

## Be a Hero! – Using Joseph Campbell’s “Hero’s Journey”

One of the most frequent storytelling tricks used by successful writers is Joseph Campbell’s “Hero’s Journey,” based on his book *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. It theorizes that every heroic journey involves most or all of 12 “Steps” that the hero takes.

While you are not writing an epic poem or tale of a heroic quest, you ARE the hero of your own story, and there are **storytelling beats** that readers subconsciously react to in generally positive ways. It is to your benefit to infuse 2-3 of the following elements into your story.

Remember, this infusion has to be *organic* (natural) and *honest* (don’t fabricate details). Also, don’t use the vocabulary given here (in other words, don’t write “I was *called to adventure* when I decided to join Boy Scouts...”). Instead, think about how these elements of the heroic journey may have appeared in your own life, and use the language of life and choices as they relate to your own experience.

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**Call to Adventure** – Every hero receives a call to an adventure. Usually it happens in 1 of 2 ways: Either someone arrives at the hero’s door and informs him of the quest, or the hero has a goal that he himself desires. At this moment, there is usually an “awakening” or “enlightenment” when the hero realizes what he has to do.

How to Use It: In your story, include the moment when you realized what your **goal** is/was. In the same way, it can be delivered to you, or come from within yourself. Put this in your Introduction paragraph.

**Leaving Home / Point of No Return** – After the call to adventure, the hero must leave the safety and comfort of home, often crossing a symbolic “threshold” of no return. This is often represented by a physical crossing (of a canyon or river, or departing a place) or a test of character, where the character must prove his worth.

How to Use It: This is a good device to incorporate in your 1<sup>st</sup> Body paragraph when you describe your first big **choice**. By showing your first big test, or your departure from familiarity and comfort (joining a new group, attempting a new task, making new friends, leaving a home/town you love, etc), you are embarking on your own heroic quest. Describe 1 specific detail of this event to bring it to vivid life in your reader’s mind.

**Meeting The Mentor** – This common heroic element is famous for a reason: It’s everywhere! Nearly every great hero has a mentor who enters the story to assist in the quest in some way. Often the mentor makes a major sacrifice to aid the hero (sometimes with his/her life), and must back off so the hero can prove her worth.

How to Use It: In the Mentor Essay, the mentor character is an obvious element. However, the mentor can appear in other forms. You can still have a mentor teach you and **sacrifice** for you as you overcome your obstacles, achieve your goals, plan your future, grow through topic-based participation, and solve global problems. In non-Mentor Essays, though, keep this role limited, and emphasize practical sacrifices the mentor made as you made **choices** and experienced **growth**.

**Approach To The Cave / Ordeal** – The climax of most heroic journeys involves 2 steps: Approaching (preparation, prayer, planning) and the Ordeal itself (confronting the task/villain). Both of these are essential. You must have the calm, and you must have the storm. This is the test that the hero has prepared and sacrificed for, and it sets up the final events of the story.

How to Use It: A great element to infuse in your 2<sup>nd</sup> Body paragraph, describing how you prepared for your major **sacrificial choice**, and then executed it, will carry echoes of heroic quests. Make sure each includes a concrete: How/where did you prepare, or what did you feel as you did so? And what did you do, and how did it work out? This will add epic weight to the story of your **growth**.

**Resurrection / Return With the Elixir** – The final 2 Steps of the journey require the hero to face death in an ultimate, final way. But due to her sacrifices and moral uprightness, she is resurrected or delivered from death – if even in spirit (moral victory). Then, having won the prize of virtue or knowledge, she returns to the people and shares what she has won (material goods *and* knowledge/wisdom) with the world.

How to Use It: The Resurrection element only works if you have faced failure in a major way, and recovered from it through **sacrificial choices** (flunking out of school, getting in trouble with the law, etc). Use a specific image to describe the "death" you experienced (but don't exaggerate), and then the action that allowed you to recover. You will almost certainly use the Elixir step when you explain tangible ways that fulfilling your future **goals** will help others. Also consider how your **growth** contains lessons that will enable you to be the kind of person others will want to follow.

