

# The Personal Essay



It's All About You!

**College Admission Coach, LLC**

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# What will colleges not know about you **unless you tell them?**

A 500–650 word opportunity to show a side of you that your gpa, transcript and test scores don't reveal. What matters to you? Here's your chance to reveal just that.



## Tip

**Think about what they already see in your application:** the classes you've taken, if you have studied hard (those grades), whether you perform well on standardized tests, how you've spent some of your time outside of the classroom.

That's pretty much it.

# Where do you start?

1. Experiences
2. Identity
3. Details

(These things combined make us unique. And also interesting to people who read your applications!)



## Tip

To really make the most of this essay, be **vulnerable**, be **transparent**, but above all, **be true to who you are!**

I'm going to lead you through a series of **Brainstorming Exercises** to help you think of ideas for your personal essay topic. Through this series of visual prompts and exercises you'll have several great ideas to choose from.

Let's begin with your **EXPERIENCES**



Everyone has a story to tell that will reveal part of your true self, your own personality, which is exactly what colleges want to learn about you.

# Important Note:

- When you take notes, please write down **story ideas**.
- Rather than write “soccer” write **“soccer: that time when my mom punched the coach.”**
- Rather than write: “babysitting gig” write: **“babysitting, that time when every single kid vomited on me.”**
- The goal is for stories that will be memorable to your reader!



Write down a memory of when you helped someone who was having a hard time.

What did you do that made a difference?

When have you felt vulnerable?

What makes you feel supported?





## Not one of the crowd


Write down a time when you **felt** different than everyone else.



# When have you dared to be different?

To actually do something differently, or when you chose to take a different path.  
The previous slide was about how you *felt*, this is about when you *acted* differently.





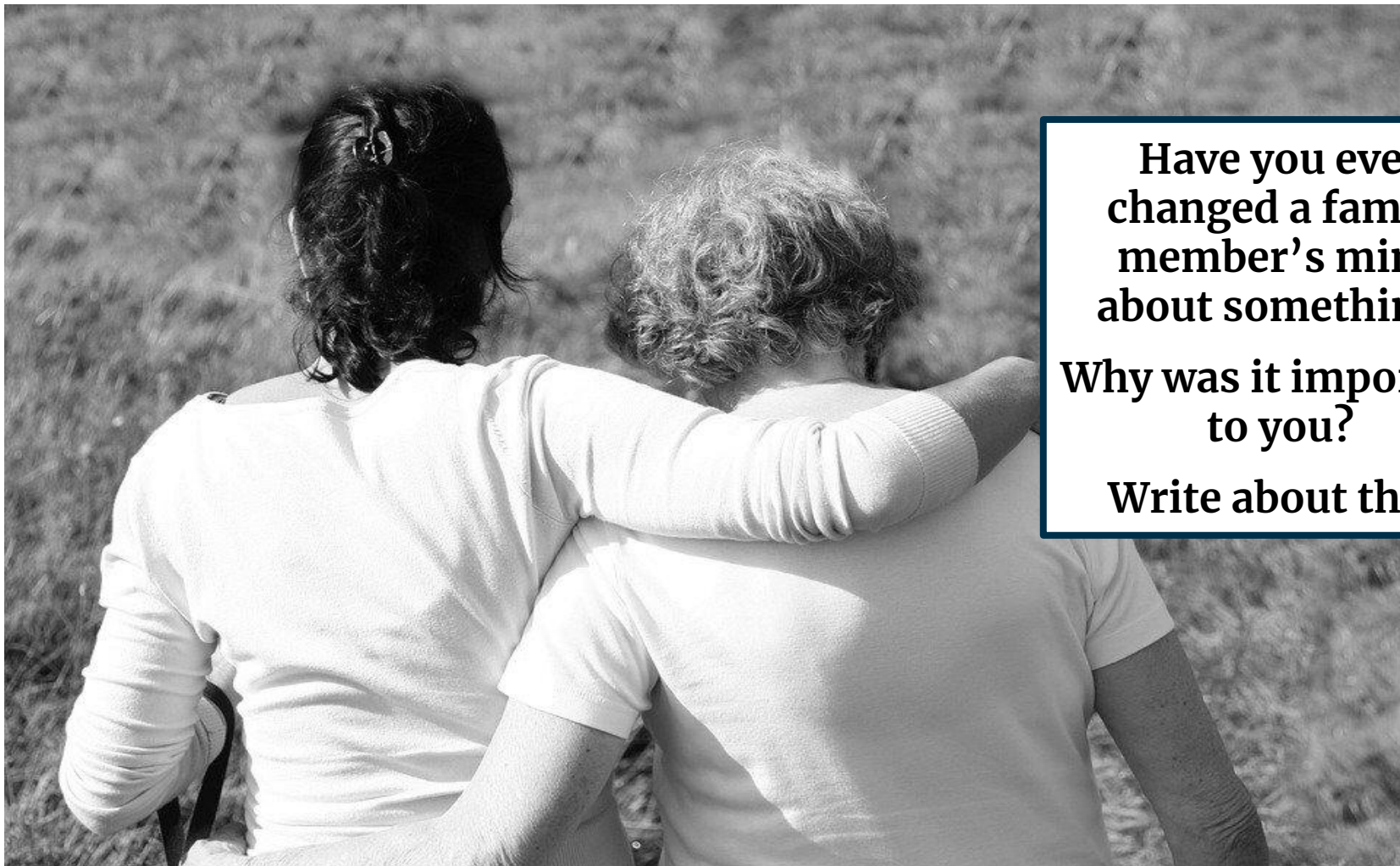
Share about a time when you worked with other people to reach a common goal. What was your role?

Write down a  
time when  
you acted as a  
mediator or a  
peacemaker.





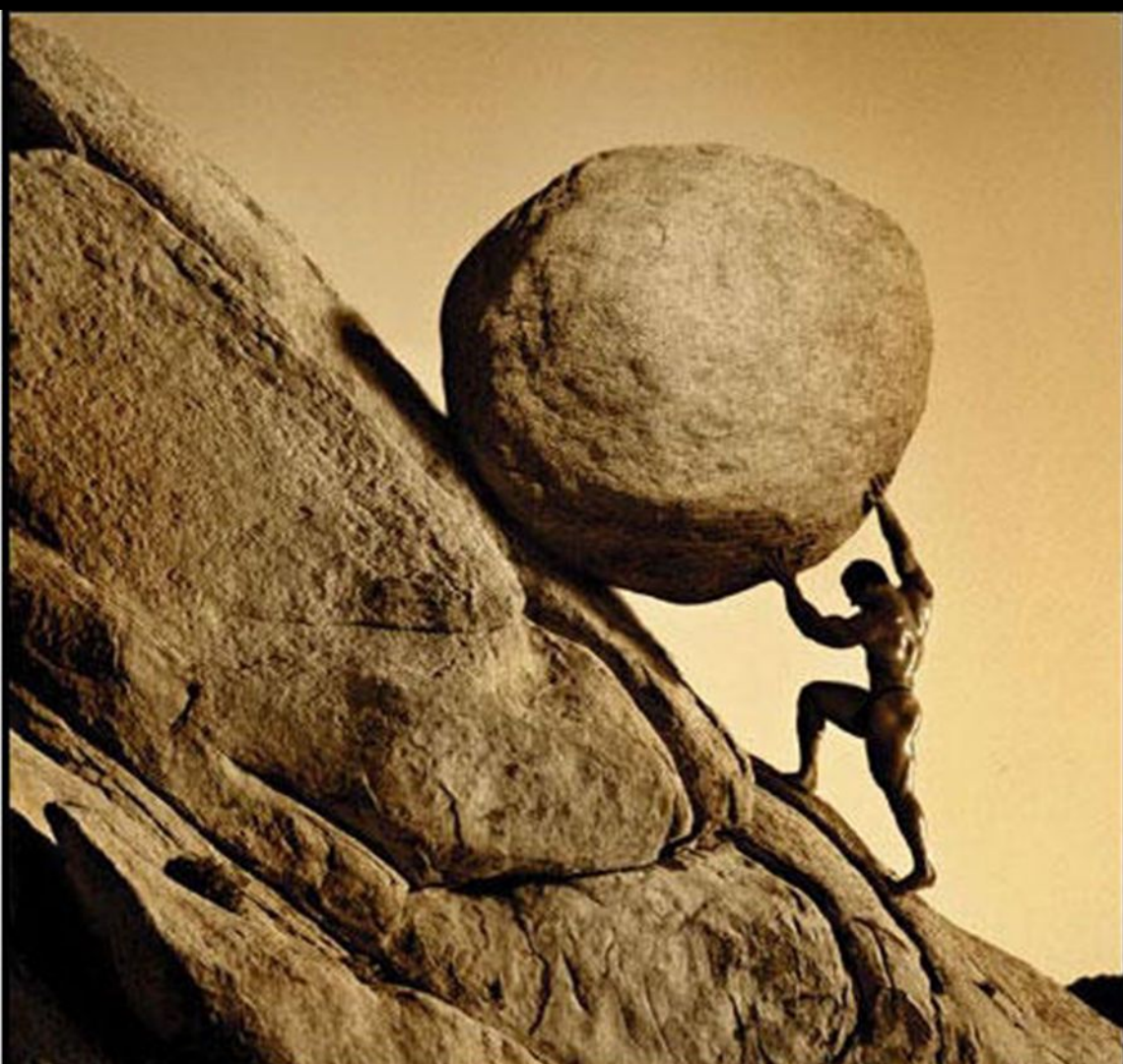
Write about a time when you were a leader or a role model. Have you led a group toward something they might not have done or gone-to on their own?



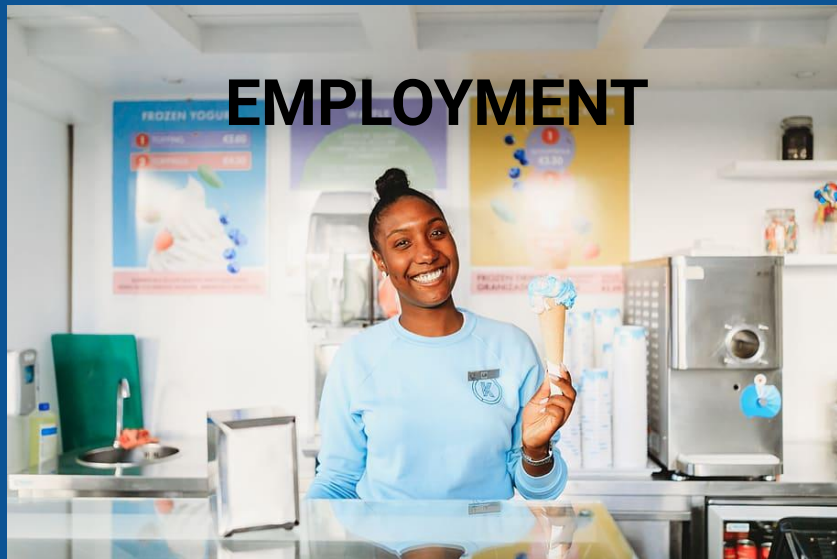
**Have you ever  
changed a family  
member's mind  
about something?  
Why was it important  
to you?  
Write about that.**



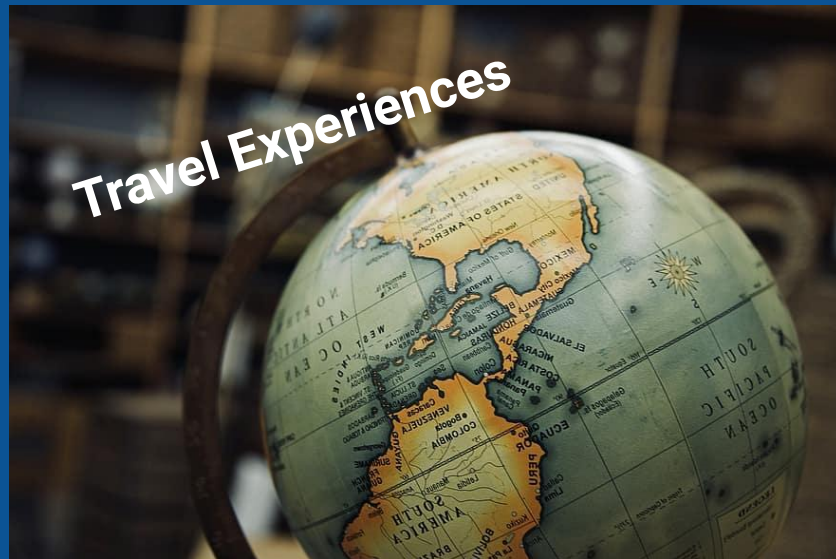
Write about  
a time when  
you failed or  
struggled, or  
maybe  
something  
you are still  
working on  
that you  
have not yet  
succeeded at



## EMPLOYMENT



## Travel Experiences



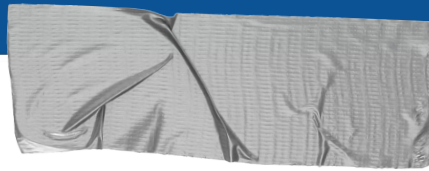
## Clubs and Activities



## Volunteering







# Identity

- **You just explored some of your Experiences. Now you will think about your Identity.**

Your identity is one of your fundamental qualities. It's an essential part of your character, and what helps to distinguish you from others.

- **[Essence Objects Exercise](#)**







### FOOD!

- Write down your ethnic background or your national heritage.
- What food or meal is a favorite in your family?
- Something that has been passed down through generations?
- Is there a particular food that you eat at one time of the year - write down your favorite memory that it evokes



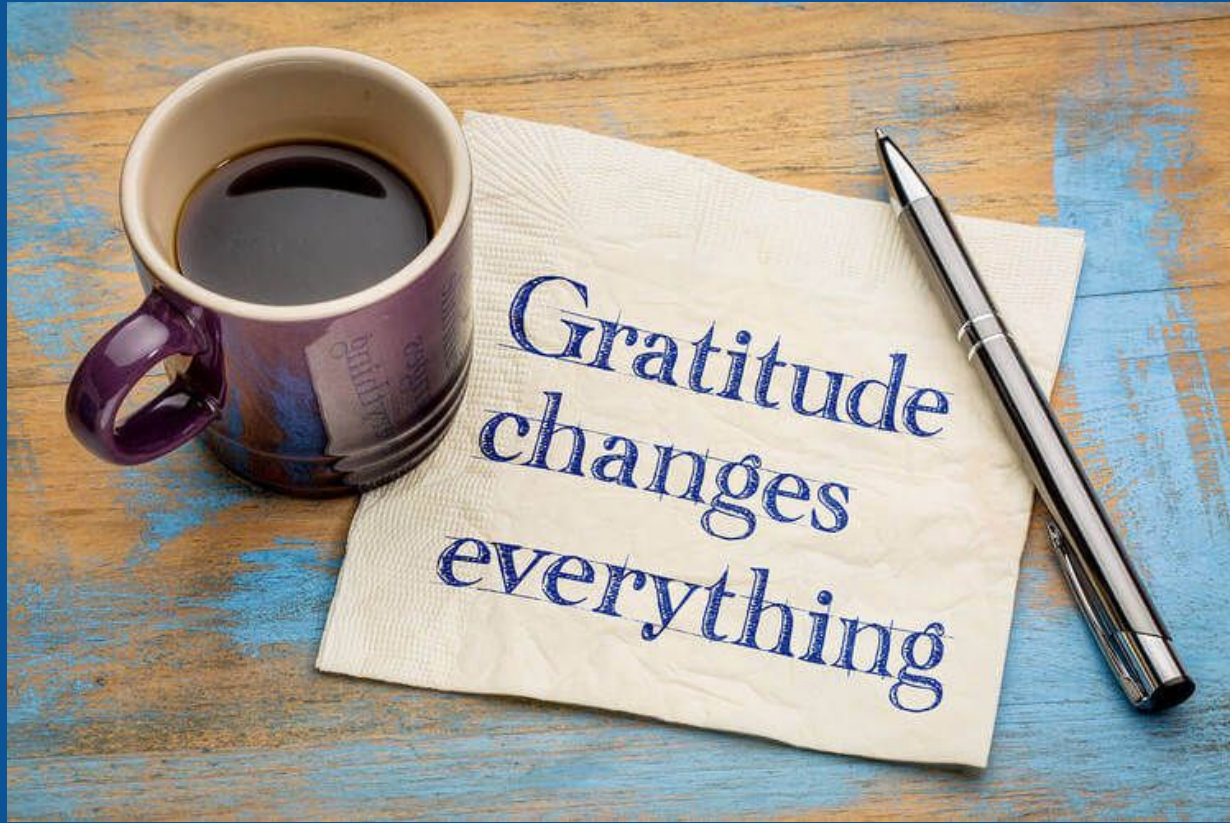
If you knew  
me, if you  
REALLY  
knew me,  
you'd  
know...

what?



What (or who) brings you joy?  
Why?





What are  
you  
grateful  
for?

How does  
gratitude  
motivate  
you?



**What do you  
choose to  
spend your  
time doing  
when you  
have free  
time?**



**What do you  
intentionally  
make time  
for?**



**What makes  
you feel  
most like  
yourself?**



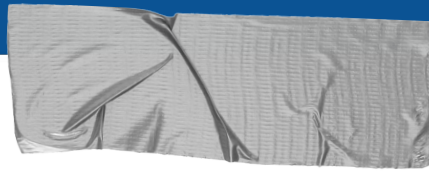


# Values

- A big part of your identity is your Values.

Let's identify your strongest values

- [Values Exercise](#)



# Details

## → Facts and Random Details

These things can often provide great insight into your world. And help you come alive more vividly on paper.

## → 21 Details Exercise

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1EpHP\\_85iUFbxfeCilqfp2hIRsNaoS85LPGFgJMO00eQ/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1EpHP_85iUFbxfeCilqfp2hIRsNaoS85LPGFgJMO00eQ/edit)

# Life Transitions

Do you have a Coming-of-Age moment?







Have you  
experienced  
something  
that you feel  
changed by?

Sometimes  
those  
changes are  
sudden and  
unexpected.

A time when you have  
apologized. When you  
have been humbled by,  
and learned from, a  
situation.



SORRY





Something that drives you  
toward impact and change,  
or a time when you have  
created change in your  
community

The background is a collage of various resume sections, tilted at different angles. Visible text includes 'SUMMARY', 'WORK EXPERIENCE', 'THE KLAMBI GROUP', 'WORK HISTORY', 'EDUCATION', 'BACHELOR', 'KEY SKILLS', 'PROFESSOR', 'EXPERIENCE', 'SKILL - Include hard skills that show off domain', 'Skill - Include people and task management', 'for management, you'll be expected to have technical hard skills and inter', 'know you know how to lead a team', 'burpercentage', 'Company & Location', 'IC DESIGNER', '2015-May 2018', '2013-April 2015', 'IC DESIGNER', '2011-May 2013', 'DESIGNER', 'May 2011', 'J.C.', 'J.E.', 'WELL', 'LYD', 'Administrative', 'PROFILE', 'assistant with', 'repairing facility', 'ility. Possess a', 'ing to leverage', 'able as administ', 'EXPERIENCE', 'ment', 'ments, and', 'ers of', 'and', '2009 - 2011', 'SECRETARY', 'Bright Spot LTD /', '• Type documents', 'emails, and prepared', 'Opened, sorted, and', 'correspondence to appro', 'Purchased and maintained', 'always carefully adhered to budgeting practices', 'directed visitors and determined to whom and who', 'd speak with specific individuals', 'ed and distributed minutes of meeting', 'Drafts, and', 'for management', 'personnel', 'incoming inventories', 'office supplied practices', 'budgeting practices', 'determined to whom and who', 'minutes of meeting'.

# Review Your Resume

Each activity has a story behind it. Real experiences that have shaped you, excited you, that you've learned from. Write some of those down.



Before you begin writing, pause and think about what you want admission officers to know about you that they don't already know.

If you have done the 3 guide words exercise, what are your 3 guide words?



# Now, put it all together....

## Experiences

How have they shaped who you are?

Do your experiences reflect your values and identity?

What choices have you made?

## Identity

How do you see yourself?

What makes you unique?

What are your fundamental qualities?

## Details

What are those quirky details that make you imperfect, one-of-a-kind, and awesome?

# Essay Drafting Do's

- Tell a story that only **YOU** can tell.
- Provide rich, sensory details. Taste, touch, smell, sound and sight.
- Write in present-tense, and dive into the story almost mid-stream.
- Make it a slice of life – a moment in time is often very powerful!
- Make it clear why it matters without using cliches!
- A good ending is tied to the lead without repeating.





# Avoid These Overused Topics!

The Service Trip that led to an epiphany

Miss America – how you hope to save the world

The Jock – learning the meaning of life on the field

Pet or relative death – learning the value of life

The Autobiography – let me tell you everything

The Resume – oops, you already have this information



# Colleges tend to value certain traits



Contribution  
Diversity of Experience  
Drive  
Intellectual Curiosity  
Initiative  
Resilience

*Which of these do your Experiences, Identity and Details point to most clearly?*



# Now start writing!

Let's put it all together. You have great ideas generated over the last hour. Look at your **brainstorming notes**, your **essence object box** and your **21 Details**.

- Choose **your favorite 3-5 stories** you would like to tell.
- Look especially at your **guide words** - how do they line up with your experiences? Look for the **common threads** between all of your notes.
- Identify **3 story ideas** to share with your coach.