

# The College Essay: Basics & Beyond

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# outline

- The basics
- Self exploration & sharing
- Storytelling
- Tips & editing rules
- Going beyond - spicing it up!

# the college essay: 101

word count -  
**500-650**

**prompt**  
selection

personal  
narrative

community  
**membership**

**writing** skills



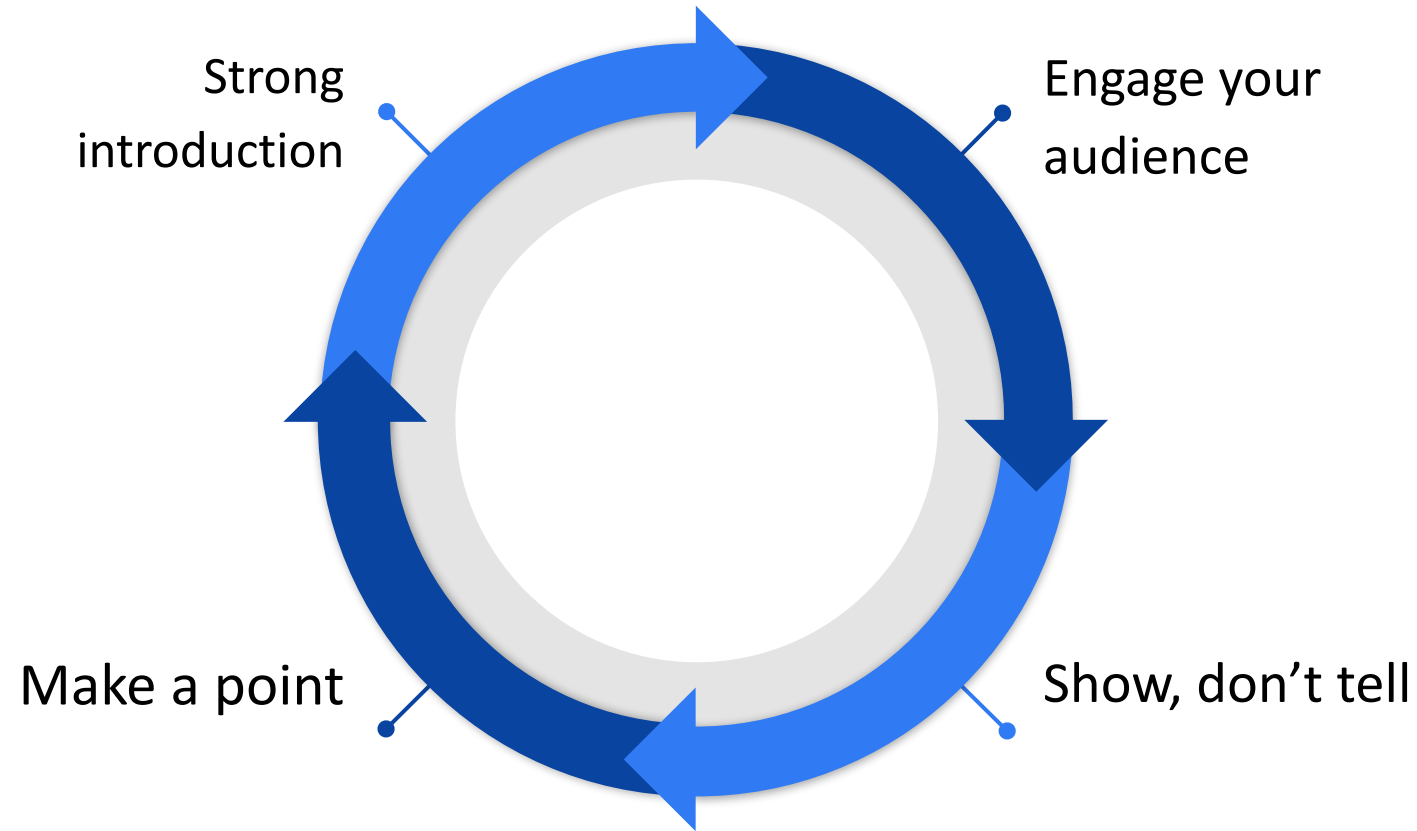
# self exploration

Find  
themes

Explore  
your  
interests

Feels  
important  
to you

# the art of STORYTELLING



# SHOW, don't TELL example

I met her a block away from my elementary school every day after school, as I had requested. I trotted towards her hefty silhouette as my classmates headed outside to be **picked up by their nannies in SUVs**. Once I passed the crossing guard, I knew my peers wouldn't be around to watch me knock on the side door of my parents' taco truck labeled Taqueria in fluorescent letters. As the door opened forcefully due to a **loose hinge**, my father's cracked, yet gentle hand firmly pulled me up the steps. I was greeted by my **parents' weary eyes and forced smiles**. I slouched down in my miniature Dora the Explorer sofa placed next to the cooler as my father drove out of the neighborhood.

# tips for writing the ESSAY

Be  
**CREATIVE.**

Be  
**PURPOSEFUL**  
and  
**PERSONAL.**

Don't be  
**REPETITIVE.**

**GRAMMAR**  
and  
**SPELLING**  
matter.

**PROOFREAD!**



# rules for editing the ESSAY

Read **ALoud**.

Share with a  
**FRIEND**.

Share with a  
**TEACHER,  
PARENT, or  
MENTOR.**

Don't be  
afraid to  
**DELETE**.





# going beyond: BULLET POINT rule

- Two or three key qualities/pieces of information student is trying to communicate
- An example for a Common App personal essay would be:
  - I'm inquisitive, creative, and driven
  - My Environmental Science course changed the way I think about our environment
  - I care about finding innovative ways to improve our air/water quality
- Can a counselor or friend identify your bullet points quickly and clearly?



# going beyond: usage of TIME

- Shrinking a century - “Shrink” time to get to the juicy details of your story

“Shelf Four is the stinging slap I received from reality in my early teens. No longer could I spend all my time trying out the delicious foods at this new restaurant or learning from the displays at the rare exhibit. Now my weekends were filled with daunting math textbooks, designed to help me conquer the beast of numbers. While Shelf Four holds the memories of slogging through countless hours of math, it also displays my development of a logical and rational mind.”

[Big Bang Theory](#)



# going beyond: usage of TIME

- Expanding a moment - Linger on a moment that had a major impact

“My hand seemed to suddenly have a will of its own. It picked up the milk carton. The spout was already open. My arm extended over Carol’s head, tipping the carton. The liquid poured in a slow, steady, thick, unending stream down through her long blonde hair, soaking the back of her clothes and running onto the floor. It poured over her forehead and into her eyes, running in rivers down each side of her nose, converging on her chin and splashing onto her plate. Her food was soon awash and the milk poured over the edge of her plate and ran into her lap. And still I poured on—it was too late to stop now. The rapture of it all; oh, sweet revenge.”

Sherlock Holmes



# going beyond: NERD out!

- Dive deep into glorious, nerdy details
- Readers don't have to understand everything - a gist can help them grasp your genuine obsession with the subject
- Help us understand what you love

“I was an avid reader early on, devouring book after book. From the Magic Treehouse series to the too real 1984, the distressing *The Bell Jar*, and Tagore's quaint short stories, I accumulated an ocean of new words, some real (epitome, effervescence, apricity), and others fully fictitious (doubleplusgood), and collected all my favorites in a little journal, my Panoply of Words. Add the fact that I was raised in a Bengali household and studied Spanish in high school for four years, and I was able to add other exotic words. Sinfin, zanahoria, katukutu, and churanto soon took their rightful places alongside my English favorites.”

# going beyond: DIALOGUE

- Provides structure
- Adds variety
- Reveals a quality about a character
- Highlight a particularly poignant phrase or moment
- Use sparingly

“While practicing a concert D-flat scale, I messed up a fingering for a low B-flat, and my instrument produced a strange noise with two notes. My band teacher got very excited and exclaimed, “Hey, you just played a polyphonic note!” I like it when accidents lead to discovering new ideas.”



# going beyond: sources of INSPIRATION

- Books, poems, movies, tv shows, songs, video games
- Use one or two sources
- Create a solid through-line
- Establish an important theme
- Reveal additional insights into your character and world view

“My eyes widen. ‘It’s all Greek to me,’ I whisper under my breath. Sure enough, *The Apology* by Plato is in Greek. My eyes dart across the page, looking for a word or phrase to grasp onto.

Unable to find a familiar word, I take a deep breath...

.....Despite translating *The Apology* by Plato years ago, the lessons I learned from translation continue to thrive in my actions today.”



# Q&A

