



# The Wow Method

## Your College Essay In Ten Simple Steps

### CONTENT

**1 Understand the Prompt**  
Before choosing a topic, you should understand what the prompt is asking and how the essay fits into the application. That means reflecting on what readers already know about you and thinking about what they can't find out from the rest of your application.

**2 Brainstorm Ideas**  
In Step 2, we encourage students to consider several different topics. For each one, we discuss the story idea, the prompt, and what readers will learn about you. You might be surprised by what you choose to write about.

**3 Focus on Theme**  
Every essay needs a theme to help the writer stay focused. The theme has two parts: 1) "What happened?" (What story are you sharing?) and 2) "Why does it matter?" (What will readers learn about you that they can't find out from the rest of your application?)

**4 Free Write for Details**  
Once the theme is clear, it's time to get some words on the page. It doesn't matter what those words are or how many you write. This free write is a chance to capture details, focusing on the "What happened?" aspect of your theme.

**5 Write Draft 1**  
Step 5 is a content draft. We suggest writing more than the word limit so you don't overthink this first draft or try to make it perfect. You'll have plenty of time to focus on structure and polish later.

**6 Review Prompt and Theme**  
In Step 6, we read the first draft with the prompt and theme in mind, then give students writing exercises to help focus the essay and add details where needed. This review is for content only. We don't comment yet on structure or polish.

### CONTENT + STRUCTURE

**7 Write Draft 2**  
In Step 7, students take a step back and review the work they've completed so far, including theme, free writes, draft 1 and Step 6 writing exercises. Then it's time to write draft 2, this time paying attention to both content and structure.

**8 Review Content and Structure**  
In Step 8, we review the essay for content and structure. We add notes in the margin, pointing out what works and where the essay could be improved, based on the student's willingness and ability to take the essay further.

### CONTENT + STRUCTURE + POLISH

**9 Write Draft 3**  
The polish draft gives the student an opportunity to step back once again and read the essay with fresh eyes. The goal is to tie up any loose ends and make sure the essay is clean, but not to rewrite it beyond recognition.

**10 Final Review and Proofread**  
The final review is for clarity and consistency only. We focus on grammar, spelling and punctuation. Perfection is not the goal. You are a high school student and should sound like one.