
THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS ESSAY

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Finding the Best Fit College

- Type of School (Public, Private Secular, Private Religious Affiliation)
- Distance from Home and Geographic Setting (Rural, Suburban, Urban)
- Size: Small <5,000, Medium 5–10,000, Large 10-15,000, Very Large 15,000+
- Programs of Study/Majors
- Campus Life/Culture: Athletics, Activities, Residential Life, Greek Life
- Cost/Scholarship Opportunities
- Ethnic and Geographic Diversity
- Special Programs: Co-ops/Internships, Honors College, Study Abroad
- Support Services

Factors Colleges are Considering:

- High School Transcript
- ACT/SAT Scores/Test Optional
- College Essay
- Letters of Recommendation
- Extracurricular Activities
- Special Talents
- Demonstrated Interest

What is the Point of the College Essay?

The essay is your opportunity to use your voice to share information about yourself and to tell your story.

- 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.

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, 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.
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.

Additional optional question (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.

We will retain the [optional community disruption](#) question within the Writing section. Additionally, we are closely following the Supreme Court case on the use of race in admissions. Depending on the outcome, we stand ready to create resources that will help students speak about their lived experiences.

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.

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? If so, how heavily or lightly?
4. What advice do you have for students as they try to decide what to write about in their personal essay?
5. How are supplemental essays utilized in the review process? If a school requires them, how are they weighed compared to the personal essay?
6. What typically stands out in a college essay and/or supplemental essay?
7. What are some common mistakes you see in college essays?

Essay Dos and Don'ts

Things you should do:

- Consider the essay prompt and be sure to answer the question
- Stay within the word count
- Proofread your work; don't just spell check
- Do use your own voice; don't overuse a Thesaurus
- Explain anything that is not common knowledge (write out abbreviations)
- Get (a little) help. Have a trusted person or two read your draft and give you edits and feedback.

More Essay Dos and Don'ts

And some things to avoid:

- 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!

High School Timeline

10th

Register for PSAT in October

If you plan to take the ACT and/or SAT, how will you prepare for these tests?

Continue extra-curricular activities, volunteering, maintaining grades, Defining My Unique Strengths in Naviance

11th

Take PSAT in Fall

Attend college fair in school, Sign up for SAT in March, May and/or June and/or ACT in April or June

Complete Personality and Intelligences in Naviance

Begin your college search - take tours, interact with schools online, attend Junior Conference

Think about who to ask for letters of recommendation and start reaching out

Start to think about/write your essay(s)

Pay attention to course selection senior year

12th grade: Eyes on the Prize

- Applying to college can be stressful, but you can stay on top of it.
Be organized; create a spreadsheet.
- August 1: Common & Coalition Applications becomes available
- Use Naviance and other materials provided by your Guidance Office.
- Talk to your School Counselor about your college list, timing, and deadlines.
–Are you applying Early Decision, Early Action, Regular Decision, Rolling, etc.
- Possibly take a fall ACT or SAT
- Fill out the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) when it is available
- Focus on what you can control. Remember that at some point you have done all you can.

And remember that there is a college for everyone!

QUESTIONS & CONTACTS

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