

CLW 2018:

LEVEL UP

ESSAY WORKSHOP

MATILDA DANG & SARA ROSS

RICE UNIVERSITY VIETNAMESE STUDENT ASSOCIATION'S  
16TH ANNUAL COLLEGE LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP  
OCTOBER 20TH, 2018

YOU ARE SPECIAL!

YOU ARE AWESOME!

I AM SPECIAL!  
I AM AWESOME!

# WHY ARE *YOU* UNIQUE?

You have your own mind

You have your own voice

You have your own passions

You have your own interests

You have your own experiences

# WHY DO COLLEGES ASK FOR AN ESSAY?



# YOU!

Express YOUrself!

“Nerd-out” about the things  
YOU care about.

Be constructive about YOUr  
life

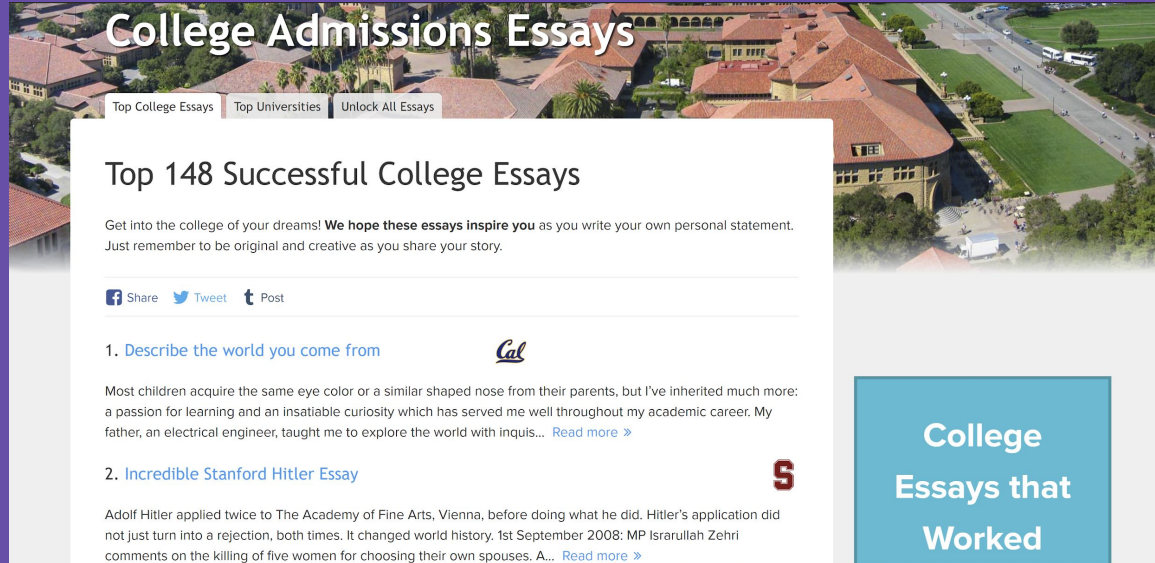
Be honest with who YOU are!



**Can someone tell if your essay's voice is yours?**

**How many people can identify the story as yours alone?**

# THIS IS NOT YOU



The screenshot shows a website with a purple header and a white main content area. The background of the website is an aerial view of a university campus with red-tiled buildings and green lawns. The main heading is 'College Admissions Essays'. Below it are navigation tabs: 'Top College Essays', 'Top Universities', and 'Unlock All Essays'. The main content area features the title 'Top 148 Successful College Essays' and a sub-heading 'Get into the college of your dreams! We hope these essays inspire you as you write your own personal statement. Just remember to be original and creative as you share your story.' Below this are social media sharing options for Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. The list of essays includes:

- 1. Describe the world you come from *Cal*  
Most children acquire the same eye color or a similar shaped nose from their parents, but I've inherited much more: a passion for learning and an insatiable curiosity which has served me well throughout my academic career. My father, an electrical engineer, taught me to explore the world with inquis... [Read more >](#)
- 2. Incredible Stanford Hitler Essay **S**  
Adolf Hitler applied twice to The Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, before doing what he did. Hitler's application did not just turn into a rejection, both times. It changed world history. 1st September 2008: MP Israrullah Zehri comments on the killing of five women for choosing their own spouses. A... [Read more >](#)

On the right side of the screenshot, there is a teal box with the text 'College Essays that Worked'.

Use these as *inspiration*, not as a template!



# THIS IS NOT YOU

Don't be formulaic  
with your writing!  
THERE ARE NO SECRET  
FORMULAS!

Write in the box the number of the question you are answering  
on this page as it is designated in the exam.

1A  
(10+4)

"The Black Walnut Tree" is a conflict between ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> literal <sup>and</sup> and figurative, the practical and sentimental. In a matter of fact, <sup>dismissive</sup> ~~the~~ mother and daughter debate selling ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> tree to pay off their mortgage. But with a <sup>transition</sup> ~~switch~~ to more figurative language comes a ~~turn~~ switch to a more ~~pr~~ symbolic view of the black walnut tree: it is a symbol of their family heritage and father's labor, and though the mortgage weighs heavy, ~~setting~~ <sup>shameful</sup> cutting down the tree would be a ~~SOA~~ <sup>SOA</sup> of <sup>v</sup> betrayal.

"The Black Walnut Tree" is written in free verse and straight~~forward~~ <sup>forward</sup>, accessible vocabulary, which is most pronounced at the beginning: "My mother and I debate: / we could sell / the black walnut tree / to the lumberman, / and pay off the mortgage." It is stated casually, and the symbolic meaning the tree holds later in the poem is contrasted ~~against~~ <sup>against</sup> as more vital

START. EARLY.

# BRAINSTORMING



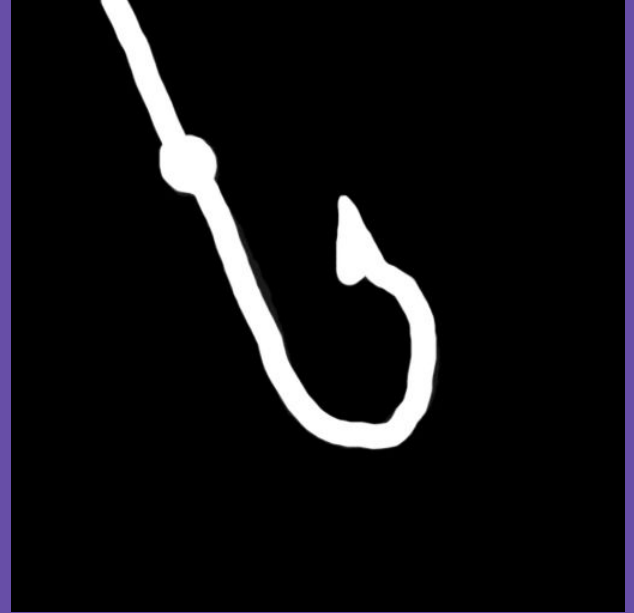
- Talk it out
- Create an ideal environment
- Set your goals
- Write or sketch EVERYTHING
- Embrace the ridiculous!
- Start general, but end specific

# INTRODUCTION

“Sitting cross-legged on the floor of a Bhimanagar slum dwelling in Bangalore, I ran my fingers across a fresh cut on my forehead.”

“I was paralyzed from the waist down. I would try to move my leg or even shift an ankle but I never got a response. This was the first time thoughts of death ever crossed my mind.”

“Eight years ago, I stepped off a plane onto a new land and said to myself, “this will be a life-changing experience.”



# BODY PARAGRAPHS

There are no formulas.

Make the paragraphs  
and ideas “flow”.

Use your VOICE to  
dictate your writing.

Be UNIQUE


$$e^{i\pi} + 1 = 0$$

# CONCLUSION



## Wrap up the story

- Link the ending to the intro
- Share something you've learned

## Don't wrap up the story?

- Link the ending to a bigger picture or idea

Remind the reader why you are unique

# CONCLUSION

DON'T bring up brand new ideas

DON'T just summarize your body

DON'T say “in conclusion,” “in summary,” etc.

RELAX!

(YOU ARE SPECIAL! YOU ARE AWESOME!)



AM I DONE?  
ABSOLUTELY NOT!

SAVE, SAVE,  
SAVE, SAVE,

SAVE, SAVE!  
SAVE, SAVE!

# EDITING

- Take a break before editing!
- Read your essay aloud.
- Check for spelling or grammar mistakes but don't stress yourself for a "perfect" essay

## Things to look out for:

- Accuracy
- Purpose
- Focus
- Main idea
- Unity
- Organization
- Development

# EDITING

GET OTHER PEOPLE TO  
READ IT. AT LEAST 2.  
MORE IF IT'S MORE  
IMPORTANT.

(BUT don't lose your  
voice.)



# ESSAY ADVICE

# WHAT ESSAY TOPICS ARE OUT THERE?

## Topic #1: The 'identity' question

*Some students have a background or story that is so central to their identity that they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.*

# WHAT ESSAY TOPICS ARE OUT THERE?

Topic #2: The ‘failure’ question

*The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?*

# WHAT ESSAY TOPICS ARE OUT THERE?

Topic #3: The 'challenge' question

*Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?*



# TIPS

- Put aside preconception about what a college wants
- Address the prompt
- Avoid cliches
- Choose a tone that speaks well of you
- Get feedback from others

RECAP

I AM SPECIAL!  
I AM AWESOME!

# REFERENCE

Ehrenhaft, G. (2013). *Writing a Successful College Application Essay*: Barron's Educational Series, Incorporated.