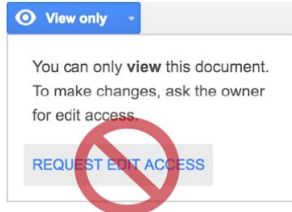


Choose Your Own Adventure Essay Tool

Student Workbook

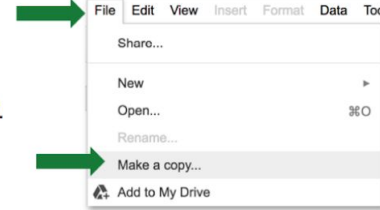


How to use this template:

This is a view-only file and cannot be edited.

Create your own copy of this template to edit.

In the menu, click **File > Make a copy...**



To make an editable copy of this Google Doc workbook (Recommended): You'll need to be logged in to a Google Account to make a copy. Once you've logged in, go to **File > Make a copy** in the top left hand corner, then add your name. You'll then be able to type directly into your own copy of this workbook, and you can share (top right hand corner) it with anyone you'd like.

To download this workbook as a Word Document on your computer: If you don't have a Google account, download this document on your computer and complete the exercises there. Click **File > Download > Microsoft Word**. To share it with someone, you'll need to email it as an attachment.

Choose Your Own Adventure Essay

Tool Workbook

Table of Contents

Montage Structure

- [The Values Exercise](#)
- [7 Short Brainstorming Exercises](#)
- [Montage Outline\(s\) 1.0](#)
- [First Montage Draft](#)
- [Montage Outline 2.0](#)
- [Second Montage Draft](#)
- [More Brainstorming Exercises](#)

Narrative Structure

- [Feelings and Needs Exercise](#)
- [Narrative Outline Pt. 1: Challenges + Effects](#)
- [Narrative Outline Pt. 2: What I did about it](#)
- [Narrative Outline Pt. 3: What I learned](#)

[Full Narrative Outline 1.0](#)

[First Narrative Draft](#)

[Full Narrative Outline 2.0](#)

[Second Narrative Draft](#)

[Click here for sample essays](#)

[Template emails for potential feedback providers](#)

Montage Structure

The Values Exercise

Instructions: Highlight and **bold** the 10 values you connect with most from the list below. Of those 10, **underline** your top 5. Finally, **italicize** your top 3. Then scroll down to the next activity. (Download a printable copy of the values list [here.](#))

<input type="checkbox"/> personal development	<input type="checkbox"/> safety	<input type="checkbox"/> courage
<input type="checkbox"/> recognition	<input type="checkbox"/> creativity	<input type="checkbox"/> self-love
<input type="checkbox"/> accountability	<input type="checkbox"/> knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/> ritual
<input type="checkbox"/> inspiration	<input type="checkbox"/> inclusion	<input type="checkbox"/> purpose
<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> curiosity	<input type="checkbox"/> privacy
<input type="checkbox"/> helping others	<input type="checkbox"/> gratitude	<input type="checkbox"/> freedom
<input type="checkbox"/> peace	<input type="checkbox"/> faith	<input type="checkbox"/> quiet
<input type="checkbox"/> diversity	<input type="checkbox"/> communication	<input type="checkbox"/> compassion
<input type="checkbox"/> expertise	<input type="checkbox"/> interdependence	<input type="checkbox"/> cooperation
<input type="checkbox"/> vulnerability	<input type="checkbox"/> efficiency	<input type="checkbox"/> growth
<input type="checkbox"/> global awareness	<input type="checkbox"/> stability	<input type="checkbox"/> authenticity
<input type="checkbox"/> hunger	<input type="checkbox"/> humor	<input type="checkbox"/> practicality
<input type="checkbox"/> my country	<input type="checkbox"/> truth	<input type="checkbox"/> nature
<input type="checkbox"/> sleep	<input type="checkbox"/> order	<input type="checkbox"/> objectivity
<input type="checkbox"/> productivity	<input type="checkbox"/> excellence	<input type="checkbox"/> leadership
<input type="checkbox"/> intuition	<input type="checkbox"/> religion	<input type="checkbox"/> wisdom
<input type="checkbox"/> culture	<input type="checkbox"/> beauty	<input type="checkbox"/> respect
<input type="checkbox"/> healthy boundaries	<input type="checkbox"/> meaningful work	<input type="checkbox"/> strength
<input type="checkbox"/> second chances	<input type="checkbox"/> trust	<input type="checkbox"/> flexibility
<input type="checkbox"/> listening	<input type="checkbox"/> self-expression	<input type="checkbox"/> financial stability
<input type="checkbox"/> family	<input type="checkbox"/> fun	<input type="checkbox"/> empathy
<input type="checkbox"/> excitement	<input type="checkbox"/> rationality	<input type="checkbox"/> belonging
<input type="checkbox"/> travel	<input type="checkbox"/> democracy	<input type="checkbox"/> equity
<input type="checkbox"/> adventure	<input type="checkbox"/> self-control	<input type="checkbox"/> resourcefulness
<input type="checkbox"/> laughter	<input type="checkbox"/> balance	<input type="checkbox"/> decisiveness

<input type="checkbox"/> entrepreneurship <input type="checkbox"/> wonder <input type="checkbox"/> health and fitness <input type="checkbox"/> love <input type="checkbox"/> close relationships <input type="checkbox"/> humility <input type="checkbox"/> art <input type="checkbox"/> responsibility <input type="checkbox"/> wealth <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> adaptability <input type="checkbox"/> success <input type="checkbox"/> independence <input type="checkbox"/> variety <input type="checkbox"/> community <input type="checkbox"/> patience <input type="checkbox"/> challenges <input type="checkbox"/> autonomy <input type="checkbox"/> loyalty <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> competence <input type="checkbox"/> collaboration <input type="checkbox"/> spirituality <input type="checkbox"/> social change <input type="checkbox"/> honesty <input type="checkbox"/> mindfulness <input type="checkbox"/> grace <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____
---	---	--

7 Short Brainstorming Exercises

Time: 20-25 min

The exercises below will take a few minutes each. Some may seem random at first, but give them a shot. You may actually find your essay topic.

Exercise #1: I Love + I Know

Spend one minute making a random list of things you love. If you have a partner nearby, set a timer and speak your list aloud while your partner writes down what you say. Examples: I love ... the ocean. I love ... the way clean laundry smells. I love ... physics. I love ... my grandmother's pupusas, etc. Then switch roles, and you write while your partner makes their list. [Here's a video of me doing this one.](#)

After you've done that, spend one minute making a list of things you know a lot about. (Examples: I know a lot about ... board games ... World War II history ... constructed languages, etc.) Again, if you have a partner, take turns talking and writing. Write them here:

Exercise #2: Essence Objects

Spend at least five minutes naming 10 "essence objects." These are tangible things that represent memories, moments, relationships, or values that are important to you. Briefly say why each one is meaningful (Ex: "The beads on my desk were hand-painted by my friends for my daughter and they represent the love from my community.")

Here are 20 questions to help you brainstorm (again, you can write them below):

- What's an object that reminds you of home?
- What object makes you feel safe?
- What's a food that reminds you of your family?
- What object represents a challenge you've faced?
- What's a dream or goal you have for the future?
- What's something about you that sometimes surprises people?
- Who are you with and what are you doing when you feel most like yourself?

- What brings you joy?
- What's hanging on your bedroom walls?
- What are you proud of?
- What's an object that reminds you of something that still feels unresolved in your life?
- What's an object that represents something you know now that you didn't know five years ago?
- What action or gesture represents love to you?
- What do you like to do that does not involve technology?
- What will you save for your child someday?
- What's the most memorable meal you've ever eaten or made?
- What's in your bag right now? Anything that's always there?
- What do you like to collect?
- What have you kept from a trip?
- What's something that people associate with you?

Exercise #3: Random Questions

Spend 5 minutes answering some of these random questions. Pick whichever ones you want. Feel free to skip around.

- What's your actual superpower?
- What's your favorite story to tell?
- What traditions have been passed down in your family?
- What's perfect about your life?
- When is a time you forgave someone or were forgiven for something?
- What's a class you'd love to take, even if no such class exists?
- How do you make people laugh?
- When in life have you felt most alone?
- What's your biggest secret?
- What would you tell your younger self?
- If the zombie apocalypse came tomorrow, what particular skill would you use to survive?
- What does your inner voice tell you?
- What's missing from your life?
- What thing could you never give up?
- What's one thing you wake up to in the middle of the night worrying about?
- What are you hiding?
- Who or what makes you laugh?
- What are you ready to let go of?

Exercise #4: Career

Name a career, or several careers, you're interested in. Describe 2-3 qualities you possess that will make you great in that career, or those careers.

Exercise #5: Identity

How do you identify? Examples: "I'm a ... reader, jazz lover, queer, Colombian, singer, feminist, etc." Name as many identities you claim or communities you're a part of. Is there one identity

that's particularly important to you, or maybe one you've struggled with? If so, what have you found challenging about it?

Exercise #6: Home

What's one place you feel most like yourself? Where do you find flow? Examples: In the kitchen (or) when I'm coding (or) when I'm playing games with my brothers (or) when I'm taking photographs? Name as many as you can think of. Or, if "home" is hard for you to define, freewrite for a minute about why "home" is hard for you to define.

Exercise #7: Identifying Your "Islands of Personality"

One of my favorite ways to help students find a topic is by discussing their islands of personality. What do I mean?

Watch [this 1-minute clip](#) from the Pixar film "Inside Out."

What are your "islands of personality"? List them here:

Montage Outline(s) 1.0

Feel free to use this space to outline as many Montage ideas as you like.

Sample Outline Chart for the Laptop Stickers Essay (Feel free to delete this example to create your own)

Structure: Montage	Topic: Laptop Stickers	
Values	Examples (aka How I've Developed These Qualities)	Insights (aka "So What" Moments)
Creativity	"We <3 Design" sticker	Helped me develop my own style
Open-mindedness	"Common Threads" sticker from TEDxYouth@Austin	Culture is It' created, not just consumed in Austin
Humor, Family	Poop Emoji sticker from my brother	I love my brother
Courage, Social Awareness	"Lol ur not Harry Styles" sticker	I used to internalize my beliefs more, but don't as much now
Entrepreneurship	"Catapult" (startup incubator) sticker	Helped me discover career
Meaningful work that I love	"Thank God it's Monday" sticker	I hope it's always like this

First Montage Draft



College Essay Guy
www.collegeessayguy.com

Full Montage Outline 2.0



College Essay Guy
www.collegeessayguy.com

Second Montage Draft



College Essay Guy
www.collegeessayguy.com

More Brainstorming Exercises

Can't decide on a topic or don't feel you have enough content yet? Here are a few more of my favorite brainstorming exercises:

The 21 Details Exercise

Instructions: Click [here](#) to begin the activity. Record your answers below.

My 21 Details	
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	
11.	
12.	
13.	
14.	
15.	
16.	
17.	
18.	
19.	
20.	
21.	

The “Everything I Want Colleges to Know About Me” List

Instructions: Click [here](#) to begin the activity. Depending on how you choose to complete the assignment, record your answers below.

10 Things I Want Colleges To Know About Me	
1)	
2)	
3)	
4)	
5)	
6)	
7)	
8)	
9)	
10)	

The Essence Objects Exercise

Instructions: Click [here](#) to start the Objects Exercise. Record your objects below, and include a few words about what they mean to you.

Examples:

Worn North Carolina Tarheel blue and white basketball: I've spent more time on a basketball court than virtually anywhere else (which is why the ball is worn), and basketball also represents my connection with my dad: when I was a kid we'd watch Carolina games together and play basketball in the backyard for hours.

Blue Bible with my name etched on it in gold lettering that my grandma gave me when I was seven: represents my having been raised in the Presbyterian Church. And my parents were missionaries and as a result I attended 12 different schools so the Bible represents moving around a lot.

My Essence Objects List
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.
11.
12.
13.
14.
15.

Narrative Structure

The Feelings and Needs Exercise

Instructions: Click [here](#) to watch the *Feelings and Needs Exercise* and click [here](#) to view the accompanying PDF. As you listen, you can complete the exercise below OR, if you prefer, use a piece of paper, take a photo, and paste it below. (On the Toolbar above, click Insert > Image)

Challenges	Effects	Feelings	Needs	What I Did	What I Learned

Narrative Outline Pt. 1: Challenges + Effects

Examples (you can delete this and create your own outline):

Challenges:

- *Domestic abuse*
- *Alcoholic step-dad*
- *Little brother Fernando's birth*
- *Learning I was undocumented*

Effects:

- *My brother and I shared the mental strain*
- *Father was arrested*
- *Money was tight*
- *Mom worked two jobs*
- *My brother and I took care of one another*
- *We kept to ourselves when dealing with financial and medical issues*
- *I avoided going on certain school trips*
- *At times I was discouraged from meeting new people*
- *My grades started to slip*

Narrative Outline Pt. 2: What I did about it

Example (you can delete this and create your own outline):

What I Did About It:

- **Took care** of my youngest brother
- **Became** my own teacher
- **Learned** how to fix a bike, swim, socialize
- **Found** a job to help pay bills
- **Improved** my grades
- **Shattered** a school swimming record
- **Taught myself** how to play instruments
- **Won** the honor of being the first student in my school to pass the AP Physics 1 exam
- **Took on** several leadership roles in clubs
- **Tutored** and **counseled** friends and peers

Narrative Outline Pt. 3: What I learned

Example (you can delete this and create your own outline):

Bullet point the values:

- *Independence*
- *Autonomy*

Then write a sentence for each one:

- *Independence: Going through the experiences with my father helped me see that I wanted to not only experience more freedom for myself and for my mom, but for other women as well.*
- *Autonomy: Going through the experience of supporting my family and learning I was undocumented helped me realize that I wanted to be able to have more freedom to make choices for myself--what I was interested in--instead of what others were interested in.*

Or use arrows:

- *Experiences with my father → freedom (for me, mom, other women)*
- *Supporting family + learning I was undocumented → autonomy*

Full Narrative Outline 1.0

Example (you can delete this and create your own outline):

Challenges:

- *Domestic abuse*
- *Alcoholic step-dad*
- *Little brother Fernando's birth*
- *Learning I was undocumented*

Effects:

- *My brother and I shared the mental strain*
- *Father was arrested*
- *Money was tight*
- *Mom worked two jobs*
- *My brother and I took care of one another*
- *We kept to ourselves when dealing with financial and medical issues*
- *I avoided going on certain school trips*
- *At times I was discouraged from meeting new people*
- *My grades started to slip*

What I Did About It:

- **Took care** of my youngest brother
- **Became** my own teacher
- **Learned** how to fix a bike, swim, socialize
- **Found** a job to help pay bills
- **Improved** my grades
- **Shattered** a school swimming record
- **Taught myself** how to play instruments
- **Won** the honor of being the first student in my school to pass the AP Physics 1 exam
- **Took on** several leadership roles in clubs
- **Tutored** and **counseled** friends and peers

What I learned:

- Independence: Going through the experiences with my father helped me see that I wanted to not only experience more freedom for myself and for my mom, but for other women as well.
- Autonomy: Going through the experience of supporting my family and learning I was undocumented helped me realize that I wanted to be able to have more freedom to make choices for myself--what I was interested in--instead of what others were interested in.

First Narrative Draft



Full Narrative Outline 2.0



College Essay Guy
www.collegeessayguy.com

Second Narrative Draft

Template emails for potential feedback provider

Once you've finished your outlines or your draft, you can share it with your mentor by using the "share" button in the top right corner of your Google doc and include a message like the one below... And feel free to copy and paste; just be sure to type in their name!

1. Example Email for Requesting Help Deciding on a Topic

Hi (name of person)!

I'm hoping to write a personal statement that will help me stand out AND show many parts of who I am.

Would you mind letting me know which of these outlines (see attached) would, in your opinion, help me do these two things?

If this is unclear, click [this 2-minute video](#) for an explanation.

And if these ideas don't seem promising, would you please let me know if you think I should continue brainstorming more ideas? I'm willing to do that.

Thank you!

2. Example Email for Requesting Feedback on a Narrative Essay Draft

Hi [Name]:

I've just finished a draft of my narrative personal statement and I'd love your feedback. Will you please help me by answering these questions? Thank you!

Question	Yes/No/Sort of
Is it clear what my challenges are? Are they compelling (i.e., do you believe they will make for a stand-out essay)?	
Is it clear what the effects of the challenges on me were?	
Is it clear what I did to overcome my challenges?	
Is it clear what I learned from these experiences?	

Finally, if you have a few extra minutes: As you read my essay, what do you find yourself wanting to know more about?

If any of this seems confusing, this [two-minute video](#) explains more.

*Thanks again,
[Your Name]*

3. Example Email for Requesting Feedback on a Montage Essay Draft

“Hi, [Your Mentor’s Name]!

I’ve just finished a draft of my montage personal statement, and I’d love your feedback. Will you please fill out this table?

Question	Yes/No/Sort of
Is it clear what my topic is?	
Are the examples in each paragraph strong, specific & visual?	
Is it clear what values I’m trying to show in each paragraph?	
Do you spot at least 2-3 insights, or moments where I answer “so what?” in the essay?	

Finally: As you read my essay, what do you find yourself wanting to know more about?

If any of this seems confusing, [this 2-minute video](#) explains more.

*Thank you so much for your time,
[Your Name]*