the first draft of their essays. Distribute a copy of the Recipe for a Draft handout to every student. Explain to them that this tool provides a step by step process for writing a first draft to a "You" question. Give the students **five minutes** to read the document and ask any questions for clarification.
- Give the students **20 minutes** to write their first draft.
- De-brief the process with the students.

5. Writing and Analyzing a Second Draft – **35 minutes**

- Let the students know that now that they have written a first draft for an essay that responds to a "You" question, the next step is to actually embed that information into an essay that responds to a "Why Us" or a "Creative" question.
- Ask the students to select one of the "Why Us" or "Creative" questions provided in the Sample College Essay Questions handout and write an essay response to it.
- When the students are done, ask them to either:
 - Evaluate their essay using the College Essay Rubric
 - Or
 - Exchange essays with a partner, evaluate each other's essay and give each other feedback based on the rubric.

Additional Resources:

Writing Tips Essay Builder http://www2.actden.com/Writ_den/tips/essay/index.htm

Extension Activities:

1. Homework: Getting the Help of a Trained Adult – **Three minutes**

- Emphasize to the students that practicing how to write their college application essay is one of the most valuable exercises they could spend their time on, whether they are planning to go to college or not. This is because the exercise pushes them to think thoroughly about how they describe and present themselves. This is a skill that will be necessary throughout their lives – for interviews, for presentations, for social and professional gatherings.

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- Clarify that this lesson has only helped to scratch the surface and lay down the foundation necessary to write an outstanding college application essay. In order to build a great final product, more work needs to be done, and it needs to be done with the guidance of a trained adult (counselor, program coordinator, teacher, etc...)

Resources:

Road to Success Lesson Plans:

- [Writing the Essay I](#)
- [Writing the Essay II](#)
- [Writing the Essay III](#)
- [Writing the Essay IV](#)
- [Writing the Essay V](#)

STUDENTS: <https://www2.careercruising.com/my/login/ilp> -- take the ILP Career Interest Inventory on the website.

- Review the top 3 careers on your list after the career interest inventory is completed.

ADVISORS: assist students with career interest inventory and research
