

InGenius application essay webinar 7/24/24 notes. Marianna Irizarry (former Stanford reader)

Context: The application reader has already read your transcript, evals and activity list when reading the essay. Only one person is likely to read this essay: the initial reader, who decides whether you go to the committee for further consideration or into the rejection pile.

Choosing a Prompt: Introduce your self but don't just regurgitate the transcript or activity list: that would waste the opportunity.

Think of the essay as your elevator conversation with the reader: you have a minute or two at most: what do you most want to get across while sticking to one topic?

Which topic can you choose to demonstrate self-understanding, personal growth and your passion(s)

What can you talk about that's rare? How did you get where you are? What was most formative to you?

Discuss a key aspect of yourself that might not come across (or come across fully) in the other materials. Be sure the essay is about you rather than someone else. Grandma may be amazing, but she's not applying to college.

Their advice is to avoid social, religious and political opinions that might prejudice the reader against you.

One consideration is the topic's relevancy within the larger pool of applicants: does it help you stand out from others?

Narrowing down your topic: 3 considerations

Application Persona: 1-2 sentences explaining who you uniquely are. It hopefully includes more than one aspect of who you are so that the combination makes you stand out. This is a useful InGenius organizing concept and is not something that goes on the application but should be an idea that you constantly check the application against to be sure this idea is coming out clearly. Application readers are describing you in shorthand to the committee if you get that far, and your goal is for that shorthand to be very close to your application persona. The best application personas are unique, authentic and memorable.

Stand Out From Your competition: The more unique your essay (it wouldn't fit anyone else), the better. If many others are saying something similar and as impressively, you're in trouble if you're applying to a competitive college (but not as if you're applying to places where you're a solid candidate). Top topics at highly competitive colleges are a formative experience, an impressive or life changing extracurricular activity and overcoming a significant challenge.

Keep Your Audience in Mind: It's vital to connect with the initial reader if it's a competitive college because otherwise you don't get to the committee. Don't be offensive or boring, and don't give them things to worry about (discussing mental health issues or extreme viewpoints)

You want a topic that will showcase your excellent writing and your intellectual vitality. A key is to advance the reader's insight into who you are and how you think.

Common application essay errors:

- Repeating your resume rather than diving into one thing in detail
- Trying to do too much: this isn't the place for quantity; quality is vital
- Don't exaggerate adversity
- Don't sell yourself short: not the best place for self-deprecating humor
- Avoid middle school achievements
- Avoid writing about others
- Don't tell: show!
- Don't sound arrogant or privileged: you can acknowledge privilege if you can say how you'll use it to help others.
- Don't write about Covid unless it's incredibly unique
- Avoid cliches
- Don't use passive voice
- Description should be vital, not for flourish

Essay structure:

Begin with a hook: catchy phrase, startling fact, a vivid image: you want to wake the reader (who has been reading tons of these) up.

The body should support your application persona and be specific. (Telling a story about/describing what you did is better than listing things or making lots of statements.). Specificity is crucial.

Closing: Bookend: go back to the hook

End with a universal or personal truth, which goes back to your thesis statement.

Indicate some kind of growth.

Editing:

Read it out loud to yourself in the process.

Give yourself a long time in this process and get feedback from people who are knowledgeable about writing and people who are knowledgeable about you.

New opportunity: InGenius is having a webinar in August that allows seniors to send in drafts of their essays ahead of time and have them (at least a few of them) dissected by during the webinar in front of everyone by an expert college essay reader. They haven't announced the date yet, but you can send in your essay if you're brave. For more information, tune into the actual webinar before they take it down. The information comes up about the 51st minute if you want to skip ahead to learn more about this.