

Common App Essays

Nearly 700 colleges accept the [The Common Application](#), which makes it easy to apply to multiple schools with just one form. If you are using the Common App to apply for college admission in 2019, you will have 250–650 words to respond to ONE of the following 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. 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?
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.

Tackling the Common App Essay Prompts

Prompt #1: Share your story.

Answer this prompt by reflecting on a hobby, facet of your personality, or experience that is genuinely meaningful and unique to you. Admissions officers want to feel connected to you and an honest, personal statement about who you are draws them in. Your love of superheroes, baking chops, or family history are all fair game if you can tie it back to who you are or what you believe in. Avoid a rehash of the accomplishments on your [high school résumé](#) and choose something that the admissions committee will not discover when reading the rest of your application.

Prompt #2: Learning from obstacles.

You're trying to show colleges your best self, so it might seem counterintuitive to willingly acknowledge a time you struggled. But overcoming challenges demonstrates courage, grit, and perseverance! That's why the last piece of this prompt is essential. The obstacle you write about can be large or small, but you must show the admissions committee how your perspective changed as a result.

Prompt #3: Challenging a belief.

Your answer to this question could focus on a time you stood up to others or an experience when your own preconceived view was challenged. Choose this prompt if you have a relevant—and specific!—experience to recount (and reflect on). A vague essay about a hot button issue doesn't tell the admissions committee anything useful about YOU.

Prompt #4: Solving a problem.

This essay is designed to get at the heart of how you think and what makes you tick. Present a situation or quandary and show steps toward the solution. Admissions officers want insight into your thought process and the issues you grapple with, so explain how you became aware of the dilemma and how you tackled solving it. Don't forget to explain why the problem is important to you!

Prompt #5: Personal growth.

Just like Prompt #2, the accomplishment or event you write about can be anything from a major milestone to a smaller "aha" moment. Describe the event or accomplishment that shaped you but take care to also show *what* you

learned or *how* you changed. Colleges are looking for a sense of maturity and introspection—pinpoint the transformation and demonstrate your personal growth.

Prompt #6: What captivates you?

This prompt is an invitation to write about something you care about. (So avoid the pitfall of writing about what you think will impress the admission office versus what truly matters to you). Colleges are looking for curious students, who are thoughtful about the world around them. The "what or who do you turn to when you want to learn more" bit isn't an afterthought—it's a key piece of the prompt. Make sure you explain *how* you pursue your interest, as well.

Prompt #7: Topic of your choice.

This question might be for you if you have a dynamo personal essay from English class to share or were really inspired by a question from another college's application. You can even write your own question! Whatever topic you land on, the essentials of a standout college essay still stand: 1.) Show the admissions committee who you are [beyond grades and test scores](#) and 2.) Dig into your topic by asking yourself *how* and *why*. There isn't a prompt to guide you, so you must ask yourself the questions that will get at the heart of the story you want to tell.