

Course outline:

Day 1 **Guiding questions:** What is this scary and unfamiliar thing called the college essay? How does it differ from the other essays I've written? But more importantly, what could I possibly write about that someone else will find interesting?

Homework:

- Read "What is the Reflective Essay?"
- Select a prompt (UC or Common Application)
- Write 5-8 mini-introductions based on topic ideas generated in class
- Bring a candid photo of yourself from childhood

"Tell all the Truth but tell it Slant" – Emily Dickinson

1. Warm up with the lyrics to a song that provides a narrative snapshot.
2. Introductions and course syllabus. Set classroom norms.
3. Read "An Applicant's Perspective" and discuss the key points.
4. Go through the typical essay types – pros and cons of each. Essays to avoid.
5. Archaeology of Self activity (similar to skeleton)
6. Do 20 Questions activity to generate topic ideas. Rank.
7. How to begin mini-lecture (introductions)
8. Sample essay: Hardship
9. Tools of the day:

Day 2 **Guiding questions:** I picked a topic... now what? How do I show without showing off? I know what I want to say, but how do I make it interesting? And how do I avoid sounding like every other applicant?

Homework:

- Read "The Lively Art of Writing"
- Write a draft of your essay (~500 words) and share it with me via Google Docs <balmeo@gmail.com> by 8:30 p.m.
- Bring a typed, double spaced copy of your essay to class

"Show smoke and let the reader infer fire." – Dennis Jerz

1. Warm up with the lyrics to a song that provides a narrative snapshot.
2. Share introductions with a partner and rank them. Select a topic.
3. Mining Memories activity (photos)
4. What do we mean by "show, not tell"? mini-lecture
5. The five senses of memory writing activity
6. Break into partners and tell the story of your chosen topic. Partners record details.
7. Hand out guiding questions and begin brainstorming around chosen topic.
8. Sample essay: Personal quality
9. Tools of the day:

Day 3 **Guiding questions:** What does my essay really say about me? How do I say more with less? Which of my details are telling details? Where do I need to focus my attention in revision? How can I revise more effectively?

“If everything is important, nothing is important.”

1. Warm up with the lyrics to a song that provides a narrative snapshot.
2. Climbing up and down the ladder of abstraction: How to convey the abstract with the concrete mini-lecture
3. Read Will Baker’s “My Children Explain the Big Issues”
4. Showing emotions activity (anxiety, fear, anticipation, relief, humiliation, etc.)
5. Decide what you want your essay to say without saying directly
6. Say more with less mini-lecture: being selective
7. Read Julia Alvarez’ “Queens”. Which details show _____?
8. Focus on one area to revise for language and work on revision.
9. Hand out holistic rubric.
10. Sample essay: Influential person
11. Tools of the day:

Homework:

- Read sample essays and holistic rubric – score
- Revise your essay on Google Docs by 8:30 p.m.
- Bring four copies of your typed, double-spaced revised essay to class

Day 4 **Guiding questions:** What will take my essay from good to great? How can I replicate this process for other essays? What are my next steps?

Homework:

- Work on that final draft!

“Writing and reading decrease our sense of isolation. They deepen and widen and expand our sense of life: they feed the soul. When writers make us shake our heads with the exactness of their prose and their truths, and even make us laugh about ourselves or life, our buoyancy is restored. We are given a shot at dancing with, or at least clapping along with, the absurdity of life, instead of being squashed by it over and over again. It's like singing on a boat during a terrible storm at sea. You can't stop the raging storm, but singing can change the hearts and spirits of the people who are together on that ship.” – Anne Lamott

1. In groups: Discuss the sample essays and rankings. Try to come to a consensus (norming)
2. In groups: Guided peer editing workshop
3. Individual revision time
4. Meanwhile: One-on-one conferences