

# College Essays – 20 Min Essay Tuning

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## Each Group Needs:

1. Groups of 3-4
2. A timekeeper with military precision, a take-no-prisoners attitude, no sense of humor.
3. A facilitator to **go over the instructions for each step as you do it.**
4. Printed copies or a computer

**Authors Need:** Their college essay, pen/pencil, lined paper for note taking

**Tuners Need:** Pen/pencil, highlighter, copy of author's paper, sensitivity, sense of decency

*Each group will have exactly 20 minutes to review each paper. Timekeepers must move us along quickly in order for a group of 4 to finish in 80 minutes or so.*

## College Essay Critique Process-

### Step 1: Reading (8 minutes)

1. **Tuners-** Read and annotate college essay. As an option, consider the author reading the essay aloud to the tuners. **Look for the following: (add these comments on the doc)**
  - a. Presentation of **content**, and **structure** of argument, **evidence**, **thesis**.
  - b. Is the author exercising careful choice of **colorful verbs and adjectives**?
  - c. **Your favorite sentence**. Why, specifically, is it your favorite?
  - d. To what extent does the essay **answer the prompt**?
  - e. Make any **quick/easy grammar corrections** you can on their paper
  - f. Jot down **clarifying questions and suggestions** you have for the author
2. **Author-** Brainstorm a focus question or area of concern. This question point to an area of concern for you in your writing. See examples to the right:

#### Focus Question Examples, CEBC

- \* Do I answer the prompt?
- \* Is it too cheesy, am I selling myself too hard?
- \* Does my essay make me sound interesting, but not too conceited?

### Step 2: Intro and Focus Question (2 min)

1. **Author explains** their general thesis, or **approach to the prompt** in their own words, followed by his/her **focusing question**
2. **Tuners- SILENCE!** - Dialogue is unproductive at this point.
3. After the Author has explained their approach, tuners may **ask clarifying questions** (NOT suggestions, not leading questions – clarification only)

-Over-

### Step 3: Tuners – Get Tuning! (8 min)

1. **Author- SILENT, taking notes**
2. **Favorite Sentence Discussion.** Tuners will discuss their favorite sentence by the author. Why is it your favorite? Tuners will come to a consensus, and send a tuner to write that sentence on the whiteboard.
3. **Feedback.** In turns, each tuner must discuss their thoughts on writing, suggestions for revision.
4. **Assessment and Evaluation:** Tuners, discuss each of the 4 categories of the rubric (other than completion) and chat about how the author has done. What refinements might they make?

<b>Completion</b> If an essay is complete, it will receive 10 points automatically. If it is less than complete, it will receive less, based on the percentage completed.	<b>10 points</b>				
<b>Core Values/Characteristics</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can I name at least 2-3 of your core values or characteristics?</li> <li>• Do I detect a variety, or are they all similar?</li> </ul>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Insight (So What?)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can I identify “so what” moments of insight in the essay?</li> <li>• Are these moments kind of predictable, or are they truly illuminating?</li> </ul>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Vulnerability</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you balance your analytical side with reflection and the ability to let the reader inside your experiences?</li> <li>• After reading the essay, do I know more about you AND feel closer to you?</li> </ul>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Craft (Refinement and Beauty)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do the ideas in the essay connect in a way that is logical, but not too obvious (aka boring)?</li> <li>• Can I tell that the essay represents a series of carefully considered choices and that you spent a lot of time revising the essay over the course of several drafts?</li> <li>• Is it interesting and succinct throughout? If not, where do I lose interest? Where could words be cut or which part isn’t revealing as much as it could be?</li> </ul>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

### Step 4: Reflection and Discussion (2 minutes)

1. **Author Response.** Author speaks to comments/questions while participants are silent. This is not the time to defend yourself or your work, but to reflect aloud on the ideas or questions that seemed particularly interesting and/or helpful.
2. **Group discussion:** Tuners- Once the author has finished reflecting, encourage a discussion with the author –
  - a. What are the strengths of the essay?
  - b. Where are the specific areas that require refinement?
  - c. How can the author make more of their essay like the “favorite” sentence?

**Repeat procedure until all essays have been revised and edited.**

**Finished with all of your papers? Gather your feedback and get revising!**

## College Essay Critique Protocol #2: No/Limited draft.

If this is you, it doesn't make sense to use the first protocol. Instead, you'll do the following and your group will use the guide below to help prompt your thinking.

### Presenter: (5 minutes)- DISCUSS YOUR IDEAS

1. Explain where you are in the process and what your challenge or question is
2. Share what essay prompt you want to answer or which ones you're debating between
3. Tell 1-2 stories that you think you'd want to write about OR talk about 1-2 character traits or lessons you've learned that you want to illustrate

### Feedback Givers (10 minutes)- INTERVIEW AND ASK QUESTIONS

Here are some ways you can help your partner pick a topic:

Mostly just listen. Imagine that you're interviewing them. You should do 10% of the talking and let them do 90%. So if you have a ten minute conversation, you're only talking for one minute. How can you make this happen...

Ask lots of questions. Here are some good, simple questions to ask:

- a. What topics are you deciding between?
- b. What do you like about each one?
- c. What are the most important experiences in your life?
- d. Who are the most important people in your life?
- e. What are your favorite qualities about yourself?
- f. How have you changed in your life? What led to those changes?

Open-ended questions are great too:

- a. Can you say more about that?

Simple, right? Then listen some more.

**YOUR JOB ISN'T TO FIGURE OUT YOUR PARTNER'S TOPIC FOR THEM; YOUR JOB IS TO HELP THEM FIGURE OUT THEIR OWN TOPIC.**

- If, for example, your partner has experienced challenges, ask them:
  - If they can articulate a.) what the challenge was, b.) what they did about it, and c.) what they learned, tell your partner, "It sounds like a good topic--go for it."

If your partner has NOT experienced challenges...

Ask them:

- What are four or five qualities you definitely want to communicate to the admissions officer?
- What could you use to connect all these qualities?

**Discussion (5 min)- What good ideas came from this? Where should the essay go next in their writing?**