

Fair Lawn High School English Department

Summer Writing Assignment for Incoming Grade 12 Students

Although the Fair Lawn English Department encourages students to choose, read, and explore many books each summer, the required summer assignment for incoming seniors involves writing. In particular, students should prewrite and draft a personal essay in response to one of the [2025-2026 College Common Application Essay Prompts](#). Of course, students are invited to instead draft a response to a different prompt as it relates to a different post-high school goal. The goal is to make this assignment useful to you.

The Grade 12 summer writing assignment will be introduced to students by Grade 11 teachers in June. When seniors return to school in September, the summer writing draft will be collected and assessed as prewriting for the first major essay completed in the first marking period. In other words, a more formal personal essay will be completed as part of a processed writing unit with a proper feedback loop and multiple student revisions.

This is our ninth year of a summer writing assignment in lieu of a summer reading assignment for incoming seniors—based on feedback from the school community. Our hope is that students stay connected with their reading and writing processes and strategies in a meaningful and useful way. Personal essay writing is a real-life skill needed for the college essay, scholarship applications, and/or a cover letter for a job.

Incoming Grade 12 Humanities Honors Students have this [additional assignment](#).
Incoming Grade 12 Advanced Placement Students have this [additional assignment](#).

In partnership,

Gary Pankiewicz, PhD
K-12 Language Arts and Literacy Supervisor
gpankiewicz@fairlawnschools.org

***Assignment and Assessment (for incoming Grade 12):**

As an introduction to the college essay genre, please read [Martha Merrill's New York Times article](#). Additional books on college essay writing are available for your review at the school and public libraries.

Next, prewrite and draft a response (approximately 500-650 words) to one of the 2025-26 Common Application Essay Prompts on the next page.

Please scroll down to the next page for the essay prompt options.

Fair Lawn High School English Department
Summer Writing Assignment for Incoming Grade 12 Students

Below is the set of essay prompts for 2025-2026 as it appears on [the Common App web site](#).

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