Revised College Essay Rubric

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|  |  | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |
| **Phase 1: What** | **Insight** | Topic/ event focuses too heavily on negative characteristics; Characteristic and/or insight is unclear or insight is not about the scholar. | Topic/ event reveals identifiable and positive characteristics of essayist, but it is general and/or not conveyed to the audience. | Topic/ event reveals identifiable and positive characteristics of essayist. A positive message is communicated to audience. | Topic/ event reveals identifiable and positive characteristics of essayist. A positive, compelling message is communicated to audience. Reveals a unique insight and avoids cliché. | Topic/ event reveals distinct, identifiable and positive characteristics of essayist. A sophisticated (e.g. reveal an awareness of the broader world, including gracefully integrating social themes or revealing academic savvy, worldliness, and cultural capital), compelling message is communicated to audience in subtle, nuanced ways. |
| **Story** | Story does not focus on the writer; or is not aligned to the insight. | Story chosen is not fully aligned to the insight, most important characteristics of author may not come through in the topic; telling of the story or the focus is largely on the wrong part of the story; may feel clichéd or stilted. Based on the story, the focus or insight is unclear. | Story chosen is aligned to insight; key characteristics of author come through in the topic and/or telling of the story; vignettes/details selected mostly connect story and insight; may feel somewhat clichéd or stilted. | Story chosen clearly demonstrates insight; key characteristics of author come through in the topic and/or telling of the story; vignettes/details selected effectively connect story and insight; story has an authentic voice and avoids cliché. | Story chosen enhances insight in a compelling and memorable way; key characteristics of author come through in the topic and/or telling of the story; vignettes/details selected artfully connect story and insight; story has an authentic voice and avoids cliché. |
| **Phase 2: How: Macro** | **Structure and Arc** | Essay is disorganized or structural elements do not convey story or insight. | Essay includes insight and story; potentially organizational/ structural elements detract from movement/storytelling. | Essay is logically sequenced to convey story and insight; no organizational or structural elements detract from movement/storytelling. | Essay is purposefully and effectively sequenced to enhance connection between story and insight; essay may deliberately – and, if employed, must mostly effectively -- leverage stylistic organizational structures (e.g. extended metaphor, motif, nonlinear chronology, shifting perspective, transitions between narrative and analytical writing, etc.) | Essay is purposefully and effectively sequenced to seamlessly integrate story and insight; essay deliberately and effectively leverages stylistic organizational structures (e.g. extended metaphor, motif, nonlinear chronology, shifting perspective, transitions between narrative and analytical writing, etc.) |
| **Phase 3: How: Micro** | **Narrative Techniques** | Craft moves (e.g. figurative language, balance of show v. tell, hook, sentence structure, bookended theme) are missing entirely, or, if included, distract the reader from the insight or highlight the wrong part of the story. | Attempts at including narrative craft (e.g. figurative language, balance of show v. tell, hook, sentence structure, bookended theme) are minimally effective. These techniques may be unevenly balanced, show a lack of awareness of audience, or reveal weak command of narrative craft. | Intentional craft moves (e.g. figurative language, balance of show v. tell, hook, sentence structure, bookended theme) align to the insight and/or story and mostly engage the intended audience. | Intentional craft moves (e.g. figurative language, balance of show v. tell, hook, sentence structure, bookended theme) effectively enhance the insight and story, engage the intended audience, and reveal a solid command of narrative craft. | Intentional craft moves (e.g. figurative language, balance of show v. tell, hook, sentence structure, bookended theme) effectively and seamlessly enhance the insight and story, create a positive, memorable narrative for the intended audience, and reveal a sophisticated command of narrative craft. |
| **Language** | Little to no purposeful word choice, or choice of language distracts reader (e.g. is overly cliché, lacks concision, creates an inappropriate tone, including gratuitous profanity or slang, or has multiple word choice and usage errors) from the purpose of the essay. | Use of language is inconsistent. At times, it is precisely used, but at times, language may include clichés, inaccuracies, including overuse of the thesaurus, gratuitous big words, or unsophisticated word choice and details. The essay needs revising for precision and concision, but choice of language does not impede the reader's ability to access the story and insight. | Accurate use of language (e.g. precise word choice, sensory details) creates a mostly appropriate tone, avoiding clichés and redundancies. May lack concision. | Strong control of language (e.g. precise word choice, sensory details) vividly conveys story, creating an appropriate tone for the intended audience. Makes solid use of word limit. | Fluent, sophisticated control of language (e.g. precise word choice, sensory details) vividly and memorably conveys story, working in concert to communicate an authentic tone that reinforces insight and is appropriate for the intended audience. Maximizes all 650 words, making every word count. |
| **Phase 4: Format and Publishing** | **Final Edits** | Free of grammatical errors: appropriate subject-verb agreement, logical comparison, no misplaced modifiers, no run-on or sentence fragments; no errors in capitalization, punctuation, or spelling, including homophones and proofreading errors (e.g., using the word "red" instead of "read", which spell check would not catch). |
| 650 words or less. 12 point font, Times New Roman. 1-inch margins around. |