

In the first step of the essay editing process, the student brings a draft of the application essay for review. The college admission counselor's responsibility is to shape this initial attempt into a well-written essay that impresses admissions officers. Below is a sample essay that the student brought for editing.

Common Application: Prompt #1– Original Draft

Prompt: Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

It was half a lifetime ago when I developed my infatuation with storytelling.

Books fascinated me then. I visited the library once every two weeks and not a day sooner. Because of the public library's cap on items allowed per card, running out of reading material before the next trip was common, often with lots of time to spare. Unfortunately, I couldn't sit still without a story and ended up applying for a second library card under my uncle's name, hoping to outfox the despotic librarians who wanted all those books to themselves. I still remember the first time I paraded out of the library carrying two full bags instead of one, grinning devilishly to celebrate the unorthodox loophole I'd discovered.

Yet, even after my efforts, I came up short. The more chapters I trafficked home, the faster I flew through the pages. By the time I finished two cards worth of hardcovers and paperbacks, days would still remain before a chance to restock, leaving me floundering for something to fill the void. I'd struck gold.

At first, my writing was primitive. I emulated the habits and mannerisms of authors whom I enjoyed reading, albeit in a crude and amateurish fashion. That lack of experience certainly didn't stop me from working nonstop—I had even developed a routine: check out a mountain of books, read like an addict, and then rattle away at a keyboard until fourteen days go by. In these word documents and text files, I conjured up whatever worlds I desired, whether they were distant lands brimming with arcane mysteries or new frontiers waiting to be explored. Of my cherished youthful memories, many were spent watching friends read through my stories, eyes wide. I became a re-teller of great journeys and adventures, devoting countless nights to a dim screen that brought even the grandest fantasies to life.

However, my creative vigor could only last so long before drying up. As I entered high school, I gradually drifted away from authoring. My trips to the library slowly disappeared, and while I tried to force myself to grapple with the reasons why, the truth would always end muddled by one false pretense or another—I told myself I was running out of free time, getting distracted from schoolwork.

I buried myself in excuses, but couldn't shake the fact that if I truly loved something, I wouldn't let an assignment or a project keep me from doing it. Rather, I was just rationalizing the irrational—the problem wasn't at all complicated; it was just a hard pill to swallow. I forgot how to enjoy writing.

I had, indeed, surrendered my grip on the inexplicable gratification of the creative process, only to have it supplanted by a deep seeded feeling of inadequacy. While I began my hobby to pass the time, it had grown into a yearning to connect with others and share my vision right under my nose. I wanted to invite others into my world, let them tour the musings and manufactures of my imagination. Without

me even noticing, it seemed like I had outgrown those sentiments— the constant search for approval and solidarity tired me, I became inundated by self-consciousness, insecure with my work. Rather than looking forward to a reader's praise, I became overwhelmed by fear of criticism, paranoid that I never had the talent to spin a truly unique story.

A year ago, I started writing again. It's certainly easier at double the age. My fingers stretch much further over the keys, and my vocabulary is noticeably larger. A reflection on my infatuation for storytelling escorted me to the realization that my anxieties were unfounded— writing is too much a part of who I am for me to sacrifice part of my identity to insecurities. Rather, I learned to embrace opposing views, and to tell stories for the love of storytelling, rather than for the admiration.

In the second step, the college admissions counselor will provide feedback on the essay's content, organization and structure, and style. The counselor will advise the student on areas for improvement and work with the student to address those concerns. The comments provided here (in blue balloons) are examples of the type of commentary given to the student.

Common Application: Prompt #1– Original Draft with Comments

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Comment [A1]: Good opener. Shorten so that it has more punch and impact.

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Comment [A2]: Avoid passive construction. Think about paring down this sentence and its ideas so that the idea isn't buried.

Comment [A3]: Good anecdote that shows your craftiness and love for books. Give your uncle and the library a name.

Comment [A4]: Strong use of diction.

Yet, even after my efforts, I came up short. The more chapters I trafficked home, the faster I flew through the pages. By the time I finished two cards worth of hardcovers and paperbacks, days would still remain before a chance to restock, leaving me floundering for something to fill the void. I'd struck gold.

Comment [A5]: two cards' worth

Comment [A6]: Needs a smoother transition to the next paragraph

At first, my writing was primitive. I emulated the habits and mannerisms of authors whom I enjoyed reading, albeit in a crude and amateurish fashion. That lack of experience certainly didn't stop me from working nonstop—I had even developed a routine: check out a mountain of books, read like an addict, and then rattle away at a keyboard until fourteen days go by. In these word documents and text files, I conjured up whatever worlds I desired, whether they were distant lands brimming with arcane mysteries or new frontiers waiting to be explored. Of my cherished youthful memories, many were spent watching friends read through my stories, eyes wide. I became a re-teller of great journeys and adventures, devoting countless nights to a dim screen that brought even the grandest fantasies to life.

Comment [A7]: Perhaps offer an example of a "primitive" sentence you wrote.

Comment [A8]: How did you know about their "habits and mannerisms"?

Comment [A9]: Give specific examples here

Comment [A10]: Proper nouns for friends' names and then offer a comment from your friend to show how impressed he was.

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Comment [A11]: Seemingly abrupt move from elementary school to high school

Comment [A12]: Muddled reasoning here for abandoning the writing.

I buried myself in excuses, but couldn't shake the fact that if I truly loved something, I wouldn't let an assignment or a project keep me from doing it. Rather, I was just rationalizing the irrational—the problem wasn't at all complicated; it was just a hard pill to swallow. I forgot how to enjoy writing.

Comment [A13]: How did you come to this realization?

Comment [A14]: Explore this idea further.

I had, indeed, surrendered my grip on the inexplicable gratification of the creative process, only to have it supplanted by a deep seeded feeling of inadequacy. While I began my hobby to pass the time, it had grown into a yearning to connect with others and share my vision right under my nose. I wanted to

Comment [A15]: From where did these feelings of inadequacy arise?

invite others into my world, let them tour the musings and manufactures of my imagination. Without me even noticing, it seemed like I had outgrown those sentiments—the constant search for approval and solidarity tired me, I became inundated by self-consciousness, insecure with my work. Rather than looking forward to a reader’s praise, I became overwhelmed by fear of criticism, paranoid that I never had the talent to spin a truly unique story.

Comment [A16]: Some very poetic prose here, but it doesn't quite convey the ideas that follow or connect those ideas to previous ones

Comment [A17]: If everyone loved your writing, then why did you all of a sudden become self-conscious?

A year ago, I started writing again. It’s certainly easier at double the age. My fingers stretch much further over the keys, and my vocabulary is noticeably larger. A reflection on my infatuation for storytelling escorted me to the realization that my anxieties were unfounded—writing is too much a part of who I am for me to sacrifice part of my identity to insecurities. Rather, I learned to embrace opposing views, and to tell stories for the love of storytelling, rather than for the admiration.

Comment [A18]: Good details.

Comment [A19]: Wait, all of a sudden, the issues have just resolved themselves? The essay will need a bit of re-organizing so that the pacing works and effectively shows your revelations and progress.

In the third step, the college admissions counselor completes a thorough edit and revision of the each essay draft, modifying structure and word choice to better express the student's ideas and overall message. An essay might take several edits to complete. Below is an example of ONE edit.

Common Application: Prompt #1– Edits

Prompt: Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

~~It was~~ half a lifetime ago, ~~when~~ I developed my infatuation with storytelling.

Books fascinated me then. ~~I~~ ~~visiting~~ ~~sited~~ the library once every two weeks and not a day sooner, ~~however,~~ often left me without reading material ~~because of~~ the Fremont public library's capped the cap on items allowed per card. ~~Okay, so my,~~ ~~running out of reading material before the next trip was common, often with lots of time to spare,~~ ~~question here,~~ ~~which bothers me for the rest of the essay, is why didn't your parents just take~~ ~~Unfortunately~~ you to the library more often, like once a week? ~~Why resort to the double card~~ ~~stragem?~~ ~~I couldn't sit still without a story and~~ ~~Hoping to outfox the despotic librarians who~~ ~~wanted all those books to themselves, I ended up~~ ~~applied~~ ~~ying~~ for a second library card under my uncle's name, ~~hoping to outfox the despotic librarians who wanted all those books to~~ ~~themselves.~~ I still remember the first time I paraded out of the library carrying two full bags instead of one, grinning devilishly to celebrate the unorthodox loophole I'd discovered.

Yet, even after my efforts, I came up short. The more chapters I trafficked home, the faster I flew through the pages. By the time I finished two cards worth of hardcovers and paperbacks, days would still remain before a chance to restock, leaving me floundering for something to fill the void. ~~needs a transition here~~ I'd struck gold.

At first, my writing was primitive. I emulated the habits and mannerisms of authors whom I enjoyed reading, albeit in a crude and amateurish fashion. ~~give a few examples here of your~~ ~~"poor man's version of 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea or thinly disguised send up of The~~ ~~Hobbit"~~ That lack of experience certainly didn't stop me from working nonstop— ~~I had~~ even developed a routine: check out a mountain of books, read like an addict, and then rattle away at a keyboard until fourteen days ~~went~~ ~~go~~ by. In these word documents and text files, I conjured ~~up~~ ~~whatev~~ ~~ere~~ worlds I desired, ~~whether they were~~ distant lands brimming with arcane mysteries or new frontiers waiting to be explored. ~~Of my cherished youthful memories,~~ many were spent watching friends read through my stories, eyes wide. I became a re-teller of great journeys and adventures, devoting countless nights to a dim screen that brought even the grandest fantasies to life ~~← I like this idea here and would like to reword it so that the tie~~ ~~between the approval and writing is more obvious because we need to set that up for later in~~ ~~the essay].~~

However, my creative vigor ~~could~~ only last ~~ed~~ so long ~~before drying up and~~ ~~a~~ As I entered high school, I gradually drifted away from ~~my weekly library trip and nightly~~ ~~authoring/writing~~ ~~sessions.~~ ~~My trips to the library slowly disappeared, and while I tried to force myself to grapple~~

~~with the reasons why, the truth would always end muddled by one false pretense or another—I told myself I was running out of free time, getting distracted from schoolwork.~~

I buried myself in excuses and false pretense - "I no longer have free time" and " I need to focus on school" —but couldn't shake the niggling fact that if I truly loved something, I wouldn't let any assignment or a project keep me from doing it. Rather, I was just rationalizing the irrational— the problem wasn't at all complicated; it was just a hard pill to swallow. I forgot how to enjoy writing.

I had, indeed, surrendered my grip on the inexplicable [is it really "inexplicable" because you later state that you enjoyed the approval or are you trying to say you didn't realize you enjoyed the approval?] gratification of the creative process, only to have it supplanted by a deep, seated feeling of inadequacy. While I began my hobby to pass the time, it had grown into a yearning to connect with others and share my vision ~~right under my nose~~. I wanted to invite others into my world, to let them tour the musings and manufactures of my imagination. Without my even noticing, it seemed like I had outgrown those sentiments [?]— the constant search for approval and solidarity tired me, I became inundated by self-consciousness, insecure with my work. Rather than looking forward to a reader's praise, I became overwhelmed by fear of criticism, paranoid that I never had the talent to spin a truly unique story. [maybe cut down this paragraph a bit and discuss where the insecurities came from because it seems like everyone loved your writing]

A year ago, I started writing again. It's certainly easier now; at double the age my. My fingers stretch much further over the keys, and my vocabulary is noticeably larger. Reflecting on A reflection on my love infatuation for storytelling escorted me to the realization that my anxieties were unfounded— writing is too much a part of who I am for me to sacrifice part of my identity to insecurities. Rather, I learned to embrace opposing views, and to tell stories for the love of storytelling, rather than for the admiration [conclusion is a bit abrupt, as it sounds like you thought about writing again, just starting doing it, and magically your insecurities disappeared? Explain why is is "too much a part" of who you really are].

Notes:

- great diction and tone, and some seriously impressive turns of phrase
- shows very personable and engaging style
- would love to see more proper nouns, images, and specific details
- would like to address some gaps in transition/logic

~610w

The final essay has undergone many drafts and revisions before it is finally ready to be submitted. The final essay is now a compelling piece of the student's application, representing the student well and placing the student at best advantage for admission.

Common Application: Prompt #1– Final

Prompt: Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

Most families arrange garage sales sensibly during spring cleaning season, as trees denuded in the winter begin slipping into their delicate new clothes.

Yet Mom has insisted the house be clutter-free by New Year's, so I move boxes of childhood nostalgia into a vacant driveway the weekend following Thanksgiving, even though I'm never been more sure of anything in the world than that absolutely no one will stop to browse our exclusive selection of junk. Upon clearing out a few straggling antiques and yellowing phonebooks, I spot an old acquaintance: a cracked Rubbermaid bin.

Inside are my stories. Safeguarding both fiction and fable, the container is a testament to my fascination with writing.

Half a lifetime ago, I lived through books. Our public library capped the items checked out per card, so I often ran out of reading material before finding a chance to restock. Hoping to outfox the despotic librarians who wanted all the books to themselves, I applied for a second library card under my uncle's name. I'll never forget the first day I paraded out of the library carrying two full bags instead of one, celebrating the unusual loophole I'd discovered.

Yet, the more chapters I trafficked home, the faster I flew through the pages. After finishing double helpings of paperbacks and hardcovers, days still remained before my next trip. Without any new adventures to embark on, I decided to conjure my own.

Initially, my writing was primitive; I emulated the habits and mannerisms of authors whom I enjoyed, albeit in a crude and amateurish fashion. Seuss's artistic vision. Twain's wittiness. Nabokov's painstaking attention to detail. Inexperience certainly didn't stop me from working around-the-clock—I developed a routine: bring home a stack of books, read, and clattering away at my keyboard until the I

could repeat the cycle. In word documents and text files, I captured distant lands and unexplored frontiers. Although my accounts were never the most original nor riveting, I prided myself in re-telling great journeys nonetheless.

However, in high school, I gradually drifted away from writing. Trying to grapple with the reasons why, I buried myself in excuses, muddling the truth with one false pretense or another. A tough pill to swallow, reality explained I'd surrendered my grip on the inexplicable gratification of the creative process, now supplanted by a deep-seeded feeling of inadequacy. I needed only a cursory re-examination of the stories I'd authored to recognize that they were simplistic impersonations of books I'd read. I found myself voiceless. With a body of work on built the shoulders of giants, I still had not managed to reach heights any higher. Rather, the never-ending quest for adventure tired me. Dissatisfaction and self-consciousness inundated me, and I tossed my knock-off ideas into a stupid box, hoping to never see them again.

As the garage sale ends, I race to my laptop to begin a new story. At double the age, my fingers stretch further across the keys and my vocabulary feels noticeably fuller. I set my sights on crafting a unique narrative, rather than feigning creativity by piggybacking another novelist's ingenuity. It's not easy. The blank document that reciprocates my stare is undoubtedly God's way of telling me how frustrating his job is, but I don't give up. I write until I drop, and I keep getting back up until I develop my own distinct ideas.

The important part is that I find something different.

The unexpected reunion with the contents of that Rubbermaid box escorted me to the realization that writing is too much a part of who I am for me to renounce it, facing insecurity. Swallowed pride is but a small price to pay to do what I love, and second only to our failed December garage sale, I've never been more right about anything in the world.

Just in case you already forget how the first draft looks like, below please find the first and final draft for comparison. Carefully check them: you will be amazed by how many changes are made in wording, content and structure.

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