

# COLLEGE ESSAY BRAINSTORM

-- to help you figure how what to write about --

**Your task:** Analyze and critique past events and/or relationships that have influenced who you are today.

## Part 1: Brainstorm!

1. If you were writing your autobiography right now, what would be 5 to 10 events or things that would have to be included? Think about your life chronologically.

|    |     |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 2.  |
| 3. | 4.  |
| 5. | 6.  |
| 7. | 8.  |
| 9. | 10. |

2. As a few friends or family members to pick 5 adjectives or personality traits that characterize you.

| Friend or Family Member #1 | Friend or Family Member #2 | Friend or Family Member #3 |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
|                            |                            |                            |
|                            |                            |                            |
|                            |                            |                            |
|                            |                            |                            |
|                            |                            |                            |

3. List 5 accomplishments you have made over the last 5 years. (Do not limit yourself to accomplishments for which you have been formally recognized since the most interesting essays are often based on accomplishments that may have seemed insignificant at the time but become crucial when placed in the context of your life.

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4. List 3 to 5 things/topics on which you consider yourself very knowledgeable.

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|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |

5. What are your most important extracurricular or community activities?

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6. List 5 people you respect/admire. They can be real, fictional, dead, or alive.

|       |       |
|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |

7. What is your favorite movie or book? \_\_\_\_\_

Who is your favorite musician? \_\_\_\_\_

8. List two times when you failed miserably and two times when you were a fantastic success:

| Miserable failures | Fantastic success |
|--------------------|-------------------|
|                    |                   |
|                    |                   |

9. List four favorite/not favorite things. These can include: activities, places, objects, virtues, etc.

| Favorites | Least Favorites |
|-----------|-----------------|
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|           |                 |
|           |                 |
|           |                 |

## Part 2: After Brainstorming

Believe it or not—you now have 25-75 potential essay topics. The next step is to narrow the list down to the topics that are most suited to an admissions essay (that will show your STRENGTHS as a person). Use the following list to help figure out which situations/questions you can answer the most completely.

For each of the personal characteristics or skills you have listed, ask:

- Does it distinguish me from others I know?
- How did I develop this attribute?

For each of the activities you have listed, ask:

- What made me join this activity?
- What made me continue to contribute to it?

For each event in your life you have listed, ask:

- Why do I remember this particular event?
- Did it change me as a person?
- How did I react?
- Was the event a moment of epiphany, as if my eyes saw something to which they had previously been blind?

For each person you have listed, ask:

- Why have I named this person?
- Do I aspire to become like this person?
- Which of these person's traits do I admire?
- Is there something that this person has said that I will always remember?
- Did he or she challenge my views?

For each of your favorites and least favorites, ask:

- Why is this a favorite or least favorite?
- Has this thing influenced my life in a meaningful way?

For each failure, ask:

- What, if anything, did I learn from this failure?
- What, if anything, good came out of this failure?

Now—find the topic that will allow you to synthesize your important personal characteristics and experiences into a coherent whole while simultaneously addressing your desire to attend a specific institution. You're trying to leave a lasting impression on the admissions counselor!