

## Personal Essays for College Applications

When you write your essays and short answer responses, write about something that matters to you. Use your own voice. Do not worry about making a special effort to include impressive vocabulary words or overly complex sentences. If you sound like yourself and discuss something you care about, your essay will be more effective.

We know that no one can fit an entire life story into a few short pieces of writing, and we don't expect you to try. Pick topics that will give us an idea of who you are. It doesn't matter which topics you choose, as long as they are meaningful to you. We have read wonderful essays on common topics and weak essays on highly unusual ones. Your perspective – the lens through which you view your topic – is far more important than the specific topic itself. In the past, students have written about family situations, ethnicity or culture, school or community events to which they have had strong reactions, people who have influenced them, significant experiences, intellectual interests, personal aspirations, or – more generally – topics that spring from the life of the imagination.

Finally: proofread, proofread, proofread! Share your essays with at least one or two people who know you well – such as a parent, teacher, counselor, or friend – and ask for feedback. Remember that you ultimately have control over your essays, and your essays should retain your own voice, but others may be able to catch mistakes that you missed and help suggest areas to cut if you are over the word limit.

- From the Yale Admissions [website](#)

### Do's

- Find a subject you care about
- Tell a story that is going to reveal something that makes you unique
- Do not be afraid to write about the ordinary, but be creative in how you tell it.
- Be sincere, be yourself, use common sense! Avoid sounding arrogant or worse, self-righteous! Be humble... even vulnerable.
- This is personal... do not try to copy a story, style, or structure! First person is ok.
- Show, don't tell

### Don'ts

- No sports stories, no short term mission stories, no camp stories
- Do not ramble

**Resources:**

<https://mitadmissions.org/blogs/entry/how-to-write-a-college-essay/>

<https://mitadmissions.org/blogs/entry/what-my-college-essays-were-not/>

**CommonApp essay prompts for 2023-2024.**

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.