ROAD MAP TO A COMPELLING PERSONAL STATEMENT
LSAMP – Th 11/8/13

THE COMPONENTS
1. Introduction
   a. Hook: “Reel ‘em in!” Some Hook strategies include:
      ✓ Personal Anecdote/Story ✓ Humor
      ✓ Thought-provoking question ✓ Question
      ✓ Definition ✓ Bizarre or interesting fact/stat
   b. Link/Transition: This is a transition sentence or idea that links your hook to the thesis.
   c. Thesis: Main idea of entire essay. Note: Once you are finished with your 1st draft, have somebody read your intro. Based on your thesis, the reader should be able to predict the general path you are headed down in your body paragraphs.

2. Background (optional...sometimes needed)

3. Body Paragraphs (SEE-A)
   a. S-Statement: This is your topic sentence...where are you headed with the paragraph?
   b. E-Example/Evidence: Support your topic sentence...be specific, relevant and concrete!
   c. E-Explanation/Commentary: Explain the importance of your evidence and connect it back to your thesis. It is common practice to have two commentaries per piece of evidence; however, this is not required.
   d. A-Anchor: Reinstate the topic sentence (in a different way); summarize the paragraph

4. Conclusion
   a. Reinstate thesis (in a different way)
   b. New, intensified insight
   c. Bring it home! This is your FINAL INSIGHT...leave a LASTING IMPRESSION!

THE PROCESS
1. Know your: Purpose, Audience, Form

2. Prewriting: Think of this as the “inventing” stage. Prewriting is arguably the most important part of the writing process; however, it is too often set aside due to a perceived lack of importance. On the back of this page are several common techniques used in the prewriting stage. NOTE: Move from less structure to more structure!!!
PRE-WRITING (INVENTION) STRATEGIES

a. Listing/Brainstorming: List anything that comes to mind that is directly related to your given topic. Keep listing and listing and listing...! Errors are welcome (concern for errors in writing interfere with the creative aspect of brainstorming).

b. Free Writing: For a set period of time (typically 10 minutes), focus on a topic and write about the ideas that come to mind. This is a very “free” activity so do not try to control your thoughts. Most importantly, DON’T STOP! Write down every single thought, including, “I can’t think of what else to write right now.” Highlight, underline or circle your best pre-writing ideas.

c. Looping: This is a form of free-writing and is a good strategy for narrowing a topic. Do a 7-minute free-write. Go back and highlight your favorite sentence. Rewrite the sentence then start another 7-minute free-write on this topic. Go through at least 3 cycles.

d. Clustering/Mapping: Write a general topic in the middle of the page and circle it. As related ideas pop into your head, write them down on the page around the topic, circle each, and draw lines to connect these related ideas to the topic. The lines illustrate relationships between ideas. You can expand to incorporate several subtopics as you begin to see further connections. Clustering and Mapping help with grouping related topics. Go to this link for a visual example: http://www.malswritingcenter.info/t5/inventiontechniques.html#cluster

e. Outlining: An outline presents a picture of the main idea and sub ideas of any topic. Outlining helps with creating order and sequencing. Purdue OWL has a helpful website for developing an effective outline. http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/544/1/

3. Drafting (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th ...): Be prepared to write several drafts! Recruit help from different resources (see below).

4. Revising: Revising involves looking at content, clarity and overall tone. Two strategies to use when revising are:
   a. Read the introduction (or have somebody else read it). Can an accurate prediction be made as to where the essay is headed?
   b. STAR: Substitute, Take out, Add, Rearrange

5. Editing: Editing involves looking at mechanics, grammar, spelling and punctuation.

GETTING THE APPROPRIATE HELP

1. Writing and Rhetoric Center: www.writingcenter.calpoly.edu – Building 10, Room 138 (Monday - Thursday: 9:00am to 4:00pm, Friday: 9:00am-12:00pm) and Kennedy Library (35), Room 202B (Sunday – Wednesday: 5:30pm - 8:00pm)
   a. Schedule a FREE consultation on your writing project by logging on to www.calpoly.mywconline.com.
   b. Drop-in appointments available on a first come/first served basis

2. Make an appointment with LSAMP staff by emailing lsamp@calpoly.edu. Please indicate that this is to look at your draft statement of purpose. Provide a draft to this draft at least one day prior to your appointment.

3. Make an appointment with your faculty advisor and/or mentor and follow the procedure above.

4. Purdue Owl has a great online writing lab: http://owl.english.purdue.edu
Will my reader know ...

☐ How I became interested in the field?
☐ What activities or experiences have contributed to my preparation for or understanding of the field?
   ○ Not just what I did, but what I learned / including skills, abilities, and values gained?
   ○ How these activities or experiences relate to my graduate school and future goals?
☐ What is my career objective / short- and long-term goals?
☐ What are my research interests?
   ○ Why my research interests are a good fit for the graduate program? How these research interests parallel those of the program’s faculty and others involved in this interdisciplinary work on campus?
   ○ Why I believe this graduate program is a good fit for my career objective & what I expect to gain?
   ○ Why this field and not a related field is what I am pursuing to achieve my career objective?
☐ If I have faced challenges / difficult circumstances that impact my application, what are these, how have I overcome them, & why this makes me a great candidate to complete graduate school / have career success?

Substance

☐ Have I answered the question asked (if specified)?
☐ Is the introduction personal? Not too general? Can the essay get along without it?
☐ Do I back up each point that I make with specific, concrete and personal examples?
☐ Does it indicate that I know what is involved (the day-to-day realities) of the profession?
☐ Are any “negatives” viewed in a positive light?
☐ Could anyone else have written the essay?
☐ What does it say about me? Does it accurately represent me?
☐ Is the essay personal and informal rather than uptight or stiff? Is it lively and interesting without being “cute” or overbearing?
☐ Does the essay point out something unique about me? What about the essay makes it memorable?
☐ Does it focus on me, rather than commenting on the state of the profession or its practitioners?
☐ What overall impression does it leave with the reader?

Structure – Write down and read through the first sentence of each paragraph in order and ask the first 3 questions. Then go back through your entire essay and answer the remaining questions:

☐ Would someone else who is reading this sentence still understand exactly what I am trying to say?
☐ Do the first sentences express all of my main points?
☐ Do the thoughts flow naturally, or do they seem to skip around or come out of left field?
☐ Is the entire essay well-organized?
☐ Does each paragraph have a topic sentence?
☐ Does it have a good focus or are there too many topics?
☐ Does each paragraph stick to the thought that was introduced in the first sentence?
☐ Does a piece of evidence support each point? How well does it support the point?
☐ Does the essay have a good ending that is more of a conclusion than a summary? Does the conclusion draw naturally from the previous paragraphs?
Interest

- Does it have a compelling “lead-in” sentence/idea?
- Do I start with action or an image?
- Does the essay show rather than tell?
- Have I used the active voice whenever possible?
- Does the essay sound interesting to me?
- Will the ending give the reader a sense of completeness?

Proofreading/Mechanics

- Did I punctuate correctly?
- Did I use capitalization clearly and consistently?
- Do the subjects agree with the verbs?
- Did I place the periods and commas inside the quotation marks?
- Did I keep contractions to a minimum? Do apostrophes appear in the right places?
- Have I varied the length and structure of my sentences? (short to moderate)?
- Have I overused adjectives or adverbs?
- Have I eliminated exclamation points (except in dialogue), clichés and deleted redundancies?
- Have I caught every single typo?

Notes