

2024 USTAF ESSAY CONTEST

Suggestions for Mentors and Students



WINWARD
ACADEMY

PRESENTED BY

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[WINWARDACADEMY.CO](https://winwardacademy.co)

Agenda

01 Overview

02 Suggestions for Mentors

03 Tips for Students

04 Questions

01 Overview

Writing Assignment

THE PROMPT

- GOAT (Greatest of All Time) is a term often used to describe exceptional people, such as athletes, coaches, musicians, artists, community leaders, and family members.

AGE 8-12

- In your opinion, who is the greatest of all time and why?

AGE 13-18

- What qualities and attributes elevate an individual to the greatest of all time?
- Who do you consider the greatest of all time in your life?
- Share a personal story about this individual and describe how they impacted you.



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02 Suggestions for Mentors

Suggestions for Mentors

+ Start with the "Why"

+ Embrace the Bigger Value

+ Dive into the Prompt

+ Anticipate Expectations

+ Plan Ahead

+ Celebrate

Start with the “Why”

A STARTING POINT

- Consider having these conversations with your students:
 - Why are they asking you this question?
 - What is the reader going to learn about you, your background, and your values?

ANTICIPATE THE AUDIENCE

- Remind students that people are reading their responses.
- They're going to care more when students care more.



Embrace the Bigger Value

INVEST STUDENTS IN THE BIG PICTURE

- The chances of being picked are very low, so it will be hard to motivate students to put in a lot of work.
- Mentors should encourage students to embrace the bigger, more important, long-term value of this exercise.



Dive into the Prompt

ADDRESS THE WHOLE PROMPT

- There are three parts to this prompt, so a complete response must address all elements. Students should brainstorm their responses to each part of the prompt.
 - What qualities and attributes elevate an individual to the greatest of all time?
 - Who do you consider the greatest of all time in your life?
 - Share a personal story about this individual and describe how they impacted you.



Anticipate Expectations

LOOK AHEAD FOR STUDENTS

- Up to 500 words means some of your students will write exactly 500 and others will write 350 words.
- Expectations shift based on age (i.e., sentence structure, overall length, vocabulary, strength of examples), so consider that when giving advice and guidance.



Plan Ahead

FINAL DEADLINE - JUNE 11 AT 11:59PM ET

- Week 1 – introduce GOAT attributes
- Week 2 – encourage brainstorm session
- Week 3 – intro paragraph (what does being GOAT mean)
- Week 4 – body paragraph 1 (who is your GOAT)
- Week 5 – body paragraph 2 (personal story about GOAT)
- Week 6 – body paragraph 3 (impact of GOAT)
- Week 7 – conclusion (connect back to GOAT's qualities and attributes)
- Week 8 – final revisions and submission (read aloud and do "stranger" test)



Celebrate

BE A CHEERLEADER

- Getting back to the earlier tip, embrace the bigger value of this exercise.
- Celebrate the process for all your students who put in this effort and find ways to include their families in how proud you are!



03 Tips for Students

Suggestions for Students

+ Start Early - Polish Takes Time

+ Stay True to Yourself

+ Record Yourself Talking

+ Embrace the Personal

Start Early

POLISH TAKES TIME

- An essay can become burdensome, so invest the time, in advance, to do it right
 - If you want to receive comments from editors, then you need to have time to receive and incorporate their feedback.
 - Remember the final product you submit has your name on it, so you should honor yourself while considering and incorporating others' feedback.
- Take the essay seriously. It's worth the time and investment to get it right.
 - It's obvious to the reader if you rush
 - It's challenging to push deeper than the surface while also avoiding clichés



Stay True to Yourself

YOUR VOICE MATTERS

- The ultimate goal of the essay is to honor your voice, your values, and your story.
- When you genuinely care, your unique voice will come through and your essay will be more engaging and memorable.
- Tell a story only you can tell; give the reader the feeling that he met you.
- Give a holistic sense of who you are by thinking carefully about each part of the prompt and how each can highlight a part of who you are.



Record Yourself Talking

YOUR VOICE MATTERS

- The best way to capture your voice is to talk to someone close to you (or even to a pet) about important moments of growth, reflection, and challenge.
- As you're sharing, record yourself. Play back what you say – note how you say it. The moments of vulnerability, passion, and authenticity will come through.
- Use this recording to guide your writing process. You can even type verbatim what you say if you really like it. Remember your ultimate goal is to capture your voice and to stay true to yourself. There's no better way to achieve that goal than to capture your voice from the outset.



Embrace the Personal

DIG DEEP WITHIN YOURSELF

- Remember the reader wants to know about YOU, not the life story of someone who inspired or influenced you.
- Share what's needed about the inspirational person but keep the focus on yourself and what that influence has meant to YOU.
- Know AI isn't going to help with this prompt because it's too personal.



Learning From Others

It is important that we learn from those who have gone before us.

We do this to:

- Avoid pitfalls
- Be strategic with our energy
- Achieve the best possible outcomes

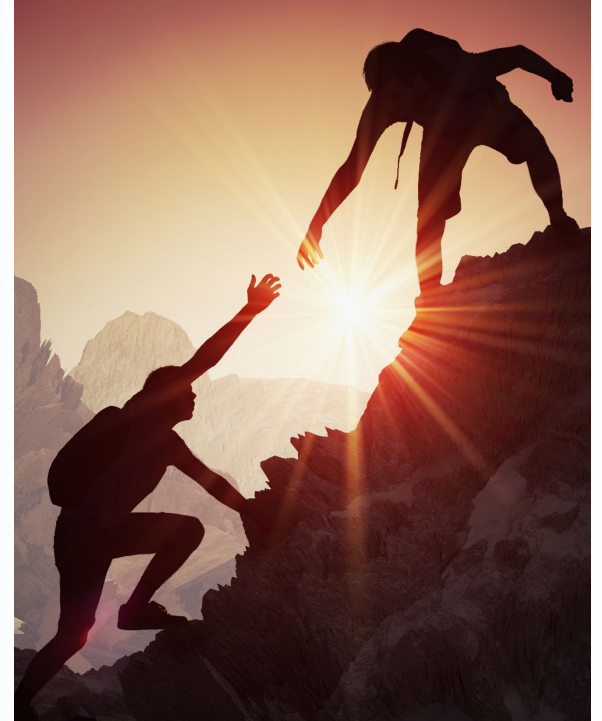


Learning From Others

Personal statement example

It had taken years, but I knew the rules - four pairs of Converse hanging on a powerline signaled to go the other way. When I walked alone to CVS or the market, I knew how to avoid the park between apartments where drugs were sold. As unnerving as it was in my early teens, I actually felt comfort knowing precisely how to avoid the gang hotspots in my neighborhood.

So when my mom gave birth to my half-sister and needed the three of us to move right before I started high school, I was unnerved. A new zip code meant a new school, new friends, and new environment, but that's not what worried me most. Now, in this new place, I knew the gangs were there, but I didn't know how to avoid them.

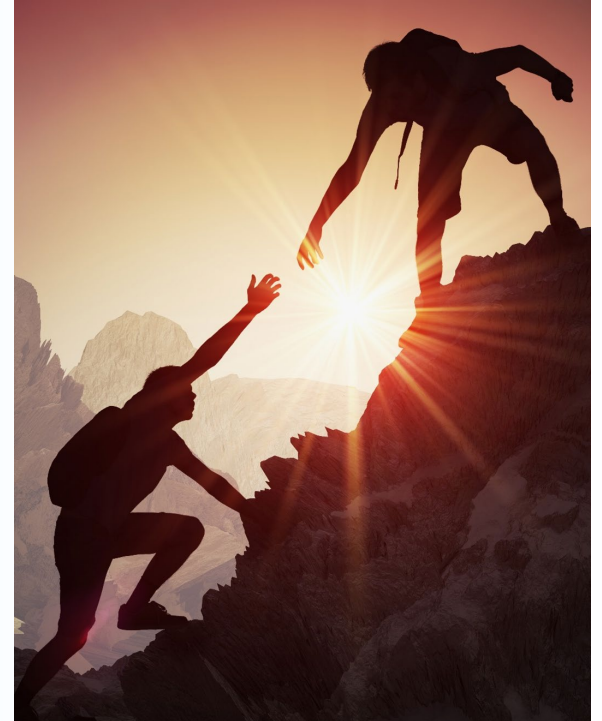


Learning From Others

Personal statement example

I'd follow normal tactics – joining a group when crossing the street and looking for adults wherever I went. Trying to keep myself safe, my baby sister safe, and my mom safe was an overwhelming responsibility for my 14-year-old self. I desperately needed a community of those who shared my values and could look out for me.

The teacher advisor for the Hispanic club told me about Air Force JROTC (AFJROTC). I showed up to a meeting and was struck by everyone in uniform. They looked composed and put together. I wanted to feel composed and put together. In conversations, I learned of their ambitions to be pilots and engineers. Wow! This program had people driven to do a lot with their lives. I wanted to be a leader among those I lead and from whom I learn.

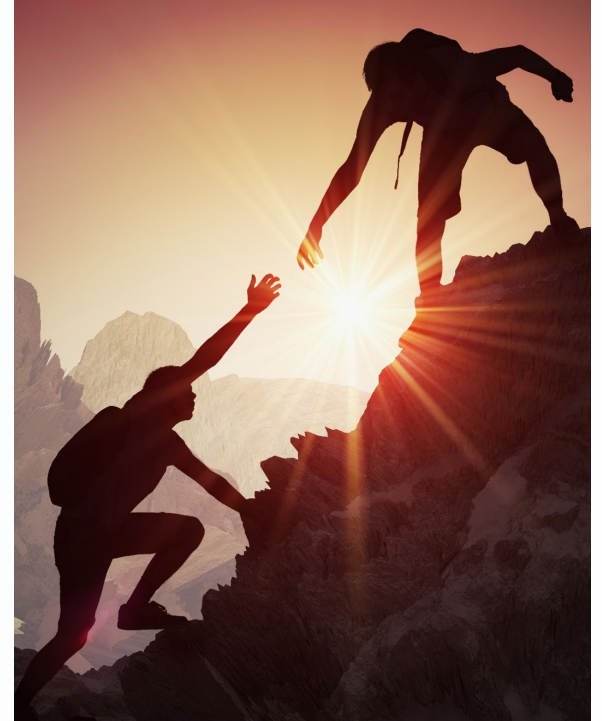


Learning From Others

Personal statement example

I was blown away by the AFJROTC community's "bring you up" approach to elevate everyone. It was a network of friends, for sure, but it was also the safety and security I needed. I didn't just want to be there for class. I wanted to go every day at lunch and after school just to continue conversations, play dodgeball or soccer, or even test the new flight simulator. It was the familiar I needed.

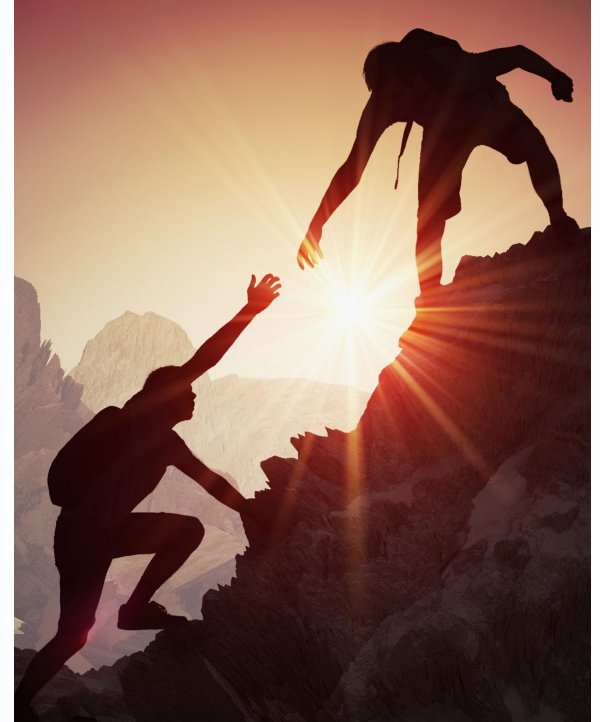
My teachers were a retired major and sergeant who facilitated conversations about world affairs, history, morals, and international relations – the most real conversations I had each day. Our time together was all about really thinking, thinking about how the present informs the future and how we are the future.



Learning From Others

Personal statement example

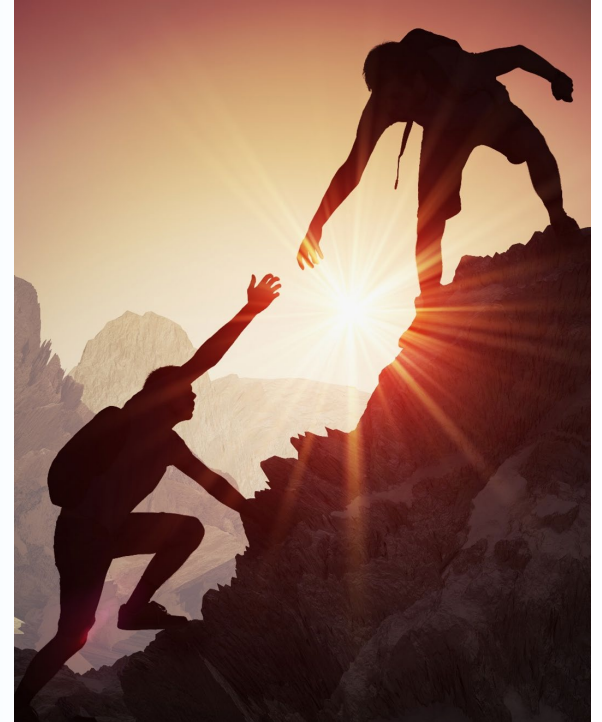
The AFJROTC program gave me safety and security at a time I needed it most, and it gave me the confidence to take responsibility for the care of my mom and sister. I guess it's no surprise that my goal is to now give back what was given to me - I aspire to be a mechanical engineer in the Navy who works on anything related to safety and security of our servicemen and servicewomen. I want to be trusted to keep machines up and running – anything from electric generators, steam and gas turbines, and internal combustion engines to air conditioning and elevators. I love working with machines, and I love being trusted to care for others.



Learning From Others

Personal statement example

I learned from a young age how to avoid taking steps in the wrong direction - how to avoid shoes on powerlines. My entire life, my most natural feeling is my commitment to see and anticipate problems to keep people safe from threats in the environment. This experience only reinforces my next steps as going in the right direction, and ones I'm proud to take as I honor my mom and sister in my future as a Navy Officer.



Scoring Rubric Overview

Descriptions of how to earn a top score in each category

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Ideas	Main idea is clear, supported, and enriched by relevant anecdotes and details
Organization	Organization enhances and showcases central idea; order of information is compelling, moving reader through text
Voice	Author speaks directly to reader in individual, compelling, and engaging way that delivers purpose and topic; although passionate, author is respectful of audience and purpose
Word Choice	Vocabulary is powerful and engaging, creating mental imagery; words convey intended message in precise, interesting, and natural way
Fluency	Sentences have flow, rhythm, and cadence; are well built with strong, varied structure that invites expressive oral reading
Conventions	Author uses standard writing conventions effectively to enhance readability; errors are few and only minor editing is needed to publish
Presentation	Presentation/formatting exceeds best of finished pieces; formatting extends understanding of message; finished appearance is of superior quality

04 Questions



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Let's hear your questions



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Thank You!

Please stay on with questions and reach out to me any time for support.

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