

The 3-Sentence Jumpstart

*Forget about your "college-application essay."
To begin, just write three sentences.*

As we have discussed, we all have personal "areas of authority" — those encounters, skills, interests, and perspectives that, with the right attention, we can come to see as distinctly ours. You can recognize your authority through the natural act of remembering, of isolating a memory and considering it closely and patiently. The more you pay this kind of attention, the more prepared you will be for self-discovery, and the more confident and equipped you will feel as you engage in the writing process.

Here's Your Mission:

With consideration of the webinar, draw from your unique experiences to make three distinct, true sentences, each of which would make anyone sit forward in their chair, curious to hear more. Aim for sentences that only you can write. Use one sentence per experience.

(See the examples on the flip side for inspiration!)

3 Important Pieces of Advice:

1. Be up-to-date.

Select relatively recent raw material from which to shape your sentences. The most useful experiences will be those that are not buried in the distant past but are fresh (and perhaps ongoing!). The college admissions officer wants to learn most about the *present* you, not the child you once were.

2. Strive for specificity.

Engage your reader's imagination with visual, concrete detail. Guard against general or abstract phrasing in description — your goal is to trigger clear seeing in the mind of your reader.

3. Avoid the vacantly mysterious.

In order to compel your reader to want to hear more, avoid relying on the kind of mystery that depends on the absence of information. Consider the following unspecific sentence:

In the back of my mind I knew what was about to come, but I still trembled with anticipation.

Although our curiosity is piqued by this emotional circumstance, we don't see anything. We can't enter this space with the writer because there is no described or suggested space. We need instead to aim for the distinct. Withholding information to compel reader interest is often an effective approach in writing, but we're striving here to capture interest with what is in the sentence, not with what isn't.

EXAMPLES FROM PAST COLLEGE APPLICANTS:

Predicaments:

I'd been snorkeling up the creek with the current for about twenty yards when I saw the first shoe: a half-buried brown high heel.

Had I realized the possibility of a turkey deciding to escape the pen, I might have shut the door.

From the back seat the boy ranted, and I struggled to keep my focus on the road.

Perspectives:

Forget diamonds — hot glue and metal wire are a girl's best friend.

The bloodstained, disc-shaped shavings of the tibia looked soft and spongy, sitting in that little dish on the sterilized table in the chilled room.

Encounters:

As we sat in Nora's blue pickup, the words fell out of her mouth: "Women are too emotional to be leaders—we care too much."

The young woman in a demanding red dress and sleek black stilettos lifted her leg onto the counter and uttered two small but significant words: "Bed bugs."

As the conference room emptied, I opened the note and read: *Thank you for saying the words that I couldn't.*

As I approached the house and barn, which looked decrepit, a ruin of my memory, the barn door flung open and a figure shouted, "Who's there?"

Interests:

It all started with a pack of flashcards — one hundred two-by-eight-inch glossy cards bound at one end by a single plastic grommet.

I drew line after line after line after line, for fourteen hours, until I had finished illustrating the map.

Who gets joy from taking selfies beside the graves of her heroes?

What Are Your Sentences?