

Morning Writing: Finding Your Voice

The Wow Method includes ten steps. Before we dive into Step 1, we introduce a no-stakes activity that calms students and helps them recognize that they already have a distinctive writing voice. This is the voice they will use in their essay.


Students log in to wowwritingworkshop.com and navigate to a landing page (below) that explains how the process works. This page shows them that every segment of Wow Online – College Essay begins with a video introduction. After watching the video, they’ll continue reading to learn more. Then they will complete a writing activity. In this case, the writing activity is Morning Writing: Finding Your Voice (instructions on the next page of this packet).

The videos are 30 to 90 seconds long, the readings are less than 10 minutes each, and the writing activities take between 20 minutes for a quick activity and 1-2 hours for writing a draft. Everything is divided into manageable chunks. The video and web page cover the basics of

voice – what it is, why students don’t have to worry about if it’s sophisticated enough, funny enough, etc. We help them feel calm and capable.

Each segment of Wow Online – College Essay begins with a **Video Introduction**. After watching the video, **continue reading** to learn more. Then you will complete an activity by clicking **Try It Now**.

Note: the video tells you to “Click Read It.” There is no click! Just read the page.



The Wow Method takes you through the writing process, but let’s be clear about what a college admission essay is in the first place before we talk process. At its core, your essay is a story – a story about you. It’s not about the orphans you met on a summer trip to Ecuador or your favorite novel. It’s about how that person, book or experience affected you. Are you different now? Did you learn something meaningful about yourself?

<p>Mundane Moments</p> <p>Some of the best essays we’ve read focus on the most mundane moments: two brothers on a bike ride through their neighborhood; a talented dancer choosing to drop all but a few of her dance classes; a boy and his sister stuck in traffic; a high school junior trying out for the pom-pom team at her new school. Frequently, we learn our enduring life lessons during these ordinary moments – the moments when our best and most authentic selves emerge. Everyone has a story to tell. If more students (and parents!) would relax and let those stories develop, the essay wouldn’t seem like such a stumbling block. Instead, it would be seen as the opportunity it is</p>	<p>Who Are You?</p> <p>The essay is the perfect place to demonstrate who you are. Let’s assume you participate in some extracurricular activities: sports, robotics or theater. Maybe you work after school, or you tutor middle school math and volunteer at a food pantry. All of these things are important, but they might not distinguish you from everyone else. There’s another girl similar to you in Florida; there’s another boy who plays drums and tutors algebra in Oregon. That doesn’t mean your accomplishments and activities don’t matter. They do matter. A lot. But they might not set you apart. Fortunately, you can stand out in your essay because no one can write your story the way you</p>
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This page also introduces the idea that they don’t have to worry about topic. We will help them identify a wonderful, effective topic when we meet to brainstorm ideas, which will be easier to develop than they might think. After watching the brief video and reading a couple of pages of text, we introduce the exercise, which you can find on the next page. And that’s it!

Morning Writing: Finding Your Voice

Part 1

What did you do this morning from the moment you woke up until you left your home?

In a moment, you will open a new document or a clean sheet of paper, and quickly write down as much as you can recall, using all of your senses. Be specific, but don't worry about making sense or sounding clever. You can write fragments, sentences, lists or run-ons. It doesn't matter, because you are not writing an essay; you are simply capturing details.

Write fast, and do not judge what you write. Don't even read it as you go along. Just keep moving forward.

1. Open a new document, or use a notebook and pen.
2. Set a timer for 10 minutes.
3. Write about your morning.
4. When the timer stops, stop writing, and read the instructions for Part 2.

Part 2

Your writing voice is unique, and often shines through when you relax and write freely. Look back at what you wrote about your morning, and find three segments that truly sound like you. Each one can be anything from a short phrase to a multi-sentence description. They don't have to be exciting or clever; they just have to sound like YOU. For example:

- Something you always say, do or think.
- A description of something that screams "my house!" or "my room!" or "my mom!"
- A phrase you like, a detailed description or something clear and specific that sounds just like you.

When you find your segments, highlight, bold or underline them. These are examples of your writing voice. This is what you sound like when you are not trying too hard to be clever or creative. This is the voice you should write in when you begin to compose your application essay. Keep it in mind as you work on the essay.

How to Facilitate a Student-Centered Brainstorm

The following pages outline a suggested brainstorming process, including pre-brainstorm activities. **Morning Writing: Finding Your Voice** is an integral part of our pre-work and the pre-work of counselors who use the Wow Method with their students.

Before the Brainstorm Discussion

- Schedule your meeting. Explain what you expect the student to do ahead of time, how long the pre-work will take and when you want them to submit it.
- Assign pre-work. Make sure you have either shared the written explanations or spoken to your student about what a college essay is and who is reading it ahead of time. Ask them to complete these writing assignments ahead of time:
 - **Morning Writing: Finding Your Voice**
 - Step 1: Understand the Prompt (*Full instructions are available to participants in the College Essay Experience program*)
 - Step 2: Brainstorm Ideas (*Full instructions are available to participants in the College Essay Experience program*)
- Receive the pre-work at least 24 hours in advance. If the student doesn't turn it in on time, find out why, then get it quickly or reschedule. Most students will get the work done when you remind them that writing is not a group activity.
- Review the pre-work, but don't obsess over it. Familiarize yourself with the student's responses so you can:
 - Say something positive about the **Morning Writing: Finding Your Voice** activity.
 - Confirm understanding of Step 1. Prepare by checking to see if they understand the general purpose of the essay prompt and whether they can distinguish between accomplishments (what do they already know about you) and characteristics (what would you like them to know).
 - Review Step 2 together. Don't spend a lot of time trying to figure out which of their Step 2 topic ideas has the most potential. Assume that many (if not all) of their potential ideas will be too broad, too cliché, too long ago or otherwise ineffective. That doesn't matter. You are looking for conversation-starters.

During the Brainstorm Discussion

Review Morning Writing: Finding Your Voice (2-3 minutes): Praise the student for completing the exercise. Point out that this is what their natural, authentic voice sounds like when they are not trying to impress anyone. It doesn't matter if they included descriptive details or simply provided a play-by-play report of their morning routine. Do not focus on what or how you wish they could write. This writing demonstrates what they sound like at their most natural. This is what you should expect from their essays, with a little more polish. Set your expectations accordingly. Also note that you will ask them to do a lot more free-writing during revision, particularly during the Content phase. Familiarizing them with the concept of free writing now will pay dividends later.

Review Step 1: Understand the Prompt (5 minutes): The goal here is to confirm understanding. Do they understand the overall purpose of a personal statement? Do they know the difference between accomplishments (what readers already know from the rest of application) and characteristics (what they wish readers knew)? Even if their list of characteristics is short or cliché, that's fine. It does not need to be comprehensive. Unless their responses are terribly off base, keep this quick.

Discuss Step 2: Brainstorm Ideas (30 minutes): Let the student walk you through their ideas. Be curious and willing to be surprised. Listen and ask questions. Use phrases like "Tell me about a time when ..." or "That's interesting... Can you say more about that?" After you review and discuss the student's ideas, help them choose a topic. *(Full instructions are available to participants in the College Essay Experience program)*

Introduce Step 3: Establish the Essay's Theme (5-10 minutes)

(Full instructions are available to participants in the College Essay Experience program)

Introduce Steps 4 and 5: Set Expectations and Discuss Next Steps (5 minutes)

(Full instructions are available to participants in the College Essay Experience program)