

Common App Essay Brainstorm and Draft Tool

Overview: This document is meant to help you brainstorm and draft a US style Common App essay.

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PART 1: Brainstorming Ideas for a US Style Common Application Essay

IMPORTANT: Remember that this is just a brainstorm. You are *NOT* writing your university essay; instead, you are getting ideas onto the page that will help you (with guidance from others such as me, Mr. Kendis) choose what to write about that will help universities know more about you. **Relax and have fun with this.** Don't put any pressure on yourself to share the 'right' thing here. Just share a bit about yourself. Have fun with this!

A) University Essay Brainstorming:

- There are a lot of prompts below. *I do not recommend that you answer all of them.* I provided a lot of prompts so you can find the ones that speak to you.
- Read through all of the prompts first. Read through first so you read the range of possibilities. Then, **choose at least five (and no more than 12) of the prompts to answer.**
- It is your choice to decide how much to write for each of the prompts. My recommendation is about a paragraph for each one that you decide to answer.
- If you are feeling stuck, set a timer and write as much as you can for one prompt (without worrying about spelling, grammar, word choice, etc.) in five minutes. Repeat with the other prompts.

Complete this sentence: If you really knew me, you would know...

What is a daily routine or ritual that you have that others might find interesting?

During the last two years, how have you grown as a person? What facilitated that growth?

What has made you strong/ independent/ confident/ resilient?

Imagine your life behind a heavy theater curtain. If an admissions officer pulls back the curtain just

slightly to get a peek, what would they see/learn? What do you want them to know?	
What is a silver lining or uplifting aspect of something challenging about you or your life?	
What is your main academic area of interest? Why are you interested in this area?	
What is something that you would like to be or to do in the future?	
How do you want to change the world?	
What's an extracurricular activity that has shaped your personality and character?	
What is a skill or talent that you have that you take for granted?	
Is there something you've done or experienced that changed you forever in a positive way? How did this event make you more mature, compassionate, self-aware, determined, or strong?	
What is a place that is meaningful to you, and why?	
What is a significant memory from your childhood that has stayed with you?	
What is a book, movie, or song that has had a big impact on your life, and why?	
What are some of your unique experiences that have shaped you as a person?	
What is a moment in your life when you had to make a difficult decision? How did you make that decision?	

What is something that you have always wanted to try, but haven't had the opportunity to do so yet?	
What is your superpower?	
What is a class you'd love to teach?	
What are your values and beliefs? Why are they important to you?	
What are some of the challenges you have faced in your life? How did you overcome them?	
What are some of your interests and passions? Why do they matter to you?	
What are some of the lessons you have learned in your life? How have they impacted you?	
What are some of your personal goals for the future? Why are they important to you?	
What is something about yourself that you don't tell everyone?	
Where do you feel most at home? Why?	
Do you have any unusual pastimes or hobbies? If so, what are they and what are they important to you?	
What parts of your identity are most important to you? Why?	
Do you want to add your own prompt(s) to answer? You can do so in the space below.	

B) What You Want Universities to Learn About You	
Which of your positive qualities do you want universities to learn about you when they read your application? (e.g. you are curious, you are a caring friend, you are hardworking, you are an independent thinker, etc.)	
Reread what you brainstormed in the first part of this homework assignment. Use the highlight feature to highlight places where you feel like you shared the positive qualities you want universities to learn about you.	
After rereading your brainstorming answers above and thinking about which positive qualities you want universities to learn about you, do you feel like you'd like to build any of the brainstorms above into an essay? If so, which one(s)?	

PART 2: Turning Your ‘Brainstorm’ Into an Essay Draft

NOTE: The essay that you’ve been brainstorming for and that you are going to turn into a draft is an essay that you can use for the Common App. Before you go any further, take a look at the [writing prompts for the Common App](#). This will help you with the next phase of this work.

A) Brainstorm Review:

1. Look at the brainstorm you did in the section above.
2. Choose three to five topics, stories, ideas or themes that you think will help tell colleges about who you are and will also show your positive qualities.
3. For each of these three to five ideas, write a one to two sentence summary of the idea.
Example: “When I moved to Brazil and had to adapt to a new school.”

Summary of Idea #1:

Summary of Idea #2:

Summary of Idea #3:

Summary of Idea #4: *optional*

Summary of Idea #5: *optional*

B) Freewriting:

- For each of the ideas you listed above, do a 10-15 minute [free write](#). That means you should write for 10-15 minutes *per idea* without interruption.
- Write continuously for the time allotted. Write whatever comes to mind without worrying about word choice, grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc.
- The goal is to write whatever comes to mind about the idea and to get as much down as possible in the time allotted.
- If you prefer a word count, you should have at least 150 words per idea.
- Remember the ideas of “show, don’t tell” as you are doing this writing. Tell a story with your words; paint a picture for the reader.

Freewriting on Idea 1:

Freewriting on Idea 2:

Freewriting on Idea 3:

Freewriting on Idea 4: *optional*

Freewriting on Idea 5: *optional*

C) Choose One Story and Analyze:

1. Choose **one** of your ideas that you wrote about above in the freewriting activity that you’d like to turn into an essay.
2. In the space below, do some analysis of this story by writing some ideas in response to the following questions:

- Why are you telling the reader (college admissions reps) this story?
- How did this change who you are?
- How did this change how you see the world or how you see yourself or how you see others?
- How did this shape who you want to be in the future?

3. **Write 200-400 words in this section, using the questions above to help guide what you are writing.**

D) Turn It Into a Draft:

1. **Take what you wrote in the analysis section and in the story/free write section and turn them into a 500-800 word draft of an essay.**
2. **Yes, you can copy and paste from above.** What you wrote above is your writing so feel free to use whatever you want from this.
3. If you are looking for a suggestion for the structure, here it is:
 - What happened (tell us a story)?
 - Why does it matter? (In other words, how did this shape you and help you grow?)
 - How did this shape: who you are now; how you see the world; who you want to be in the future; and/or, what you want to study or pursue for a career?