

College Application Essay

College application essays are required on most, but not all, college applications. The essay is also required on the Common Application, although only for those colleges that require it. Each college makes its own determination on how important the essay is in the admissions process. For many, the essay is a critically important piece of the admissions puzzle because it is, perhaps, the only opportunity they have to get an intimate look at who you are as a person, aside from your grades, statistics, activities, etc. Who are you at your core is the question that admissions officers hope you will answer in your essay. They also want to see that you can write well and build a logical argument with supporting ideas, as you will be doing a lot of that in college!

Common Application Essay Prompts (2026-2027)

You will most likely be using the Common Application (Common App) to submit your college applications to multiple colleges. Common App allows you to complete just one application to be used in the process providing that all of your chosen colleges accept it. Most 4-year colleges accept Common App in the northeast. The following are the 2024-2025 Common App college application essay prompts. These are the exact prompts from which you will ultimately choose one on which you will base your college application essay. Reflect on these options, choose one, and get started now...it is one less thing you will have to do in the fall when the college application crunch is upon you!

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
2. The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
3. Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
4. Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?
5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
6. Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?
7. Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.

Supplemental Essays

Some colleges also require an additional supplemental essay, or perhaps more than one supplemental essay. These can also be optional instead of required. Wherever you see “optional,”

assume that to mean “required.” Neglecting to take this *opportunity* to tell them more sends a message that you really are not engaged in the process. So, take advantage of the opportunity!

How Do You Write a College Application Essay?

Simply google this question and you will have dozens of links and sites from which to choose. Most of them offer sound and creative suggestions for essay writing. Remember that Common App and most college applications present prompts from which you can choose your topic. But both usually allow you to create your own essay topic as well. The following was taken directly from College Board’s My Future site for your convenience, and presents some basic essay-writing pointers to guide you:

Before You Start Your Essay

- ***Do some self-exploration.*** Your college essay is all about showcasing yourself. Think about the strengths and interests you would most like colleges to know about you. What are you passionate about? What's most important to you? What are you best at?
- ***If you need to pick the topic, be focused and specific.*** Writing about a single experience is usually a good idea; your essay should prove a single point or message. Try to avoid cliché topics like "winning a big game," taking a trip or even dealing with a death.
- ***Show your thoughtfulness.*** Be thoughtful in both your topic choice and the tone of your writing. Colleges look for students who have dealt with adversity, have overcome challenges and continue to grow from their experience. Admitting shortcomings is a sign of maturity and intelligence, so there is no need to portray yourself as a superhero; they will see through it.
- ***Get started early.*** Self-exploration can be fun, but don't procrastinate on the actual writing. You don't want to rush or be up against a tight deadline; it will affect your work.
- ***Create an essay outline.*** Sometimes creating an outline for your essay can help you get started. It will also help you organize your thoughts and develop a framework.

Writing Your Essay

- ***Read the instructions and follow them.*** Be conscious of any length limits, and, if the topic is provided for you, analyze the question carefully. You want to be aware of everything they ask and answer everything thoroughly.
- ***Use your own voice.*** Don't use big words just for the sake of using big words. They can distract from the essay when misused. Remember, this essay is about you, so use words you normally use.
- ***Use quotations and examples to show personal detail.*** *Instead* of just stating your point of view, you want to make your reader feel the experience. Adding detail will help illustrate your story. But don't use quotations simply to use them; make sure they make sense within the tone of your essay.
- ***Try to be concise.*** While adding personal detail is good, you don't want to be wordy or long-winded; short sentences can be more powerful.
- ***Don't use slang words.*** Generally speaking, slang words conjure the feeling of someone being too casual, uncaring, or not that serious. These are three things you don't want your admissions reader thinking about you. Likewise, avoid clichés and overuse of contractions.
- ***Be honest.*** The point of this essay is to show who you are, not who you wish you were. Stick to what you know, and your true personality will shine through.
- ***Don't be afraid to use humor if it's part of who you are.*** Admissions officers can have a sense of humor too, and, when used appropriately, humor can make you stand out. However, don't make being funny one of your primary goals in your college essay.

Review and Revise Your Essay

- ***Step away from your essay and come back later.*** Sometimes it helps to take a break from your work and come back in a few days. Review what you've written and make sure it still makes sense and conveys what you want it to.
- ***Write multiple drafts.*** This is almost always a critical part of the writing process. You will need to write at least a couple of drafts to get your essay right where you want it.
- ***Get feedback from others.*** Ask your friends and family to read your essay and tell you what they think. Be open to suggestions and ways to improve it, even if this means going back to the drawing board.
- ***Revise if necessary.*** You want to edit your essay down to what is important. Make every word count!
- ***Type your essay.*** Period. No matter how good your essay, if people can't read your handwriting they won't appreciate the work.
- ***Proofread your essay.*** You want to make sure you've used proper spelling, grammar, and punctuation, so always ask someone with excellent written language skills – a parent, teacher, etc. to proofread your essay.