

Make Your College Application Essay Like a Screenplay

See the essay as a screenplay of your life

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Over the years I've written dozens of articles on how to write a great college essay and read just about every book and article on the subject. But recently I found something new.

Robert Cronk, author of "Concise Advice: Jump-Starting Your College Admissions Essays" has something different to say. He advises students to think about their essay as a screenplay. He says, "Essays are not term papers ('documentaries' in film-speak). They are stories by which the audience (the reader) will get to know the main character. And that main character is you."

Cronk suggests following these 10 steps when getting started on the college essay.

Step 1: Close your eyes and walk down memory lane. Try to create an event timeline of your life - the good, the bad, the ugly and definitely the funny.

Step 2: Make a list of those moments that stand out. Here's one possibility - "that time on the mission trip when they made me room with someone I didn't know and despite our differences we became good friends." Don't think you have to impress the admissions officers by boasting about your accomplishments. You're better off telling an interesting story about you.

Step 3: Close your eyes again and visualize yourself back in those moments. Try to remember all the details of the events - what was said, how you felt, etc.

Step 4 : Describe those moments in words. Just write without judging your work; get your thoughts down and then review.

Step 5: Determine what each of those moments meant to you. How did you change because of that moment? Why are you different now? What new insights do you have about yourself?

Step 6: Choose one of the moments for your essay and turn your description into a polished paragraph. Write a solid description of the moment.

Step 7: Write the end of the essay. Yes, this is where you think about how you want the essay to end up. Writing the ending first will make writing the middle of the essay much easier.

Step 8: Fill in the in-between. Write the guts of the essay. Think about your transitions between paragraphs and try to create "bookends" by using a reference made in your introduction at the

end of your essay. Linking the beginning and the end of your essay is a fairly sophisticated writing technique that alerts the reader that you gave the essay a lot of thought.

Step 9: Polish the essay. Review, revise and rest. Repeat and repeat again.

Step 10: Let others read it. Ask for comments but don't change the "voice" of the essay. Make sure it still sounds like you, and, most important, ask yourself if anyone else could have written this essay. When the answer is "no," smile and submit. Lee Bierer is an independent college adviser based in Charlotte.

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MAKE IT A GREAT DAY!