

Aug. 12, 2002

Dear James,

Thanks for sending me the two draft introductory paragraphs for your college applications essays. I have shared them with some of my colleagues and want to give you our consensus comments.

Regarding topics, the only concern we have with the introduction to “an issue of international concern and its importance to you” is that many students will decide to use the 9/11 and related terrorism subject this year. We are not saying not to use it but it is important that you differentiate yours from all the others – remember that college admissions officers who read your essays will also read many others. You want yours to stand out. Rather than state well known facts – “the most disturbing display of terrorism is located in the Middle East. Jerusalem has become a battleground for terrorism” -make sure that you focus on how Middle Eastern terrorism has impacted you and/or your thinking. Similarly, you should get to your point sooner about Nathan Hale’s famous last words since everyone knows who he was and what he said. Why do his words have importance to you? How have they changed or impacted you? Focus on your reactions/perceptions rather than reciting well-know facts. Does that make sense to you?

When revealing what is important to you, it is often useful to describe a personal event or situation that you experienced and to relate that event to a broader topic. Be as specific and descriptive as possible because it will allow you to present yourself as a unique individual.

Your terrorism essay has some very interesting themes that you can develop – why do you believe that the suicide bombers exhibit shameful reasoning? How do their beliefs in an afterlife differ from yours? What other situations can you think of where some were influenced by others who were afraid to do something for themselves? Has this ever happened to you or people you know?

How have Nathan Hale’s words driven you to succeed? Give examples! How have they made you humble? (I’m not sure what you mean by your last sentence). Who do you have in mind when you say those who contribute a great deal but do not get recognized?

I haven’t considered grammar/vocabulary in this preliminary review because at this point it is more important to focus on what you are saying vs how. So continue to develop these ideas and send me more refined versions when you are ready. Call me if you have any questions.

All the best,