

# **10 SIMPLE STEPS TO THE DREAM ESSAY OF YOUR DREAMS**

by

**Nived Ravikumar**

***Guru-In-Chief, Statement Guru***

So you want to write a dream essay for your college/graduate school application?

Here are the 10 simple steps you should follow:

### **Step 1: Commit to It**

I don't just mean commit to the essay-writing process. Commit to the idea of going to college or graduate school or professional school or whatever essay-requiring program it is you're considering.

If you can't make a convincing case to yourself that this is 100% what you want to do, you'll never convince a group of strangers who are generally not in the giving-people-the-benefit-of-the-doubt business. They can smell weakness from a mile away, and it repels them like sunlight repels Dracula.

Remember: a dream essay isn't created in a vacuum. *It is lovingly birthed by an engaged applicant.*

## **Step 2: Get Reacquainted With Someone Very Special**

Between work and school and life in general, you might've gotten rather preoccupied in recent years. You might've lost touch with this person. Sure, you see them around here and there, but you're way too busy for anything more with them than mindless chit-chat with them.

Of course, this very special person is YOU!

Any admissions board member anywhere would agree with this point: in the dreamiest of essays, applicants demonstrate a deep understanding of themselves.

So slooow down and take time for introspection. Think about what's truly important to you. Be honest with yourself. What are your best traits? Worst traits? What makes you not just one in a million, but one in A HUNDRED AND NINE BILLION?! That's the estimate of the amount of people who have ever lived. So what is it about you that makes you different from all of them?

Once you start to understand yourself in a broad sense, you can delve further into the nitty-gritty...

### **Step 3: Brainstorm**

My upcoming product [Brainstorm Clinic](#) will address this specifically, but it is theoretically possible to write a dream essay without that. Theoretically.

The task of brainstorming makes a lot of people uncomfortable because, on the surface, it can sorta look like goofing off. Scribbling random things down, staring off into space, recording yourself rambling... yep, those seem way more goof-offy than things a go-getter like yourself typically does. But this is an important step. Maybe the most important. So try to think of it another way...

Brainstorming is like going grocery shopping on a profoundly empty shopping. EVERYTHING looks delicious. The question isn't if you're gonna fill up a shopping cart or not, it's how many shopping carts are you gonna fill up?

With a fully stocked fridge and pantry, think about how many recipes you can happen across

online and just run into your kitchen to make on a whim. Hundreds? Thousands? Hundreds of thousands?

Now, imagine the opposite -- your kitchen is as barren as mine currently is. Unless you come across a recipe that involves canned tuna, dijon mustard and cacao powder, you're not gonna be breaking out the chef's hat anytime soon.

This is what brainstorming gives you -- an inventory overflowing with ideas, concepts and images.

## **Step 4: Tweet-sis Statement**

A dream essay needs a *tweet-sis statement*.  
Period. Okay, not period because I need to  
explain what a tweet-sis statement is.

First, a definition of *thesis statement*:

*The **thesis statement** is that sentence or two in your text that contains the focus of your essay and tells your reader what the essay is going to be about.*

Your thesis statement is usually found in the first paragraph (often at the very end of it). It should make a claim rather than just state a fact. For example, “The sky is blue” is a bad thesis statement. Not just because I live in Los Angeles and the sky is usually smog-colored. It’s bad because it is supplying information, not starting a persuasive argument.

But if your thesis statement is “The sky is blue because angels are blue and the sky is full of angels, yay!” While I have no idea how one would prove that in the rest of the essay, it’s bold, unique and the start of an argument.

A *tweet-sis statement* is simply, an admissions essay thesis statement that is worthy of Twitter. If you think you have a tweet-worthy thesis statement, you can get my input by tweeting it to me. Here are the guidelines.

1. Tweet your thesis statement to [@StatementGuru](#). I will tweet back my critique.
2. 140 characters or less. Twitter's rules, not mine. But brevity is good, in this case.
3. It must be about you (leave the sky examples to this article).
4. Points for originality (make it one in 109 billion).

Remember, actually tweeting it to me is optional, but it need to be tweet-worthy. One that would get favorited and retweeted by the masses and earn you legions of followers if it were to be tweeted.

Hint: "I like computers, I want to learn more about them" is not tweet-worthy.

## **Step 5: The Perfect Recipe**

Recalling my kitchen analogy, say you have a stocked fridge and pantry. And say you have a sweet tooth. There's only one thing missing... a dessert recipe.

In essay terms, the thesis is simple the name of the dish. It's the OUTLINE that's the recipe itself. It gives you a framework to follow, so you know what ingredients (gained via brainstorming) you need and in what quantities you need them.

How the heck do you go from tweet-sis statement to delicious, delicious recipe, err, I mean outline?

This isn't an exact science, so I can't break it down for you that precisely, but here are 10 simple steps to a dream outline:

1. The tweet-sis statement, whether implied or stated, is the focal point of the first paragraph.
2. The first paragraph (and by transitive law, the tweet-sis statement) is the focal point of the rest of the essay. Its shadow looms large throughout.

3. The first paragraph should grab the reader by being evocative, bold and/or quirky.

4. The remaining paragraphs “prove” the argument started by the tweet-sis.

5. Don’t try to do too much. Many an essay has been sunk because the writer rushed to cover three different things rather than deal with one comprehensively.

6. Every paragraph should have a distinct purpose.

7. A clear demonstration of transformation should be evident. If you are the same person with the same values at the end as you were at the beginning, there’s a problem.

8. Whether you want to use bullet points or prose to organize your outline is up to you, as long as you treat each paragraph as a separate unit.

9. The ending should come full circle with a reference, either subtle or blatant, of the tweet-sis.

10. Outlining is when your brainstorming nuggets find out if they made the varsity squad or not. With relative ease, you should be able to figure which ones are going to work in this essay and which ones aren't. If you have to write more than one essay, you might find a use for those spurned ones after all.

## **Step 6: Drafting**

I want to point out what we've already done at a meta level.

We went from a very open, receptive process, in brainstorming, to a more restrictive, linear one.

Or... from shopping spree to creating a recipe.

With recipe in hand, it's time to get a bit more open again. Why not sprinkle in a bit of cinnamon? How about some vanilla extract?

In essay writing terms, this means **USE THE OUTLINE, DON'T BE USED BY THE OUTLINE.**

Treat each paragraph the outline calls for as a separate open-ended assignment. If you have a burst of inspiration at any point, explore it. Go in tangents. Explore.

Once you've gotten it out of your system, your outline will be waiting to nudge you back on course.

When you're drafting, it's important to play the role of storyteller. Provide rich details and let things unfold naturally instead of just plainly summarizing. Be imaginative, be emotional, be introspective. The WHY is more important than the WHAT.

Above all, have fun. Get excited. Passion, at the end of the day, is the name of the dream essay game.

## **Step 7: Whittle**

Now you should have an unwieldy document that waay overshoots your word limit. Great!

Next step is to shift to a more restrictive mode again by organizing and editing.

You don't have get this perfect yet, but get it very good.

As you're whittling, establish a rhythm throughout, with paragraphs of roughly the same, not-too-short not-too-long length. There are exceptions to everything, but less than 100 words per paragraph is usually too low, more than 200 per paragraph is usually too high. More advanced writers can try to throw some very short paragraphs in the mix to "spice things up."

There should be progression throughout the essay. In other words, reordering the paragraph order in any way should have a devastating impact on the essay's structural integrity.

Keep only what's essential. Cut the filler.

It would be very irresponsible of me not to mention that my e-book [50 Questions For Your Admissions Essay Draft](#) is designed for this exact part of the process.

One very effective technique I've developed for my own writing projects is called Forced Retype. The way it works is exactly like it sounds, you force yourself to rewrite everything. Not from memory, but like this:

1. Re-save your original version with a different name.
2. Start your next draft ABOVE the previous one. I like to do this new work in a larger, more stylized font. In this draft, some parts you'll type exactly as in the old draft, some parts you'll reword and condense, some parts you'll leave out. Absolutely no copying and pasting. Make those fingers work.
3. Do this from beginning to end. As you do, delete the parts of the old version you've already worked through.
4. You'll be left with a way more effective, more polished essay.

5. Bask in the glory of it. Don't over-bask though, you've still got work to do.

## **Step 8: Step Back**

At this point, to really know where you're at, you'll need to look at your draft with more objective eyes. Where do you get more objective eyes? (hint: not at Target)

The truth is, as the author of this essay, it's incredibly hard not to be highly subjective. You've got skin in the game, a dog in the fight and so on and so forth.

But it is possible to give yourself a dose of objectivity. Here's some strategies as to how:

1. A blow to the head can result in short-term memory loss. If the injury is severe enough, you might forget the fact that you wrote an essay altogether. Perfect! Instant objectivity! Just remember to leave a note to inform your post-head trauma self that this essay exists and needs to be revised.

*Warning: Ask your doctor if it's okay to purposely injure yourself before proceeding.*

2. Don't look at it for a while. Forty-eight hours, a week, a month. That [e-book](#) I referred to earlier, I spent the better part of several weeks writing, then you know what I did with it? Nothing. For nearly two months. When I picked it up again, I did so with fresh eyes. I found some issues that needed to be fixed. I had ideas for new sections to include. I viewed everything with clarity vs. fighting through the mental logjam of two months prior.

*Warning: This method might not be feasible if you procrastinated a whole bunch and the deadline is looming.*

3. Oral language predated written language. We are programmed to respond more to sound than words on a page. If someone entered a crowded movie theater and yelled "FIRE!" panic would ensue. But if someone passed a note around the theater that read "FIRE!" people would just be confused. And they would all get burnt alive as a result.

This is all a totally roundabout way of saying that you should try to find a way to listen to your essay. At the most basic level, you can simply

read it out loud, maybe in front of a mirror. If you want additional objectivity, record yourself with a laptop mic or a webcam. Listen to yourself, are your words entertaining? Are they compelling? Is there focus to it or does it meander? If you want extra EXTRA objectivity, have someone else record himself or herself reading it. A friend or family member is fine, but you could even hire a professional to do it for only five bucks on [Fiverr.com](https://www.fiverr.com).

*Warning: Using Fiverr.com means some random person in Bulgaria or wherever will see your essay. Chances are, nothing will happen. But there is a slim chance that they will use your essay for nefarious purposes. I'm not Bulgarian, so I couldn't tell you what sort of nefarious purposes they're into over there when it comes to essays, but there must be some.*

## **Step 9: Feedback**

This one is sort of obvious, but it's worth repeating because a lot of applicants don't want to bother anyone with their drafts. Get over it! Bother people. But bother the right people.

I'm continually surprised by how bad essay feedback from close friends and family can be. I really shouldn't be, because there's something they also fundamentally lack when reading your words. Did you guess what that is? That's right, objectivity!

So if you don't have family members and friends known for their essay writing or essay reading skills, sending them the essay is optional. If you do, take what they say with a grain of salt.

If you *do* have access to someone you trust in such matters, by all means, send it to them. People who know their way around an essay cultivate an ability to be objective, it's one of the (few) perks of being an essay expert. Sigh.

If you don't know anyone who fits the bill. You now know me. And have I got the [package for you!](#)

## **Step 10: Finalize**

Perfect grammar and spelling are essential. So essential that every “how to write an essay” guide ever written mentions it, so I won’t bother.

At this point, your essay is in great shape. Now it becomes a matter of refining and polishing. This part of the process is not very time efficient, and you might grow frustrated with staring at your essay for hours on end for minimal gains.

But try to power through. From here, you can jump back to any preceding step. Not happy with your ending? Maybe brainstorm for a bit. Your middle paragraphs drag a bit? Take them for a Forced Rewrite.

There you have it. Good night. And sweet dreams dream essays!

\*\* As a special thanks for reading this article, I’m offering you 10% off all of my [Premium 1-on-1 Services](#). Coupon code is “dreamessay”.

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*Nived Ravikumar is Guru-in-Chief at [Statement Guru](#), where he helps applicants across the globe craft exceptional essays for their undergraduate, medical school, law school, business school and engineering school applications.*