

• How to Start a Great • Personal Essay Story!

• *Presented by Performance Prep*

The key to writing an effective college application essay is to start with your **real-life stories**.

The idea is to find moments, incidents, and experiences from your past that illustrate a larger point you want to make about yourself in your essay.

Often, the best place to share an engaging mini-story (anecdote) is at the very start of your piece.

The anecdote (mini-story) serves to “hook” or grab your reader’s interest at the start—something you always want in a standout application essay.

However, once you share that little moment, incident, or mini-story, where do you go after that first paragraph or two?

At this point, you should take your reader back to the beginning and give him or her some context (BACKGROUND) to the moment described in the anecdotal introduction.

HERE'S HOW YOU "BACKGROUND" AN ANECDOTE

Once you drop your reader into the moment and tell them your story, then you need to **REWIND** to describe the broader context of what it means.

It's like when you are in the movie theater and something big happens, and then the film frame freezes and the narrator says, *“Oh! You are probably wondering how I got here?”*

After the initial exciting moment (often plucked from the middle of the storyline) to indicate the shift back to the beginning of the story’s timeline, you then explain how it all started.



BACKGROUND: This type of cold-shoulder treatment wasn't new to me. I'm a big guy. In bare feet, I'm about 6 feet 7 inches tall, and I'm pushing 300 pounds. Yes, it can be a pain. I bump my head going through doorways, I don't fit in most mid-size cars, and I can barely squeeze into most classroom desks. But I understand that the world is made for average-sized people, and I like to think I'm above average. One thing, however, is hard for me to take: People who don't know me assume I'm mean. ...

ANECDOTE: As my mom backs out of our driveway, I glance at the back seats to make sure my basketball gear is there, along with my school books, phone charger, and beat-up copy of *Catch-22*. We slowly wind through my neighborhood and over about a half dozen speed bumps, then pull onto the highway heading south with the other Sunday traffic.

I sit back and watch the familiar landmarks—the large Denny's sign with the missing “N,” the short stretch of undeveloped land, the Shell billboard that meant we were almost there—flash past my window.

BACKGROUND: I've made this 20-mile trip between my parents' homes for the last decade, four times a week, ever since they divorced when I was seven. I must have taken it more than a thousand times. Sometimes I dreaded getting into that car and resented my parents for putting my older sister and me through the circular logic that moving us back and forth will make our lives normal because we see each parent often, but moving back and forth isn't normal, unless they make it normal, which isn't normal. Now I know it makes sense because normal isn't ideal, normal is the unexpected and the crazy and the unforgiving. ...

Source: Essay Hell

