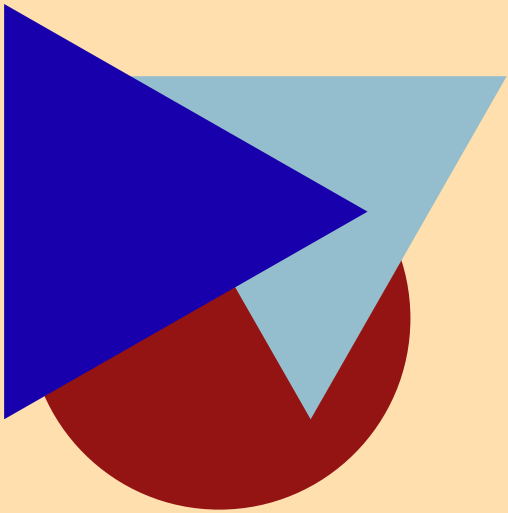
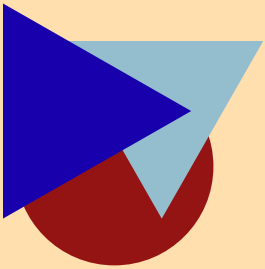
The art of ***structure*** in application essays.



3 non-normie ways to think about structure, zero formulas



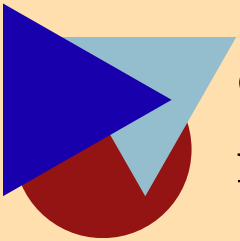
01. Forget “hooks”

So many college essay coaches are telling you to grab your reader’s attention with a “hook.”

But you don’t ***need*** to start in the middle of an action, ask a question, confess a contradiction, or manufacture suspense.

Instead, just think about how you want to invite your reader into what you’re sharing. What do you want to reveal, inspire their curiosity about, or make them feel/hear/see as they first step in?

There’s no one right way to begin. But there are *plenty* of ways to come across as artificial, formulaic, cliché, or overly dramatic.

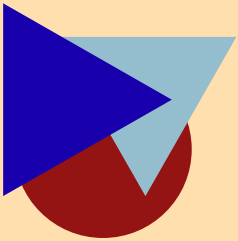


02. Think about the reader's experience

What do you want your reader to feel, notice, wonder, or discover as they move through each part of your essay?

Think about the journey and atmosphere you want to create (ideally one that reflects your vibe and personality!).

Then be purposeful about what to include, what to leave out, and how to arrange it all so that the different parts work together to communicate how you want readers to experience you.

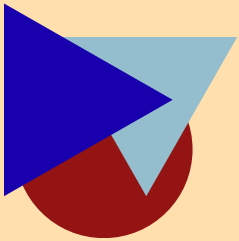


03. Don’t force a growth arc

Your essay doesn't need to follow a cliché personal growth arc, complete with a dramatic turning point and life-changing realization.

Even if you're writing about an experience that changed you or impacted you, you don't have to pretend you learned some profound lesson the moment it happened. Often, we only understand why something mattered much later. Sometimes, we're still figuring it out!

Give yourself room to explore what you experienced, how you felt, and what it means to you now, without feeling like you have to tie everything up into a neat, packaged transformation story.



The takeaway

The art of structure is realizing that you have the power to shape the experience of someone getting to know you through your writing.

Telling a story in the order it happened? Jumping between different moments, reflections, and ideas? Both are valid. And so is everything in between and beyond! Personally, I tend to mix approaches in my own writing.

Don’t think of it as following the formula or getting it “right.” You get to make thoughtful, purposeful choices about how to tell a story and share your reflections in a way that feels true to you.



Hi! I'm Sana.

I love helping folks with writing :)

-10+ years coaching writers
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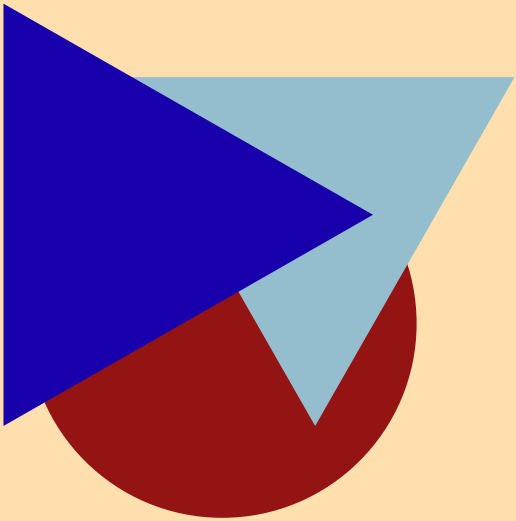
Thanks for being here :)



Have a lovely day.