

The Common Application Essay

What Is It?

The Common Application (informally known as the Common App) is an undergraduate college admission application that applicants may use to apply to any of 517 member colleges and universities in 47 states and the District of Columbia, as well as in Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, and United Kingdom.

- **To correlate with the personal statement that all of you will need to write as part of the common application process for college, you are going to write one for our course that you may tweak to use as you apply to colleges.**
- **You are going to want to have your college applications in by mid-October.**
- **This is a great assignment to save in your Google Drive as you never know when or if you are going to need it.**
- **It must match the guidelines set by the college: 250-650 words, single-spaced, with 1" margins.**

Prompts

- The prompts are designed to encourage reflection and introspection. If your essay doesn't include some self-analysis, you haven't fully succeeded in responding to the prompt.

The essay prompts are as follows:

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. Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma - anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.
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?

Tips For Writing

- **Make the essay about you—sure, your grandmother was an incredibly inspiring person in your life, but college admissions officers want to hear your story and not hers. If your essay includes family members or friends, make sure the focus stays on you.**
- **If you're stuck, take a closer look at the prompts and write down every possibility you can think of for each topic and pick one from there.**

Tips Continued...

- **Be Concise:** Admissions offices have thousands of essays to read
- **Be Honest:** Don't embellish your stories
- **Be an Individual:** Ask yourself, "How can I distinguish myself from everyone else applying?"
- **Be Accurate:** Check your spelling, grammar, and punctuation
- **Be Likable:** Are you someone that they would like to have around them at their university?
- **Be cautious in your use of humor:** Humor is always in the eye of the beholder

Organization

An impressive essay generally contains a strong opening, well organized content, and a powerful closing. If your essay lacks structure and seems to ramble, chances are it won't impress the reader. Start with an outline and design your essay paragraph by paragraph.

Make sure you include enough background information about whatever topic you are writing about so that the reader can put it into context:

For example, one student wrote an excellent essay about a horrible first day of school, but forgot to include that he had just moved to town, from halfway around the world, and was struggling with English.

Resist the temptation to run off and start writing. Experts will tell you that up-front planning of your essays is well worth the time invested. Not only will the quality of your essays be much higher, you'll probably end up saving time in the long run!

Final Draft Due: Friday 10/11

You MUST have a HARD COPY of your outline and rough draft. On Friday 10/11 you will be turning in all components together.