

Let's write some essays



Who is this for?

- Anyone applying to a Common App school that requires the essay
- Anyone who wants to understand the significance of our personal stories.
- Anyone who wants to learn how to align your experiences and your values.



What's the point of the essay?

- Help them get to know a part of who you are that is not already reflected in the application

- Help them hear your voice
 - Are you funny? Be funny.
 - Are you quirky? Be quirky.
 - Are you formal? Be formal.

Avoid the following:

1) Bragging



2) Rehashing
your application



3) Hyperbole



4) Highlight reel



Other topics to (almost always) avoid:

- Travel essays
 - Making a run of the mill trip sound like Lord of the Rings (they can see right through it)
- Sports essays
 - Hard to make these sound individualized - just another boring winning field goal essay
- Camp essays
 - Again - a very universal topic.

What about COVID?!

Additional prompt on CommonApp: Community disruptions such as COVID-19 and natural disasters can have deep and long-lasting impacts. If you need it, this space is yours to describe those impacts. Colleges care about the effects on your health and well-being, safety, family circumstances, future plans, and education, including access to reliable technology and quiet study spaces. For more information, check out our [COVID-19 FAQ](#).

Writing about difficult personal topics

Some questions to ask:

- Are you demonstrating growth or explaining circumstances?
- Do you offer authentic insights?
- Does your experience illustrate your core values, who you are now?
- Will your story overshadow the rest of your application (your accomplishments)?
- Is your essay the best place for this story?

More notes:

- Consider your audience and check your privilege
 - **Your experiences aren't universal**
- Throw away the 5 paragraph essay (sorry, teachers!)
- Embrace first person
- Be who you are, as authentically as possible
- Use language that is authentic to you (while obeying grammar rules)
- Engage the senses - take us there!



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Following



Main topics students referenced or discussed in their [#CommonApp](#) essays: environment, health (mental health and disease), technology, gender equity, poverty, race relations and poverty.



tbnelan @TBNelan · 16h



Replying to [@Clark2College](#)

...as if ripped from headlines. My favorite essays were ab: math, coffee at p/t job, nail polish, tea, bowling. The S voice & own story was evident. (cc [@JackieClaraB](#))

Essence objects exercise

Mrs. Christensen's Essence Objects (at age 48)

#1

A wedding ring



Why?

This ring is not an accessory to my life. It is my life. I make all decisions, big or small, in the shadow of this ring.

#2

Little Bear



Why?

Symbolizes the very first thing my son attached to here in the States. It is still a big part of our household, even though it doesn't look like this anymore.

#3

Tennis Racquet



Why?

This object represents a lifelong passion for me. It was how I spent most of my time as a teenager, how I paid for my college, and something I still enjoy doing today.

Other items

- My study Bible
- Purple grading pen
- Green lamp
- Dad's lab coat
- I asked for a smile photo
- My 2008 senior sweatshirt
- Green Life Saver Mints
- My Lion mug
- Gardenia flowers
- Five cup salad
- Sound of Music vinyl record
- My grandmother's side table
- Mom's senior picture
- Family portrait
- Dad's fraternity pin
- A ponytail holder
- Man vest
- A tattered copy *To Kill a Mockingbird*
- Coin collection
- Antique photo box
- Old journal

Now choose yours!

Values exercise

- Community
- Inspiration
- Serenity
- Physical challenge
- Responsibility
- Competition
- Practicality
- Working with others
- Freedom
- Security
- Strength
- Self-control
- Personal development
- Respect
- Mindfulness
- Culture
- Bravery
- Communication
- Change and variety
- Compassion
- Nature
- Experience
- Intuition
- Trust
- Social justice
- Intellect
- Self-reliance
- Laughter
- Faith
- Involvement
- Adventure
- Vulnerability
- Adaptability
- Restraint
- Healthy boundaries
- Friendship
- Excellence
- Meaning
- Power
- Privacy
- Self-expression
- Stability
- Diversity
- Love
- Control
- Surprise
- Nutrition
- Competence
- Risk
- Balance
- Self-discipline
- Courage
- Family
- Empathy
- Fun
- Humility
- Efficiency
- Intensity
- Health and fitness
- My country
- Music
- Truth
- Resourcefulness
- Awareness
- Art
- Religion
- Autonomy
- Wit
- Patience
- Listening
- Commitment
- Leadership
- Helping others
- Practicality
- Creativity
- Excitement
- Collaboration
- Social change
- Beauty
- Passion
- Integrity
- Ecological awareness
- Quality relationships
- Travel
- Logic
- Curiosity
- Spirituality
- Directness
- Honesty
- Independence
- Cooperation
- Affection
- Wisdom
- Knowledge
- Growth
- Mystery
- Order
- Innovation
- Accountability
- Democracy
- Tradition
- OTHER?!

My top 10

Community

Passion

Security

Quality Relationship

Love

Tradition

Laughter

Competition

Faith

Family

My Top 5

Faith

Love

Family

Quality Relationship

Laughter

My Top 3

Faith

Family

Laughter

My Number One Value

Faith!

The Seven Common App Prompts (and UTK, too!)

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.

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?

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

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?

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.

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.

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

Essays I could write from my top 3 items

1. **Faith** through marriage- The List
2. **Family** through adoption- “I asked for a smile.”
3. **Laughter**- A coping mechanism for life.

Student essays that worked