

Thank you to Ellen Gaddie of [Simply College Prep](#) for sharing this email, which she sends to parents before a student starts working on application essays. Whether or not you use the Wow Method, you can follow Ellen's framework, which includes an explanation of her essay coaching philosophy, an introduction to her process, and an important note about staying on track with a clear schedule.

Hello parents,

This email is long, so please bear with me as the information is vital to your student's essay success.

Soon your student will begin writing their main essay (a.k.a. personal statement). Since "essay" is a stress-inducing word, I work hard to make this straightforward for your student.

I am proud to be certified in and use the Wow Method. I am also one of a select group of consultants who completed training and wrote a personal statement. Wow honed my essay coaching skills, and I continue to see great results from even the most reluctant writer.

To paraphrase the president of the Wow, Kim Lifton, this is what I do:

I teach content first, followed by structure and polish. I guide your student through a simple, reflective writing process that teaches them how to understand the task at hand. I give simple instructions and the freedom to make their own editorial decisions.

My role, therefore, is essay coach, not essay editor.

Wow Method Steps

Before your student and I start brainstorming ideas, they will have pre-work to get them thinking and ready. The introductory exercises are "Finding Your Voice" and "10 Steps to a Great College Essay," followed by the ten steps below.

1. Understand the Prompt
2. Brainstorm Ideas
3. Focus on the Theme
4. Free Write for Details
5. Write Draft 1 (Content)
6. Review Prompt and Theme
7. Write Draft 2 (Content+Structure)
8. Review Content & Structure
9. Write Draft 3 (C+S+Polish)

10. Edit and Proofread

The Schedule

I will guide your student through these steps within 3-4 weeks. Sounds great, right? It is, but it requires a lot of focus on your student's part and meeting deadlines. Most students will start near the end of the school year and complete their essays by the end of July. That leaves plenty of time to enjoy summer and continue working on college research, starting applications, and other work.

About the College Essay

I want to assure you that there is no ideal, impressive, or expected topic that your student should pick. In fact, the topic is secondary to the story they will tell in their voice and what matters the most.

Readers know what students do, thanks to the activities and honors section of the application. They also know what's on the transcript and may even have test scores. However, they don't know what experiences your child has had and how those may have shaped them into the person they are now -- not who they may become. The essay is the opportunity for each student to tell the admissions reader what and why they want them to know something about them.

Admissions readers are looking for the person in the personal statement. They do not want a structured five-paragraph impersonal essay. Really. Not kidding. So, I have to undo everything your student learned about writing a five-paragraph paper, teach them the art of developing content, and assure them the structure comes later.

If you're thinking, "OMG, how will my teen figure out a story to tell? Then my answer is to take a deep breath. Your child does have something to say, and I will help them discover that through the essay process.

I beg you not to do an internet search on essays that got kids into Name Brand U. I assure you the essay was not **the** reason for admissions, as most colleges review applications holistically and in totality. If you do, please keep your findings to yourself. Modeling a personal essay on someone else's will erase your student's voice and may reinforce a belief that they have nothing to say or worse, that you don't believe they can write something great. They can. I know it.

How Can You Help?

1. Please help keep your teen on track (no surprises, trips, or anything that would delay their ability to meet the deadlines). Think of them as a journalist with tight deadlines to meet.
2. Please refrain from coming up with an idea for their essay.
3. Please refrain from doing any writing for them now or later. It is vital the story they write is genuine and written in *their* voice.

Admissions readers read thousands of essays and know when a parent or other adult has "helped" with the writing. Your intentions may be good, but to further dissuade you understand that each student must sign an acknowledgment that the work and information on their application are all theirs.

Finally, I ask you to trust me, the process, and your teen. They will find their story.

I appreciate your support, and please reach out if you have any concerns.

Ellen

P.S. Attached is a sample schedule for you to review. Your teen will have their own version once we negotiate and agree on their start date.