

College Essay/Personal Statement Guide

The personal statement will provide admissions officers with an accurate portrait of **who you are and why a college education is important to you**. The essay you write provides additional evidence of your intellectual, creative achievement, and is often the *only opportunity* for the readers of your application to get a feel for you as a person.

Common Application Essay Prompts (choose one to answer):

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.

MAXIMUM IS 650 WORDS!!!

The How: The hardest part of writing a personal statement isn't the actual writing. The most challenging part of writing a fire personal statement is deciding *what to write about*.

Answer:

- o **WHAT:** the essay provides details of your achievements and personality that aren't reflected in other parts of your application.
- o **SO WHAT:** how do the events that you describe illustrate your growth as a person, your passions, your intellectual curiosity, and your potential as a new member of a school's campus community?

<u>Essay Structure</u>	
A typical one to two page (650 words) personal statement will consist of the following:	
Paragraph 1:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An introductory paragraph that provides your essay's theme• Has an interesting hook to catch the attention of the reader
Paragraph 2, 3 and 4:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• These paragraphs develop your theme through examples and detailed experiences, they build upon each other• Give detailed examples – show not tell
Paragraph 5:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A conclusion widens the lens and wraps up your essay without summarizing or repeating what has already been written• Demonstrates personal growth or a newfound understanding

Keep the following in mind:

- A college admissions officer can read up to 100 essays a day! **Your topic should be catchy and interesting.** If possible, it should make you stand out from the crowd.
- **Use concrete examples.** Rather than tell how something affected you, **show it with examples and images.**
- Be appropriate. The person who reads your essay might not share your life philosophy, sense of humor, or religion. Stay away from these topics, and avoid relationships, sex, and crude language.
- It is the *quality* of your experience that matters, not the number of experiences.

If you decide to begin writing your essay, please open a Google Doc that is attached to your high school email. Please share the Google Doc with your Mentor and iMentor Teacher/Program Manager.

Brainstorming a topic

The best way to find a good topic is to start with a list of potential ideas and narrow them down. To do this, we will do a quick free write on each Essay Topic.

PICK TWO OF THE SEVEN PROMPTS TO FREE WRITE & BRAINSTORM

Topic 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.

Example: When I was 10, my family moved to the US from China. I barely spoke any English and was so afraid my new classmates would make fun of me that I didn't speak for the first year I was in school. I eventually learned the language and made friends, but I'll never forget what it was like to feel like an outsider during that difficult time.

Free Write Topic 1:

Topic 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?

Example: *On a summer trip with my cousins, we went rock climbing and in the middle of the climb I experienced a panic attack due to my fear of heights. One of the trainers had to climb up and help me down and I was upset that I couldn't finish. Now, when I am nervous or afraid of something I think about that experience and push myself to keep going despite my fears.*

Free Write Topic 2:

Topic 3: Reflect on a time when you *questioned* or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your *thinking*? What was the outcome?

Example: *In my sophomore year of high school, I witnessed an incident where a classmate was bullied and I made the decision to join my school's Student Government so that I could make people aware that bullying is not "normal" or okay. I was able to make anti-bullying rules in my school and am proud I took a stand against injustice.*

Free Write Topic 3:

Topic 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.

Example: I would try to solve the increasing problem of pollution in our oceans. I learned in science class that there our plastic waste ends up in the ocean and there are garbage patches the size of Texas! I created a campaign in my school to increase awareness of this issue and got everyone to pledge to stop using plastic water bottles. I would like to continue this mission in college and hope to major in environmental studies so I can help solve this problem.

Free Write Topic 4:

Topic 5: Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

Example: Growing up as an African-American, I learned firsthand that the first trait people use to define how black you are, after your skin tone, is your hair. When I decided to cut my hair into an Afro, people started making assumptions about my race, sexuality, and political involvements, and they began treating me differently. Cutting my hair helped me understand my own identities and helped me see how I can be a catalyst for social change.

Free Write Topic 5:

Topic 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?

Example: Twitter provides me a sense of personal relevance, emotional arousal and memories of important events. Personally, I can spend hours on Twitter learning about people, history, and sports without even thinking of giving my eyes a rest. It has become an outlet for instant news, sports or personal updates where the entire world can tap into the same resources. A central location where I can jump between tweets and pages, filling in blanks and completing stories as I go. Twitter and social media has become a starting point, from which I can google facts, search for articles, or visit my local library.

Free Write Topic 6:

Topic 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.

Example: I am envious of Waldo, and not just because he has been in the past, in space, under water, and always on vacation, although that all sounds nice. Maybe the reason why we are always asking where Waldo is, is because deep down we envy him. We all wish that we were encouraged to take in our surroundings to appreciate the greatness of the world, instead of the greatness of our own achievements. Perhaps we wish that for one day we could just indulge in what is around us right now.

Free Write Topic 7:

<u>My Outline:</u>	
The prompt I chose:	
<p>Paragraph 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An introductory paragraph that provides your essay's theme/topic • Has an interesting hook to catch the attention of the reader • What is some background information the reader will need to understand the story? • What event started the action of the story? How was I introduced to the challenge? 	
<p>Paragraph 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What internal and external obstacles or challenges did I face? How did I deal with them? 	
<p>Paragraph 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What internal and external obstacles or challenges did I face? How did I deal with them? (provide more details) 	
<p>Paragraph 4:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At what point did my outlook or attitude change? How did that affect what happened next? 	
<p>Paragraph 5:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A conclusion widens the lens and wraps up your essay without summarizing or repeating what has already been written • What did I learn from this experience? How did it change me? 	

My Draft

*Use this space to write your draft, keep in mind the essay must be under **650 words**.*