

College Essays and Personal Statements



What are some suggestions to make your
essay stand out?

Presumptions:



- ❧ You are told to write about “expanding your horizons” through international travel...
- ❧ About the good things you’ve done through community service
- ❧ About how funny you are, so you tell an embarrassing story
- ❧ About the weird hobby that makes you unique
- ❧ Use big words and obscure allusions
- ❧ Make sure it was a life-changing moment!

However...



- ❧ Being yourself is the most important aspect!
- ❧ Use as many details as possible... and stay focused on ONE particular instance that illustrates your qualities
- ❧ DO NOT repeat your resume
- ❧ Write in a narrative style so it reads like a story or journalistic article and not like a textbook
- ❧ Consider metaphor
- ❧ Be persistent and keep working on it

How long?



- ❧ See if the application has a specified word count or provides a limited space, and then stick to it
- ❧ If there is not specified word count, 500 words is a good rule of thumb, however essays that worked in the past have ranged from 78 words to 1700.

Ideas for topics:



- ❧ Think of a quality that you would want to emphasize.
- ❧ Think of a specific instance that would fully and accurately illustrate that you possess this quality
- Use your Values exercise to try to determine what to focus on that cannot be easily inferred from your list of activities, resume, or grades

Turn-offs



- ❧ Bad breath
- ❧ Poor personal hygiene

- ❧ Oh wait, for college essays?
 - Cynicism
 - Thinking you are a finished product
 - Too depressing
 - Self-destructive behaviors
 - Lack of integrity
 - Placing blame on others
 - Withdrawn from the community instead of embracing it

More topics to consider:



GET CREATIVE- Start a journal if you have writer's block and can't seem to think of a good place to start.

See: The Big List of Brainstorming Questions

Or Google "100 Brave and Interesting Questions"

Common App 2018



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.

UC Personal Insight Questions



⌘ <http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/personal-questions/freshman/index.html>

Today: Practice/HW



- ❧ Brainstorm a list of topics that you could cover for your personal essay. USE ACTUAL TOPICS for applications you plan to send in- so you don't double your work!
- ❧ Keep this list with you throughout the next few days and start writing down your feelings, thoughts, and ideas, and don't worry about organization yet (this is easily fixed in revision).
- ❧ The more ideas you have, the more your essay will be unique and honest to your own character
- ❧ The assignment: Get SOMETHING written for a rough draft writing workshop. Try for 500 words. Type it up. You will revise numerous times.

4 Types of Essays



A (narrative)	B (montage)
Student has faced significant challenges and does know what he or she wants to study.	Student has not faced significant challenges and does know what he or she wants to study
C (narrative)	D (montage)
Student has faced significant challenges and does NOT know what he or she wants to study	Student has not faced significant challenges and does NOT know what he or she wants to study.

Narrative vs. Montage



❧ Narrative structure follows a format of cause and effect

❧ I am a horrible speller- I made a faux pas with my spelling in an important situation – I learned something about myself in the process – I have since rededicated myself to learning how to spell

Montage structure follows a more thematic approach

-There are three different moments in my life that made me realize I wanted to get into politics

Formatting



- ❧ When creating a narrative, you could use the formula of the Hero's Journey
- ❧ Steps:
 - ❧ 1. Normal, or past, life before a main event caused a change. What was your life like? Create a realistic and tangible vision of your "before".
 - ❧ 2. Major event that impacted your life. Create this in present-tense perhaps. Try to recreate the same emotional tone you would have felt during this event.
 - ❧ 3. What internally did you have to change, whether it is your mentality, your physical position, or your attitude? What is your call to action?
 - ❧ 4. What is the resulting impact on your life? Your future? Creative an "outcome" of the event.
- ❧
- ❧ This structure is mostly appropriate for describing how you overcame an obstacle, how you experienced adversity, or how you realized that you were "ready for the world."

The Introduction:



- ☞ Your opening paragraph is as important, if not more important, in your college essay as it is in your essays for English class. You need to hook your reader with realistic but interesting word choice, voice, and fluency. Think outside of the standard attention getting devices
 - Tell an anecdotal story
 - Start with an image that doesn't make any sense
 - Straightforward statement/ thesis
 - Begin with a problem that must be solved
 - Just start it! Don't worry about the "perfect" essay

Example Essay Openers:



- ❧ “Bowing down to the porcelain god, I emptied the contents of my stomach. Foaming at the mouth, I was ready to pass out. My body couldn’t stop shaking as I gasped for air, and the room started spinning.”
- ❧ “Smearred blood, shredded feathers. Clearly, the bird was dead. But wait, the slight fluctuation of its chest, the slow blinking of its shiny black eyes. No, it was alive.”
- ❧ “Every Saturday morning, I’d awaken to the smell of crushed garlic and piquant pepper. I would stumble into the kitchen to find my grandma squatting over a large silver bowl, mixing fat lips of fresh cabbages with garlic, salt, and red pepper. That was how the delectable Korean dish, kimchi, was born every weekend at my home.”
- ❧ Do you ever have those dreams where you’ve arrived at school and suddenly realize you’ve forgotten to wear pants? Well, for most high school seniors that dream becomes a reality, at least figuratively. We must bare our souls, not to best friends, or family, but to complete strangers who may not even want to hear about it and may even flat out reject us. What twisted institution would ever subject young adults in the formative stages of emotional growth to this experience? Oh right. College (#73).