

Lesson 7

Starting the College Essay

Materials Needed:
pen or pencil or computer
access to Internet or library



Vocabulary: These words will help you understand this lesson.

Word/Term	Definition
essay	short literary composition on a particular theme or subject
brainstorming	a process of developing ideas by writing down many possibilities without judgment
cliché	a trite, overused expression
thesis	statement put forward as a premise; the focal point of an essay

Journal Entry

Who are you? If someone were to ask you to describe yourself, what would you say? Well, I'm asking. In your journal, with no one looking, write about yourself as you see you. What values do you have? What skills do you have? Are you sensitive, stubborn, thoughtful, persistent? What would you like to be remembered for? What is most important to you? How do you feel about your family? Be honest and remember; this is just for your eyes.

Ahhhh...The College Essay

One of the most important aspects of the college application process is the college essay. In many ways, it is the best indicator of who you are. It is your chance to set yourself apart from others and to show admissions officers what you can genuinely offer to their school. So, do not look at the essay as an obstacle, but as a tool for getting into college.

You will probably be asked to write something about yourself and your experiences. When thinking about an essay response, do not go with your first instinct. You should really think about what you want to write, and you also want to be sure to follow the writing process. (This will be explained later.)



On the following pages is a step-by-step guide to writing a college essay. You will be given pointers on how to develop your essay, and then you will actually write one.

Do not allow yourself to think that you are a *bad* writer. Everyone can write, and if you follow the guide and use the help of your PASS mentor, you will write a good essay. Keep these things in mind. First, the college wants to gain insight into who you are as a person; second, they want to know what is important to you; and third, they want to see your writing skills and how well you communicate. Great writing skills can wow the admissions officer. So can honesty and sincerity!

Beginning Your Essay - Give Yourself Time

The first thing you need to remember when writing a college essay is to allow yourself enough time to write it and then to write it well. If you wait until the last minute, you will not have time to revise or edit, and it will be evident in your final product. Coming up with a topic or idea is usually the most difficult step because you want your composition to be original, genuine, and engaging. When you are writing an essay to send with an actual application you will need a couple of weeks to complete it if you wish to do your best.

Understanding the Question

Look closely at the essay question being asked of you by the college. Some schools will ask general questions, such as: “Write about an event that changed your life in a positive way,” or “Discuss your goals for the future.” Other schools may be more specific. In any case, **MAKE SURE YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT THE QUESTION IS ASKING.** You will not impress an admissions officer if you respond to a question that was not given, even if it is the most outstanding essay ever written. If you do not understand an essay question, ask your PASS mentor or someone else for help.

Writing Your Essay – The Process

For the rest of this lesson, you are going to begin writing a college essay. You will follow the steps of the writing process, which include:

- brainstorming or prewriting exercises
- outlining and organizing
- writing a rough draft
- revising
- editing
- writing the final draft

If you think this sounds like a lot of work, you are right. Do not worry, however; this unit will give you a step-by-step guide to writing your essay.

Your topic is stated below. Look it over carefully.

Topic: In an essay of about 500 words, discuss an event that changed your life in a positive way. Explain what the event was and how it changed you.

1. Brainstorming

Do not rush into writing your essay. You should spend much of your time brainstorming ideas. As you write down your thoughts, you may discover that some of them are rather general. The key to writing a good essay is to keep the topic specific. If you do this, it will help you to remain focused. Also, remember that your idea must involve you personally. Do not write about an event that did not involve you directly; you want to keep it personal. Write some of your ideas in the space below. Now might be the time to reread your journal entry. Is there something in a journal entry you could use?

Now that you have written down some ideas, take a short break from the lesson. When you return, read these ideas again, starring (*) the ones that seem most interesting. Choose a topic about which you can write honestly. Do not exaggerate! Also, there is no need to prove that you have learned a moral lesson based on the event. You are not trying to *prove* anything; you are simply trying to express something about yourself.

Organize Your Thoughts

After you have brainstormed on some topics, choose two about which you think you could write something significant. You are going to explore the two topics that most interest you. Write one topic at the top of each column. After you do this, include the appropriate information for each item listed below for each topic:

1. Identify the event that changed you.
2. Tell when the event happened to you.
3. Briefly state how the event changed you.
4. Briefly state why it changed you.
5. State if the event is still affecting you and how.

2. Outline two topics

Topic 1:	Topic 2:
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

Now that you have completed the list for both topics, look at your responses and ask yourself the following questions. *Which topic has more information? Which one was easier to write about and caused the stronger emotional response?* Star the topic you would like to write about.

Congratulations! You have chosen a topic for your essay. The hard part is now over.

At this point, it is a good idea to read some sample essays. If possible use the Internet. If you type in *The College Essay* you will have a variety of sites from which to choose. They offer advice and sample essays. Be very careful not to use any of the wording of the essays there. Just get ideas on how to proceed. If you do not have access to the Internet visit a high school guidance office or local library to read some books on college essay writing.

The Outline and First Draft: Use a computer if available.

Parts of the Essay

Your essay will have three major parts: introduction, body of the essay, and conclusion. Below is a description of each, including how you should deal with your topic in each part. The essay basically follows the same format as the formal writing you have done in the past.

Introduction: The introduction needs to be focused and should catch the reader's attention right away. Your introduction must clearly state what you will discuss in the essay. The sentence or two stating your idea is the thesis, or the topic of your essay; it is the entire focal point of the paper. When you write your introduction, do not write, "In this essay I will explain..." Do not tell the reader what you are going to write, just write it.

Body of the essay: The body of the essay is an extension of the introduction. This is where you provide all of the details to support your thesis. This is where you would discuss how the event changed you and why it changed you, giving vivid examples. Do not, however, use too many adjectives and adverbs so that the topic loses focus.

Conclusion: The conclusion is considered by some to be the most important aspect of the essay. Here you tie together all your ideas and restate your thesis. You want to leave a lasting impression, so you may want to include a statement that leaves the reader thinking. You may want to think of a simile or metaphor that would reinforce your idea.

A Word of Caution

Plagiarism occurs when a person uses the ideas or writings of another and presents these writings or ideas as his or her own. It is cheating to use the words of another and claim them as your own. Colleges have means to discover essays written by others. You would surely be turned down if you did this on a college application. You would be dismissed from college if you did this on a paper for a professor during your college years. Plagiarism is copying a paper from a source and not giving proper documentation. It is turning in a paper another person has written for you or turning in a paper written by another without that person's knowledge. Buying a paper from a research service and claiming you wrote it, is plagiarism. Even paraphrasing (summarizing) from a source without proper documentation is plagiarism. The Internet provides access to papers and makes plagiarism easy. Sites to purchase essays can easily be found on the Internet. However, colleges have technological tools to detect papers from other sources. Whatever you write, use your own words. Only you should represent you.

3. Creating a Working Outline

The next step to writing a good essay is to create an outline. In the past, you may not have taken this step, but it is an essential one because it organizes your thoughts before you begin to write and provides you with something to which you can constantly refer if you lose your focus as you write. An outline format has been provided for you; all you need to do is to fill in the missing information.

I. INTRODUCTION (First Paragraph)

A. Thesis: (should include the event and why it changed you)

B. When it happened:
With whom (by whom)

C. Short description of event:

II. BODY OF THE ESSAY

A. (Second Paragraph) - How the event changed you (supporting details):

1.

2.

3.

B. Third Paragraph - Why event changed you:

1.

2.

3.

You may have more than two paragraphs in the body. Use a separate sheet of paper if needed.

III. CONCLUSION (Last Paragraph)

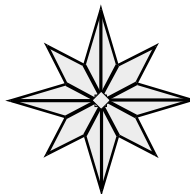
A. Statement that explains how event changed you:

B. Statement that explains why:

C. Summary sentence:

Remember, when you actually write your essay, you will include more information than appears in your outline. Do not allow the outline to restrict you; it is simply there as a guide to remind you of the important points to include in the essay.

Review what you have written. Change anything you feel could be better. Then ... it's time to take a break. You will look at it with fresh eyes if you wait a day or two before going further.



End of Lesson 7