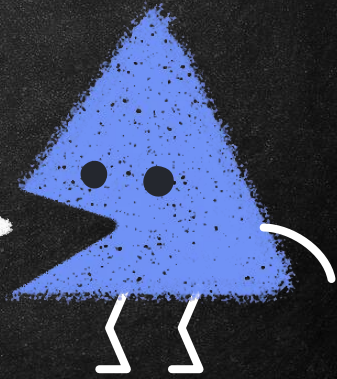


# WHAT MAKES IT GREAT?

Writing College Essays

## WHAT TO INCLUDE:

- A catchy opening sentence, or “hook”
- $\frac{1}{3}$  story,  $\frac{2}{3}$  the lesson or outcome of the story
- Information that isn't already in other parts of your college application
- The truth!



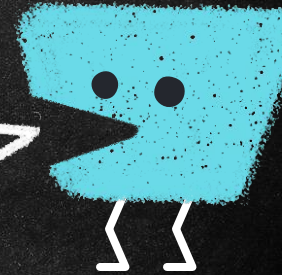
# TO DOS AND SOME NOT TO DOS

## DO

- Write about yourself
- Story will be true, but add some drama
- Don't be afraid to be vulnerable and open
- Use humor
- Engage the reader using all 5 senses
- Proofread!

## DON'T

- Stories about sports injuries
- COVID
- Stories about other people
- Talk about the "challenge" but not the effects
- List achievements
- Use cliches



# ESSAY EXAMPLE #1

MARCELA MARIE CASTILLO

## WRITING

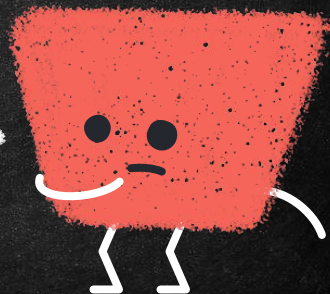
### Personal Essay

**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.**

The silence in the room was deafening. I was in a familiar place but certainly under very un-familiar circumstances. During the Christmas holidays of my sophomore year, I held my aunt Sofia's hand as she passed away peacefully surrounded by our family and infinite love. I look back and am grateful for the time I had with her.

Earlier that day, while sitting in front of a Bunsen burner with my properly adjusted goggles and ill-fitting white lab coat I noticed an office runner with a bright pink summons slip enter the lab. My teacher walked over to me and told me that I was to go to Principal Sister Mary Angelica's office right away. My first thought was that I was out of uniform, again. However, when I entered her office, my dad was there and simply said "It's your aunt. We have to leave now." I gathered my backpack from my locker as hot tears rolled down my flushed cheeks. I was numb. I was angry. I was scared.

The short ride home seemed to take forever. As my dad's car rolled to a stop, I leaped out of the car and raced through the house to the special room set up for my aunt. When I entered the room, my aunt Dorothy, my brother, and sister were around my aunt Sofia's bed. My aunt's face was ashen – gone was the glow from her eyes that she always had when she saw me. My dad was crying – I had never seen him cry before this moment. My aunt took my hand and told me that it was all right and to take care of my dad. I was numb. I was angry. I was scared.



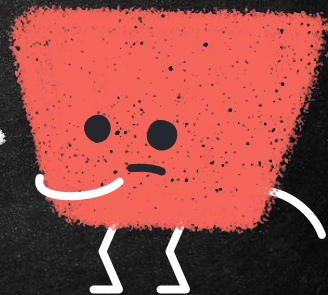
# ESSAY EXAMPLE #1

My aunt Sofia and I had spoken about this moment – about how she didn't want to be in a hospital surrounded by heartless sterile machines. Instead, she wanted to be in her bed covered by the quilt we had made together. She wanted to be surrounded by the people she loved the most. When my aunt first told me that she had cancer, her words were alien to me. I never thought I would have to face it head on. Yet here in her room I was staring right at it. Sure I was scared and numb. But I was also angry. Why isn't someone doing something about it? What about those people who are all alone or are forgotten?

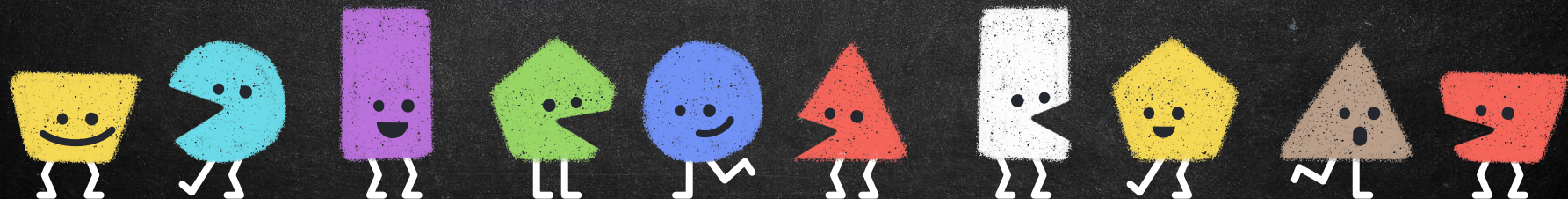
It makes you stop and think. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) every year over 220,000 cases of breast cancer are diagnosed in the United States and over 40,000 women and men die from it. Yes, it's scary. And what's my role? I am going to make a difference and be the voice of the future. I refuse to let my aunt simply be remembered as a statistic.

I've come a long way since that day. I miss my aunt terribly. However, she instilled in me the importance of giving to others. She always seemed to have an "appropriate" quote to tell me to prove a point – Einstein, Ghandi, Beyonce, and others. But the one she seemed to tell me the most was from a Star Trek movie where Spock says "Logic clearly dictates that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few." My goal is to enter government service as an advocate for public health – it's not Obamacare or Trumpcare, it's just health care.

As I wrap myself up in our quilt, I know my aunt would be proud of my determination to make a difference in the lives of others.



SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS  
ON THIS ESSAY...



## WRITING

## Personal Essay

**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.**

Underneath my bed is a box of masks. Every morning I reach into the box and pull out a few to carry with me. Sometimes, I wear them to disguise my thoughts and emotions. Other times, they act as a collection of faces I want to share with the outside world as I make my way through the journey of adolescence.

*I Can Do It Mask.* I slide this mask on at the start of every class. I want to prove to everyone, particularly to myself, that ADD will not beat me. Sometimes ADD can have its down side, like the occasional all-nighter I have to fight through because I was spending time perfecting my blog.

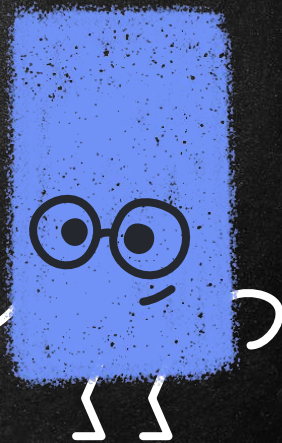
*Procrastinator Mask.* I'll get to that one later.

*Adult Responsibility Mask.* This is the heaviest of them all. Responsibilities build on top of one another adding to the mask's weight. Even when dealing with my parents – especially my mom and her "Aussie" way of doing things – my adult mask helps me keep my cool. With homework, writing my blog, volunteer work, and being a teenager, sometimes the burdensome load of this mask is intense. I just want to rip it off and enjoy being a high school kid.

*The Behind Closed Doors Mask.* This is the mask I wear when cuddling my stuffed animals or kissing my poster of One Direction or dancing around the room singing to Taylor Swift. I would be mortified if anyone saw me.

*Independence Mask.* I like to think this is a perfect fit, but occasionally I enter a state of exhaustion. At this point in time, I eagerly discard my independence mask and welcome my vulnerable mask. I fall into bed and turn on Netflix to watch my favorite episodes of Gilmore Girls. I don't like to wear the vulnerable mask but it's there when I need it and reminds me that I'm not invincible and still need mom's help.

Essay Example #2



*Don't Worry, Be Happy Mask.* I could be shopping, doing community service, or just hanging with my family – yes, even with my little brother – or friends. I really like this mask.

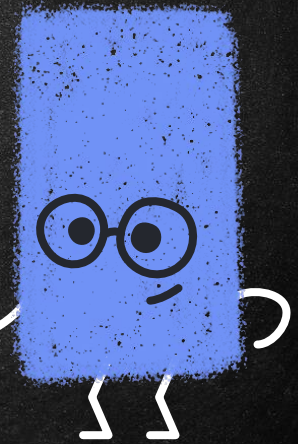
*Confidence Mask.* When I wear this mask, I get a shining beaming exterior. It's essential in every situation, like interviews or when trying to influence friends. Sometimes I worry that I don't have a clue what I'm talking about. But with this mask I have the confidence to share and speak from my heart.

*Procrastinator Mask.* I'm not perfect. With my ADD, I sometimes, give into temptation and go for instant gratification such as Facebook or friends. But this mask, sometimes with my mom's help, is always replaced by a different mask.

*Scared Little Girl Mask.* This mask lies beneath the surface of the others. I don't use this one very often anymore, but sometimes the world's a scary place. It can put you in those dark mindsets where you realize that you don't compare to the images of tall, skinny girls you see everywhere. However, I have big dreams and big ambitions. Now, I think the world won't be big enough to handle ME. I know that younger girls will see me as a real girl in the real world. As I mature, I recognize that this mask no longer serves its purpose and it will stay under my bed.

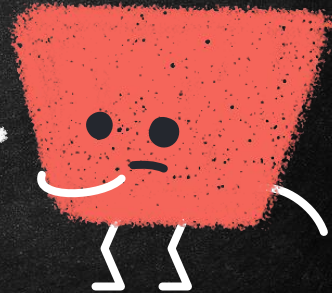
*Dorri's True Face.* As I transition from childhood to adulthood and embark on my journey to college, I'm going to leave my bag of masks. I no longer need the rigid casts that at times deflect or protect me from knowing my inner self. Because at the end of the day, I'm not just one of these masks – I'm all of them and they are each very real. I'm ready for the unknown and eager to let the world see my true face – without the mask.

Essay Example #2



# 2022-23 COMMON APP ESSAY PROMPTS

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then 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. Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?
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 that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?
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.





# THE COLLEGE ESSAY

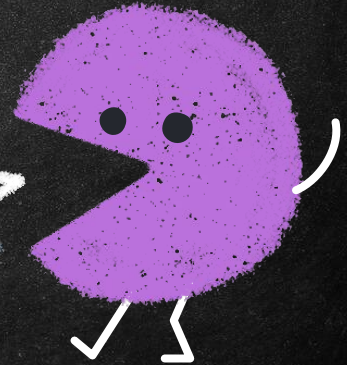
YOUR SNEAKER COLLECTION MAKING THE PERFECT PANCAKE  
PHOTOGRAPHING SQUIRRELS DRAWING CARTOONS COACHING YOUR  
BROTHER'S SOCCER TEAM QUITTING BALLET BUILDING CAR ENGINES  
LEARNING MAHJONG WHY BEING SHY IS A SUPERPOWER THE FINALS OF  
YOUR COMMUNITY PING PONG TOURNAMENT DAWN KAYAKING

WRITE ABOUT SOMETHING  
*you actually Care About*  
NOT THAT YOU THINK YOU  
SHOULD CARE ABOUT

WHY BOYSENBERRY JAM IS MISUNDERSTOOD YOUR LOVE OF FINGERNAIL  
POLISH DISCOVERING THE SECRET MENU AT YOUR FAVORITE RESTAURANT  
WHY EVERYONE ELSE LOADS THE DISHWASHER WRONG THE REASON  
BUTTERFLIES ARE THE LEAST UNDERSTOOD INSECT WHAT IT'S REALLY LIKE TO  
WAITRESS AT 6 A.M. THE LITTLE-KNOWN CHALLENGES OF PLAYING THE  
HARMONICA BADLY ROLLERBLADING ACROSS CALIFORNIA

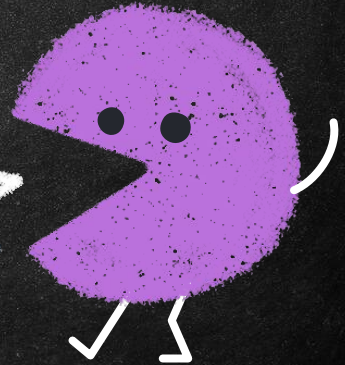
# HOW TO FIND YOUR STORY...

- Values
- One still frame of an entire movie
- What pivotal moment has impacted your life or trajectory
- What makes you unique
- Cultural traditions or experiences
- Events or situations that taught you a life lesson
- Difficult or challenging times
- 'aha!' moments



## SOME ESSAY TOPIC IDEAS:

- A story from your childhood
- Your relationship with a person you admire
- A story from a time when you traveled to another city or country
- If you were not born in Illinois, the story of where you grew up, when or why you moved, the transition, etc.
- What you have gained or learned from being a part of a club, sports team, your job, etc.
- A loss



# COLLEGE ESSAY: Self-Editing Checklist

We've talked about a lot of different elements that can help your essay shine. Now that you've got a rough draft on paper, go through it using this list and see how you might improve your work for the second draft.

- Topic: Have you chosen a topic that really matters to you? Is that passion coming through?
- Voice: Does this essay sound like you? Read it aloud to check. Give it to a friend and ask.
- Resume: Does the essay sound like you are trying to review your resume? Remember, it shouldn't!
- Generality: Does this essay contain vivid, memorable language rather than generalities?
- Specificity: Does your essay have specific examples that bring the writing to life?
- Reality: Does the essay show the real you, not a pretend version you think admissions wants?
- Humor: Is the essay funny if you're funny, serious if you're serious, thoughtful if you're thoughtful, etc.?
- Evolution: Does the essay show some way that you've grown or changed over the years?
- Clarity: Do the paragraphs flow easily from one to the next? Is the order and structure working well?

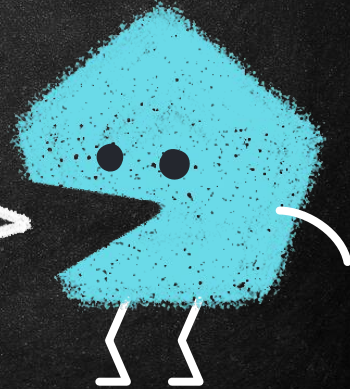
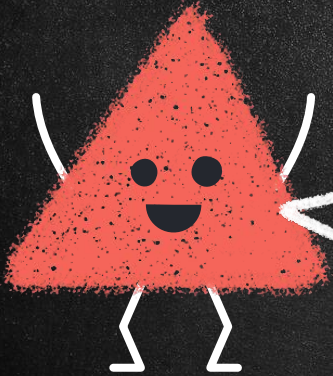


Now here's one more challenge. Writing almost always gets stronger when you cut out words. Go through your essay carefully and search for words and phrases that really don't need to be there. This is another good time to read it aloud and see if there are places where lines are too long or extra words make you trip a bit as you read. Cut, cut, cut where you can, and your writing will become even more alive.

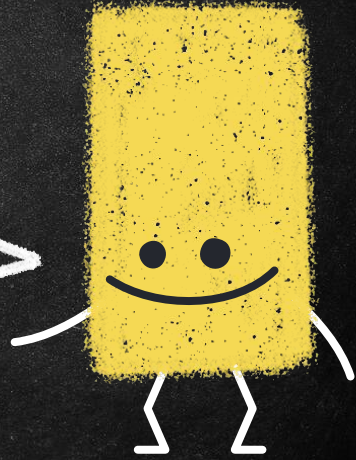
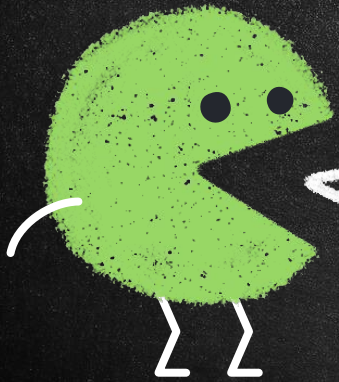
# SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAYS

Examples:

- ★ *The Major essay*: “Why are you interested in the major you indicated as your first-choice major?”
- ★ *The “Why Us” essay*: “Tell us why you want to attend (insert college here).”
- ★ *The “Community/Diversity” essay*: “A hallmark of the (insert college here) experience is being able to learn and live in a community with a wide range of perspectives. How do you or would you learn from and contribute to diverse, collaborative communities?”



ANY QUESTIONS?



-YOU CAN EMAIL A ROUGH DRAFT FOR REVIEW TO:

MS. HOLMES: SHOLMES@MAINE207.ORG

-CHECK OUT "THE COLLEGE ESSAY GUY" ON  
YOUTUBE!

-FOR ACCESS TO THE ESSAY WRITING WORKBOOK:

BIT.LY/3NHXJCZ

CODE: K6HXDOD

