

WRITING YOUR PERSONAL ESSAY

for College





But first, let's check in on your
preparation for life after high school!

The 4 Es

- x Students are expected to graduate with a confirmed plan and knowledge of financial aid resources
- x Plan relates to a “4E pathway”
- x Your planning began freshman year and will continue through your senior year!



The 4 Es

- x **ENROLL:** college, university, technical school, trade school
- x **ENLIST:** military enlistment or military reserves
- x **EMPLOY:** pursuing a full-time job, internship
- x **EXPLORE:** study abroad, Peace Corp, full-time mission/volunteer service work





Planning for each

pathway:

11th Grade

The 4 Es

- x **ENROLL:** Ensure SAT/ACT/CLT scores meet requirements of schools on your college lists and scholarships (Bright Futures)
- x **ENLIST:** Take/retake the ASVAB exam – *only most recent score counts!* Make sure the branch you're interested in offers your career pathway.
- x **EMPLOY:** Participate in OTECH Career Fair in April, continue to update resume
- x **EXPLORE:** Explore field trip opportunities, summer enrichment and pre-college programs

The 4 Es

Here's what you should be thinking about as you set goals and explore options for your future.

Find this guide...

- x On the SDOC College & Career website
- x By asking your School Counselor or College & Career Counselor for a copy
- x By following your district College & Career Coordinator on Instagram - @mrs.malfara

11th Grade Spring Semester Planning

- ☐ Continue to check your school and/or grade level's Remind or Canvas and your school email, listen to announcements, etc.
- ☐ Share your goals with your School Counselor during scheduling. Enroll in challenging courses aligning with your chosen SDOC4E pathway and be sure you are on track to graduate AND qualify for Bright Futures.
- ☐ Make sure your full legal name (the one on your birth certificate) is the one you see in Focus. (You will use this for scholarship, financial aid, and college applications.)
- ☐ Use Khan Academy to build on strengths and areas of growth to score as high as possible on the SAT this semester.
- ☐ *College bound?* Be sure to have a full, rigorous class schedule your senior year. Learn about choosing the right college (match, reach, and safety) and search for scholarships. Review Common Application essay prompts.
- ☐ Stay consistent with extracurricular activities that align with your values and interests. Build on leadership opportunities.
- ☐ Continue building your resume in Xello, including your accomplishments, sports, awards, community involvement, and leadership experiences.
- ☐ Maintain competitive weighted and unweighted GPA (through AP, honors, IB, and AICE coursework).

#SDOC4E

SDOC4E
ENROLL • ENLIST • EMPLOY • EXPLORE

Future
Ready!

You can find local volunteer opportunities and more right on your Xello dashboard!

Hey Danielle!

0%

All lessons

Grade 9

MC

My Saved Careers

Get started

About me

Careers

Schools

Majors

Opportunities

Saved options

Explore options

Careers

Schools

Majors

Opportunities

Saved options

Goals & Plans

My goals and plans

Course Planner

College Planning

WRITING YOUR PERSONAL ESSAY

for College



The “Why” in Personal Essay Writing

What is a personal essay?

- Also called the personal statement
- An opportunity to personalize your college application beyond grades & test scores.
- Informs the college or program of what “makes you a good fit” for their institution.
- Helps a school understand the values, interests, and qualities you bring to their community.

Why do I need one?

- College is an option to be prepared for.
- Provides an opportunity to learn better essay-writing techniques that you will need anyway as a future professional.
- Think positively! This is an opportunity to learn more about you as you transition to adulthood.

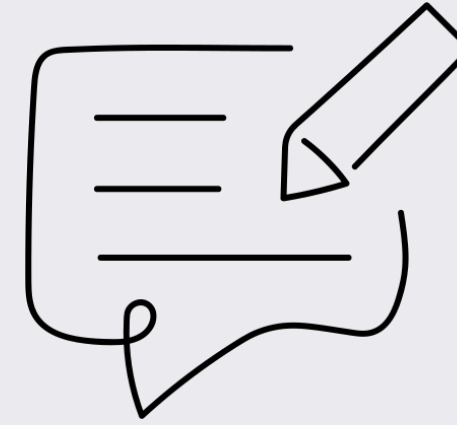
What do I write about?

Answer this:
What has shaped you?

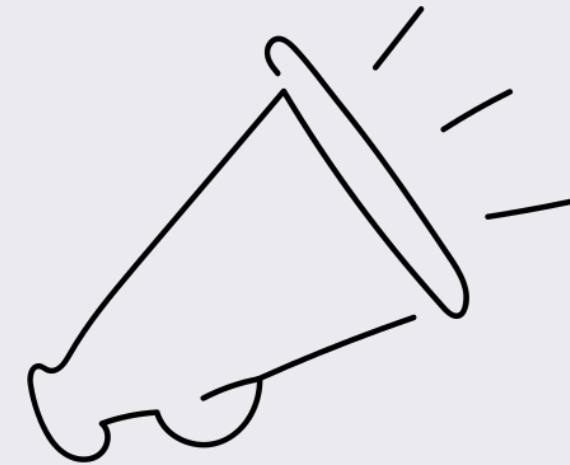


LEARNING OBJECTIVES

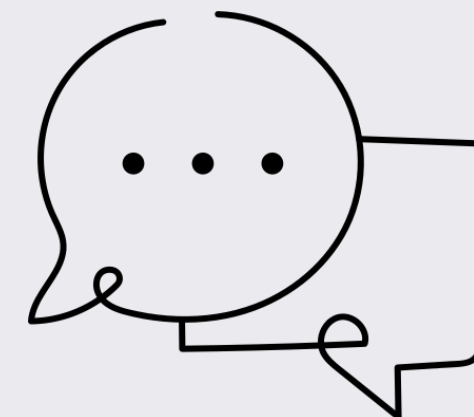
By the end of this lesson,
you will understand . . .



The definition and
purpose of the
personal essay



How to brainstorm
effectively

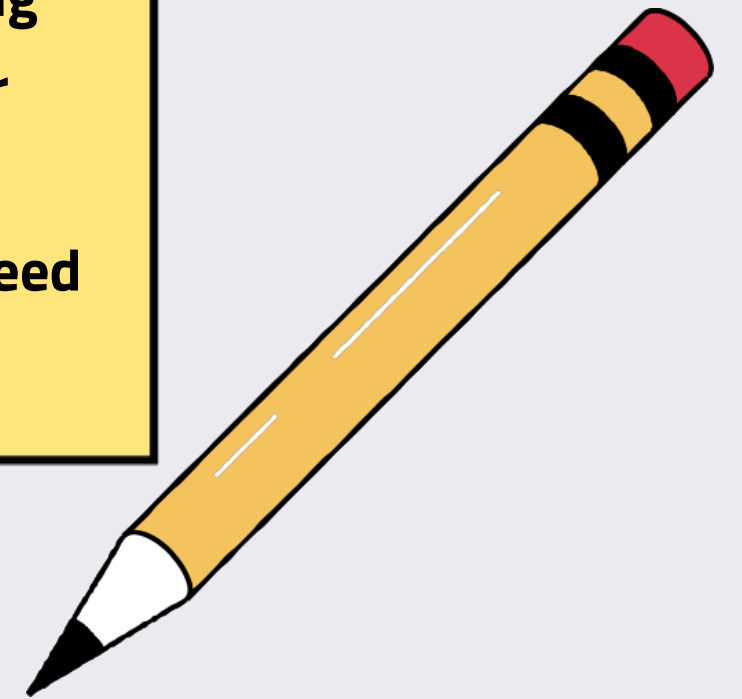


How to outline and
begin drafting your
personal essay

What the Personal Essay Is Not

- **Not a typical 5-paragraph essay**
- **Not a resume**
- **Not a journal entry**
- **Not an academic essay, especially not one in which you avoid using the word "I"**

You have some freedom in writing about YOU, your values, and experiences that need to be shared.



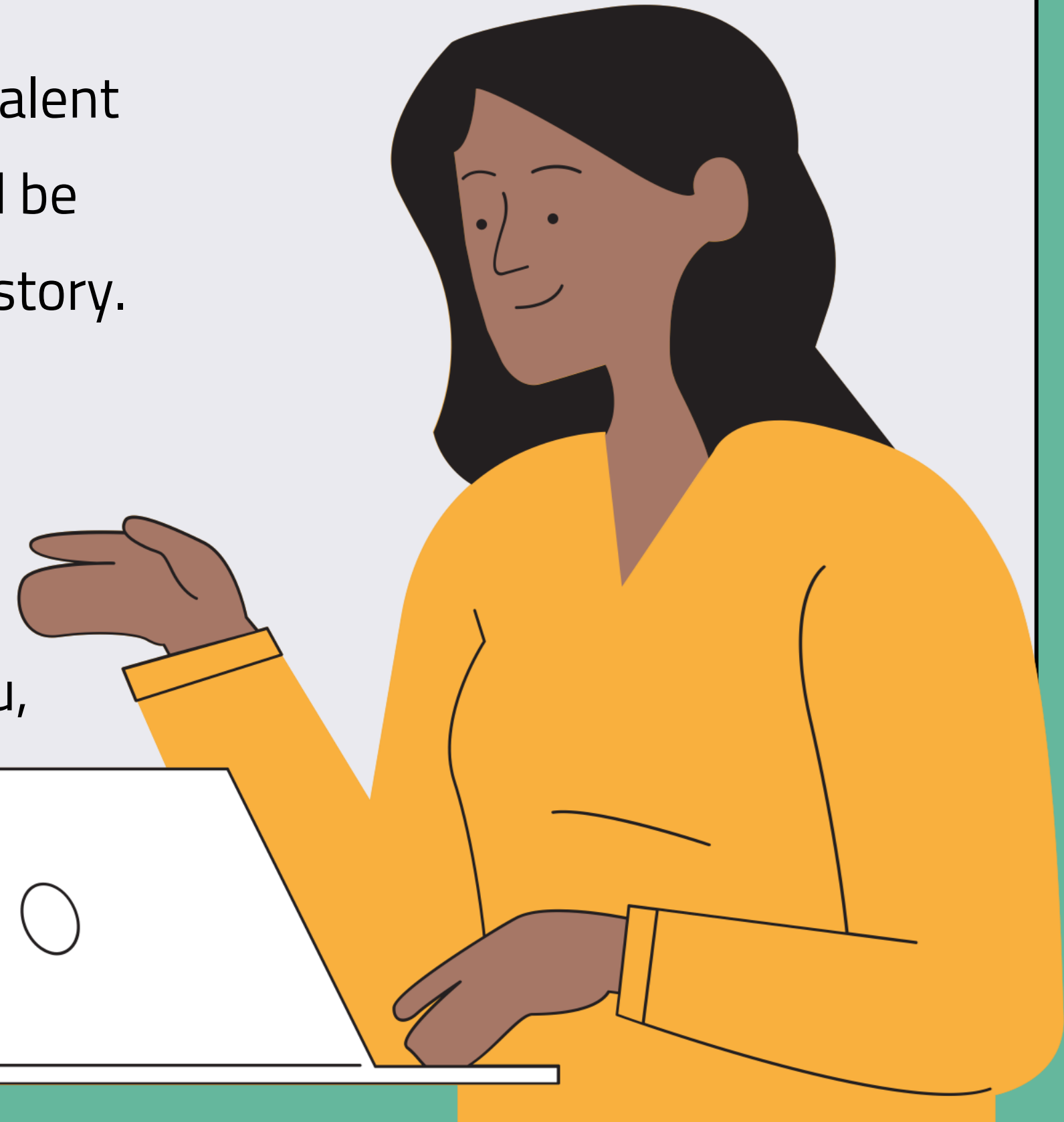
Personal Essay Prompts

Prompt 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, share your story.

Prompt 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?



Personal Essay Prompts

Prompt 3

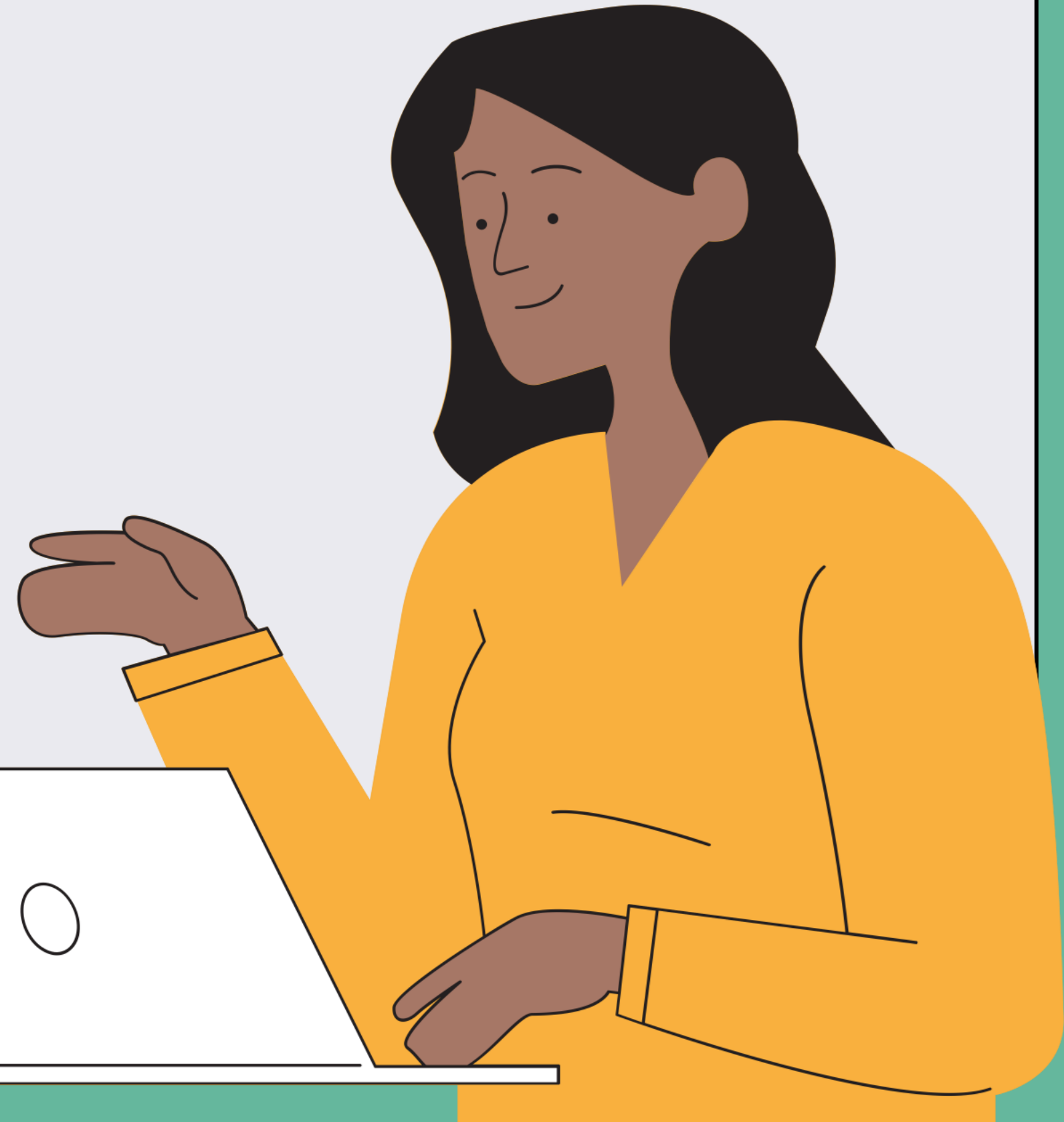
Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?

Prompt 4

Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?

Prompt 5

Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and new understanding of yourself or others.



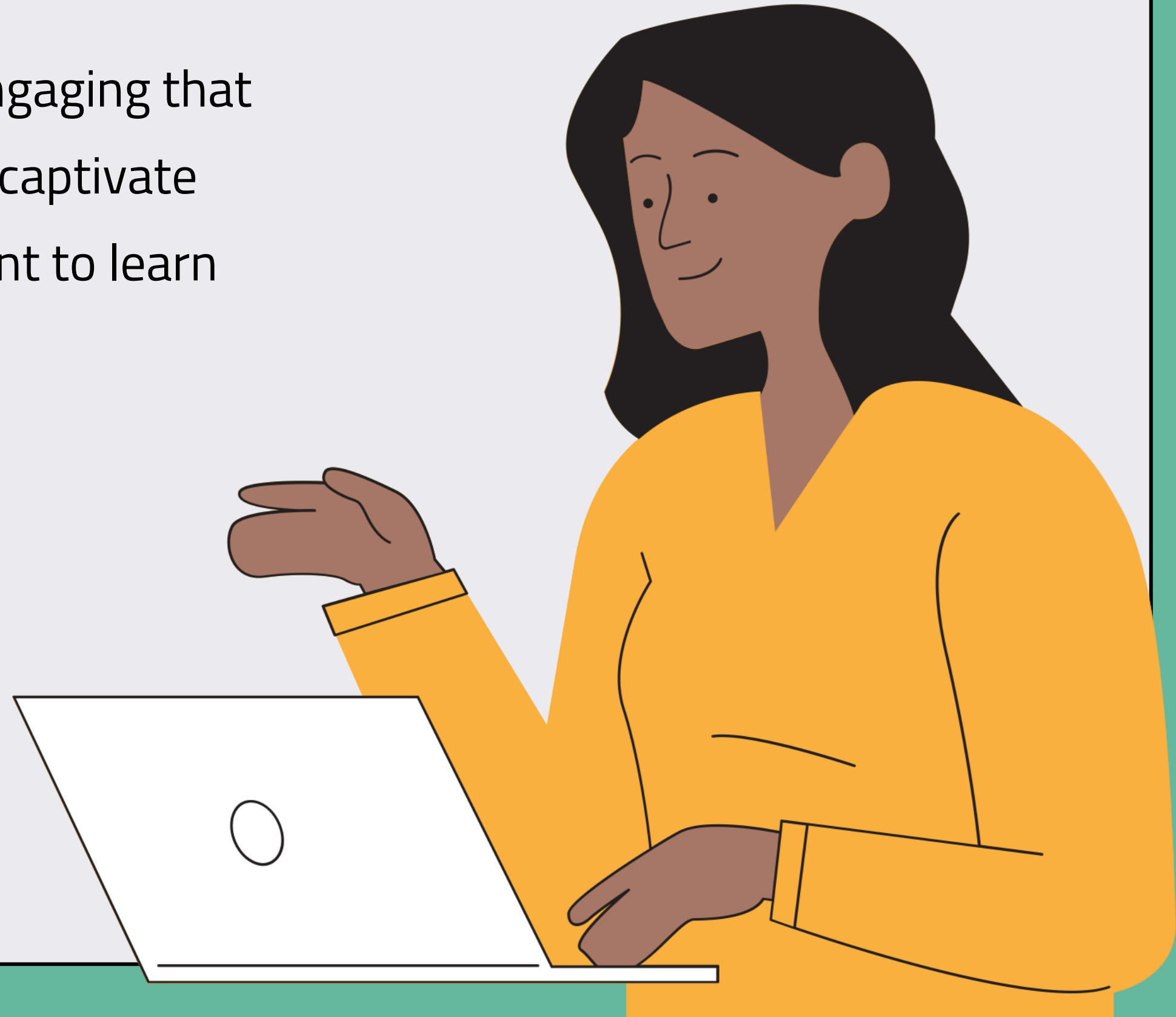
Personal Essay Prompts

Prompt 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?

Prompt 7

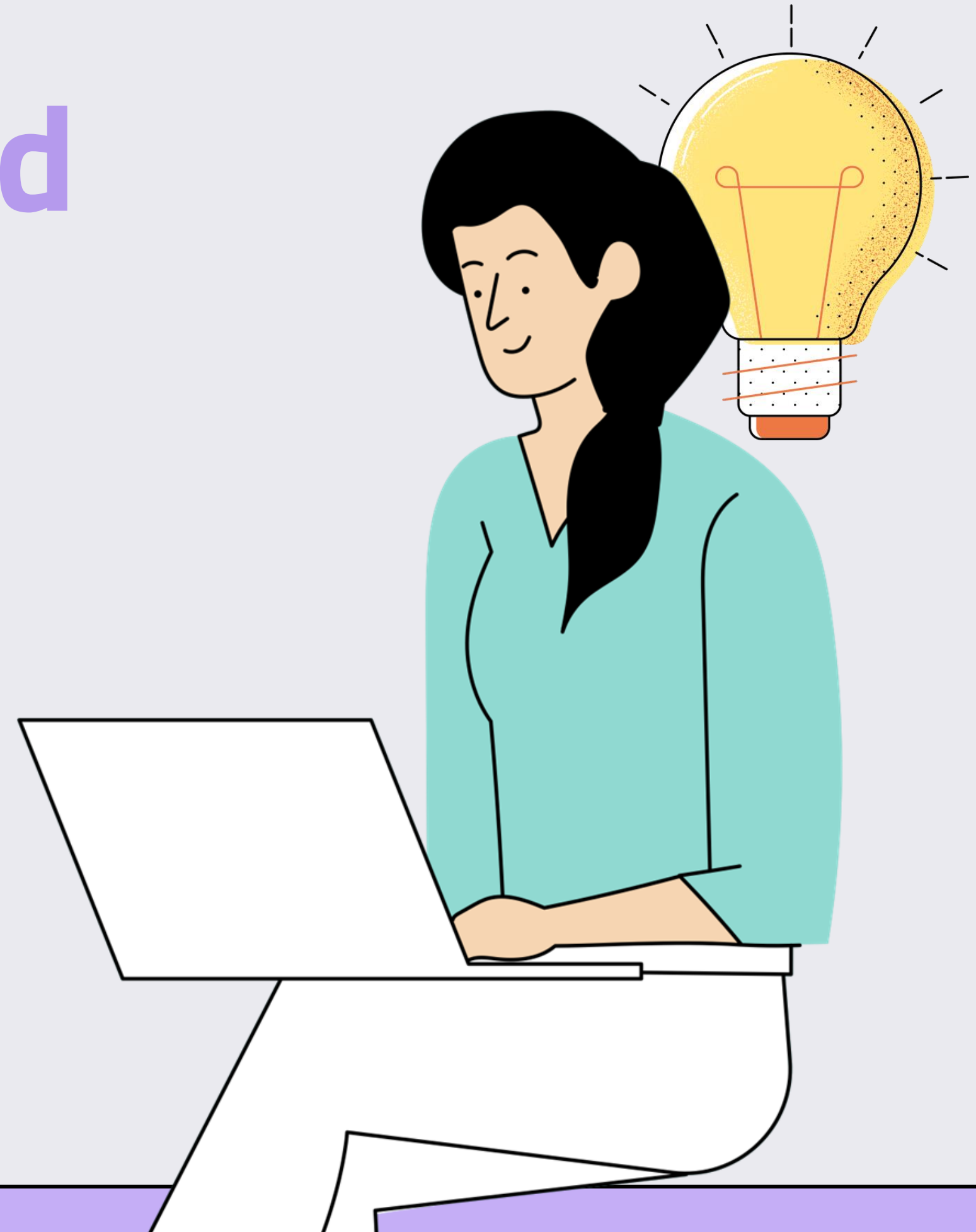
Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.



How long should my essay be?

It depends.

Your main Common App essay can be up to 600 words. Other colleges can ask for a personal essay and additional supplemental essays that can add up to 1,000 words.



What are college admission officers looking for?

They are looking for the answers to these three questions:

1. Who is this person?
2. Will this person contribute something of value to our campus?
3. Can this person write?



If my grades are bad, can I get into Harvard with a great essay?

Nope.

You need to research the requirements for the colleges you are applying to. Schools look at GPA, coursework, and test scores. When you're being compared to other students with similar GPA/scores, the essay can make or break your chances. So, expand your college list to schools you have a chance of getting accepted into.



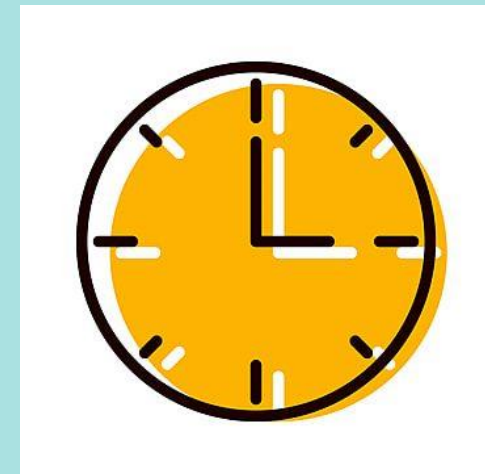
THE VALUES EXERCISE

Let me help you out with a brainstorming exercise!



What do you need?

- ☐ Your values worksheet
- ☐ Pencil or pen
- ☐ Don't overthink!



What do I value?

- ☐ You have 1 minute! Pick your top 10 values from the list.
- ☐ You have 30 seconds! Pick your top 5 from your 10 values.
- ☐ You have 10 seconds! Pick your top 3 from your 5 values.
- ☐ You have 3 seconds! Pick your 1 that is important to you.

THE VALUES EXERCISE

D

Five
Values of
a Great
Detective

Observation skills

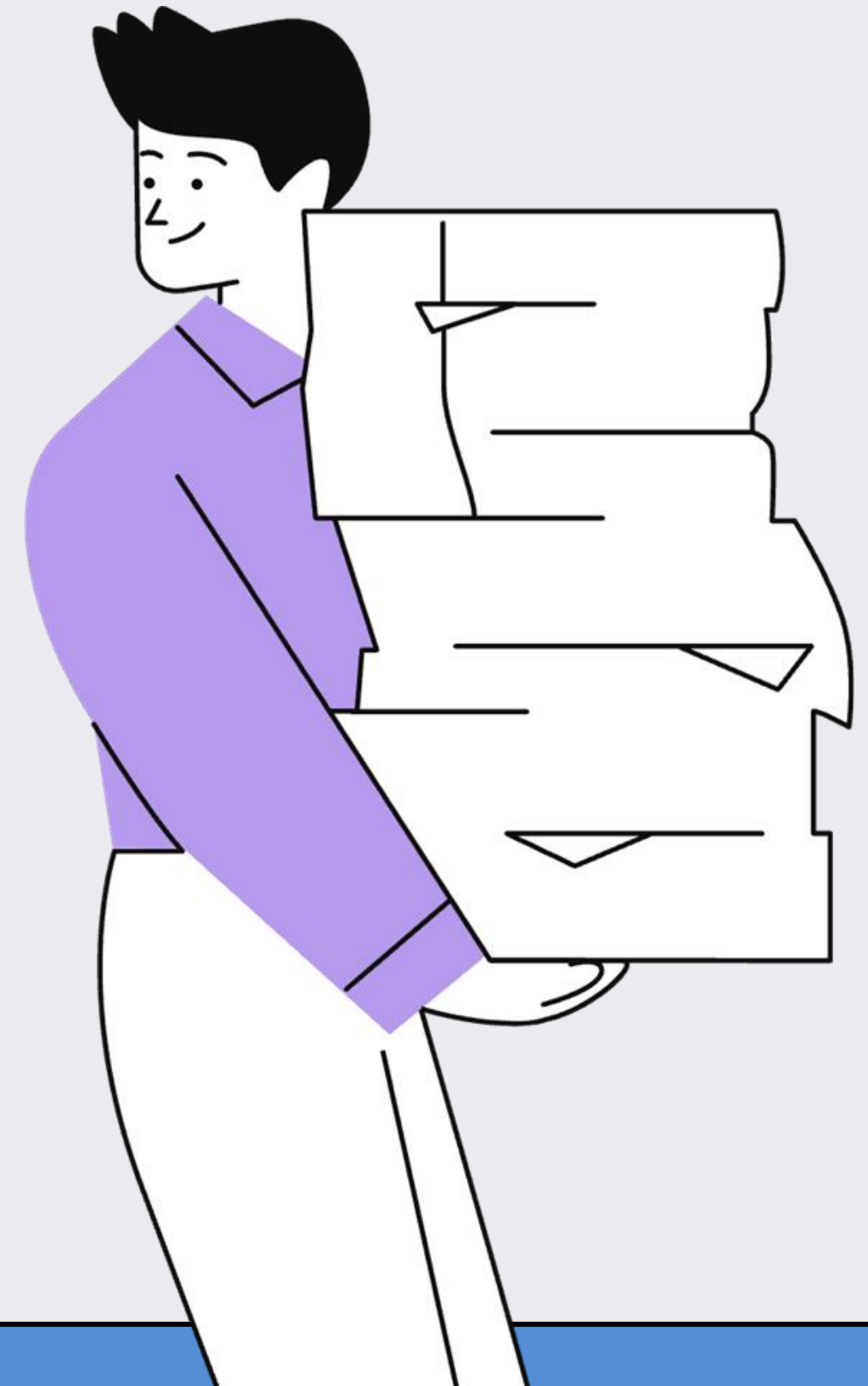
Willing to work with others

Compassion for others

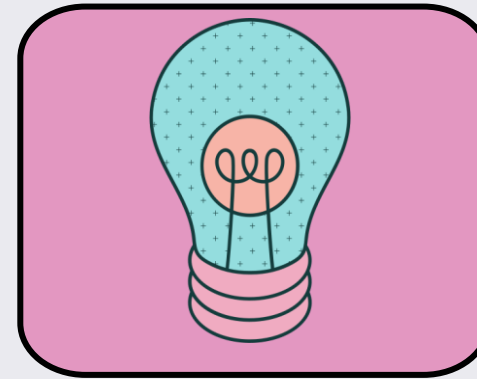
Hard-working

Attention to detail

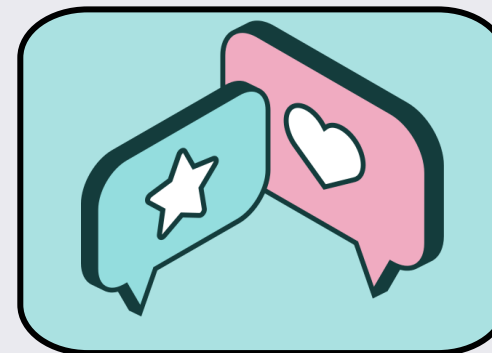
**Do your values align with the values
needed in your career goal?**



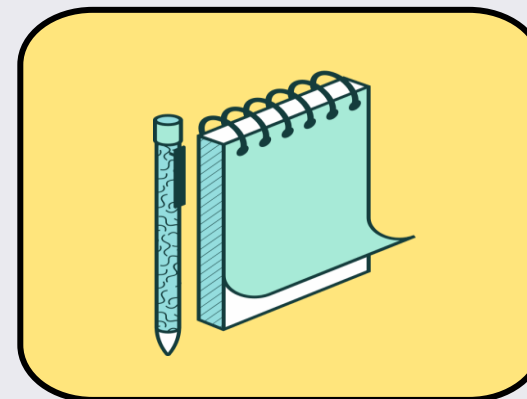
What to include in your personal essay?



Core Values: Demonstrating your values is fundamental.



Insight/reflection: Why are specific moments & experiences important to you?

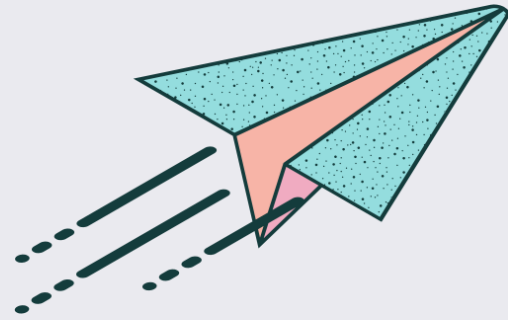


Vulnerability: Is the reader able to hear your story?



Craft: Does your essay show that you're ready to write in college?

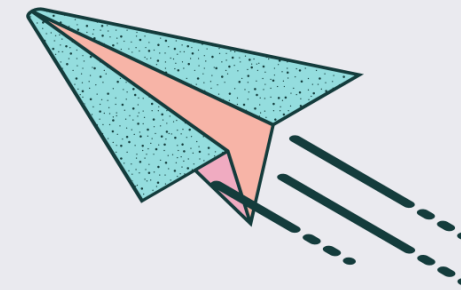
So, how do I write it?



Montage Structure

Series of experiences
connected together

5 different "homes" that
explore 5 different sides of
who you are



Narrative Structure

Typical structure of a story

- The challenge you faced
- What you did about it
- What you learned

Montage Structure Outline



A technique that involves creating a new whole from separate fragments using pictures, words, music, etc.

A few images tell the whole story

Find a focus: You can't discuss every single aspect of your life, but you can show it in a few important points or metaphor. Make a visual.

Analysis of the Montage Structure

The challenge

I don't have any particular challenges.
I don't know what to study.

Brainstorm

Identify what's important to you.
What are my values?

Find a focus

How do you want to share the
details of what's important to
you and your values?

How do you share it?

- Series of flashbacks
- Detail your 5 biggest mistakes
- Include a thesis

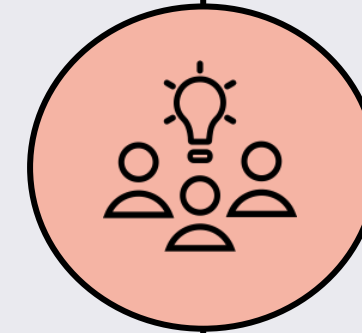
Thesis Statement

It lets the reader know that you are guiding them through the essay.

There is more than one way to write an essay. You can begin with the details and end the essay with a thesis statement.

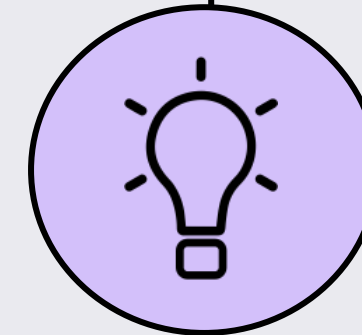
Narrative Structure Outline

The 5 basic elements of a narrative structure



1. Status Quo

The main character lives his normal life.



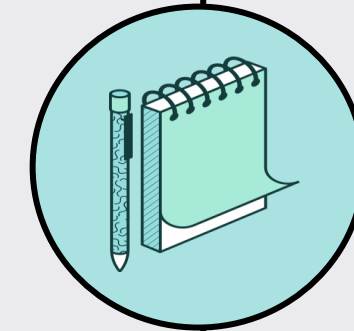
2. Inciting Incident

One day, something happens.



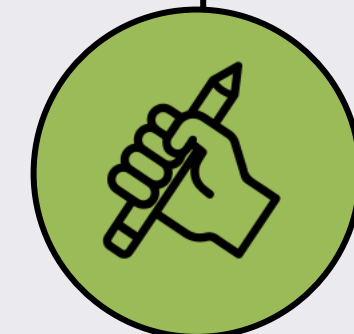
3. Raising the Stakes

The events threaten to change the main characters' personal lives.



4. Moment of Truth

The character must make a choice.



5. Outcome

How the story ends

Analysis of the Narrative Structure

Connect your challenges to your future career using the values worksheet.

VALUES

Put a star next to the 10 values you developed as a result of the challenges you've encountered.

FUTURE CAREER

Put a check mark next to the 10 values of your future career.

COMMONALITY

Circle the values that are in common.

Ask Yourself

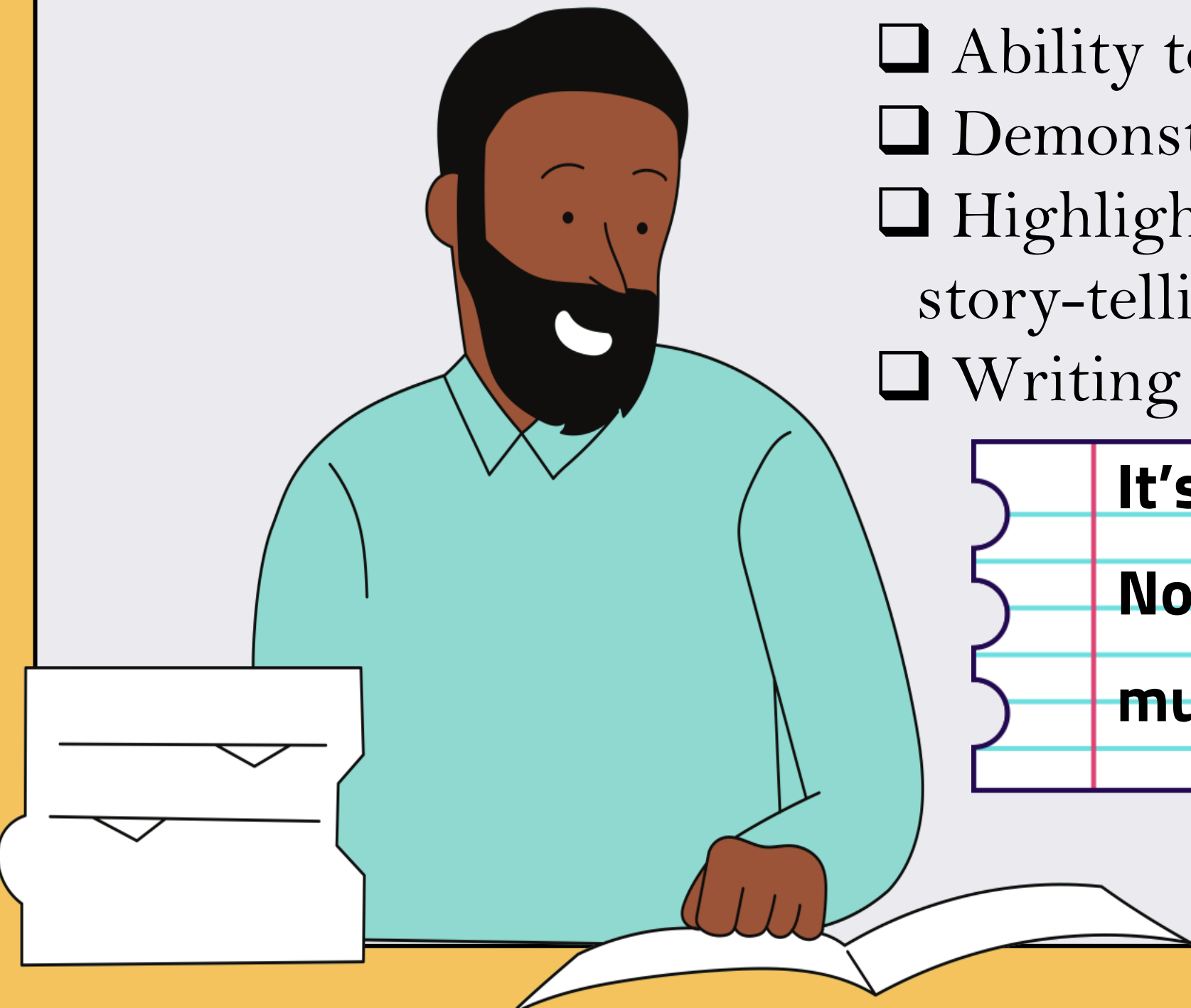
What experiences in my life led me to develop that value?

Qualities to Emphasize

- ☐ Have a sense of humor, if you have one.
- ☐ Your ability to notice little things
- ☐ Your commitment to an activity or idea
- ☐ Ability to overcome a challenge
- ☐ Demonstrate how you are still able to overcome challenges
- ☐ Highlight your growth and learning experience and not story-telling the past
- ☐ Writing about something small can reveal a lot

It's like watching an episode of Friends.

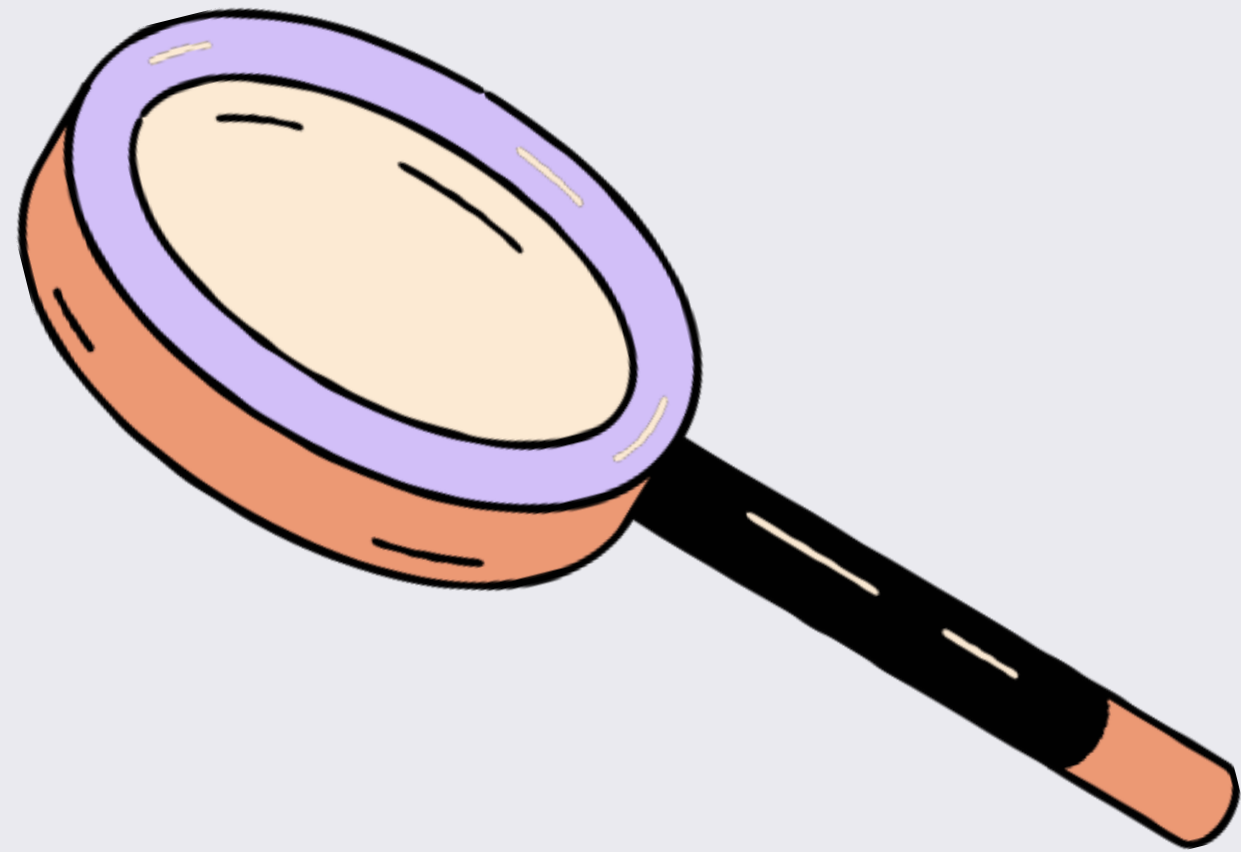
Not much is happening but we learn so much about each character.



Ready to Write: What to Avoid

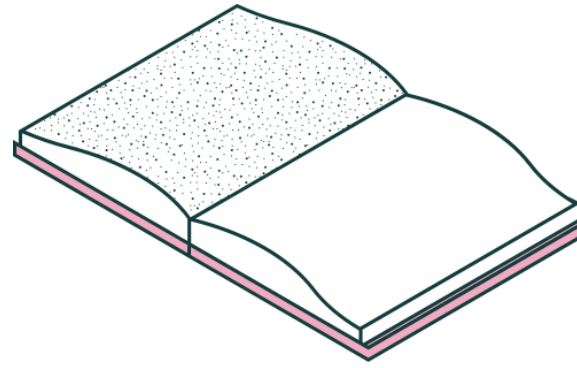


- ☐ Phony life-changing experience
- ☐ Everything appears perfect
- ☐ Social problem & political issue bandwagon
- ☐ Using big words that you would never use
- ☐ Melodramatic
- ☐ Don't overly focus on the past; highlight your growth
- ☐ Overusing Covid and school shutdown
- ☐ Not having a main idea
- ☐ Using weak verbs
- ☐ Failure to use "I"
- ☐ Too many simple sentences
- ☐ Sentence fragments
- ☐ Wordiness
- ☐ Too many people proofreading your essay
- ☐ Not checking grammar, punctuation, and spelling



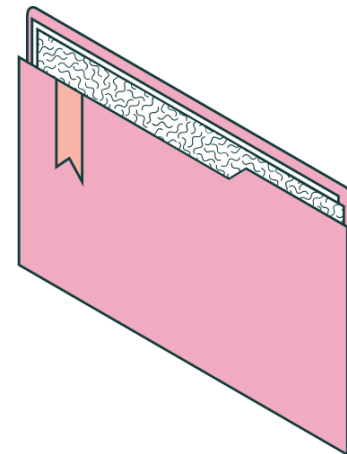
The Introduction of the Personal Essay

Options for the introduction



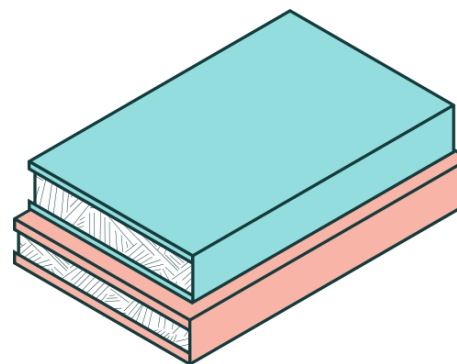
An Anecdote

Tell a story. Describe an incident or event that relates to your main point.



A Zinger

Use an attention getter. Begin with humor, wordplay, or creative twist to grab the reader's attention.



Straightforward Statement

A simple beginning can get the point across.

Let's Do This!



Recap

- Brainstorm: What am I writing about?
- Outline: What structure am I using?
- Draft: Just write!
- Revise: Check my introduction.
- Proofread: Does it make sense?

Reminders

- It's okay to re-evaluate your values and what's important to you.
- Be willing to start over.
- Have at least 2 trusted adult professionals available to review/proofread your essay.
- Don't take too long or you will overthink.