



# Essays for US College Applications ISL

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[www.GlobalUniversityChoices.com](http://www.GlobalUniversityChoices.com)

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# Agenda

- 1<sup>st</sup> Workshop
  - Role of essays in apps
  - Main CommonApp essay
  - Good topics, dangerous topics, brainstorming
- Assignment
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Workshop – Tuesday, 12 May 2015
  - Why this college?
  - An extracurricular activity
  - “Creative” essays, others
- Both sessions:
  - Voice, style
  - Process, revisions, feedback



# + A solid essay can heal the sick but it can't raise the dead

- Only place **your voice** is heard
- Can you **write**?
- **Standout** in the big “maybe” group
- Knock you out of consideration
- Convince a “likely” school you are serious about them





# + YOU are the topic!

- *“Tell me something about yourself”... your passions, strengths, voice*
- **Why they want you in their classrooms and on their campus that they can't learn otherwise from application**
- Challenging to be truly original but you can always **be authentic!!!!**

+ **What you don't want to do**

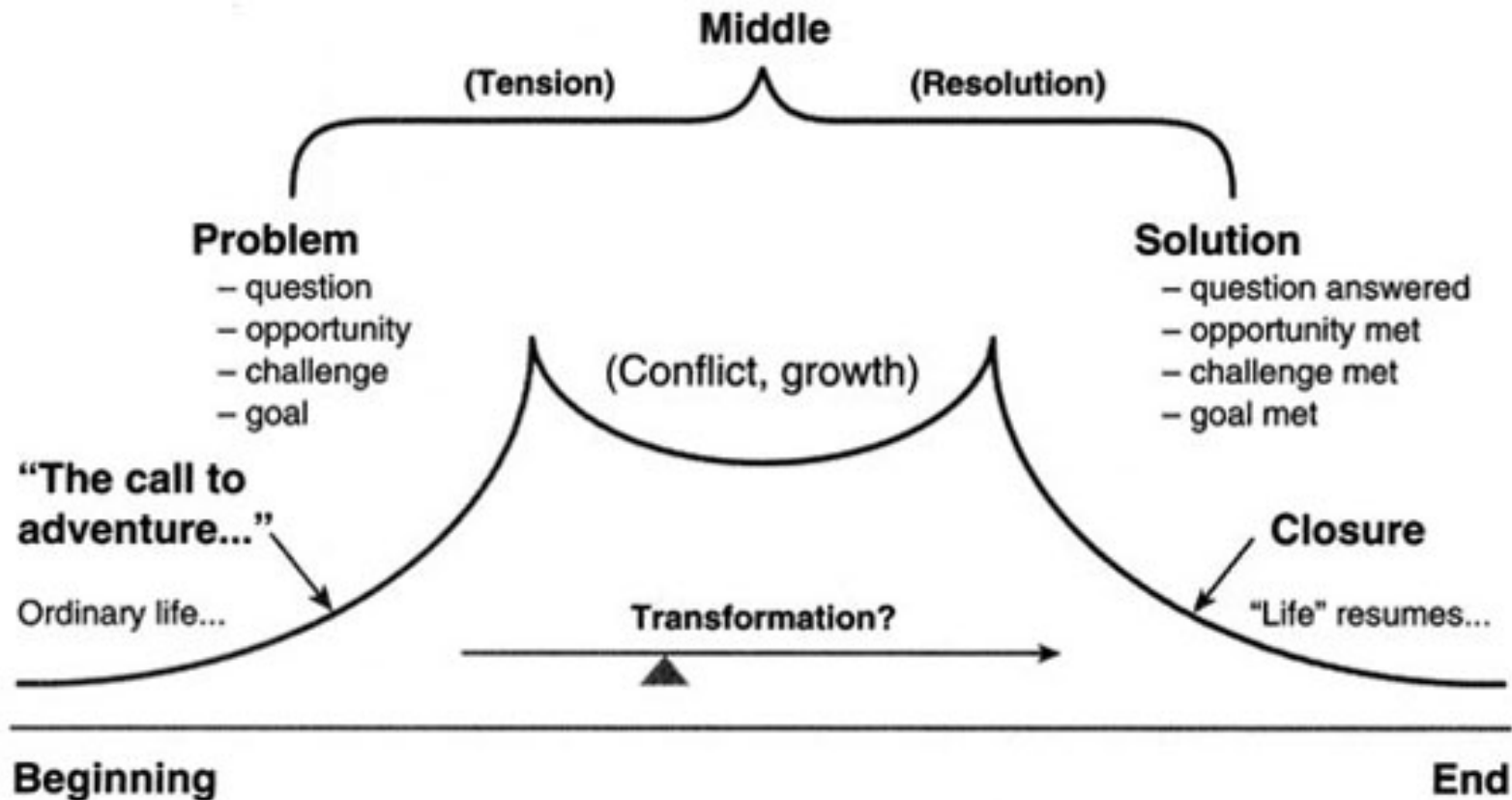


# + 1. Tell a story about yourself => Go deep

- That puts you in a positive light
- An experience that feels meaningful
- The event(s) changed you in a positive way
- Short – brief moment in time



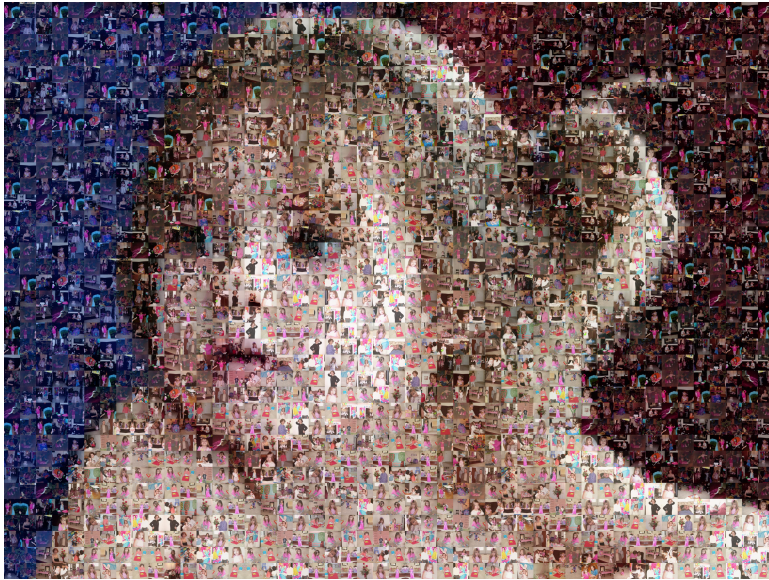
# + Story structure



## + Stories that worked

- “A blue seventh place athletic ribbon hangs from my mantel. Every day, as I walk into my living room, the award mockingly congratulates me as I smile.”
- “One fundamental rule of reincarnation is that you do not know your past life. Well, it seems as though I broke that rule. In fact, I am absolutely certain that my past reincarnation was none other than d’Artagnan, the fourth musketeer.
- “I wasn’t sure where I had made a wrong turn, but I was sure I wasn’t supposed to be in Boston.”
- “‘Let’s go out to dinner and we can talk about this,’ my Dad told me the night he arrived in Florence to visit me.”

## + 2. Use a montage structure => Go wide



- Create a whole from separate fragments
- Few images that tell the whole story
- Little glimpses into your life
- Focusing “lens” or metaphor
- Start from point where you want to end up



## + Montages that worked

- As a kid I was always curious. I was unafraid to ask questions and didn't worry how dumb they would make me sound.
- I look at the ticking, white clock: it's eleven at night, my primetime. I clear the carpet of the Sony camera charger, the faded Levi's, and last week's Statistics homework. Having prepared my work space, I pull out the big, blue box and select two 12 by 12 crème sheets of paper.



# Have you faced challenges? Do you know what you want to do?

<b>A</b> Student <b>has</b> faced significant challenges and <b>knows</b> what s/he wants to study.	<b>B</b> Student <b>has not</b> faced significant challenges, but <b>does know</b> what s/he wants to study.
<b>C</b> Student <b>has</b> faced significant challenges, but <b>does not know</b> what s/he wants to study.	<b>D</b> Student <b>has not</b> faced significant challenges and <b>does not know</b> what s/he wants to study.

[www.CollegeEssayGuy.com](http://www.CollegeEssayGuy.com)

# + No bad topics, but...

## Topics to avoid...

1. Repetition of activities, other info on application
2. Your illegal activities
3. Your girl or boy friend
4. Anything that raises questions about your ability to cope with life on campus
5. Your heroism
6. Social, religious or political lectures
7. “Woe is me”
8. Excuses for your record
9. Your list of accomplishments
10. Through *blank* (piano playing, spider collecting, rock climbing) I have learned Noble Value A, High Platitude B, and Great Lesson C.



# + International Traps



Living abroad doesn't automatically make someone a fascinating person

## + Essay #1

My family is extremely multicultural. Both my mother and my father come from a German Mexican background. To add to this mix, I was born in the U.S.A., making me also American by birth. My family therefore raised me using influences from three different cultures as well as the culture of whatever country we were living in at the time. This has made my family life a little different. Often, we celebrate cultural holidays not many people in my American school are familiar with, and we even mix cultures in our celebrations. For example, we celebrate the Mexican holiday of The Three Kings, but make a German cake instead of the Mexican cake traditionally made for the holiday. This mix of cultures in my family home has enhanced my life and made me proud of my ancestry.

## + Essay #2

I am an environmentalist. "Garbage girl" and "green queen" are only two of the names my friends jokingly call me. I recognize that an 18-year-old with a passion for trash is rare, but this global conundrum has allowed me to unite my interests in the environment and Asia. Living in Beijing developed my Chinese language skills while piles of rotting trash permeated the autumn air just outside my new home in Haidian. I held my nose but was captivated. As an eco-centrist, I care for the environment and realize the importance of raising awareness to confront the enormity of this problem.

## + International Clichés

- “I am a child of 2 (or 3 or 6) worlds.”
- “I am unique because my cultural influences are unique.”
- “I traveled to strange places and so I appreciate diversity and/or want to fix world hunger.”
- “I am a humble and modest guy who likes to do normal things.”

If you are more than your passport(s) and a list of places you have lived, then who are you?

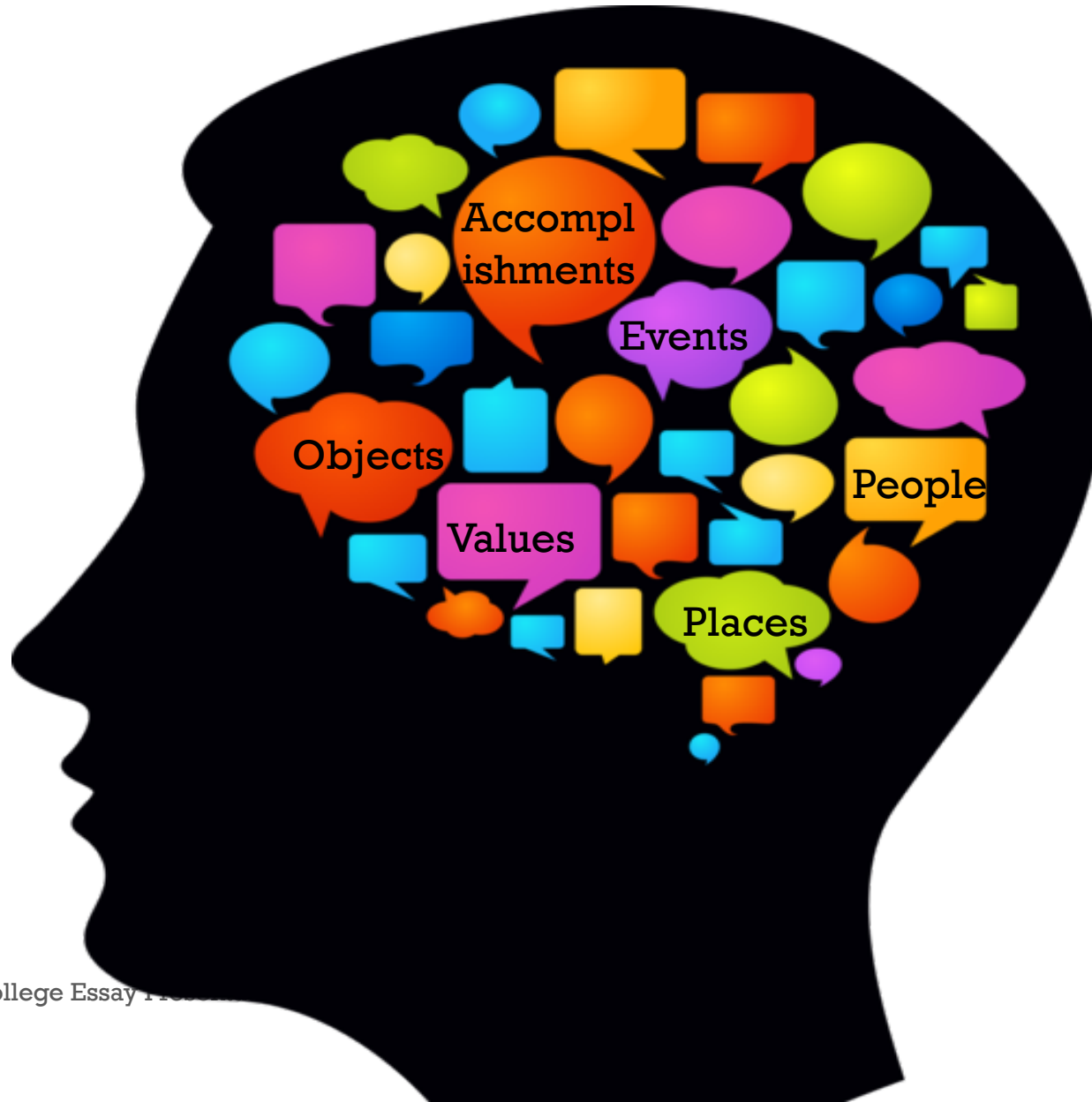
+ What do I want colleges to learn about me?



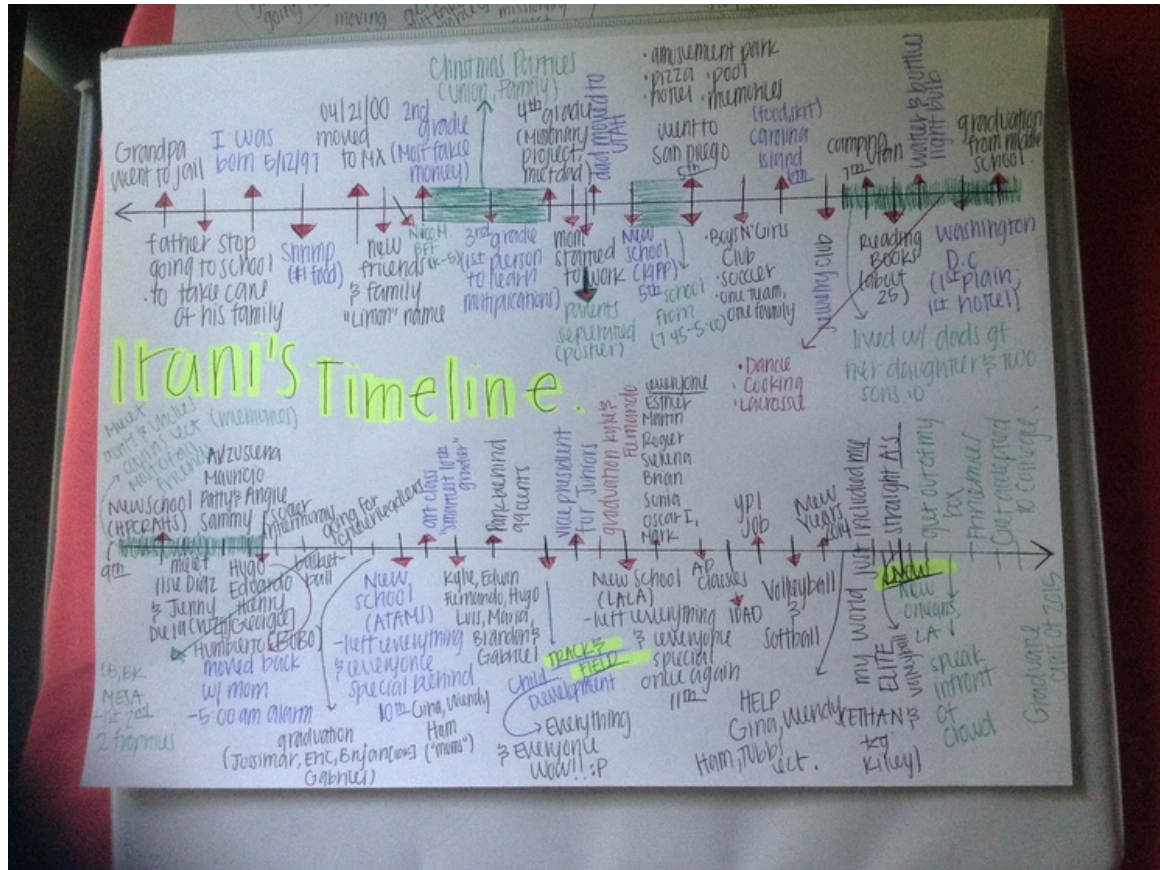
"I want to show my colleges I'm well-rounded, so I wrote a poem in Spanish about how chess club has made me a better quarterback."



# + Brainstorming/Inspiration



# + Brainstorming exercise #1: Personal Timeline



Milestones => High school

People

Activities

Interests/Ideas

Challenges faced

Accomplishments

Whatever you want!



## What I want colleges to know about me

- Core qualities, essential values, fun facts, brilliant achievements, important lessons
  - ❑ I speak 4 languages
  - ❑ I moved 8 times before high school and twice since starting
  - ❑ I'm nationally ranked in tennis
  - ❑ I love solving hard problems\*\*
  - ❑ I raised 5'000 CHF to support earthquake relief in Nepal
  - ❑ I am a compassionate person\*\*
  - ❑ I'm industrious, funny, a leader, shy, outgoing, curious, a risk taker, a passionate reader...\*\*
- Not just useful for the essay. Checklist for your whole application
- Create a file and keep it handy. Revise frequently.

# + Brainstorming exercise #2: Essential Objects









## + Brainstorming questions (extra)

- If I had to quickly replay my life, which two or three moments would jump out ahead of all the others? Is there a moment in the entire span of my experience...that fills me with particularly intense feelings when I think about it?
- What in the world truly fascinates me?
- In what situations am I “in the flow”?
- What has been the hardest thing in my life?
- Have I ever made a discovery that thrilled me?
- What have I done that "they" said couldn't be done?
- What has been difficult for me to accomplish?
- Is there a place or environment where I am perfectly content?
- At what points have I felt inadequate and how did I deal with those feelings?
- What do I regard as my greatest victory?
- What do I regard as my greatest failure?
- Have I ever felt betrayed?
- What has held me back from realizing my ambitions?
- What is the funniest thing that ever happened to me?
- Have I ever felt pure rage?
- What fills me with pride?
- When have I challenged a belief or idea?
- What background or story is central to my identity?

## + You have an idea for a topic



- A specific incident or subject, a “slice of life” that best showcases
  - What makes you stand out and
  - Focuses on a small period in time
- Series of small incidents with a common theme, focusing lens
- Start writing!
  - Be prepared to try multiple topics

## + Stuck on a topic?

- If you aren't making any progress, go through brainstorming questions and write 2 or 3 sentences about any topic you are vaguely considering.
  - Email to [mstelzner@globaluniversitychoices.com](mailto:mstelzner@globaluniversitychoices.com)

# + Ready to write

- Your voice
  - Think of a friend or young person (under 30) that you talking to
  - No thesaurus words!
  - Does it sound like you?
  
- Show, then tell. Or tell, then prove with examples
  - Show
    - Anecdotes
    - What you saw, heard, touched, ...
  - Tell
    - Why important?
    - What does it mean?
  
- Be prepared to try a new topic

# + Writing Assignment

- 20 minutes – set a timer
- Write continuously, way over 650 words
  - Don't worry about first sentences, spelling or grammar – no corrections. Just write.
  - Repeat your last line until something else occurs to you



# + Writing Assignment - Optional

- Underline the parts that “sound like you”
- **Highlight** where you are showing, not telling
- Is it a story?
  - Is there a point in time?
  - Does something out of the ordinary take place?
  - Is there a struggle between opposing forces, a conflict, that gets resolved?
  - Is there a point to the story?
- Is it a montage?
  - What is your theme/focusing lens?
- Revise. Still don't worry about starting sentence.

# + Finally...

- Email me **something** by 7pm, Sunday, 10 May  
[mstelzner@globaluniversitychoices.com](mailto:mstelzner@globaluniversitychoices.com)
  - ❑ Your very rough draft
  - ❑ Re-write draft if you want
  - ❑ Send rough drafts on more than one topic
  
- [www.globaluniversitychoices.com/isl](http://www.globaluniversitychoices.com/isl)
  - ❑ [www.collegeessayguy.com](http://www.collegeessayguy.com)
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