



Common Application: A Run Down of the Personal Statement Essay

The Common Application personal essay is a crucial component of your college application. It offers a unique opportunity to showcase your personality, experiences, and aspirations to admissions committees beyond grades and test scores.

1. **Start Brainstorming early**

Don't wait until the last minute to start your essay. Begin early to give yourself ample time to brainstorm topics. Senior year is very stress inducing as is, having to add college applications on top of it complicates things even more. The common application opens August 1st every year. If possible, begin brainstorming and possibly writing at this time.

2. **Understand the Prompts**

The Common App provides several essay prompts to choose from. Read each one carefully and think about how you can use it to share something meaningful about yourself. Select a prompt that resonates with you and allows you to tell a story only you can tell. However, if your story does not necessarily fit perfectly into any of the prompts for the cycle, you always have the option to submit an essay that answers a different prompt or one of your own design. Nonetheless, the Common App prompts really show what colleges want to hear about you on a personal level, so don't steer away too much from the questions that were provided.

3. Embrace Your Story

Reflect on how your background/ story has shaped your aspirations, work ethic, and worldview. Your unique perspective is valuable and can set you apart from other applicants. This essay is your chance to show your personality, values, and passions. Be genuine and honest in your writing. Admissions officers are looking to get to know the real you, so let your voice and personality shine through. The best essays are those that are genuinely reflective of the writer. Admissions officers can tell when an essay is authentic versus when a student is trying to say what they think the college wants to hear. Be honest and true to yourself in your writing.

4. Focus on a Specific Experience or Moment

Rather than trying to cover too much ground, focus on a specific event, experience, or theme in your life. Detailed narratives that offer insight into a pivotal moment or aspect of your character will be more engaging and illuminative than a broad overview of your life. A lot of these pivotal experiences and moments include a time of hardship or difficulty. It is okay and even encouraged to be vulnerable but be careful of “trauma dumping.” Although you might have many stories or ideas you want to share, it’s important to stay focused. Choose one topic or theme and delve deeply into it. This will ensure your essay is cohesive and powerful.

- A lot of the time, these stories have to do with friends or family. BUT remember this is your opportunity to talk about why YOU should be admitted. You don’t want to write an essay about how your mom inspired you so much that by the end of the essay, they want to admit your mom instead of you.

5. Reflect and Analyze

Colleges are looking for more than just a story—they want to see reflection and growth. Don’t just describe what happened; delve into how it affected you, what you learned, and how it shaped who you are today. If you talked about a difficult life moment, end your essay with explaining how it impacted you in a positive way and how it has led to certain passions, goals, or character traits.

6. Show, Don't Tell

Use vivid details and descriptions to bring your story to life. Instead of simply stating your qualities or achievements, demonstrate them through stories from your life. This approach will make your essay more engaging and memorable.

7. Focus on a Strong Opening

The first few sentences of your essay are crucial. They should grab the reader's attention and make them want to continue reading. Start with an interesting hook, such as a surprising fact, a question, or a vivid scene. Do this as creatively as possible. For example, start your essay with a metaphor and reveal its relevance and its importance later on.

8. Edit and Revise

A great essay requires multiple drafts. After writing your first draft, take a break before revisiting it with fresh eyes. Look for areas to improve clarity, flow, and grammar. Ask teachers, family, or friends to provide feedback, but remember the final essay should be in your voice. Avoid common pitfalls such as clichés, repetitive language, and off-topic tangents. Also, ensure you're answering the prompt directly and thoroughly.

9. End Your Essay the Right Way

It's a good idea to end your essay off by talking about how you will carry the things you've learned throughout your essay into college, and how that will make you successful in a college environment

Something Important to Remember/ Disclaimer: Do not write thoroughly about your career aspirations. This is a topic and question that will come up when you write your supplement essays. If you write about it for your personal essay, you will be left with nothing to say when specifically asked about it!

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