

HOW A COLLEGE APPLICATION IS CONSIDERED

GROWTH AND POTENTIAL

- Have you reached your maximum academic and personal potential?
- Have you been stretching yourself?
- Have you been working to capacity in your academic pursuits, your full-time or part-time employment, or other areas?
- Do you have reserve power to do more?
- How have you used your time?
- Do you have initiative? Are you a self-starter? What motivates you?
- Do you have a direction yet? What is it? If not, are you exploring many things?
- Where will you be in one, five, or 25 years? Will you contribute something to those around you?
- What sort of human being are you now? What sort of human being will you be in the future?

INTERESTS AND ACTIVITIES

- Do you care deeply about anything—intellectual? extracurricular? personal?
- What have you learned from your interests? What have you done with your interests? How have you achieved results? With what success or failure? What have you learned as a result?
- In terms of extracurricular, athletic, community, or family commitments, have you taken full advantage of opportunities?
- What is the quality of your activities? Do you appear to have a genuine commitment or leadership role?
- If you have not had much time in high school for extracurricular pursuits due to familial, work, or other obligations, what do you hope to explore in college with your additional free time?

CHARACTER AND PERSONALITY

- What choices have you made for yourself? Why?
- Are you a late bloomer?
- How open are you to new ideas and people?
- What about your maturity, character, leadership, self-confidence, warmth of personality, sense of humor, energy, concern for others, and grace under pressure?

CONTRIBUTION TO THE COLLEGE COMMUNITY

- Will you be able to stand up to the pressures and freedoms of college life?
- Will you contribute something to the college and to your classmates? Will you benefit from your college experience?
- Would other students want to room with you, share a meal, be in a seminar together, be teammates, or collaborate in a closely knit extracurricular group?

TWO ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- An overview of the Harvard admissions process in *The New York Times*
<http://thechoice.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/09/10/harvarddean-part1/>
- An essay by Helen Vendler, professor of English at Harvard and former member of the Faculty Standing Committee on Admissions
<https://college.harvard.edu/admissions/apply/what-we-look/valuing-creative-reflective>

COLLEGE ESSAY PROMPTS 2019-20

Common Application Essay Prompts ~ word limit 650

<https://www.commonapp.org>

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?
- . 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.

Coalition Application Essay Prompts ~ suggested length 500-550 words

<http://www.coalitionforcollegeaccess.org/essays.html>

- a. Tell a story from your life, describing an experience that either demonstrates your character or helped to shape it.
- b. Describe a time when you made a meaningful contribution to others in which the greater good was your focus. Discuss the challenges and rewards of making your contribution.
- c. Has there been a time when you've had a long-cherished or accepted belief challenged? How did you respond? How did the challenge affect your beliefs?
- d. What is the hardest part of being a teenager now? What's the best part? What advice would you give a younger sibling or friend (assuming they would listen to you)?
- e. Submit an essay on a topic of your choice.

THE COLLEGE ESSAY IN FOUR PARAGRAPHS

Your essay provides the “tip factor” in your college application. If a college admissions officer is reading your essay, then you have already made it past the first cut: your test scores, grades, and other stats have placed you in a pool of what the college considers to be qualified applicants. From this pool of qualified applicants, the college will select the students to whom they will actually extend an offer of admission. The essay is the place where you show your best “you” to college admissions officers. A strong essay includes the following:

- a powerful story described vividly
- a compelling voice
- thoughtful reflection
- clean, fluent writing

There are many ways to write a college essay; there is no one formula. One way that can work well, however, is the 4-paragraph reflective essay, described below.

¶1: INTRODUCTION

This first paragraph is your central “story,” condensed to one significant moment that you capture in vivid description. This moment (experience, realization, problem, obstacle, issue, challenge, failure, etc.) will become the touchstone or focal point for your essay. The purpose of this paragraph is to “hook” your readers—grab your readers’ attention, engage their interest, make them want to keep reading. This paragraph should provide details that appeal to the five senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, smell). Consider writing in the present tense as another way to draw your readers in and make them live the experience with you as you describe. **SHOW, don’t TELL!** Your details should be chosen strategically: they will provide material for the reflection that will emerge in the rest of the essay.

¶2: REFLECTION part 1

This second paragraph is the first part of your reflection—that is, your deep thinking about what you have described in your introduction. The purpose of this paragraph is to provide context for the moment you’ve just described and to begin to show why that moment is significant to you and how it impacted you.

¶3: REFLECTION part 2

This third paragraph is the second part of your reflection. In this paragraph you should extend your thinking. Dig deeper and show how the impact of this moment that you’ve described applies to other aspects of your life—how your reflection transfers to other situations. Demonstrate that you are someone who thinks about your experiences and can learn from them.

¶4: CONCLUSION

This final paragraph provides your “take-away” point. What is it, ultimately, that you want the college to know about you as a person? In this paragraph you should wrap up by showing how the moment that you’ve described and reflected upon has set you up to move forward in life—how it has given you purpose, a drive, a cause, a goal. If in the final sentence(s) of your essay you can revisit a detail from your intro and present it from a new perspective or with a twist, you will provide very satisfying closure to your essay.