
THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS ESSAY

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PRESENTED BY:

KATE ANDERSON
SUNY OSWEGO

SUZANNE MILLER
SUNY GENESEO

What is the Point of the College Essay?

The essay is your opportunity to use your voice to share information about yourself and to tell your story.

- Highlight achievements
- Share passions
- Explain situations
- Set yourself apart
- Showcase your writing ability

The essay is the part of the application where you get to tell us who you are beyond the numbers (grades and test scores) and the letters of recommendation.

Choose a topic that best demonstrates your positive qualities and supports your strength as an applicant.

The 2023-2024 Common Application Essay Prompts

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?

The 2022-2023 Common Application Essay Prompts (continued)

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.

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.

And don't forget you still have space, up to 650 words, for Additional Information.

Frequently asked questions

1. How do you review applications and how does the personal statement/essay fit into your evaluation?
2. On average, how much time do you spend on reading an essay? Is the application and essay read by more than one person?
3. Should a student's essay(s) be copyedited and proofread by a teacher, parent and/or counselor? If so, how heavily or lightly?
4. What advice do you have for students as they try to decide what to write about in their personal essay?
5. How are supplemental essays utilized in the review process? If a school requires them, how are they weighed compared to the personal essay?
6. What typically stands out in a college essay and/or supplemental essay?
7. What are some common mistakes you see in college essays?

Essay Dos and Don'ts

- Consider the essay prompt and be sure to answer the question
- Stay within the word count
- Proofread your work; don't just spell check
- Do use your own voice; don't overuse a Thesaurus, **and don't use Chat GPT/AI**
- Explain anything that is not common knowledge (write out abbreviations)
- Do not write about obstacles or flaws that you have not overcome or learned something from, and don't write about anything that might be offensive or demonstrate bias. Be positive about yourself and others
- Don't be too modest; it's okay to brag a bit; you are selling yourself to schools
- Do not let someone else have the last word. Avoid using a quotation to end your essay. (All your words are important, but pay special attention to your first and last sentences. You want to draw your reader in right away and you don't want your essay to trail off.) Finish strong!

Warm-Up Writing Exercises (10 minutes)

Activity 1 - I love..... (1 minute)

Make a list of things that you love until a one-minute timer is up.

Activity 2 - If you really knew me... (3 minutes)

Write about something about yourself that you wouldn't normally share with anyone else. Be brave! Go as deep as you're willing to go. Keep writing until 3 minutes has passed. Write about the same thing, or different things.

Activity 3 - Make a list of 3-5 things that are grateful for. Choose 1 and expand on WHY. (3 minutes)

Be as specific and as personal as you can.

For more activities to help in brainstorming, crafting and writing an essay/personal statement - check out
The College Essay Guy, on youtube.

QUESTIONS & CONTACT INFO

SUNY Oswego

Kate Anderson
Long Island Admissions Counselor
315.529.3378
kate.anderson@oswego.edu

SUNY Geneseo

Suzanne Miller
Long Island Admissions Counselor
585.519.5145
millersu@geneseo.edu