1) What is the purpose of an application essay?
2) What distinguishes good from less-than-good application essays?
3) How should we apply these lessons to actual writing?
4) What does good idea generation and brainstorming look like?
Purpose of the Essay

- **Defining the Genre: Statement of Purpose vs. Personal Statement**
  - **Statement of Purpose:**
    - Professional
    - Expository
    - Often for graduate school (M.A./Ph.D.) applications
  - **Personal Statement**
    - Tends to be Narrative-based (though it does not have to be).
    - Tends to be grounded in personal experiences and reflections
    - Tends to be narrower in scope.
The RA Application Essays

(1) What has inspired you to become a great RA? (250 words)

(2) RAs strive to create welcoming and inclusive communities. What does building such a community on a residence hall look like for you? (250 words)

(3) Describe a time where you experienced personal growth. Be sure to emphasize how you experienced personal accountability and resilience. (250)
Qualities of A Good Personal Statement

- Center on experiences you care about
- Focus on specific values
- Explain how you live with those values
- What you bring to a team
- What makes you unique
- Clear, well-organized
- Concise
- Focused on the role, position, etc.
- Appropriate, professional
- Informative
Common Pitfalls of the Personal Statement

- Lecturing/Preaching: Informing your audience what they already know
- Too much narrative, not enough reflection: All story, no explanation
- Too much reflection, not enough narrative: All explanation, no story
- Inauthenticity: Not being true to one’s own experiences
Preaching/Lecturing

- (Bad) Example: Without RAs, students simply could not live together within dorms. Someone must manage the various affairs related to dorm-life, including handling disputes, enforcing policies, and caring for the residents. This requires empathy and leadership skills.
- What’s going on here? Why might this be seen as being preachy or lecturey?
Inauthenticity

- People often fall into cliche and trope when writing personal statements.
  - The best essay is the one you fell accurately represents your emotional experiences.
- Not every story you tell has to be your summer internship or volunteer experience.
  - People often want to discuss these kinds of stories because they think it is impressive
  - They often do not actually have sincere emotion about what they communicate.
- Pick the story which best reflects you as a person rather than you as a resume.
- Avoid overly emotional or strong language
  - Being an RA likely won’t change your life.
  - Ask yourself: Was that really the greatest moment of your life? Will this be as life-changing as you say?
  - Hyperbolic, exaggerated language detracts from authenticity and specificity
Too Much Narrative, Not Enough Reflection

- Narrating personal experiences should reveal something to your audience
  - But if there’s no explanation, is anything actually revealed or conveyed?
- Consider: You encounter an essay where the author recounts their upbringing
  - Suppose the essay only consists in this narration
  - Is this informative?
- Absent reflection or explanation, the personal narrative is ineffective
  - There should be an explanation as to the exact significance the event/experience had on your life
    (as it relates to the prompt)
Too Much Reflection, Not Enough Narrative

- Just like having a narrative without a upshot is not informative, having a conclusion without evidence or illustration can be equally uninformative.
- Anybody can say which qualities would make a good RA
  - Showing that you understand the qualities enough to recognize them in your past experiences is the interesting part.
- (Bad) Example: Over the summer I volunteered in Haiti building houses. There I saw how much compassion and hard work can do for people. As an RA, I would like to use the diligence and empathy I have learned to help each and every one of my residents.
As a second-year-student that has been engaged in plethora of events on campus, I believe I am getting the best out of my college experience and in the same time I am giving back to my community. The opportunity to become Resident Assistant will enable me to develop my skills and to become a successful role model, listener and an advisor. Additionally, it will equip me with the necessary knowledge and interpersonal competence, so that I can become a conflict solver, caregiver and event organizer. Being an RA will be a cornerstone in my personal development, because it will prepare me for my future career as a business person, as well as for the teamwork and interactions with my future fellow workers. As part of the RA team, I will become more communicative, organized, punctual and with great time management.
Idea Generation & Brainstorming

Write down three experiences that you think will inform your answer to this question:

(1) What has inspired you to become a great RA?