

## BONUS POINTS!

+1 (nice to have!)	+2 (will significantly help you stand out from other applicants)	+3 (if done properly can make the difference between acceptance vs. waitlist)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- essay blends in ways the student can contribute to a campus</li> <li>- essay makes bigger connections (i.e. summarizes the context and then moves onto broader discussion of the student's V-SPICE qualities)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the student voices their vulnerabilities honestly (but doesn't overplay their struggles), giving their essay more depth                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- essay contains a strong hook and ending</li> </ul> </li> <li>- if the essay is picked up from a random pile, the author's close friends/family will be able to tell that the essay is the author's</li> <li>- essay is emotional: uses the 5 senses, dialogue, and moments</li> <li>- essay is analytical; includes action steps and reflection portion                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- essay is humorous</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the student showcases their personal growth in an engaging manner that speaks both to the reader and to themselves</li> <li>- essay utilizes subversion on a sentence and/or broader story-level (e.g. "I'm proud to say that my dad is the richest man I know — rich not in capital, but in character")</li> </ul>

## PITFALLS

-1 (generally avoid)	-2 (definitely don't want to include)	-3 (you may get rejected because you did this)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- essay is about music, sports, trauma, parents' immigration story, etc. (it's easy to fall into clichés when writing about these stereotypical topics, but it is possible depending on how the student presents them; being personal is key)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- essay is too philosophical</li> </ul> </li> <li>- essay uses too much flowery language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the student is not making things happen/they are not the main character; essay is focused more on background info/other characters than on themselves                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- essay contains obvious insights (student can make insights original with a logical chain—e.g. "I wanted to study more efficiently, so I began using the pomodoro method which made me realize...")</li> </ul> </li> <li>- the student is writing what they think the admissions officer wants to hear</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- too much of the essay (over 50%) is about their problems/situation/circumstances, doesn't explain how they overcame them</li> <li>- essay lacks specificity; contains only chronological summaries instead of moments and analysis (it's helpful to show the parts of the student's life unique to them/the importance of the steps they took to find a solution)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- moments in the essay sound forced/self-aggrandizing/patronizing</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

VULNERABILITY	SELFLESSNESS	PERSEVERANCE	INITIATIVE	CURIOSITY	EXPRESSION
1- the essay has no vulnerability or evidence that it was written by a human being OR the student showcases too much vulnerability and discusses trauma in a way that does not make them an attractive applicant	1 - essay portrays no examples of selflessness, both in the examples stated throughout the essay as well as in the overall intention or final reflection of the piece	1 - essay shows no proof or mention of perseverance whatsoever	1 - essay does not mention initiative/proactivity or offer any evidence that the student has gone above and beyond what has been expected of them	1 - essay does not show curiosity (in particular, intellectual curiosity) clearly OR the author communicates their curiosity in an exaggerated, cringy way	1 - essay does not include the author's creativity/willingness to take risks OR the student overexaggerates their originality (e.g. "It felt like I was born for doing [insert passion here]"
2 - essay barely showcases vulnerability (fear, doubt) OR communicates V in a cliché/boring way that fails to evoke sympathy	2 - moments of selflessness in the essay sound forced, unrealistic, and/or self-aggrandizing OR selflessness comes off as cliché, or forced (e.g. "I gave up all of my sleep and free time to help them")	2 - essay describes perseverance with clichés/lacks development; focuses too little or too much on the author's struggles	2 - essay somewhat conveys initiative but lacks emotional and analytical weight that's specific to the author (e.g. "I stepped up because that was the right thing to do")	2 - essay hints at the author's curiosity but reads disingenuous/not personal enough (e.g. "I'm interested in physics because I want to understand how the world works")	2 - essay shows some creativity but gives generalized examples that do not highlight the student's passion/drive (e.g. "The solution to [insert struggle here] came to me out of the blue")
3 - vulnerability shown at least once in a powerful manner; reader can effectively feel the author's intention and emotion at each stage of their experience	3 - essay conveys selflessness genuinely and without exaggeration; author demonstrates self-awareness of their strengths and weaknesses (e.g. "I didn't have experience making scarves, but I knew my friend needed help")	3 - essay shows at least one specific and convincing example of perseverance; reader can sympathize with and understand why the author is able to persevere	3 - essay successfully communicates the author's initiative in a honest, compelling manner; has successfully made us root for them	3 - essay displays curiosity in a believable and engaging way but lacks specific details that makes the reader sense their passion for the subject	3 - essay effectively describes the student's creativity in a personal and original way, including the thought process and inspiration behind their choices
4 - not only did the applicant discuss their vulnerability in an elegant, inspiring way, but they generated profound insights into their experience about how they plan to shape the future	4 - essay skillfully shows selflessness in impactful/vivid detail and might use other characters to work for the author (such as in the "Relationship Essay") ALSO combines selflessness with another dimension of the rubric masterfully (initiative, intellectual curiosity or ingenuity for instance)	4 - essay not only highlights perseverance but also, through specific examples, shows how the student grew from their struggles and/or will help others in similar situations (e.g. "Through translating English documents for my immigrant parents, I've become more patient with my parents and myself")	4 - essay captures initiative while being inspiring (though not overly so) and personal; reader can see how the author's initiative/leadership also uplifts others (e.g. "It was the first time I helped organize a protest at school. Despite my uncertainties, I knew my peers and I would be alright because we truly believed a better community was possible")	4 - the student's curiosity may not be necessarily unique, but it's described through an honest and personal lens that shows their genuine interest in learning; essay also effectively displays how the author takes action to explore their curiosity (e.g. "I wanted to learn more about the beauty of animation that heavily shaped my childhood--that's why I began watching every tutorial on YouTube")	4 - essay contains not just novel solutions to problems in the applicant's life as well as creative insights into the experience, but also communicates this in a refreshing, original manner

Note that a student does not need to hit a perfect score on the rubric in order to write a stellar common app essay. Many students who have been admitted to top colleges wrote common app essays that focused incredibly well on **one letter**. Other successful students focused on touching upon three or four. However, the ***most important principle*** for a student to know is that their *overall application story* (which includes the CA essay, supplemental essays, and sometimes even the activities list and additional info and recommendations) should hit all six points.

For example, if a student notices that their CA essay talks about a time when they showed exceptional creativity and initiative, they would be wise to dedicate a supplemental essay towards talking more about their intellectual curiosity and perseverance when learning a difficult academic subject.

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Vulnerability	Selflessness	Perseverance	Initiative	Curiosity	Expression
1- the essay has no vulnerability or evidence that it was written by a human being OR the student showcases <i>too much</i> vulnerability and discusses trauma in a way that does not make them an attractive applicant	1 - essay portrays no examples of selflessness, both in the examples stated throughout the essay as well as in the overall intention or final reflection of the piece	1 - essay shows no proof or mention of perseverance whatsoever	1 - essay does not mention initiative/proactivity or offer any evidence that the student has gone above and beyond what has been expected of them	1 - essay does not show curiosity (in particular, intellectual curiosity) clearly OR the author communicates their curiosity in an exaggerated, cringy way	1 - essay does not include the author's creativity/willingness to take risks OR the student overexaggerates their originality (e.g. <i>"It felt like I was born for doing [insert passion here]"</i> )
2 - essay barely showcases vulnerability (fear, doubt) OR communicates V in a cliché/boring way that fails to evoke sympathy	2 - moments of selflessness in the essay sound forced, unrealistic, and/or self-aggrandizing OR selflessness comes off as cliché, or forced (e.g. <i>"I gave up all of my sleep and free time to help them"</i> )	2 - essay describes perseverance with clichés/lacks development; focuses too little or too much on the author's struggles	2 - essay somewhat conveys initiative but lacks emotional and analytical weight that's specific to the author (e.g. <i>"I stepped up because that was the right thing to do"</i> )	2 - essay hints at the author's curiosity but reads disingenuous/not personal enough (e.g. <i>"I'm interested in physics because I want to understand how the world works"</i> )	2 - essay shows some creativity but gives generalized examples that do not highlight the student's passion/drive (e.g. <i>"The solution to [insert struggle here] came to me out of the blue"</i> )
3 - vulnerability shown at least twice in the essay; reader can effectively <i>feel</i> the author's intention and emotion at each stage of their experience	3 - essay conveys selflessness genuinely and without exaggeration; author demonstrates self-awareness of their strengths and weaknesses (e.g. <i>"I didn't have experience making scarves, but I knew my friend needed help"</i> )	3 - essay shows at least specific and convincing example of perseverance; reader can sympathize with and understand why the author is able to persevere	3 - essay successfully communicates the author's initiative in a honest, compelling manner; has successfully made us root for them	3 - essay displays curiosity in a believable and engaging way but lacks specific details that makes the reader sense their passion for the subject	3 - essay effectively describes the student's creativity in a personal and original way, including the thought process and inspiration behind their choices
4 - not only did the applicant discuss their vulnerability in an elegant,	4 - essay skillfully shows selflessness in impactful/vivid detail and	4 - essay not only highlights perseverance but also shows how the student grew from	4 - essay captures initiative while being inspiring (though not	4 - the student's curiosity may not be necessarily unique, but it's described through an honest	4 - essay contains not just novel solutions to problems in the applicant's life as well as

<p>inspiring way, but they generated profound insights into their experience about how they plan to shape the future</p>	<p>might use other characters to work for the author (such as in the “Relationship Essay”)</p> <p>Also combines selflessness with another dimension of the rubric masterfully (initiative, intellectual curiosity or ingenuity for instance)</p>	<p>their struggles and/or will help others in similar situations (e.g. “<i>Through translating English documents for my immigrant parents, I’ve become more patient with my parents and myself</i>”)</p>	<p>overly so) and personal; reader can see how the author’s initiative/leadership also uplifts others (e.g. “<i>It was the first time I helped organize a protest at school. Despite my uncertainties, I knew my peers and I would be alright because we truly believed a better community was possible</i>”)</p>	<p>and personal lens that shows their genuine interest in learning; essay also effectively displays how the author uses their curiosity to help others (e.g. “<i>I wanted to make the beauty of animation more accessible—that’s why I started a stick figure animation program at my local elementary school</i>”)</p>	<p>creative insights into the experience, but also communicates this in a refreshing, original manner</p>
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Bonus Points!	+1 (nice to have!)	+2 (will significantly help you stand out from other applicants)	+3 (if done properly can make the difference between acceptance vs. waitlist)
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Pitfalls (see Session 2)	<b>-1 (generally avoid)</b>	<b>-2 (definitely don't want to include because)</b>	<b>-3 (you may get rejected because you did this)</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- essay is about music, sports, trauma, parents' immigration story, etc. (it's easy to fall into clichés when writing about these stereotypical topics, but it <i>is</i> possible depending on <i>how</i> the student presents them; being personal is key)</li> <li>- essay is too philosophical</li> <li>- essay uses too much flowery language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the student is not making things happen/they are not the main character; essay is focused more on background info/other characters than on themselves</li> <li>- essay contains obvious insights (student can make insights original with a logical chain—e.g. “<i>I wanted to study more efficiently, so I began using the pomodoro method which made me realize...</i>”)</li> <li>- the student is writing what they think the admissions officer wants to hear</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- too much of the essay (over 50%) is about their problems/situation/circumstances, doesn't explain how they overcame them</li> <li>- essay lacks specificity; contains only chronological summaries instead of moments and analysis (it's helpful to show the parts of the student's life <i>unique to them</i>/the importance of the steps they took to find a solution)</li> <li>- moments in the essay sound forced/self-aggrandizing/patronizing</li> </ul>

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