

College Plaza

where college is a *verb*

*imagine ask study explore try struggle learn focus believe persist achieve
become*

The College Essay

For many colleges, universities and scholarship organizations, the personal essay is the most important element of the application, second only to the transcript. As you prepare to write your essay (*ideally, working on a solid draft the summer before your senior year*) we recommend the following:

1. Remember that the central goal of the application essay is to communicate your distinct voice. **Believe that you have something of value to write** about who you are, what matters to you, your passions, your hopes for your life in this world.
2. Read the essay question carefully and answer the question. If the college asks for a one page essay, write a one page essay!
3. Assume that you will need to do drafts. Ask your high school teachers/advisors, tutors and other college mentors to read your drafts and offer feedback through this process! EDIT! EDIT! EDIT!
4. Be specific rather than general. Some of the most powerful essays share a single story that reflects a larger quality/character trait/hope/goal about the student. Demonstrate this trait rather than just telling it. Focus on a particular moment, experience, lesson that reveals something greater about who you are and how you see the world rather than making your essay too broad and general. Through your essay, try to actually *show* something real and true.

5. The essay should not be a list of accomplishments nor should it be a list of excuses for aspects of your application that you are worried about. There are other places in the application to explain what you have done—or not done—through your high school years!
6. If your essay focuses on a person who has had a significant impact on your life, be sure that the essay is more about you than that person! Don't forget yourself in the telling of the story.

Common Application essay prompts (250-650 words) www.commonapp.org

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 failure can be fundamental to later success. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?*
3. *Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?*
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 or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.*

After completing a draft essay, reflect upon and respond to the following questions:

1. Who did you ask to read this essay and what three pieces of feedback were most helpful to you?
2. Why did you select this particular topic?
3. What aspect(s) of this essay leave you most proud?
4. What was challenging about writing this essay?
5. After a college/university admissions representative reads your essay, what do you hope he/she will know and understand about you.