**AP Literature Exploratory Essay** (see also: personal narrative, college essay)

**Overview**: An exploratory essay is generally a short, autobiographical exploration

of some significant personal idea, experience, or problem. Its author should seek to

examine, as opposed to prove, and the best exploratory essay will be

impressionistic, subjective, and inductive.

**Due Date**: A rough draft will be due (for mandatory peer critique and voluntary

conferencing) by the beginning of class on Friday, September 2nd. A final draft,

based on modeling, prewriting, journaling, drafting, peer review, conferencing, and

self-assessment, will be due by the beginning of class on Friday, September 16th.

This should provide enough time for grading before early decision deadlines.

**Format**: typed, double-spaced, 12 pt font, MLA (header, title, margins, pagination),

250-word minimum, not to exceed 650 words.

**Reminder**: This is NOT an academic essay. Feel free to refer to yourself as “I,”

and/or to write informally at times if it is clear you are doing so for aesthetic

reasons. Overall, however, demonstrate that you understand the conventions of

language and writing.

**Class resources**: The rubric below, models we look at in class (for example,

“Shooting Dad” and past successful student submittals), any personal narrative that

“shows vs. tells,” literary impressionism…think Sandra Cisneros, F Scott Fitzgerald, Hemingway, William Faulkner, etc. The narration of experience, both as it happens,

and in retrospect, this is the stuff of the exploratory essay.

**Prompts** (from the 2017-18 Common Application) Select 1:

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story. [No change] **What about your background is meaningful? What is it about your identity that is meaningful? What interest do you have that is meaningful? How so? What talent do you have that is meaningful? How so?**

**What is an event or moment that you can recall that reveals what is so meaningful about your background?**

**What is an event or moment that you can recall that reveals what is so meaningful about your identity?**

**What is a moment that reveals why your interest is so meaningful to you?**

**What moment exemplifies why your talent is so meaningful?**

**What will be shown about you through this background, identity, interest, talent?**   
  
2. 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? [Revised]

**What was the challenge, setback, or failure? What event or moment captures this challenge, setback, or failure? What will be shown about you from this challenge, setback, or failure?**   
  
3. Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome? [Revised] **What was the idea or belief you challenged? Why did you challenge it? What was your thinking? What happened as a result?**

**When did you question or challenge the belief or idea? What did this look like? What was the moment? What will be shown about you through this questioning or challenging of a belief?**   
  
4. Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma - anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution. [No change] **What is the problem you’ve solved? Brainstorm several problems you solved that may work for this essay. What problem would you like to solve? When was the moment you solved the problem? What were the moments that led up to this? When did you realize you wanted to solve this problem? What was the moment? What will this show about you?**   
  
5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others. [Revised]

**What was the accomplishment, event, or realization**? **Describe the moment of the accomplishment, event, or realization. How did it spark a period of personal growth or a new understanding of yourself and others? What will be shown about you from this narrative?**   
  
6. Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more? [New]

**What is the topic, idea, or concept? How or why does it make you lose track of time. What would be a moment or event that showcases you losing yourself in this topic, idea, or concept? How so? What does it show about you?**

**Rubric**

**(A) Ideas**: -Essay is original, creative, imaginative, thought provoking, complex,

memorable, and/or sincere.

-Ideas are subtle, surprising, revealing, deep, humorous, moving, and/or beautiful.

-Ideas demonstrate reflection, analysis, and evaluation (experience is signified

implicitly), and are developed, linked, and elaborated.

**Writing**: -Essay is vivid, evocative (“shows” vs. “tells”), and subsequently

deliberate/purposeful in its use of connotative diction, concrete detail, imagery,

schemes (variety of syntax), tropes (figurative language) and/or symbolism.

-Essay is effectively and logically structured and sequenced with cohering parts and

transitions.

-Active voice predominates.

-Essay is focused and economical.

-Essay is free of unintentional spelling and grammatical errors, and essay is

formatted per MLA guidelines

**Awareness of Audience**:

-Author’s subject, tone & mood are effective and well suited to rhetorical purpose.

-Essay effectively balances appeals (ethos, logos, pathos, kairos, mythos).

**Reflection/Annotation:**

Reflection and annotations are thorough & analytical.

**(B) Ideas**: Essay is thought provoking, engaging, and purposeful (implicit

thesis/central idea); ideas demonstrate observation and subsequent evaluation.

**Writing**: Essay is deliberate/purposeful in its use of diction, syntax, imagery, and/or

symbolism; essay is for the most part logically structured and sequenced; essay is

mostly free of spelling and grammatical errors and mostly formatted per MLA

guidelines. **Awareness of Audience**: Author’s subject, tone, & mood are

appropriate for the task; essay appropriately utilizes multiple appeals.

**Reflection/Annotation**: Reflection and annotation are adequate.

**(C) Ideas**: Essay develops a central idea that fulfills the purpose and generally

controls the piece. **Writing**: Essay is sometimes inconsistent in its employment of

detail, diction, and/or images, or essay is at times too explicit; structure and

sequence may suffer minor deficiencies in logic and/or coherence; spelling and/or

grammatical errors are potentially distracting. **Awareness of Audience**: Author’s

subject, tone & mood might not always be appropriate for the task and intended

audience. **Reflection/Annotation**: Reflection & annotations are present but

uneven.

**(D) Ideas**: Essay doesn’t always feel appropriately purposeful or controlled.

**Writing**: Essay is lacking in its employment of detail, diction, and/or images, or is

primarily explicit; structure and sequence suffer significant deficiencies in logic

and/or coherence; spelling and/or grammatical errors are especially distracting.

**Awareness of Audience**: Author’s subject, tone &/or mood often don’t fit the task &

intended audience. **Reflection/Annotation**: Reflection & annotations are cursory

at best.

**(NP)** Compounds problems in category above.