

COMPETENCY ESSAY

Every School One student must complete a satisfactory Competency Essay of **between 600 and 650 words** before the end of the second trimester of his or her senior year. Seniors who have not yet passed the essay are responsible for keeping track of the five dates when **substantially revised** drafts of the essay are due during the senior year. **Students who are not seniors may turn in drafts of their essays at any time. Seniors are encouraged to hand in their drafts well ahead of the dates.** These dates are **deadlines**; they are **NOT** suggested dates to turn in drafts. **It is your responsibility to be aware of them and meet them.**

If you miss the April 10 by 9 a.m. deadline as a junior, you will have to endure *daily* help sessions with Cary for the rest of the school year *during your lunch time* to get the draft done and to revise it. If you are a senior and you do not turn in a carefully and substantially revised and freshly printed draft of your essay on or before the due dates next year, you will not participate in that year's graduation ceremony unless you do a second senior essay in a complete and timely way. There are no exceptions. These deadlines are designed to have your college essay perfected in time for you to apply to college in a timely way.

You must choose an essay topic from those listed on the back as our topics are those for 2025-6 Common Application. The only exception is for students who are applying to art schools only that don't accept the Common App. and have different essay questions. Jim or Cary can help you pick a topic if that's your situation. Be sure your topic will provide the reader with important insights into **your personality and values**. The best college essays are those that display the student's passion and personality. This is your advertisement about yourself to colleges. All essays must contain **specific evidence** to support the assertions you make. When completed, this will be your main college essay unless you choose to replace it.

STRUCTURE:

Introduction: Each essay must begin with a paragraph that introduces the main topic of the essay as well as the subtopics it will cover. It should begin generally and become more specific as it provides general background that will prepare the reader to understand the points you will be making. This paragraph must close with a **clear, specific thesis statement** that lays out the main point of your essay.

Body Paragraphs: Each body paragraph will discuss a specific subtopic or step in the process you are describing. Before beginning to write, you should outline subtopics for body paragraphs and figure out an appropriate order for these topics. Each body paragraph should begin by introducing the topic of the paragraph. You should then provide information about this topic and include specific, detailed evidence to support what you are saying. The paragraph must end with a general summary of what the paragraph explained.

Conclusion: Your final paragraph should summarize the information you have provided in the essay. Summarize your main points from all of the body paragraphs and look toward the future. Synthesize all of the information to lead up to your main point. Be sure that the main thrust of this paragraph agrees with your thesis statement. If it doesn't, your essay has gone off course along the way.

Lots of articles with advice about college admissions essays are available at
<https://sites.google.com/view/s1classes/collegecareer/admissions-essay?authuser=0>

TOPICS (from the Common Application):

Instructions. The essay demonstrates your ability to write clearly and concisely on a selected topic and helps you distinguish yourself in your own voice. What do you want the readers of your application to know about you apart from courses, grades and test scores? What are your best intellectual and personality features?

Choose the option that best helps you answer that question and write an essay of no more than 650 words, using the prompt to inspire and structure your response. **Remember: 650 words is your limit, not your goal.**

2025-2026 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?
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.

While the **deadline for juniors is 9 a.m. on April 10**, you are strongly encouraged to get help soon if you feel it would help, and **deadlines for this project are just that: the final chance no matter what**. You should get your essay in earlier. If you get it in sooner, you will get it back promptly. If you wait until the deadline, you may have to wait as we wade through the pile. **If you miss the April 10 deadline, you have to attend help sessions with Cary during lunch for the rest of the school year to get the draft done and work on the revision**, so don't even let it get close to April 10. Teachers and advisors are happy to help you, but don't wait until the last couple of days. **March vacation is a great time to get this done or at least close to done.**

Definitely feel free to chat with advisors, teachers, parents and friends to get ideas about unique or great things about yourself that you might want to share before writing a draft.