

## EXAMPLES OF COLLEGE APPLICATION ESSAY QUESTIONS

(Common Application questions:)

- *"Evaluate a significant experience or achievement that has special meaning to you."*
- *"Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence."*
- *"Discuss some issue of personal, local, national, or international concern and its importance to you."*
- *"We would like to know... what experiences have led you to select your professional field and objective." (Boston University)*
- *"Please relate your interest in studying at Georgetown University to your future goals." (Georgetown University)*
- *"Discuss some creative work that could serve as a key to the way you see the world and the way you see yourself in the world. The creative work may be a scientific theory, a novel, film, poem, song, or any other art form." (University of Chicago)*
- *"John Keats said, 'Even a proverb is no proverb to you till your Life has illustrated it.' Please tell us about an experience in your own life which illustrated a proverb, maxim, or quote that has special meaning for you." (Duke University)*
- *"Ask and answer the one important question which you wish we had asked." (Carleton University)*
- *"What is the biggest misconception people have of you and why?" (Hiram College)*
- *"You have just completed your 300-page autobiography. Please submit page 217." (University of Pennsylvania)*

(Long questions from William & Mary:)

- *"Discuss how a particular work of music, literature, or art has inspired your life."*
- *"What historical figure do you most identify with and why?"*
- *"After your college graduation, describe the innovation or invention which you would patent."*
- *"What about you needs improving and how are you working on it?"*

(Short questions from William & Mary:)

- *"Why did you first become interested in William & Mary?"*
- *"What has been the most important thing you have learned from your high school experience?"*
- *"What is your favorite time of day and why?"*

## **common application™ 2020 - 2021**

Common App has announced that the 2020-2021 essay prompts will remain the same as the 2019–2020 essay prompts.

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, please share your story.
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?
3. Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
4. Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma — anything 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.
5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
6. Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging 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?
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.

## ***Admissions Committee Assignment***

Bestley College is one of the most competitive, prestigious colleges in the Northeast. The deadline for deciding who earns admission to the next freshman class is tomorrow. Unfortunately, the entire admissions committee ate some tainted fast food during a marathon essay-reading session yesterday. All but one member came down with food poisoning. As a result, the college president has asked the substitute committee members (you) to make the final decisions for the committee. Two openings are left, and you must choose from several applicants who have similar backgrounds. The essay is the deciding factor. In your discussion about who to choose for this last spot, consider the following questions:

***What makes one essay stand out above the others? (Be as specific as possible in your answer, and provide supporting examples from the essay.)***

***What, exactly, makes you reject the remaining essays? (Again, be specific. Provide examples.)***

# The Learning Cycle

**Experiencing**

**Processing**

**Concluding/Generalizing**

**Applying**

**Personal/Persuasive Essay**  
**MIND MAP -**  
**Jamie's Example**

**ESSAY GOAL:**  
**TO SHOW/PROVE THAT EVERY**  
**CLOUD HAS A SILVER LINING**

Silver Lining #1:  
I grew closer to John,  
my brother.

Silver Lining #2:  
My family grew and I  
developed new  
relationships.

**EXAMPLE OF**  
**EXPERIENCE:**  
**My Parents' Divorce**

**ARGUMENT:**  
**Through my parents'**  
divorce, I learned that every  
cloud has a silver lining because I  
- Grew closer to my brother John  
- Developed new relationships.  
- Discovered positive changes  
in my parents, and  
- Learned to take on new  
responsibilities in the  
family.

Silver Lining #3:  
I discovered  
positive changes in  
my parents.

Silver Lining #4:  
I learned to take on  
new responsibilities  
in the family.

Dad's  
emotional  
side

Learned to  
cook at my  
Dad's  
house

Started to  
take care of  
my own  
expenses

Saw him cry

Expressed  
himself  
more to my  
brother and  
me

Gave me  
support  
& advice

I could  
confide  
in him

Sheila, my  
new  
Stepmom

Step-  
grand-  
parents

When my  
mother told  
me the news,  
it felt like a  
storm cloud  
had hit our  
family

We split  
into  
separate  
homes;  
two lives

Jonathan,  
Eric and  
Nancy: step-  
siblings

I felt shock,  
disbelief, and  
denial

I took on  
more  
chores

After 20  
years of  
marriage

When the toilet  
broke, she  
would fix it  
rather than call  
Dad

Mom took  
more  
control

They spent  
more time  
with us

Each parent  
took care of  
us for a  
particular  
day of the  
week

Both parents , not just  
one, would come to  
school events

Fights  
with my  
boyfriend

Upset &  
distracted

Would throw  
the lacrosse  
ball around

Helped  
me  
unwind

When I felt  
stress from  
school or  
homework

## PERSUASIVE ESSAY MIND MAP (Table Version)

<b>GOAL:</b>
<b>EXPERIENCE:</b>
<b>SUPPORTING BACKGROUND DETAILS:</b>
<b>ARGUMENT:</b>

Reason 1:	Reason 2:	Reason 3:
<i>Supporting Evidence 1.1:</i>	<i>Supporting Evidence 2.1:</i>	<i>Supporting Evidence 3.1:</i>
Supporting Details 1.1:	Supporting Details 2.1:	Supporting Details 3.1:
<i>Supporting Evidence 1.2:</i>	<i>Supporting Evidence 2.2</i>	<i>Supporting Evidence 3.2:.</i>
Supporting Details 1.2:	Supporting Details 2.2:	Supporting Details 3.2:
<i>Supporting Evidence 1.3:.</i>	<i>Supporting Evidence 2.3:</i>	<i>Supporting Evidence 3.3</i>
Supporting Details 1.3:	Supporting Details 2.3:	Supporting Details 3.3:

# PERSUASIVE ESSAY MIND MAP

**GOAL:** To show ...

**Experience:**

**Supporting Background Details:**

**Argument:**

*Reason #1*

*Reason #2*

*Reason #3*

**Supporting Evidence and Details:**

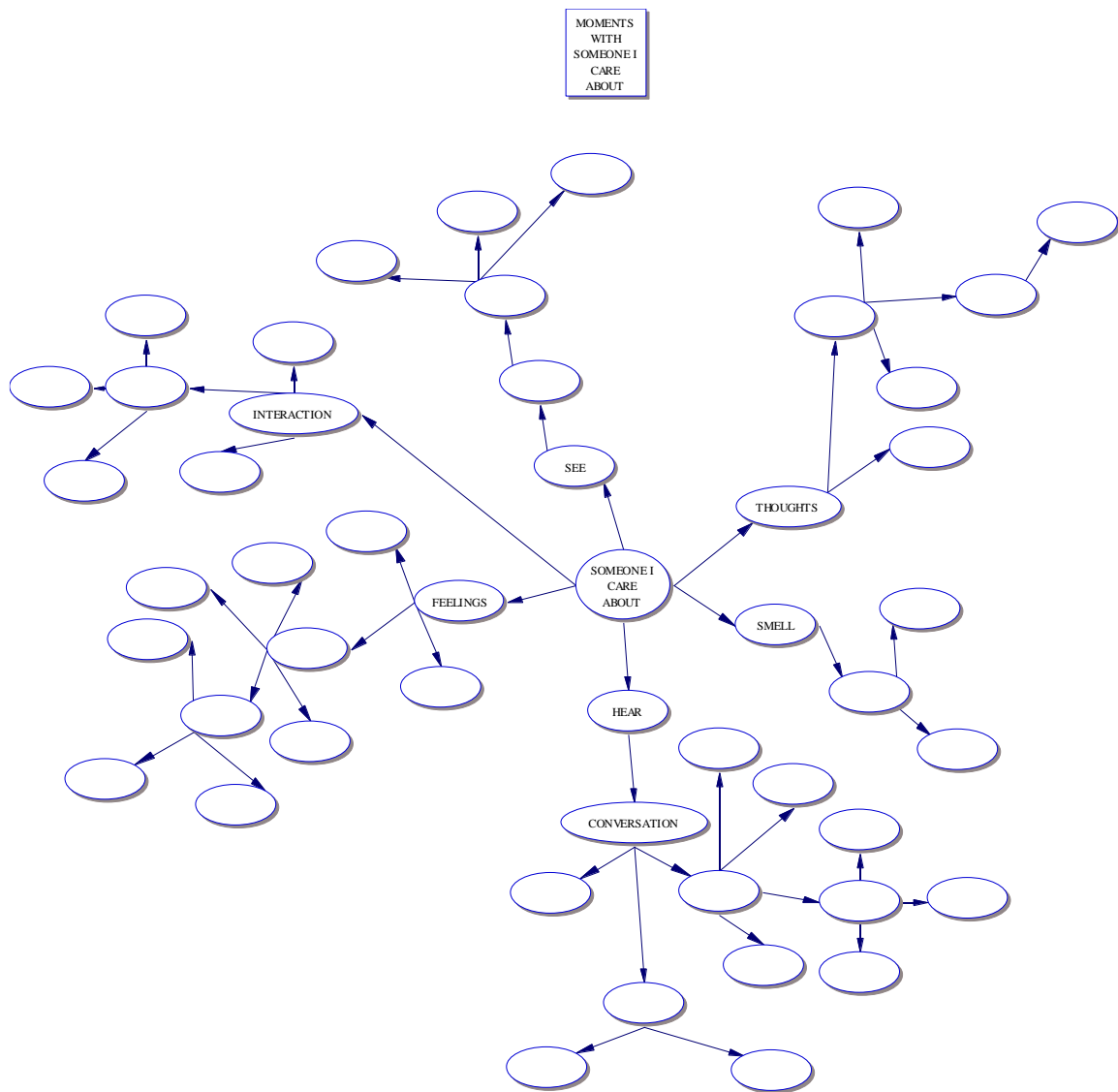
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_

**Supporting Evidence and Details:**

- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_

**Supporting Evidence and Details:**

- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_





# **In the Beginning:**

## **Helpful Hints for Jump-starting your Personal Essay**

- Try not to dwell too much on writing the "perfect" beginning and ending in the first stages of writing
- For your own information, jot down any pointers about where you want your beginning to lead the reader; or, describe the stage that you want to set for your story. For example,

*I want to show how my relationship with my best friend taught me the importance of taking risks in life. I want my beginning to convey both the closeness and the tension that we experienced in our friendship.*

- Launch into your story AFTER you have used a brainstorming technique (e.g., clustering or free writing) that enables you to loosen up and associate with your topic.
- After you have written your first draft, look for one of the most interesting, engaging sentences or ideas in your story. Consider using this sentence or capturing this idea (in concrete form) as your lead.
- Keep in mind -- the ideal hook may occur to you while you are doing something other than writing (e.g., eating dinner, taking a walk, arguing with a sibling, etc.) Plant in your head the mission of creating an effective hook, and an idea may come to you when you are least expecting it.

## **In the Beginning: Types of Leads and Connections**

**Creative lead** - This beginning triggers a smile or sense of wonder in the reader. It is an effective way to hook the reader through curiosity.

*High above the Earth in a starship from the Andromeda Galaxy, two aliens stand gazing out a viewport at the brilliant blue orb below.*

p. 38, Eric a. Maki (Brown University)

*Why I Wear Underwear*

p. 141, Sarah Bayliss (Harvard University)

*I like ducks.*

p. 187, Susan Glueck (Harvard University)

**Action lead** - This beginning carries the reader into the heart of action. It is a powerful way to lead into a story.

*"Here she comes again. Just like always--running in, breathless, a stack of books in her arms. She throws the books on top of me and glides onto my bench, screeching to a stop in its center.*

p. 233, Kimberly I. McCarthy (Brown University)

*You strain to be able to see just one more line of the chart sitting twenty feet in front of you as if your fate depended upon it.*

p. 158, Sam Liu (Harvard University)

**Metaphor or analogy lead** - This beginning enables the reader to quickly grasp a complex idea or topic. The reader makes an immediate association with something that corresponds in some respects to the idea that the writer is trying to convey.

*Mental Block is a nasty old hermit who lives in the gullies and ravines of my mind. He makes a living by slinging nets across my neural canals and catches my thoughts as they swim toward the great spawning grounds where writing is born.*

p. 49, Arun Ramanathan (Haverford College)

*Uproot a tree and replant it. Chances are very high that the tree will have difficulty surviving. If you do the equivalent to a human, the poor person will have the same problem.*

p. 67, Thai Pham (Brown University)

*The woman wanted breasts. She had fame waiting on her like a slave, money dripping from her fingertips, and men diving into her very being...*

*This woman is us. My family has been in existence for nearly 20 years now, and we are aging and losing our own breasts and tight face--the giddy happiness of a child's unconditional love for his family, the young family's need for each other...*

Excerpts from "the risky" essay (Parke Muth, University of Virginia.)

**Personal lead** - This beginning exposes something personal about the writer. The reader becomes quickly engaged in the writer's personal thoughts or conversation.

*I think I began to grow up that winter night when my parents and I were returning from my aunt's house, and my mother said that we might soon be leaving Leningrad to go to America.*

p. 63, Anonymous (Princeton University)

*I have never before attempted to collect and write down my thoughts about my sister and her effect on my life--probably because it's so difficult for me to talk about--but as I turn it all over in my mind, I begin to see what a profound impact she has had on me.*

P. 109, Ellen L. Chubin (Harvard University)

**Quotation lead** - This beginning, like the metaphor lead, enables the reader to quickly associate with the meaning that the writer is trying to convey. If not overly wordy, obtuse, or cliché, it can be an effective way to set the stage for an essay.

*"I shall burn the city." This motto appeared on the shield of Capaneus in Seven Against Thebes and it struck terror in the hearts of his enemies.*

p. 181, Catherine L. Censor (Columbia College)

Somewhere ages and ages hence: two roads diverged in a wood, and I--  
I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.  
Robert Frost

*I have chosen to take roads less traveled by.*  
p. 107, Kelley P. Bordon (Barnard College)

**Dialogue lead** - This beginning draws the reader into the middle of a conversation or the writer's personal thoughts. It is effective because conversation is a naturally engaging process.

*"Howard, slow down, you're tailing that blue car!" We switch lanes.  
"Danielle, move your leg!" demands one voice. "How much longer,"  
demands another.*  
p. 120, Kimberly D. Morgan (Harvard University)

*"I don't know yet," she replied. "I'd like to write a poem, since I think that's  
my forte, but I just can't find the inspiration under this kind of pressure."*  
p. 35, Jennifer Applegate (University of Pennsylvania)

**Traditional lead** - This beginning is direct and straightforward. It gives the reader a sense of what to expect in the essay. On the downside, it can be boring.

*The experience I want to share with the Whitman Admissions Committee is  
the joy my brother Jeff has brought into our family.*  
p. 116, Jade Larrabee (Whitman College)

*I have often thought that the fictional character Hawkeye, the lead role in  
the popular television show MASH, is based on a "real-life" individual: my  
grandmother.*  
p. 134, Michael Wesler, Harvard University

Take the next two minutes to list all that you see in this room.

<p>Common Object</p>	<p>Describe me using sensory details.</p>	<p>What am I different from?</p>	<p>If I could talk, what would I say?</p>
<p>Unique Object (the one that only you observed)</p>	<p>What am I similar to?</p>	<p>What am I thinking?</p>	<p>What do I <i>do</i>?</p>

## FROM GENERAL TO SPECIFIC: A REVIEW

Here are ways that writers were able to bring their main, general or abstract ideas into sharper focus:

**1. Examples/Illustrations** allow your readers to see, touch, hear, taste, smell and feel what your ideas are made of.

GENERAL	There is a certain smell when you walk into the gymnasium.
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>A smell of leather</i>
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>shellacked parquet floors</i>
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>old sweat</i>
There is a certain smell when you walk into the gymnasium... <i>A smell of leather, of shellacked parquet floors, of old sweat.</i> Gregory Lippman, Princeton University	

**2. Explanations/elaborations** enable your readers to understand the full meaning of your point or idea.

GENERAL	At the beginning, the language was very difficult for me.
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>completely different from anything I had studied or spoken before</i>
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>new and exciting</i>
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>required some major adjustments in study habits</i>
I must admit, that especially at the beginning, the language was very difficult for me. <i>It was completely different from anything I had studied or spoken before, and, while being new and exciting, it required some major adjustments in study habits.</i> David Weymouth, University of North Carolina	

**3. Facts/Detailed observations** offer your readers the concrete particulars of your idea.

GENERAL	I entered the dance world.
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>age of seven</i>
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>attended beginning ballet class at Susan Cooper's School of the Dance in Mt. Vernon for little dancers</i>
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>every Saturday morning for one brief hour</i>
<i>At the age of seven I entered the dance world, and attended beginning ballet class every Saturday morning for one brief hour at Susan Cooper's School of the Dance in Mt. Vernon for little dancers.</i> Shelley Bornkamp, Washington State University	

**4. Comparisons/Contrasts** enable the reader to see your object or idea next to a similar or dissimilar one.

GENERAL	I do have certain definite memories of my brother.
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>My brother Tommy died when he was four and I was six</i>
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>I never knew him well</i>
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>he was much stronger</i>
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>built like a bulldozer, or at least a small ox</i>
<i>My brother Tommy died when he was four and I was six, so I never knew him well; however, I do have certain definite memories of him. Although two years younger than I, he was much stronger, built like a bulldozer, or at least a small ox.</i> Juliet Siler, Harvard University	



## FROM GENERAL TO SPECIFIC: A REVIEW

Remember the different techniques that you can use to bring your ideas into sharper focus? Here are the ways that writers can make their main or general ideas more specific:

**1. Illustrations** allow your readers to see, touch, hear, taste, smell and feel what your ideas are made of.

GENERAL	<b>My mom is sick.</b>
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>She takes pills every day: purple ones, white ones and giant orange ones that look impossible to swallow.</i>
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>[The pills] make her stomach turn, so in the morning she has to lie down on the living-room couch, her feet hanging off the end and her headband dangling from her papery fingers.</i>
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>Sometimes she will come upstairs to deliver a load of laundry, and I hear her slow steps on the stairs. The basket creaks where she drops it, and then I hear her slump on my bed. By the time I look up from my reading or my homework, she is fast asleep, her wrinkled eyelids quivering lightly.</i>
<p><i>My mom is sick. She takes pills every day: purple ones, white ones and giant orange ones that look impossible to swallow. They make her stomach turn, so in the morning she has to lie down on the living-room couch, her feet hanging off the end and her headband dangling from her papery fingers. Sometimes she will come upstairs to deliver a load of laundry, and I hear her slow steps on the stairs. The basket creaks where she drops it, and then I hear her slump on my bed. By the time I look up from my reading or my homework, she is fast asleep, her wrinkled eyelids quivering lightly.</i></p> <p><b>1 – 3 from <i>Pills</i>, by Haley Fox, Senior, The Wheeler School, Providence, RI</b></p>	

**2. Explanations/elaborations** enable your readers to understand the full meaning of your point or idea.

GENERAL	It's because we treat her differently now.
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>She hates it.</i>
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>My brothers won't let her carry stuff; my dad pretends she doesn't know anything;</i>
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>I forget things and blame her.</i>
It's because we treat her differently now. <i>She hates it. My brothers won't let her carry stuff; my dad pretends she doesn't know anything; I forget things and blame her.</i>	

**3. Facts/Detailed observations** offer your readers the concrete particulars of your idea.

GENERAL	I remember the day she told us.
MORE SPECIFIC	<b>It was after a lacrosse game,</b>
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>and I think we lost because I was complaining about the refs.</i>
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>It was only the second time I'd seen her cry. The first time was when Sam was little, and she was trying to put a sweater on him in the kitchen, but he jumped up and hit her in the nose.</i>
I remember the day she told us. <i>It was after a lacrosse game, and I think we lost because I was complaining about the refs. It was only the second time I'd seen her cry. The first time was when Sam was little, and she was trying to put a sweater on him in the kitchen, but he jumped up and hit her in the nose.</i>	

**4. Comparisons/Contrasts** enable the reader to see your object or idea next to a similar or dissimilar one.

GENERAL	It's strange to sit across from her,
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>because it's like looking into a mirror of myself 35 years later;</i>
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>the same uncontrollable curls</i>
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>and green eyes.</i>
It's strange to sit across from her, <i>because it's like looking into a mirror of myself 35 years later; the same uncontrollable curls and green eyes.</i>	
4 – 6 from <i>Like a Person</i> , by Elizabeth Berger, Senior, Bronx High School of Science.	

**5. Inner thoughts** expose the reader to the conversation going on inside of your head.

GENERAL	So I sit there, trying to figure out what just happened.
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>It is too much to absorb.</i>
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>My mother, who has on more than one occasion followed me down the block to make sure I was going where I claimed to be going, just made an attempt to speak to me.</i>
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>She spoke to me. Like a person.</i>
So I sit there, trying to figure out what just happened. <i>It is too much to absorb. My mother, who has on more than one occasion followed me down the block to make sure I was going where I claimed to be going, just made an attempt to speak to me. She spoke to me. Like a person.</i>	

**6. Dialogue** captures your ideas in the exchange of words between the characters in your essay.

GENERAL	And just like that, we're back.
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>She sits down and says: "Maybe instead of seeing a movie, you and Jackie could do sample SAT's. That could be fun."</i>
MORE SPECIFIC	<i>Yeah, that would be great," I say.</i>
<i>She sits down and says: "Maybe instead of seeing a movie, you and Jackie could do sample SAT's. That could be fun."</i> <i>"Yeah, that would be great," I say... And just like that, we're back.</i>	

## SELF-ACTUALIZATION AND FULFILLMENT: THE "PEAK EXPERIENCE"

### ***WHAT IS THE "PEAK EXPERIENCE"?***

Abraham Maslow devoted much of his adult life to learning and writing about self-fulfillment and the actualization of human potential. He described the *peak experience* as "*a moment of highest happiness and fulfillment.*" Such a moment could be "*temporary..., non-self-centered, purposeless, self-validating*"; as well as an "*end-experience and state of perfection and of goal attainment.*"

Examples of human peak experiences include moments of:

*Artistic perception*

*Communion with nature*

*Child-parent bonding*

*High athletic performance  
and fulfillment*

*Creative achievement*

*High honor*

*Experiencing childbirth*

*Deep intimacy*

*Deep insight and self-awareness*

*Spiritual awareness &  
growth*

**To study the peak experience, Maslow made the following request to his students:**

***I would like you to think of the most wonderful experience or experiences of your life; happiest moments, ecstatic moments, moments of rapture, perhaps from being in love, or from listening to music or suddenly "being hit" by a book or a painting, or from some great creative moment.***

**(Abraham H. Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being, 1968, pp. 71-73)**

## EXPLORING THE PEAK EXPERIENCE

**Imagine that you are helping to define characteristics of the peak experience. List a moment or moments in your life that you have felt at your "peak." If possible, try to reflect on peak experiences in two or more areas of your life, such as school and extracurricular activities. Or, reflect on a peak experience (e.g., a moment of deep insight or awareness) that might have occurred in your college essay story.**

**Did you feel differently during these moments in comparison to your other, "off-peak" moments? How? Try to**

**1) *Show/convey* the specific differences in yourself:  
(Were you a different person? In what way/s?)**

**2) *Show/convey* the differences in the world:  
(Did the world look different to you? In what way/s?)**

How is "flow" similar to "peak experience"?

## **"FLOW"**

*Thirty years after Maslow wrote about the "peak experience," Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi used the metaphor of flow "... to describe the sense of effortless action [that people] feel in moments that stand out as the best in their lives. Athletes refer to it as 'being in the zone,' religious mystics as being in 'ectasy,' artists and musicians as aesthetic rapture... Flow tends to occur when a person's skills are fully involved in overcoming a challenge that is just about manageable...A typical day is full of anxiety and boredom. Flow experiences provide the flashes of intense living against this dull background...How does one return to the more enjoyable flow state? ...by learning new skills... and increasing challenges. Thus the flow experience acts as a magnet for learning--that is, for developing new levels of challenges and skills." (Finding Flow, 1997, pp. 29 - 33)*

## **Developing Talent**

*In further explanation of the flow experience, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi said that*

...innate talents cannot develop into a mature intelligence unless a person learns to control attention... It takes much effort to absorb the knowledge and the skills that are needed to do the mental operations an adult professional is supposed to perform. Mozart was a prodigy and a genius, but if his father hadn't forced him to practice as soon as he was out of diapers, it is doubtful his talent would have blossomed as it did.

*Finding Flow, 1997 (p. 27)*

## Discussion

Read the following essays in 100 Successful College Application Essays. In your group, pinpoint how the writer captures aspects of *flow* and *peak experience* and effectively conveys them to the reader. What, exactly, makes these experiences so compelling and attractive to an admissions committee? Share specific examples with the rest of the group.

**p. 229: *Gregory Lippman***

**p. 233: *Kimberly I. McCarthy***

**p. 234: *Mitch S. Neuger***

**p. 240: *Dani Ruran***

**p. 242: *Peter Urkowitz***

## **Bringing Closure to your Essay: Writing Powerful Conclusions**

End with a metaphor, an anecdote or image that ties your essay together:

*When I was twelve I read a book about a girl growing up in Tzarist Russia. Her grandfather once told her, “Life is like a zebra. There are whites, and black stripes on it. When you are on a white stripe walk slowly, enjoy it. When you come to a black stripe raise your collar, shut your eyes, and run as fast as you can go to get to a white one. But, remember, there is always a white stripe after a black one!”*

**Anonymous, Princeton University, p. 63.**

Conclude with the lesson that you have learned from your experience, and how that lesson will make a difference:

*My journey to the U.S. has taught me a valuable lesson: “Winner never quit, and quitters never win.” I have applied this lesson to solve my problems in adapting to a new environment, and I expect this attitude to help me overcome those problems I may encounter in the future.*

**Thai Pham, Brown University, p. 67.**

*By starving, I attempted to gain pride in myself by attaining my father’s approval or acknowledgment of my value as a person. Of course, I gladly accept applause and attention from others, but the primary approval must come from me, and I feel secure now that I can live with that knowledge safely locked in my mind.*

**Anonymous, Wellesley College, p. 139.**



Illustrate your main theme or concluding lesson with a quotation:

*As for me, I intend to use my education and skills to help put an end to such suffering. Granted, the goal is probably naïve. But as Robert Browning once said, “Ah, but a man’s reach should exceed his grasp. Or what’s a heaven for?”*

**Stephen Gripkey, Yale University, p. 97.**

*Reflecting on the friendship that TP and I once had, I can say that the saddest lesson that I learned from my transitory semester in high school is that the best things in life are often the hardest to preserve, the hardest to hold on to; in the words of Robert Frost, “Nothing gold can stay.”*

**Josh Jacobs, Amherst College, p. 191.**

Asking a relevant or thought-provoking question:

*Sometimes I feel like the best place to do all my writing would be outside somewhere, by a lake in Maine or something, like an artist with an easel, my typewriter and I, all the time. But then it would rain, and all my work would get wet and ruined. So I just stay in my room. I have trouble seeing out of the window, but everybody has to make do, don’t they?*

**Michael Chaskes, Wesleyan University, p. 293.**

End with an image that the reader can picture in the mind’s eye:

*Dancing can be exhausting and frustrating as sweat drips and muscles cramp. However, at other times, I actually feel the sensation of flying, flying through the air with the pink satin pointe shoes or the black leather jazz shoes. Dance, to me, is flying without wings.*

**Christine Richardson, Princeton University, p. 237.**

Predict what will happen in the future:

*Someday, these hands will grip forceps and retractors, tense and slick...I have confidence that they will become the hands of an M.D., with the power to heal and comfort solemnly implicit, and I have every hope that these hands will someday, thrilled and proud, touch the opened Van Wickle Gates as they enter.*

**Joanne B. Wilkinson, Brown University, p. 217.**

Bring the reader full circle by returning to the idea, anecdote, or image presented in the introduction:

[Introduction] *Recently my grandfather showed me a photograph of my grandmother when she was just eight-year-old Eva Littwin, living a little girl's life in post-World War One Brooklyn; she stands in the courtyard of a tenement building, hanging a laundry to dry...*

[Conclusion] *Beside me, in a companionable silence, my sister stacked everything in the drainboard and when we were through, we stood back to admire the way the dishes slouched orderly, gleaming, against one another. Just as eight-year-old Eva Littwin must have admired the rows of sheets and dishtowels which billowed and danced on their line in the tenement courtyard.*

**Leah S. Schanzer, Swarthmore College, p. 128.**

[Introduction] *I like ducks.*

[Conclusion] *That is why I like ducks.*

**Susan Glueck, Harvard University, p. 187.**

## What makes a "meaningful" experience?

*Remember, for an experience to be especially meaningful for you and your reader, some of the following things might happen as you draft, reflect on, and revise your writing:*

- You and your reader are learning something from your experience/the experience is changing you in some way.
- You realize that at some point in the experience, you felt unsettled, confused, anxious, numb, or even in pain.
- You realize that what you believed to be true about yourself, others, or the world around you may not necessarily be true after all.
- You examine your beliefs by comparing what held true for you in the past to what is holding true for you in the present.
- You make a decision about whether or not to change your belief/s in light of your experience.
- You reflect on how your changed belief, or what you learned, will affect how you believe, act, or feel in the future.
- You make a connection between your thoughts, feelings and actions through your writing.
- To describe particularly complex thoughts, feelings, and actions you use analogies, metaphors, quotes from proverbs, poetry, fiction, etc.
- You reach a new level of understanding in your conclusion - and feel a sense of power from greater understanding.
- You think of an introduction that hooks your reader; you know that he/she cannot put the essay down because it holds promise.

## REVISION: A Game of Dialogue between Writers and Readers

### **CLARIFY YOUR MEANING:**

What is the lesson that you are trying to convey here...?

How did this specific experience.... change you in some way?

Did you feel confused or unsettled at some point in this experience....?

Did this specific experience... challenge any of your beliefs or assumptions about yourself, others, or the world around you?

How did this specific experience... actually change your beliefs and/or actions in some way?

What, specifically, did you learn from this experience?

How will what you learned from this experience influence what you think, believe, or do in the future?

Have you reached a new level of understanding by writing about your experience? Can you describe this new outlook?

How can you connect your thoughts, feelings, and actions...?

Can you use any analogies, metaphors, quotes, or forms of imagery to convey or enhance your ideas (particularly your complex ideas)?

## **CLARIFY YOUR IDEAS:**

A great idea would be ...

An important point you might want to consider is...

Another way you can look at this is ....

What if you considered the idea that .....

You can approach this topic in a different way...

A whole new way to look at this is...

Your idea could be conveyed differently...

But many readers won't agree with this idea...

You can make your idea clearer by...

Your idea might be more interesting if...

## **CLARIFY YOUR PURPOSE:**

Your overall purpose is to...

The goal of this paragraph is to...

The goal of this statement is to...

The message that you want to convey is...

What you are really trying to get at ...

The people who are reading this want to understand more about...

What makes this topic particularly important and timely is...

The specific problem that you are trying to address is...

Your main point is...

If you want to start off with a strong idea, you should...

## **IMPROVE YOUR ESSAY'S ORGANIZATION & COHESIVENESS:**

You can tie this together by...

A good transition between these paragraphs is...

You are getting off the subject here...

This statement doesn't really add anything...

This statement isn't necessary because...

This statement doesn't follow your line of reasoning...

A good summary statement is...

A statement to set the stage for your topic is ...

This could tie in better with your main point...

A good way to wrap things up is...

A good transitional word or phrase is ....

## **STRENGTHEN YOUR CONNECTION WITH THE READER:**

A good "clincher" is ...

Use dialogue ....

Express your inner thoughts ...

Describe your feelings in the moment ...

Show, don't tell ...

Describe what you are sensing (seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching) in the moment ...

An unforgettable concluding statement is ...

## CLARITY & CONCISENESS

You are using **slang or jargon**... Try using the terms...

This is **too wordy**.... You can cut down by...

This is **redundant**... All you have to say is...

You are using **empty, trite, meaningless phrase/s**... To be more meaningful, you could...

You are **stating the obvious**... We already know....

You are using **excessively difficult words/language**... To simplify your expression...

This sounds **too forced or contrived**... To be more genuine...

This **sentence is too lengthy** (over 28 words)... You can shorten it by...

This **paragraph is too lengthy** (over 7 lines)... You can cut it down by...

The **link between your subject and verb is unclear**... You can move your subject and verb closer together by...

You have **too many punctuation marks in one sentence**... You can eliminate some of them by...

This is in the **passive voice**... You can transform it to the active voice by...

This **lacks parallel construction**... You can make the construction parallel by...

This section **lacks a topic sentence**... A good topic sentence is ....

You are **forgetting about your reader**. If you considered your reader, you would ...

You **do not define these unfamiliar terms**... You could define them by...

This sounds **too choppy**... Your words would flow more smoothly if...

**You lose me** at this point because... You can bring me back on track by...

**I'm bored** during this part because... You can liven things up by...

You have **too much unnecessary detail**... You can get right to the point if...

# **IMPROVE YOUR GRAMMAR**

**[Your grammar... is incorrect. The correct way to write this is.....]**

**Comma**

**Semicolon**

**Colon**

**Hyphen**

**Apostrophe**

**Capitalization**

**Subject-verb agreement**

**Verb tense**

**Pronoun and antecedent agreement**

**Dangling modifiers**

**Sentence fragment**

**Run-on sentence**

**Diction**

**Spelling**



## ENGAGING YOUR READER: POINTS FOR REVISION

### Above all, avoid wordiness:

⇒ **Guard against lengthy sentences** that dilute your message or obscure your meaning. Keep in mind that the average sentence of a professional writer is 18 words in length. The average spoken sentence is 20 words long, and the average sentence in government and business writing is 28 words. A sentence is *too* long

- when it loses your reader.
- if you, yourself, cannot recite aloud or even repeat in your mind the sentence you are about to write.
- if it is peppered with too many punctuation marks.

Consider the following strategies to keep your sentences lively and concise:

⇒ **Vary the length of your sentences** to make your writing dynamic. Learn to trust short sentences that are ten words or less. Maintain a readable average of 18 words or less. The shortest and longest sentence on the page should differ by at least 20 words.

⇒ **Use words that are genuine, rather than forced or contrived. Try using the natural flow of speech in your writing.**

⇒ **Avoid redundancies. Eliminate or if necessary, paraphrase words or phrases that have been used more than once.**

⇒ **Keep the subject and verb close together.** The lengthier the sentence, the more this subject-verb link is obscured. Trying to pack too many ideas between the subject and verb is risky; the reader may lose track of who or what is doing the acting or being acted upon.

⇒ **Use the active voice (when the subject is acting) as much as possible** to make your writing more dynamic and compelling:

*John hit the ball. (Active Voice)*

*The ball was hit by John. (Passive Voice)*

## Order and Content

Many stories follow the logical sequence: beginning, middle and end.

Keep in mind that many of us put a lot of detail at the beginning because our minds are busy sorting through our experience. Much of the detail generated by processing our experience may be unnecessary to the storyline. In your first revision, try the following:

**Cut down on the beginning and expand the climax** – add more dialogue, action, and feeling to the moment or point toward which all the tension in your story builds.

**Reorder your story to make it more engaging to the reader. Start in the middle at a point where the tension is evident** (before the climax), flashback to the beginning to set the stage for your story, and then lead into your climax and conclusion.

**Start at the point of action or dialogue before the climax**, go back and set the stage for your story, then build towards the climax and ending.

**For each of the main ideas that you present, draw the reader through the phases of the learning cycle:** experiencing, processing, generalizing and applying. To bring each of your ideas into sharper focus, use

- Sensory detail
- Inner thoughts
- Facts/concrete observations
- Comparisons and contrasts
- Dialogue
- Action words
- Reflections
- Explanations

Also, use the techniques in the above list to show the elements of your story: characters, action, setting and tension (CAST).

**Avoid “user-hostile” writing** - writing that frustrates and leaves a negative impression on the reader. This can be accomplished in many ways:

⇒ **Make your essay look “friendly” to the reader. Break down lengthy paragraphs** (for many of the same reasons that we avoid lengthy sentences). Average paragraph length should be below 7 typed lines.

⇒ **To capture your precise meaning, replace words that are general and vague** (e.g., happy, great, bad, amazing, good, a lot, etc.) with simple, specific, and direct ones (e.g., “The night was sultry” vs. “The night was hot.”)

⇒ **Jargon/slang** (e.g., the specialized vocabulary that you use in the school lunchroom with your friends). While you and your peers may understand it, the reader outside your circle of friends won’t.

⇒ **Phrases that state the obvious.** Without realizing it, we sometimes write what is already implicit. For example: *You will find it interesting to know...; This story is about...; It is obvious that...; It happened like this...*

**Use transitions** to guide your reader through your writing. Transitions are words and phrases that help to make a paragraph more unified and coherent (e.g., first, however, therefore, etc.) They signal relationships between and among sentences, and smooth the connection from one idea to the next – thus helping the reader to follow the writer’s train of thought. Without transitions, the sentences within a paragraph may seem abrupt, choppy, and confusing to follow as the reader jumps from one idea to the next.

## TRANSITIONAL EXPRESSIONS

**To illustrate or to give examples:** for example, after all, an illustration of, even, for instance, indeed, in fact, it is true, of course, specifically, that is, to illustrate, as a case in point, as an illustration, in particular, one such, yet another

**To explain:** for instance, to begin with, in short, specifically, for example, in other words, certainly

**To emphasize an idea or point:** indeed, in fact, as a matter of fact, to be sure, of course, in any event, by all means, above all, especially, in particular, most important, surely

**To show comparison:** likewise, similarly, in the same way, in the same manner, equally, also, as well, both, neither

**To show contrast:** however, even though, on the other hand, nevertheless, although, and yet, but, but at the same time, despite, even so, even though, for all that, however, in contrast, in spite of, notwithstanding, on the contrary, regardless, still, though, yet, be that as it may, whereas

**To present additional ideas:** another, in addition to, related to, furthermore, also, moreover, further, besides, too, and then, again, and then, next, finally, still, too, besides, and, as well, besides, beyond that, first (second, third, last, and so on), for one thing, what is more

**To show cause and effect:** therefore, thus, as a result of, consequently, hence, accordingly, because, for this purpose, hence, otherwise, since, then, thereupon, to this end

<b>To conclude:</b> finally, in short, in other words, in a word, to sum up, in conclusion, in the end, all in all, altogether, in brief, in other words, in particular, in short, in simpler terms, in summary, in sum, on the whole, that is, therefore, to put it differently, to summarize
<b>To show sequence:</b> first, second, in the first place, last, moreover, next, secondly, finally
<b>To concede a point:</b> certainly, granted that, of course, no doubt, to be sure
<b>To show place:</b> above, adjacent to, below, elsewhere, farther on, here, near, nearby, on the other side, opposite to, there, to the east, to the left, in front, in the foreground, in the back, in the background, at the side, adjacent, nearby, in the distance
<b>To show time, place in time, or the passage of time:</b> afterward, as long as, as soon as, at last, at length, at that time, before, earlier, formerly, immediately, in the meantime, in the past, lately, later, meanwhile, now, presently, shortly, simultaneously, since, so far, soon, subsequently, then, thereafter, until, until now, when, soon after, previously, at length, next, eventually, after awhile, at present, briefly, currently, during, finally, first, (second, and so on), gradually, in the future, now, recently, suddenly
<b>To give a reason:</b> as, because, for, since
<b>To show alternative:</b> either/or, neither/nor, on the other hand, instead of
<b>To show condition:</b> provided that, if, unless
<b>To show manner:</b> as though, as if
<b>To show frequency:</b> sometimes, frequently, occasionally, often

# Styles of Learning

**People "have different learning styles -- characteristic strengths and preferences in the ways they take in and process information."**

(Richard M. Felder, *Matters of Style*. ASEE Prism, 6(4), 18-23, December, 1996).

*Some people prefer to learn from:*

**Facts**

**Figures**

**Statistical data**

*Others prefer:*

**Theories and ideas**

**Concepts**

**Models**

*Some favor:*

**Visual forms of information --**

**Pictures**

**Diagrams**

**Flow charts**

*Others respond well to:*

**Verbal forms of information --**

**Reports**

**Articles**

**Explanations**

## **Index of Learning Styles (ILS) Assessment**

The *Index of Learning Styles (ILS)* by Felder and Silverman at NC State University. helps you to identify your preferences on four learning style dimensions (*active/reflective, sensing/intuitive, visual/verbal, and sequential/global*). After you take the assessment and obtain your results, you will read an interpretation of your results and ways to enhance your learning (pp. 29-31). In class, we will define these styles and relate them to the ways in which you write.

The ILS is available on the web, and anyone who wishes to do it online can do so. If you do not have access to the web, that is okay. We have a paper and pencil version of the assessment on the following pages of your handouts. The advantage to taking it on the web is that you do not have to calculate your results; the computer does it for you in a couple of seconds. If you take the paper and pencil version of the assessment, you will have to calculate your own results which takes about five to ten minutes.

As you get ready to take your assessment at home, the authors, Felder and Silverman, want users of their assessment to keep in mind two important points:

1. The ILS is still being developed and validated. The results *suggest* your individual learning preferences, but should not be over-interpreted.
2. The profile of results does not reflect your suitability or unsuitability for a particular subject, discipline or profession. Using the assessment as justification to make a major shift in your career goals can be destructive.

For the purpose of this workshop, you are taking the assessment to apply your knowledge of your preferred styles of learning to your writing process.

## Instructions for Taking the ILS

### **Administration**

You can take the ILS either on the Web or on paper:

1. If you are taking the assessment on the web, go to the site <http://www2.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/users/f/felder/public/ILSpage.html>.
2. When you reach this page, click on the ILS questionnaire--Web version and follow the instructions for completing, submitting and automatically scoring the assessment. Be sure to print out your results and bring them to class!
3. If you are taking the assessment on paper, refer to the next few pages in your handouts [the ILS questionnaire, paper and pencil version and ILS questionnaire response sheet can also be printed from the above website by going to the above web page and clicking on the paper and pencil and response sheet categories].
4. To take the paper and pencil assessment, follow the directions at the top of the next page, Index of Learning Styles and upon completion of questions 1 - 44, turn to the Scoring Sheet on p. 27 in the handouts. To calculate your responses, follow the instructions at the top of the scoresheet. In a nutshell, you are asked to put a "1" in the blank that corresponds to your answer "a" or "b" for each item. After you have placed a "1" in the appropriate "a" or "b" blank following each item, add up the columns (i.e., all the "1's" in each column) and write the totals in the indicated spaces below the columns. For each of the sets of totals, subtract the smaller total from the larger one, and write the difference (1 to 11) and the letter (a or b) with the larger total. See the example on the score sheet.
5. Once you have calculated your totals (e.g., 3a, 7b, 3b, etc.), turn to the Learning Styles Results Sheet on p. 28 in your handouts. Place an x above the number which you calculated -- on the left side of the continuum if the "a" total was larger; on the right side of the continuum if the "b" total was larger.
6. Next, read through the interpretation of your results, Learning Styles and Strategies, pp. 29-31 in your handouts (this interpretation is also located at the above webpage by clicking on "Descriptions of the learning styles.")
7. After you have read through Learning Styles and Strategies (the article which describes your learning styles), think about how these styles apply to the way that you write. Be prepared to share your ideas with the class at the next session.



# INDEX OF LEARNING STYLES

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## DIRECTIONS

Circle "a" or "b" to indicate your answer to every question. Please choose only one answer for each question.

If both "a" and "b" seem to apply to you, choose the one that applies more frequently.

1. I understand something better after I
  - (a) try it out.
  - (b) think it through.
2. I would rather be considered
  - (a) realistic.
  - (b) innovative.
3. When I think about what I did yesterday, I am most likely to get
  - (a) a picture.
  - (b) words.
4. I tend to
  - (a) understand details of a subject but may be fuzzy about its overall structure.
  - (b) understand the overall structure but may be fuzzy about details.
5. When I am learning something new, it helps me to
  - (a) talk about it.
  - (b) think about it.
6. If I were a teacher, I would rather teach a course
  - (a) that deals with facts and real life situations.
  - (b) that deals with ideas and theories.
7. I prefer to get new information in
  - (a) pictures, diagrams, graphs, or maps.
  - (b) written directions or verbal information.
8. Once I understand
  - (a) all the parts, I understand the whole thing.
  - (b) the whole thing, I see how the parts fit.
9. In a study group working on difficult material, I am more likely to
  - (a) jump in and contribute ideas.
  - (b) sit back and listen.
10. I find it easier
  - (a) to learn facts.
  - (b) to learn concepts.
11. In a book with lots of pictures and charts, I am likely to
  - (a) look over the pictures and charts carefully.
  - (b) focus on the written text.
12. When I solve math problems
  - (a) I usually work my way to the solutions one step at a time.
  - (b) I often just see the solutions but then have to struggle to figure out the steps to get to them.

13. In classes I have taken
  - (a) I have usually gotten to know many of the students.
  - (b) I have rarely gotten to know many of the students.
14. In reading nonfiction, I prefer
  - (a) something that teaches me new facts or tells me how to do something.
  - (b) something that gives me new ideas to think about.
15. I like teachers
  - (a) who put a lot of diagrams on the board.
  - (b) who spend a lot of time explaining.
16. When I'm analyzing a story or a novel
  - (a) I think of the incidents and try to put them together to figure out the themes.
  - (b) I just know what the themes are when I finish reading and then I have to go back and find the incidents that demonstrate them.
17. When I start a homework problem, I am more likely to
  - (a) start working on the solution immediately.
  - (b) try to fully understand the problem first.
18. I prefer the idea of
  - (a) certainty.
  - (b) theory.
19. I remember best
  - (a) what I see.
  - (b) what I hear.
20. It is more important to me that an instructor
  - (a) lay out the material in clear sequential steps.
  - (b) give me an overall picture and relate the material to other subjects.
21. I prefer to study
  - (a) in a study group.
  - (b) alone.
22. I am more likely to be considered
  - (a) careful about the details of my work.
  - (b) creative about how to do my work.
23. When I get directions to a new place, I prefer
  - (a) a map.
  - (b) written instructions.
24. I learn
  - (a) at a fairly regular pace. If I study hard, I'll "get it."
  - (b) in fits and starts. I'll be totally confused and then suddenly it all "clicks."
25. I would rather first
  - (a) try things out.
  - (b) think about how I'm going to do it.
26. When I am reading for enjoyment, I like writers to
  - (a) clearly say what they mean.
  - (b) say things in creative, interesting ways.
27. When I see a diagram or sketch in class, I am most likely to remember
  - (a) the picture.
  - (b) what the instructor said about it.
28. When considering a body of information, I am more likely to
  - (a) focus on details and miss the big picture.
  - (b) try to understand the big picture before getting into the details.
29. I more easily remember
  - (a) something I have done.
  - (b) something I have thought a lot about.
30. When I have to perform a task, I prefer to
  - (a) master one way of doing it.
  - (b) come up with new ways of doing it.

31. When someone is showing me data, I prefer
  - (a) charts or graphs.
  - (b) text summarizing the results.
32. When writing a paper, I am more likely to
  - (a) work on (think about or write) the beginning of the paper and progress forward.
  - (b) work on (think about or write) different parts of the paper and then order them.
33. When I have to work on a group project, I first want to
  - (a) have "group brainstorming" where everyone contributes ideas.
  - (b) brainstorm individually and then come together as a group to compare ideas.
34. I consider it higher praise to call someone
  - (a) sensible.
  - (b) imaginative.
35. When I meet people at a party, I am more likely to remember
  - (a) what they looked like.
  - (b) what they said about themselves.
36. When I am learning a new subject, I prefer to
  - (a) stay focused on that subject, learning as much about it as I can.
  - (b) try to make connections between that subject and related subjects.
37. I am more likely to be considered
  - (a) outgoing.
  - (b) reserved.
38. I prefer courses that emphasize
  - (a) concrete material (facts, data).
  - (b) abstract material (concepts, theories).
39. For entertainment, I would rather
  - (a) watch television.
  - (b) read a book.
40. Some teachers start their lectures with an outline of what they will cover. Such outlines are
  - (a) somewhat helpful to me.
  - (b) very helpful to me.
41. The idea of doing homework in groups, with one grade for the entire group,
  - (a) appeals to me.
  - (b) does not appeal to me.
42. When I am doing long calculations,
  - (a) I tend to repeat all my steps and check my work carefully.
  - (b) I find checking my work tiresome and have to force myself to do it.
43. I tend to picture places I have been
  - (a) easily and fairly accurately.
  - (b) with difficulty and without much detail.
44. When solving problems in a group, I would be more likely to
  - (a) think of the steps in the solution process.
  - (b) think of possible consequences or applications of the solution in a wide range of areas.

# SCORING SHEET

1. Put "1"s in the appropriate spaces in the table below (e.g. if you answered "a" to Question 3, put a "1" in Column "a" by Question 3; if you answered "b" to Question 3, put a "1" in Column "b" by Question 3).
2. Total the columns and write the totals in the indicated spaces.
3. For each of the four scales, subtract the smaller total from the larger one. Write the difference (1 to 11) and the letter (a or b) with the larger total.

For example, if under "ACT/REF" you had 4 "a" and 7 "b" responses, you would write "3b" on the bottom line under that heading (3 = 7 - 4, and the "b" total was the larger of the two.)

ACT/REF			SEN/INT			VIS/VRB			SEQ/GLO		
Q	a	b	Q	a	b	Q	a	b	Q	a	b
1			2			3			4		
5			6			7			8		
9			10			11			12		
13			14			15			16		
17			18			19			20		
21			22			23			24		
25			26			27			28		
29			30			31			32		
33			34			35			36		
37			38			39			40		
41			42			43			44		
Total (sum X's in each column)											
ACT/REF			SEN/INT			VIS/VRB			SEQ/GLO		
	a	b		a	b		a	b		a	b
(Larger - Smaller) + Letter of Larger (see below*)											

\*Example: If you totaled 3 for a and 8 for b, you would enter 5b.

# Learning Styles Results

Place an "x" above the number which indicates the difference between your "a" and "b" column totals. If the "a" total was larger, place the "x" above the appropriate number on the left side of the continuum; if the "b" total was larger, place the "x" above the appropriate number on the right side of the continuum.

---

Results for:

ACT	11	9	7	5	3	1	1	3	5	7	9	11	REF
						<--	-->						
SEN	11	9	7	5	3	1	1	3	5	7	9	11	INT
						<--	-->						
VIS	11	9	7	5	3	1	1	3	5	7	9	11	VRB
						<--	-->						
SEQ	11	9	7	5	3	1	1	3	5	7	9	11	GLO
						<--	-->						
	"a" side										"b" side		

---

- If your score on a scale is 1-3, you are fairly well balanced on the two dimensions of that scale.
- If your score on a scale is 5-7, you have a moderate preference for one dimension of the scale and will learn more easily in a teaching environment which favors that dimension.
- If your score on a scale is 9-11, you have a very strong preference for one dimension of the scale. You may have real difficulty learning in an environment which does not support that preference.

# **Explanation of Learning Styles**

## **Active learners prefer to:**

- Do something active with the information.
- Discuss, apply or explain the information.
- Say, "Let's try it out and see how it works".
- Work with a group.
- Walk the information through all phases of the learning cycle, i.e., experiencing it, processing it (with a group), drawing conclusions about it, and applying it.

## **How can active learners help themselves?**

- Form a group to discuss your writing topic (e.g., “there is not great loss without some gain”); have members explain different aspects or perspectives of the topic to each other.
- As you are learning about your topic, find ways, if possible, to experience it firsthand. In short, learn by doing. (For example, if you are writing a report on the Tigers’ winning season, spend some time shadowing the coach and team members. Sit on the bench with the team during a game.)

## **Reflective learners prefer to:**

- Quietly think and draw conclusions about the information or topic first.
- Say, "Let's think it through first" (before writing).
- Work alone.

## **How can reflective learners help themselves?**

- Make time to review what you have learned about your topic and to think of possible real-world applications.
- Paraphrase what you have learned about your topic in your own words.
- Give yourself a quiet place to think, feel, and write.

## **Sensing learners prefer to:**

- **Select a topic and learn information that has a connection to the real world.**
- **Learn and memorize facts.**
- **Solve problems by well-established methods.**
- **Be tested on material that has been explicitly covered in class.**
- **Be patient with details.**
- **Do hands-on work.**
- **Be practical and careful.**

## **How can sensing learners help themselves?**

- **If you can select your own topic, choose one that has practical meaning to you. Otherwise, find ways to connect your topic to the real world.**
- **Seek practical applications of your topic.**
- **Seek real-world examples of your topic.**



## **Intuitive learners prefer to:**

- **Discover possibilities and relationships.**
- **Explore the theories and ideas underlying the topic at hand.**
- **Learn by innovative teaching strategies.**
- **Work quickly, and avoid repetition and checking their work.**
- **Grasp new concepts.**
- **Learn abstractions, theories and mathematical formulations.**
- **Be innovative.**
- **Avoid learning that involves memorization and routine calculations.**

## **How can intuitive learners help themselves?**

- **Ask for/seek different interpretations and theories about your topic and the facts that you are learning in association with it.**
- **Take time to learn all that you can about your topic before writing about it; on essay tests, read the entire question before answering and edit/proofread your work.**

## **Visual learners prefer to:**

- Learn by seeing diagrams, pictures, flow charts, time lines, films, demonstrations, etc.
- Envision or picture the topic, or experience it in their mind's eye.

## **How can visual learners help themselves?**

- Find visual representations of the subject of your learning or writing.
- Find CD-ROMS or videotapes that present the topic.
- Diagram or cluster the ideas that you associate with your topic. Enclose your ideas in circles, and draw lines between them to show the connections.
- When researching your topic, color-code written information with a highlighter so that everything relating to one aspect of your topic is in one color.

## **Verbal learners prefer to:**

- Learn about the topic by hearing or reading words, i.e., spoken or written explanations.
- Discuss the topic, experience, or new information out loud.

## **How can verbal learners help themselves?**

- Write summaries or outlines of the topic in your own words.
- Work or learn in groups so you can hear explanations of the topic.
- Explain the topic out loud in your own words. Talk about it to yourself or the mirror, if necessary.

## **Sequential learners prefer to:**

- Develop their ideas about the topic and gain understanding step by step, with each step following logically from the previous one.
- Follow logical, stepwise paths in finding solutions or drawing conclusions about the topic.
- Understand the logical connections between related ideas or pieces of information.
- Know a lot about specific aspects of a subject, but not about how to relate those aspects to the same subject or different subjects.

## **How can sequential learners help themselves?**

- Ask the instructor to fill in the skipped steps of information, or fill them in yourself by consulting references.
- Outline the topic for yourself in logical order.
- When writing, be sure to draw conclusions about your topic from the points that you present. Consider how your topic relates to the big picture.
- Strengthen your global thinking skills by relating new information or ideas to things you already know.

## **Global learners prefer to:**

- Learn in large "jumps".
- Jump to conclusions before sorting out how one arrives at these conclusions.
- Absorb material almost randomly without at first seeing the connections; then, suddenly "get it".
- Solve complex problems quickly.
- Put things together in a novel way once they have grasped the big picture.
- Get the big picture of a subject before mastering the details.

## **How can global learners help themselves?**

- Get an overview of the entire topic before going back to master the details (for example, skim through the whole chapter before going back to learn individual sections of the chapter).
- By the same token, when writing, think about the main ideas of your topic before going back to generate the examples, illustrations, facts, details, comparisons/contrasts, etc., to support these main ideas.
- Ask questions or consult references about how the topic relates to what you already know.
- Take heart in the fact that once you do learn the information or master your topic, you may be able to draw conclusions about it or apply it in novel ways that sequential thinkers would never dream of!

## Day One Assignments

1. Read the *Preface* and *On Writing the College Essay* (pp. 1 - 18) in 100 Successful College Application Essays. Taking on the role of the admissions officer that was assigned to you during class, prepare a 3 minute (brief!) discussion of the vital points that he or she presents about the "do's" and "don't's" of writing college application essays.
2. Choose an essay question (from the list that we reviewed in class) that you would like to answer; **or**, visit the website of the college of your choice. The admissions page usually explains how you can download the current application. Print the portion of the application which states the required essay question/s, and bring it to the next class.

### 3. WORD POWER

Read the last chapter, *Essays on Writing*, in your college essay book (pp. 283 - 291). Keeping in mind the points that we discussed about the connection between the reader and the writer, identify any phrases, words, ideas, descriptions, details, examples, testimonies, "hooks", etc., that you find particularly powerful or compelling. Be prepared to share these at the next class, and to answer *why* they are so powerful to you and *why* they enable you to connect with the writer.

### 4. BRAINSTORMING

Okay, it's time to stop reading what everyone else has written. Now, it's your turn to do the writing. First, do what you usually do to loosen up. Throw the football around. Listen to or play your music. Run a mile. Engage in whatever helps you to boost your level of energy. Then, set your timer for 15 minutes. Write down everything that comes to you in relation to the essay question that you selected. You can use the clustering techniques that we experienced in class. Or, you can write a stream of thoughts, phrases, sentences, ideas, feelings, experiences, images, metaphors, etc., -- whatever comes to mind. Just write. If you run out of things to write (and the timer is still running), then write whatever is going through your head -- even if it is, "this is stupid; I don't have anything else to say." Be sure to bring whatever you come up with to the next class.

### 5. FOCUSING IN

Read over what you just brainstormed and choose at least two items (any of the ideas, thoughts, examples, images, etc.) that you particularly like. Find a way to relate these items in a paragraph. You can write the description of a scene, the opening of a dialogue, an activity that is taking place, or even a "hook" introduction to an essay. Whatever you choose to write, immerse yourself as fully as possible into your writing. Show, don't tell. Again, be sure to bring what you create to the next class!

## DAY TWO ASSIGNMENTS

### Introduction to the College Application Essay:

- ❑ Read *Essays on Applying to College* (pp. 19 - 47) in your college essay book. As you read, note any introductions (find at least one) that you particularly like. What makes the intro grab your attention? Be specific. Be prepared to discuss your findings in class.
- ❑ Write a potential introductory paragraph for your college application essay. (Keep in mind that you don't have a second chance to make a first impression!) Be sure to "hook" your reader by following the hints and using one of the techniques suggested in your handouts (pp. 14-17).

### The Body:

- ❑ Read *Essays on Coming to America* (pp. 49 - 61) in your college essay book. As you read, note what makes the bodies to these essays particularly powerful. Do any of them have an underlying structure?
- ❑ Write at least one paragraph of the body to your college application essay. Remember to **show** vs. tell.

### The Conclusion:

- ❑ Read *Essays on Family* (pp. 89 - 124) in your college essay book. As you read, note what makes the conclusions to these essays particularly powerful. Bring specific examples to class.

## DAY THREE ASSIGNMENTS

1. Write the conclusion to your college application essay, and complete the body if you haven't already done so. Remember to leave the reader with an unforgettable statement or idea, or use one of the techniques for writing a powerful conclusion that is listed in your handouts.
2. **Be sure to bring several copies** of your college application essay (one for each person in the class, one for the teacher, and one for yourself) to class.
3. If you have time, read *Offbeat and Other Essays* (pp. 125 - 152) in your college essay book. As you read, note *how*, specifically, the writer makes meaning of his or her experience (use the points from *What makes a "meaningful" experience?* on p. 32, and questions to *Clarify your Meaning*, p. 33, as your guide).
4. Become familiar with the "Game of Revision" questions under each topic (pp. 33-37). Be sure to apply these questions about meaning, ideas, purpose, organization, coherence, clarity, and conciseness to your own essays. Think of ways that you can improve your overall essay by addressing some of these questions. You will be continuously revising your essays throughout the rest of the program.
5. Read *Self-Portraits* (pp. 153 - 202) in your college essay book. Again, determine how, specifically, the writer makes meaning of his or her experience. Be sure to use your handouts on meaning, pp. 32 – 33, as guidelines.



## DAY FOUR ASSIGNMENTS

1. Rewrite your college application essays (you should be on at least your second revision), addressing the comments that you received during your revision/feedback session. Make sure that you show the *meaning* you have made of your experience, and that your ideas are clearly presented in a compelling and organized way. Apply the tips and strategies from *Engaging Your Reader: Points for Revisions* (pp. 38-42) to your essay, and produce a draft that is clear, concise, and free of grammatical errors
2. Read *Idea Essays* (pp. 231 - 258) and *Essays on Work Experience* (pp. 259 - 272.)