

Common App Personal Statement - Always choose prompt #7

Written by Jack Delehey on 2020 February 20th



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2019–2020 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. 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.

Yes, it may be a little early for this post, but I've already had several juniors reach out to me regarding "The College Essay", more accurate called "The Personal Statement" on the Common Application. So I've decided to post here my thoughts on it. The Personal Statement is widely considered the 3rd most important portion of your application (behind GPA, SAT/ACT). So what is the best way to knock it out of the park? Two part answer:

- 1) Start early
- 2) Choose prompt #7. Don't consider any of the other prompts.

The first point is self explanatory, the second needs a bit of a deeper dive.

The Common Application presents seven possible prompts for the 500-word "Personal Statement." The first six prompts are specific, while the seventh is an essay on a "topic of your choice." These days, admissions at top universities across the country are becoming increasingly difficult. So how do you stand out? Simple: ignore the status quo. If you pick prompts #1 to #6, you certainly can write a great essay...on a topic that roughly 10-20% of all other applicants have written. Choosing option #7 allows a student to ignore the status quo, set them apart from the pack.

There's another, slightly more subtle reason prompt #7 gives you a leg-up: *technically each year's prompts can be different than the previous year's*. And those prompts are only released by The Common App in the summer. However, prompt #7 will *always be there*. So you know

it'll be an option even before The Common App officially releases it. You can't say the same for prompts #1-#6. You'd hate to write a full essay on a prompt that doesn't exist.

Of course, choosing option #7 and then writing a poor or average essay won't do you any good. Luckily, I've helped students for the past 7 years write elite college essays, utilizing tactics that help separate my students' essays from hundreds, if not thousands, of others.

At this point, it is too early in the year for juniors to dive into essay specifics but if you really want to get ahead on your brainstorming and outlining, don't consider any other prompt: topic #7 will separate you from the pack.

-Jack