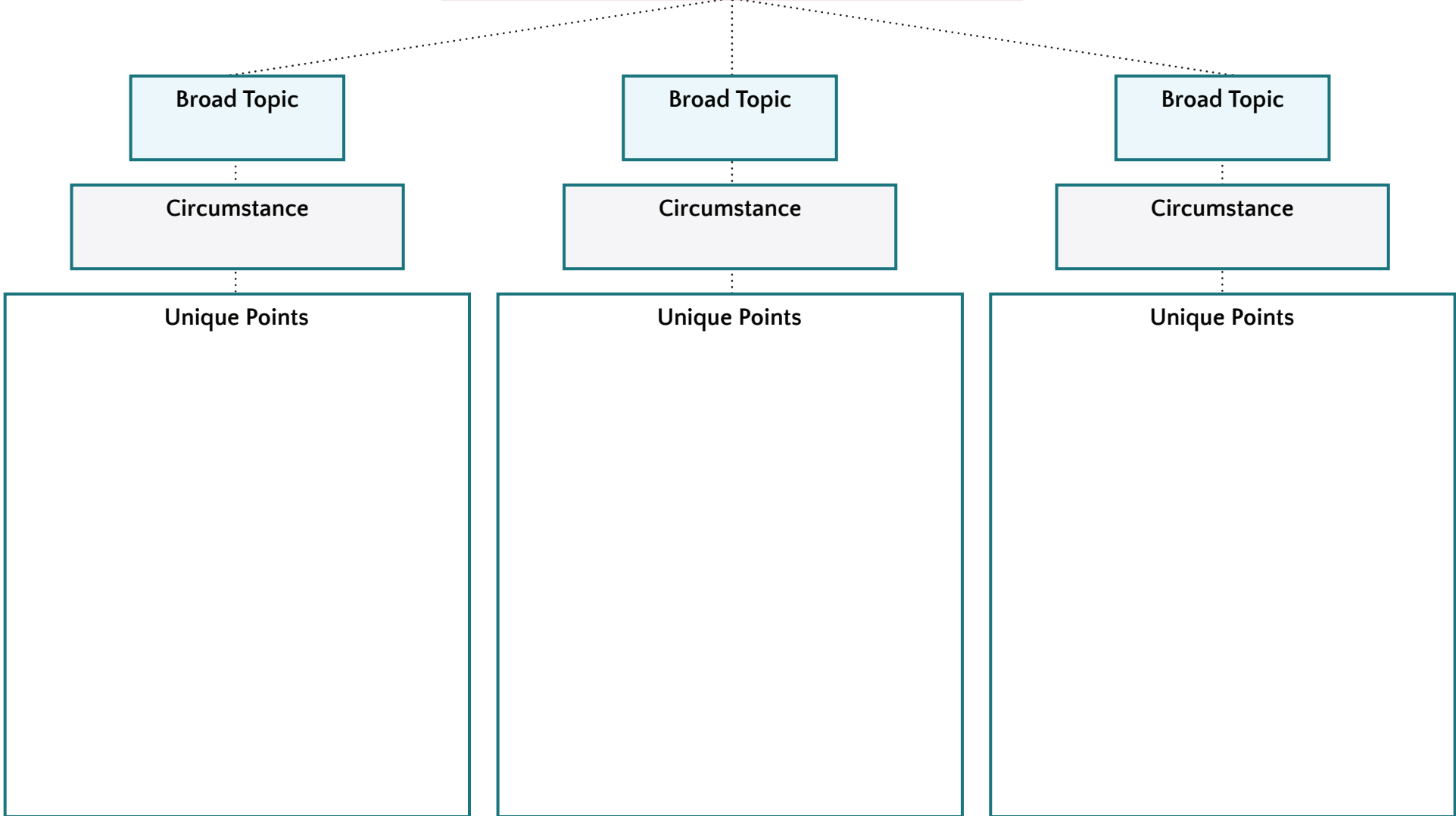


College Essay Brainstorming Worksheet

Writing a college essay can seem daunting at first, but it doesn't have to be. By taking the time to brainstorm, outline, and draft, you can craft a strong college essay that stands out. To get started, use the instructions on Page 2 to thoughtfully fill out the columns below.

Essay Prompt:
Factors and/or challenges that have influenced you



College Essay Brainstorming Worksheet

Use the instructions on this page to thoughtfully fill out the columns on Page 1.

1 Brainstorm

Take your general ideas and hone in on what makes your story unique. Begin with a broad topic, identify a specific circumstance, then elaborate by jotting down unique points related to that circumstance.

Broad Topic: An overarching theme that immediately pops into your mind when thinking about the writing prompt. It should be a general jumping point for more specific points you want to make. Example:

Broad Topic

Family

Circumstance: The specific situation that made or makes the broad topic more influential to you. It's okay if the circumstance is something that many other students may identify with. Example:

Circumstance

Single parent household

Unique Points: Parts of your circumstance that make your story uniquely your own. While the broad topic and circumstance can be relatable to anyone, your unique points should set your story apart from others' with details that are specific to you. Examples:

Unique Points

- Grew to be very independent; mom worked long, irregular hours
- Had to cook for myself and my siblings with a limited budget of \$20
- Discovered the use of spices to add flavor to simple ingredients

Repeat this process two more times. Take a step back, carefully examine the three columns, and try to select one as the topic of your essay.

2 Outline

Review or add to the unique points of the topic and circumstance you want to write about. Find a common thread in order to outline the paragraphs of your essay.

Common Thread: An idea, topic, or theme that is carried consistently throughout your essay. It does not have to be explicit; you do not have to explain how every paragraph relates to the common thread. However, it should be prevalent enough to ensure that the pieces of your essay are united. Example:

*My essay's common thread:
Resourcefulness*

*Paragraph I:
- Eldest of four siblings
- Single mom working long, irregular hours
- Family struggling financially*

*Paragraph II:
- Responsibility to buy food for siblings with \$20
- Felt determined and resourceful
- Wanted to get creative*

*Paragraph III:
- Perfected the art of budgeting for meals
- Became very resourceful and strategic
- Loved using different spices and ingredients
- Soon able to make entire meals under budget*

In the example above, the student's resourcefulness is the common thread of the essay. Paragraph I sets the backdrop for the student to be resourceful; Paragraph II presents the opportunity; Paragraph III details when and how the student demonstrated resourcefulness.

3 Draft

After outlining your paragraphs, begin the drafting process. Here are some tips to keep in mind in order to craft a strong essay.

Show, Don't Tell: Be very descriptive. Add concrete and/or interesting details to bring your story to life for your reader. Think about the five senses. Example:

There is something therapeutic about the smell of spices sautéing in a pan of caramelizing onions, and there is nothing more relaxing after a long day at school than standing over the stove gently coaxing these ingredients. In 30 minutes and for only \$20, I would have a delicious dinner prepared for my family. And there was always enough leftover for when my mother returned from her 12-hour shift at the hospital.

Focus On Yourself: Make sure you are ultimately telling your story, not the story of something or someone else in your essay. Example:

Watching my mother work long, hard hours just to put a roof over our heads has inspired my strong work ethic. Her example has motivated me to put my full heart into the classroom, and at home to take care of my siblings.

Negative vs. Positive: It's okay to talk about negative life circumstances, but it's best to focus on how you overcame them, what you learned, and how you grew from these experiences. Example:

As the eldest of five, I have to play a parental role at home. I get home from a long day of classes and clubs and head straight to the kitchen to prepare dinner. While this is stressful at times, my situation has taught me the importance of hard work, and the strong bond of family.