
THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS ESSAY

Hicksville High School, 2/28/24

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What is the Point of the College Essay?

The essay is your opportunity to speak directly to the person reviewing your application, using your voice to share information about yourself and tell your story. Here you can:

- Highlight achievements
- Share passions
- Explain situations
- Set yourself apart

The essay is the part of the application where you get to tell us who you are beyond the numbers (grades and test scores) and the letters of recommendation. Choose a topic that best demonstrates your positive qualities and supports your strength as an applicant.

THE COLLEGE ESSAY

- Common Application
 - One required essay, 250 – 650 words
 - 7 prompts (including one of your own design)
 - <https://www.commonapp.org/blog/2023-2024-common-app-essay-prompts>
 - Other opportunities to tell your story: 'Additional Information' essay and 'Community Disruption' question
- Coalition for College Application
 - One essay, 500 – 550 words
 - 5 prompts (including one of your own design)
 - <https://www.coalitionforcollegeaccess.org/essays>
- School-Specific Application
 - Ex: CUNY, SUNY, Penn State, University of California



The 2023-2024 Common Application Essay Prompts

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?

The 2023-2024 Common Application Essay Prompts (continued)

5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
5. 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.

Additional Optional Questions

(Up to 250 words):

Community disruptions such as COVID-19 and natural disasters can have deep and long-lasting impacts. If you need it, this space is yours to describe those impacts. Colleges care about the effects on your health and well-being, safety, family circumstances, future plans, and education, including access to reliable technology and quiet study spaces.

(Up to 650 words):

Do you wish to provide details of circumstances or qualifications not reflected in the application? You may use the space below to provide any additional information you wish to share.

Supplemental Essays

Some colleges have a supplement to the Common Application and ask for an additional essay. The prompts may be similar to those on the Common Application, or they may be very different.

Occasionally the essay questions will be unique and designed so that the reader can gain insight into your thought processes. The same essay rules apply.

A common supplemental essay question is “Why this college?” Demonstrate why you are a great fit for this school.

Do your research. Go to the website. If possible, visit campus, speak to current students or alumni. Discuss specific academic programs and activities you would take advantage of at that college.

The Dos of College Essay Writing

- * Always consider the essay prompt and be sure to answer the question
- * Use your own voice and words
- * Be positive about yourself and others
- * Explain anything is not common knowledge, write out abbreviations
- * Proofread your work, check grammar and spelling beyond spellcheck
- * Stay within the word count
- * Have a trusted person or two read your draft and give you feedback

Essay Writing Don'ts

- Do not write about obstacles or flaws that you have not overcome or learned something from, and don't write about anything that might be offensive or demonstrate bias. Be positive about yourself and others
- Don't be too modest; it's okay to brag a bit; you are selling yourself to schools
- Do not let someone else have the last word. Avoid using a quotation to end your essay.
- Don't start your essay by repeating the prompt and don't let your essay fade away with a weak finish. All your words are important but pay special attention to your first and last sentences. You want to draw your reader in right away and you don't want your essay to trail off. Finish strong!
- Don't pay someone else to write your essay, don't let your parents write your essay, don't write an essay with your best friend and submit identical work, and don't use AI or ChatGPT to write your essay! This is your opportunity to speak to the admissions officer reading your essay. They want to hear your voice.

Frequently asked questions

1. How do you review applications and how does the personal statement/essay fit into your evaluation?
2. On average, how much time do you spend on reading an essay? Is the application and essay read by more than one person?
3. Should a student's essay(s) be copyedited and proofread by a teacher, parent and/or counselor?
4. How are supplemental essays utilized in the review process? If a school requires them, how are they weighed compared to the personal essay?
5. What typically stands out in a college essay and/or supplemental essay?
6. What are some common mistakes you see in college essays?
7. What advice do you have for students as they try to decide what to write about in their personal essay?

Getting Started

Contemplate your accomplishments, skills, and activities. While some of these are listed on your application, are there any you wish to go into depth about? What has inspired you to engage in these activities or strive to achieve these accomplishments?

Do you know what you would like to pursue in college? If so, in what way have you engaged in these interests? What has led you to these objectives? If not, what things are you interested in exploring and why?

Which character traits would you use to describe yourself. Consider ways in which you have shown leadership, initiative, creativity, commitment, intellectual curiosity, etc.

Highlight the qualities and achievements you wish to share and provide specific examples that demonstrate these traits.

QUESTIONS & CONTACTS

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