



# The College Application Essay



# Steps to a Successful Application

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## 1. Start Early

- a. Though deadlines may be later in the year, aim to have applications submitted by December

## 2. Do your research

- a. Build a comprehensive college list - use tools such as SCOIR, College Board and Social Media

## 3. Be thorough

- a. Complete all pieces of the application in full and with consistency.

## 4. Follow Up

- a. Keep track of your applications, financial aid, documentation and various secondary steps

# How to Build a College List

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## Factors to consider

- School size
- Location
- Cost
- Choices of Major
- Acceptance requirements

Your list should be compiled of a few choices from each category:

**Match** - your GPA and test scores align with the schools requirements

**Reach** - your GPA and test scores are slightly lower than the schools requirements

**Safety** - your GPA and test scores are higher than the schools requirements

# Ways to Apply

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When applying for college, you have options!

- Common Application - up to 20 schools
- Coalition Application
- CFNC - North Carolina Colleges
- Individual College Website

# The Essay

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Your essay is your chance to stand out from the crowd. Focus on a topic or story that has shaped your character.

- Common App Prompt Choices

# Why do colleges ask for essays?

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- To find out who you are (and what they can't see from your grades and test scores)
- To find unique people who are going to make the campus a better place
- To test your ability to organize your thoughts and express yourself through words (what you do most in college)

“If any other person could put their name on your college essay, then the admissions people have probably read it a bazillion times.”

- Debbie Every, Marvin  
Ridge High School

## Overused Topics

- The time you didn't make the team
- Breaking up with your boyfriend/girlfriend
- Babysitting siblings
- Mission trips

# WHAT MAKES AN EXCITING ESSAY?

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1. Personality
2. Honesty
3. Originality
4. Focus



# EXAMPLE #1 (THE LETTER "S")

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I hate the letter "s."

Of the 164, 777 words with "s," I only grapple with one. To condemn an entire letter because of its use 0.0006 percent of the time sounds statistically absurd, but that one case changed 100 percent of my life.

I used to have two parents, but now I have one, and the "s" in parents isn't going anywhere.

"S" follows me. I can't get through a day without being reminded that while my friends went out to dinner with their parents, I ate with my parent.

## EXAMPLE #2 (COSTCO)

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Prompt: 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.

# EXAMPLE #2 (COSTCO)

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Managing to break free from my mother's grasp, I charged. With arms flailing and chubby legs fluttering beneath me, I was the ferocious two year old rampaging through Costco on a Saturday morning. My mother's eyes widened in horror as I jettisoned my churro; the cinnamon sugar rocket gracefully sliced its way through the air while I continued my spree. I sprinted through the aisles looking up in awe at the massive bulk products that towered over me. Overcome with wonder, I wanted to touch and taste, to stick my head into industrialized freezers, to explore every crevice. I was a conquistador, but rather than searching the land for El Dorado, I scoured aisles for free samples. Before inevitably being whisked away into a shopping cart, I scaled a mountain of plush toys and surveyed the expanse that lay before me: the kingdom of Costco.

# Step One: Brainstorm an Original Topic

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## How to Find the story - 3 ways to Brainstorm

1. Find your Strengths - not your talent but your underlying qualities
  - a. Examples
    - i. Great in seeing things - make connections
    - ii. Solve complex issues
    - iii. Observant

**This free personality test** (<http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jtypes2.asp#questionnaire>) is based on Carl Jung's and Isabel Briggs Myers' personality type theory. Knowing your personality types can help in understanding your underlying strengths.

# Brainstorming

- b. Use strengths to identify when showed up in life
  - 1. Examples - Strong willed, Charismatic
  - 2. Find different experiences when this strength showed - let strengths show in telling the story. Let the reader draw the conclusions.



# Brainstorming

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2. Ask 6 to 8 people who know you well from different parts of your life:  
**What 3 Adjectives best describe me?**
  - Write exactly what tell you
  - Map out findings
  - Need to show development of where you are and want to become
3. Free write in a journal
  - Socialize and share the story to see how others see it.

# Brainstorming Questions to Get You Started

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-If you were writing your autobiography right now, what would be five to ten events or things that would have to be included?

-Quickly write down three words that best describe you. Ask your parents, siblings and best friends to write down three words to describe you.

-List five accomplishments you have made since the summer before high school.

-List three to five things on which you consider yourself very knowledgeable

-What are your most important extracurricular or community activities?

-List five people whom you respect and admire. They can be real or fictional, dead or alive. Explain why they are on your list.

-List two times in life when you failed miserably and two times when you were a fantastic success

-List four of your favorite things and four of your least favorite. These can include activities, places, objects, virtues, etc.

# ONE WAY TO ORGANIZE YOUR BRAINSTORMING

| List your defining qualities | Write down a time when that quality was challenged, formed, tested, proven, or affected/changed |
|------------------------------|---|
| 1.                           |   |
| 2.                           |   |
| 3.                           |   |
| 4.                           |   |
| 5.                           |   |



# Step Two: Start with an Anecdote That Shows Your Idea



# Show

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During my break volunteering at the local hospital, I chose to go to my favorite Mexican restaurant by the sea. As I was taking in the beautiful scenery, an elegant lady motioned me over. Not wanting to be rude, I walked over to her table.

“We’re ready to order,” she said, assuming I was a waitress.

# Don't Tell (Yet)

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As a young Hispanic woman, I often experience people making judgements about how I am based on how I look and who they think I am. Sometimes they think I am just the help or an employee when I am in stores or restaurants. One time, a woman thought I was a waitress, and I was just eating lunch there. This makes me upset, and I often feel hurt and angry.

# Step Three: Explain How Your Opening Anecdote Pushes Your Argument

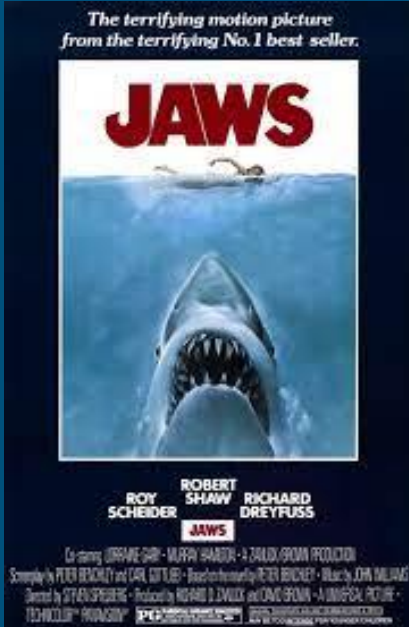


# QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

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1. How does the problem make you feel?
2. How did you handle the problem? What steps did you take?  
From where did you draw inspiration to face it?
3. What did you learn in the process of dealing with the problem (about yourself, about others, about the world in general)?
4. Did this experience change you, or how you think about things/life in any way?

# Motifs can be fun!



# EXAMPLE #1 (COSTCO AGAIN)

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I adopted my exploratory skills, fine tuned by Costco, towards my intellectual endeavors. Just as I sampled buffalo chicken dip or chocolate truffle dip, I probed the realms of history, dance and biology, all in pursuit of the ideal cart - one overflowing with theoretical situations and notions both silly and serious. I sampled calculus, crosscountry running, scientific research, all of which are now household favorites. With cart in hand, I do what scares me; I absorb the warehouse that is the world. Whether it be through attempting aerial yoga, learning how to chart blackbody radiation using astronomical software, or dancing in front of hundreds of people, I am compelled to try any activity that interests me in the slightest.

# Step Four: Wrap up Your Essay by Returning to and Building upon Your Opening Anecdote





# EXAMPLE #1 (COSTCO MOTIFS CAN BE FUN!)

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My intense desire to know, to explore beyond the bounds of rational thought; this is what defines me. Costco fuels my insatiability and cultivates curiosity within me at a cellular level. Encoded to immerse myself in the unknown, I find it difficult to complacently accept “what”; I want to hunt for the “whys” and dissect the “hows.” In essence, I subsist on discovery.

# REVIEWING THE STRUCTURE PART #1

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Create an anecdote that shows your idea.

- Show instead of tell
- Start in the middle if possible
- Use strong verbs

# REVIEWING THE STRUCTURE PART #2

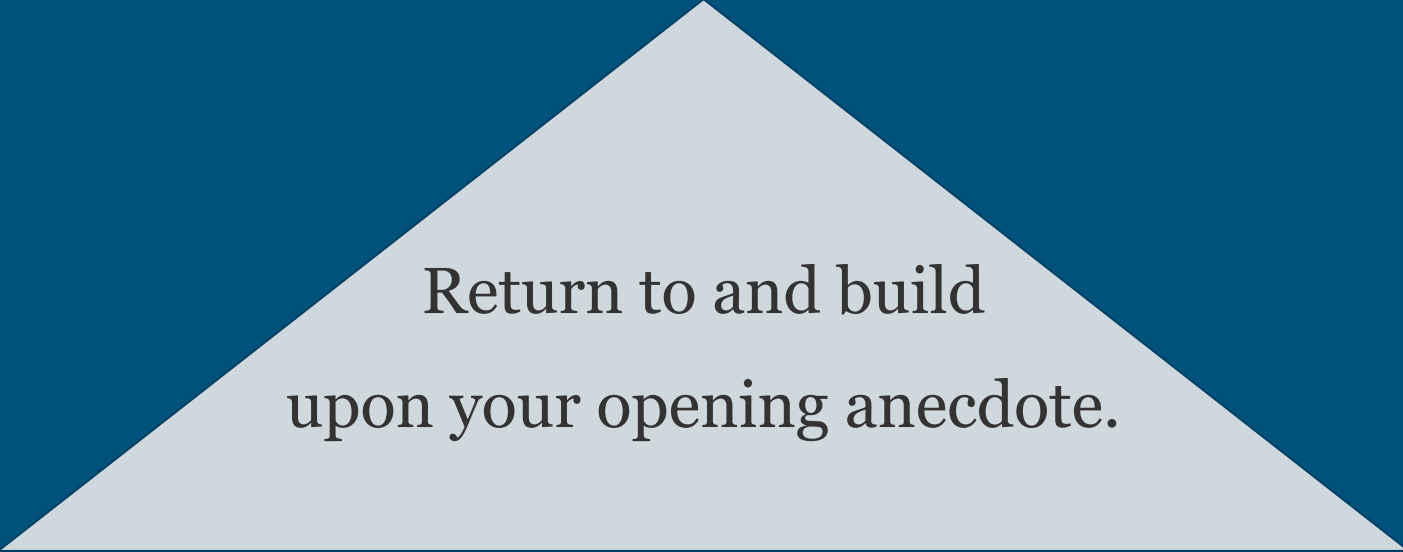
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Explain how your anecdote pushes your argument.

1. How does the problem make you feel?
2. How did you handle the problem? What steps did you take? From where did you draw inspiration to face it?
3. What did you learn in the process of dealing with the problem (about yourself, about others, about the world in general)?
4. Did this experience change you, or how you think about things/life in any way?

# REVIEWING THE STRUCTURE PART #3

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Return to and build  
upon your opening anecdote.

# OTHER POSSIBLE PROMPTS

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- 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?
- Reflect on a time when you questioned a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
- Describe a problem you 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.
- Describe an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
- Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that you lose all track of time.

# Summary

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- Choose topic that will showcase you
- Keep it simple
- Begin with a hook to encourage reader to find out more
- Focus on learning and development as a person
- Tell your story and how it impacted you
- Use your own words
- Do not state what you learned it should show in your story
- Have it proofread by no more than 2 people

# Online Websites

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<https://www.collegexpress.com/articles-and-advice/admission/articles/college-applications/writing-college-application-essay/>

<https://www.khanacademy.org/college-careers-more/college-admissions/applying-to-college/admissions-essays/v/writing-a-strong-college-admissions-essay> - videos

<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/essays>

# QUESTIONS???

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For further assistance feel free to contact:

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