



Ivy Method Essay Brainstorm & Structure Guide

A great College Essay tells a compelling story that reveals an applicant's personal qualities and growth. The best stories frequently come from the most unexpected places. All of our students begin by working through the below prompts on paper to unlock ideas and uncover great personal stories to write about.

- Do you have any weird, random hobbies or passions? (Think: Origami, samurai movies, making pizza, scuba diving, blacksmithing, etc.)
- List every single extracurricular activity you've ever participated in, from childhood to now.
- What are your favorite classes in school? Why?
- Are there any funny, fun, or crazy stories you have that you love to tell others?
- What have you been up to the past 2-3 summers?
- What are your favorite books?
- What are your favorite movies?
- What are your favorite videogames?
- What are your favorite TV shows?
- What are your favorite foods?
- What are your favorite trips you've been on? Why?
- What do you love to do for fun?
- What intellectual interests do you love to explore outside of school?

- Is there a person who has deeply influenced how you think? This could be someone famous/publicly known, or someone important in your own life.
- Do you remember a time when you failed at something, or maybe just felt like you were outside of your comfort zone? What happened? What did that feel like, and what did you do? What did you learn from that experience?
- Are there any defining events in your life in the last ten years? Examples: Moving to a new town or school, meeting or losing someone important, or building a friendship or an interest or skill.
- Think about your family's history. What makes your family different, unique from others? What have you gained or learned from this?
- Is there a problem you've solved or would like to solve? It might be an ethical problem, an intellectual challenge, or something that's important to your community. If so, what is it and why is it important to you?

Narrowing It Down

- Which of the above activities or interests has had a BIG impact on your life?
- Which has taught you something important about life/who you are?
- Pick ONE of these activities to brainstorm on more deeply
 - **How** has this activity or interest impacted your life?
 - **Why** is it meaningful to you?
 - **What** life lessons has it taught you?
 - **Try to write as much as you can!** Feel free to answer these questions for any interest or activity that has had a big impact on your life.

How to Structure Your Essay

Once you have identified some possible ideas to write about, you're ready to start drafting. STRUCTURE is the most important first step in crafting your college essay. We're big fans of the "Story Sandwich" (or Story/Reflection/Story):

Introduction: A gripping, in-the-moment story about a unique/interesting life experience that uses imagery and relevant details.

Body: Personal reflection! Explain how the experience in the introduction changed your perspective, or conversely, describe a change in your perspective that led to the experience in the introduction.

Conclusion: Bring it back to your story! Either return to the exact moment of the introduction, or return to a similar, parallel moment that shows how you applied the lessons learned during the essay's body paragraphs.