

Finding Your Voice – Morning Writing

from Wow Online – College Essay

Part 1

What did you do this morning from the moment you woke up until you left your home?

Open a new document on your computer, and quickly write down as much as you can recall, using all of your senses. Be specific, but don't worry about making sense or sounding clever. You can write fragments, sentences, lists or run-ons. It doesn't matter, because you are not writing an essay; you are simply capturing details.

Write fast, and do not judge what you write. Don't even read it as you go along. Just keep moving forward.

1. Set a timer for ten minutes.
2. Write about your morning.
3. When the timer stops, stop writing.

Part 2

Your writing voice is unique, and often shines through when you relax and write freely. Look back at what you wrote about your morning, and highlight great details or examples of your voice. Find three segments that truly sound like you. They don't have to be exciting or clever; they just have to sound like YOU. For example:

- Something you always say, do or think.
- A description of something that screams "my house!" or "my room!" or "my mom!"
- A phrase you like, a detailed description or something clear and specific that sounds just like you.

Step 1: Understand the Prompt

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Which prompt are you responding to?

In general terms, what is the prompt trying to find out about you?

If you are writing a Common Application essay, think about the Common App in general (not the 7 essay choices specifically.) What is the purpose of a Common App essay? If you are writing a different essay, read the prompt carefully. In your own words, what is it trying to find out?

What do readers already know?

Before you decide on an essay topic, think about what readers already know about you. Remember that an application contains a great deal of information. In the space below, make a list of some of the things readers can find out about you from the rest of your application (e.g., I play drums; I babysit; I have a 3.7; I got 24 on my ACT; I volunteered at a soup kitchen last summer.)

What do I want readers to know?

Now think about what you want readers to know about you that they can't find out from the rest of your application. In the space below, list some of your best characteristics (e.g., I am confident; I don't give up; I used to be a follower, but I have become more of a leader; I have always been a leader, but I've become more humble and able to follow others; I am creative; I love a challenge; I have overcome my fears and feel strong.)

Step 2: Brainstorm Ideas

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Instructions

Before you decide what to write about, you'll want to explore several ideas. Depending on which essay you are writing, you could approach this task in different ways:

- If you are working on your Common Application essay, you might want to consider several different options from the choices they offer (a background story, a time when you experienced failure, a time when you challenged a belief, etc.), or you might have several ideas in one area (e.g., several background stories, several places where you are content.)
- If you are responding to a prompt other than the Common Application, keep an open mind and consider various stories that could effectively show readers something meaningful about you.

Example #1

Prompt	Common App (A background story)
Story Idea	Teaching Ellie to swim
Notes	I worked with her all summer, she was scared, wouldn't put her face in the water, last day she finally tried it. I didn't feel frustrated, really wanted to help her. Pool was quiet that day, a little overcast, she was playful and trusted me.
What do I want readers to know about me?	I am patient and diligent. This was the first time I felt like I taught someone something. I want to do that again, whether as a swim instructor or in other aspects of my life.

Example #2

Prompt	Common App (An event that sparked growth and new understanding)
Story Idea	Robotics competition
Notes	This year we almost won the State championship. Our coach always told us to focus on one important thing at a time. Under pressure, I remembered that advice, and encouraged my teammates to follow it. We worked so well together. Even though we didn't win, it was our best year yet. I was proud of my ability to stay calm and proactive under pressure because that is not usually how people see me.
What do I want readers to know about me?	I know how to focus and lead others. I apply the lessons I learn.

Step 2: Brainstorm Ideas

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Think of Several Ideas of Your Own

Keep in mind that you are juggling three things at once: characteristics (what you want readers to know), prompts and topics. Stay flexible and open to surprises.

Idea #1

Prompt	
Story Idea	
Notes	
What do I want readers to know about me?	

Idea #2

Prompt	
Story Idea	
Notes	
What do I want readers to know about me?	

Continue with additional ideas

Step 3: Focus on Theme

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A traditional personal statement is built around a theme, which has two parts:

- 1) What happened?
- 2) Why does it matter?

Before you continue, choose one idea from the possibilities you came up with in Step 2.

What happened?

What will you write about in your essay? Choose one scene/experience/moment from the ideas you came up with in Step 2.

Why does it matter?

What does this topic illustrate that the reader wouldn't know from the rest of your application? Focus on characteristics, not accomplishments.