WOW | YOUR COLLEGE ESSAY EXPERTS

Adapting Wow's Process for Supplemental Essays

After completing the Common Application essay, we guide students through the same 10-step process for their remaining essays. We sometimes combine or skip exercises, according to the student and prompts, without losing key concepts: prework, brainstorming, theme, content draft/exercises, content + structure draft(s), and polish draft(s).

To work efficiently, we continue to give clear deadlines, set follow-up tasks for ourselves and check in the morning after deadlines.

We create subfolders for each school to stay organized.

Steps 1 and 2

Prework

- While prompts and prework questions vary, each school's prework will help students understand the prompt(s) and brainstorm ideas. The prework is the equivalent of Step 1 (Understand the Prompt) and Step 2 (Brainstorm Ideas).
- Think of their notes as conversation starters for your upcoming meeting.
- Send the prework assignment approximately 1 week before it is due. The due date should be 2-3 days before the meeting.

Brainstorming Guidelines

- Start by briefly checking in or chatting with the student to help make them feel comfortable. This should only take a couple minutes.
- Then talk through the school's prompts, one at a time.
    - First, make sure they understand what the prompt is asking. (The prework should break down the prompts.)
    - Then ask them to tell you about their idea(s) for that prompt. Ask follow-up and prompting questions. Redirect them if an idea doesn't answer the prompt.
    - Ask them to choose which effective idea they want to write about. Sometimes this is clear from the beginning.
    - Make sure they have a clear and concise theme of some kind.
- You may need to remind them to think of the school's essays (and often the Common App) as a package, and help them avoid writing about the same topic/characteristics for multiple prompts.
- At the end of the meeting, confirm their theme(s), as well as their next steps/deadlines.
- It can be helpful to talk about their schedule a week or two at a time. You can usually set deadlines similar to the Common App schedule, though once the school year starts, some students may need more time.

Adapting essays for similar prompts

- When working with a student on more than one school, you will likely see similar prompts.
- Some prework will ask them to consider their previous supplemental essay topics as ideas.
- You can also mention this to students, especially if they have a story/idea/draft that's a strong fit for another prompt.
- While you shouldn't plan the entire essay during the brainstorm, talk about how they'd adapt their original essay by comparing its prompt and the new prompt.
    - What are they each asking?
    - What are their word counts?
    - What could the student possibly add or cut to clearly answer the new prompt?

Steps 3-5

Applying Steps 3 and 4

- Assign theme and free write exercises for every essay, due the night of the brainstorm.
- Depending on the prompt, the theme may not perfectly fit a traditional "Why happened?" (anchor story) and "Why does it matter?" (characteristics).
    - E.g., The prompt is short and includes multiple questions.
    - The student should still write their theme as two clear "I" statements:
        - What are you writing about? (main focus/story)
        - Why does it matter? (what readers will learn about you)
- Regardless of the theme, the student should know <u>what</u> they intend to write about and <u>why</u> they have chosen this topic or other content.
- If the student is modifying an existing essay and has very little additional content, the free write may not be necessary. Use your best judgement.

Content Draft (Step 5)

- Encourage them to focus on content, getting their story/ideas/theme on the page. They don't need to worry about perfecting their opening line, structure, or language.
- The student may or may not utilize their free write.
- The draft can be a little messy or long (but they don't necessarily need to write a ton of extra content for short essays).
- Whatever they turn in, open your next email by complementing them on writing a strong draft, developing their ideas, etc.

Steps 6-10

Step 6 and Step 7 best practices

- Use your judgment on which exercises to assign, according to the student and prompt.
    - Think about what you've learned about the student's willingness and ability. What would help them make progress?
- For longer essays/when the student needs help developing content, consider assigning Step 6 Part 1.
    - You can also prompt students with the same type of comments and questions during your first round of content + structure feedback.
- While you typically don't need to assign Step 6 Part 2, consider sharing feedback on their opening during revision: affirm their choice, suggest another to help restructure their essay, etc.
- Similarly, students might not need to do Step 7 Part 1, but you can still encourage them to review their past work and make notes before revision.

Content + structure draft (Step 7 Part 2)

- Whichever exercises they're completed, the student should take their best shot at revising within the word limit.
- If they're unsure about how to revise, remind them that you'll share direct feedback on their next draft.
- This revision may be similar to their first draft or very different.
    - If a student writes a strong content draft for a shorter/simpler prompt, they may not need to make many major changes during revision.

Reviewing for content + structure + polish (Steps 8-10)

- Aim for about 2-3 rounds of feedback, plus proofreading.
- Always review the prompt and theme, and let them guide your feedback.
    - Some prompts are very specific. Make sure the student is answering the question(s).
    - Check the word limit; the content comments you share on a shorter essay might not be the same feedback you'd give on a longer essay.
- Start with content and structure: What does the essay do well, and what could be improved or clarified?
    - Consider suggesting content/ideas from past exercises and prework.
    - Keep an eye out for formal introductions and conclusions, which are often heavy-handed, redundant, and/or take up precious space in shorter essays.
- Remember what you've learned about the student's willingness and ability. Do they get overwhelmed by too many comments? Will they add a lot of content every time you prompt them?
- Our general essay review guidelines and tips still apply.