

## College Essay/Personal Statement Writing Workshop

Most colleges require some sort of essay or writing sample in their application. As colleges are looking at applicants in a more holistic way (not just as test scores and GPA's), essays are extremely important in showing the admissions team who you are. Essays are a crucial part of your application and can either help or hinder your chances of getting accepted.

### College Essay vs. Regular Essay

College essays are generally more personal and specific to you than a normal essay. The goal is to communicate who you are, who you have become that person, and what you will contribute to the university in which you are applying. While many colleges only require one essay (usually the common or coalition essay), other universities use different or even additional essays to assess your application.

### How to Write Your Essay

- Know Your Prompt
  - Understand what is being asked, determine how it relates to you personally, and use the prompt to showcase you as an applicant.
- Brainstorm Your Ideas
  - Reflect on your experiences and jot down all of your ideas. If you are not sure which prompt works best for you, brainstorm and then use what you have to determine the strongest topic for you to write on.
  - Narrow down the options and decide what story to tell.
- Make an outline
  - Shape your thoughts so they have an introduction, body, and conclusion; also ensure that there is a natural flow and progression.
  - Make sure you do not only talk about what has happened to you but hit how it has changed, motivated, and inspires you now.
- Write the essay
  - Stay on topic and be concise, but keep it personal and interesting.
  - While you are drafting it is alright to go over word limits yet be careful when finalizing your essay.
- Proofread
  - Check for spelling and grammatical errors and ensure that the essay flows overall.
  - If you are comfortable sharing your essay, have a teacher (preferably an English teacher) read it and give you tips on how to improve your writing.
  - Make sure that your writing is at the college level with appropriate vocabulary and sophisticated sentence structures.

- Tell a good story that highlights your strengths, demonstrate how you have grown as an individual, and lets the college know what you will offer as a prospective student.

### Common Essay Prompts and How to Approach Them

- “Describe a person you admire.”
  - Avoid typical figures, and pick someone who has genuinely had an impact on your life, changed your worldview, or challenged you to grow as a person.
- “What is a book you love?”
  - Choose a book that truly inspired or shaped you and discuss why you enjoyed it and what it meant to you. Do not choose a book just because you think it will impress the admissions officers.
- “What is an extracurricular activity that is meaningful to you?”
  - Highlight what these experiences have taught you about yourself and how you have grown from them.
  - Tell a story and include how you found this activity, why you were drawn to it, and what it has shown you about yourself.
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- “Why do you want to attend this school?”
  - Do some research about the programs, professors, and opportunities to include and go beyond reputation and rankings.
  - Be specific. Instead of saying “I would like to do research during college” say “I would like to research \_\_\_\_\_ and aid Professor \_\_\_\_\_ in her upcoming publication”.
- “What is an obstacle or challenge you have overcome?”
  - This is a good prompt for students that have overcome adversity. It gives a place to show that you have succeeded in spite of challenges that have restricted opportunities, resources, or privileges that other applicants might have.
  - Be careful to not spend too much time talking about the past. While it is tempting to give the admissions committee a detailed account of your struggles, it is more productive if you give yourself space to describe how you overcame the obstacles and what they have taught you.
  - Give a good example of what you went through or are going through without compromising your ability to talk about how it has and will continue to change you.

## Additional Resources

- [How to Answer Popular Essay Prompts](#)
- [7 Tips to Upgrade Your Essay](#)
- [College Essay Tips from University Admissions Administrators](#)
- [10 Tips for Writing the College Application Essay](#)