


A QUICK GUIDE TO WRITING THE COLLEGE ADMISSION ESSAY





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WHAT IS THE COLLEGE ESSAY?

650

The college admission essay is a 650 word essay responding to a prompt provided in the Common App. Because so much of the college application is comprised of numbers (GPA and test scores), common course selections, and familiar activities, the essay is the best way for an admissions committee to hear an applicant's voice. Aside from an interview, the essay is an applicant's only opportunity to share their personal experience with the admissions committee.

Does every college require an essay?

More than 900 colleges use the Common App for admissions. Many of the schools require the essay, and some make it optional. If a school does not require the essay, they likely require some short form answers to their own application questions.

Some colleges have their own writing prompts that are included with the Common App. These prompts usually require a shorter response (around 150-250 words) and can range from school specific questions to more personal queries. Examples include: *Why us? Tell us more about an extra curricular activity. Tell us about your major and career plans. Tell us about a community you're in.*



What Should I Write About?

The Common App provides students with six essay prompts and an "open topic" option:

Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If that sounds like you, please share your story.

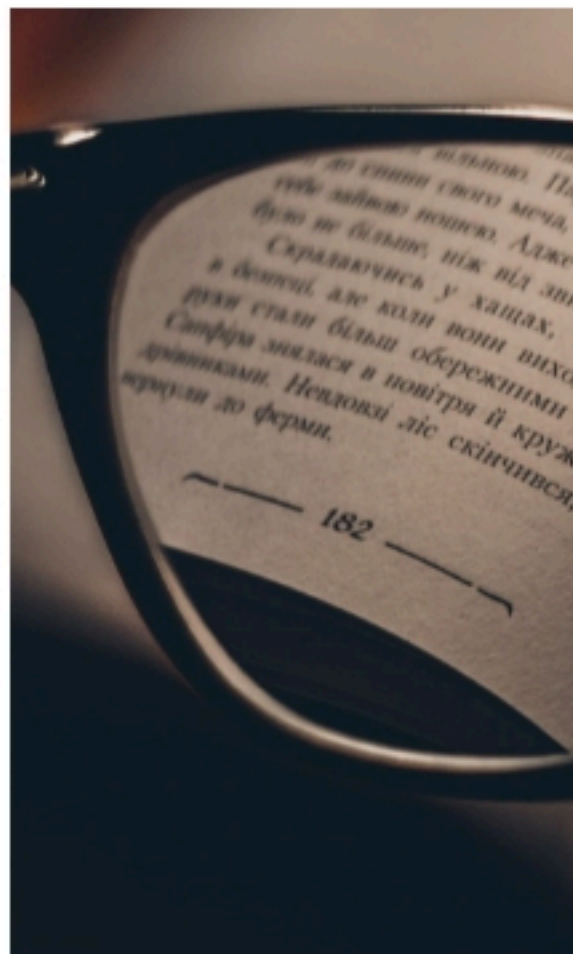
The lessons we take from the obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?

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?

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

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?



YOUR VOICE MATTERS

Above all, you need to be authentic in your essay. *Your* voice needs to come through. Lots of people will want to help and offer advice, but resist letting them take over your essay. Teachers, parents, and counselors will do their best to help you make your essay the best it can be. But, do not adopt in an inauthentic voice. Be true to yourself and defend your choices. This is your story to tell.

WHAT DO COLLEGES LOOK FOR?

WHO ARE YOU?

Tell a story that your test scores and GPA can't tell. Reflect on who you are and what you can bring to the school. Reveal something about yourself that is not represented elsewhere in the application. Show the committee the type of student they will be admitting.

CAN YOU WRITE?

The essay should be clear, organized, focused, and logical. There should be no errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, or sentence structure. The essay needs to answer the prompt in the number of words given.

WHAT ADMISSION OFFICERS SAY:

Great essays are exciting to read because they allow us to hear the student's voice and picture them as part of our campus community.

We love it when students write about topics that get them excited, no matter how mundane. Taking a seemingly simple subject and making it interesting is always a plus.

CHOOSING A TOPIC

What do you want readers to know about you that they can't find out from the rest of the application package?

TOPICS TO AVOID

Summary of accomplishments.
Predictable sports stories.
Your good fortune or humble brags.
Illegal or illicit behavior.
Political or religious topics that are too controversial.

CONSIDER THE WHAT

What comes to mind when you think of the high and low points in your life?
Has anyone played a pivotal role in your life?
Have you overcome any significant struggles?
Can you think of a time when something challenged your sense of self or the world?

CONSIDER THE WHY

Why did you choose your topic?
Why is your choice significant?
What does your story say about who you are today?
Does your story show growth?
Does your story convey passion?
Does your story illustrate resilience?

RESIST CLICHES

If your essay focuses on predictable values, it is not likely to stand out.
For example:

Challenge-Getting a job.

Predictable Values Learned-

Discipline, Commitment, Hardwork

Unpredictable Values-Risk, Social Change, Learning to Set Boundaries

You want to convey *unique insights* and make *interesting connections*. Between the challenge/experience and the resulting values.

BRAINSTORMING

The Writing Process



Content

What is the story you want to tell?
What details matter?
What does the reader need to know?
Why is it important?



Construction

How will you organize your content?
Catchy opener.
Descriptive Narrative.
Unique Reflection.
Clear significance.



Cleanup

Review and revise.
Proofread and polish.
Edit and edit again.

Set your essay aside for a few days.

Revisit and revise with fresh eyes.

Ask for editing help from someone you trust, or contact
Compass Academics for expert support.

NEED ADDITIONAL SUPPORT?

Campus Visit
Planning



College
Selection



Scholarship
Search



Compass Academics specializes in guiding students and their parents through
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