

**CREATING THE  
BEST NARRATIVE:  
TIPS ON COLLEGE  
ESSAYS & SHORT  
ANSWER  
QUESTIONS**



# HOW IMPORTANT ARE ESSAYS?

- According to the [NACAC 2023 State of College Admissions Report](#):
  - 18.9% of colleges attributed “considerable importance” to the essay or writing sample, 37.3% of attributed “moderate” importance
  - 26.5% attributed limited importance in the overall admissions decision
  - 17.3% attributed “no importance” to the essay



# ESSAYS

- Opportunity to get to know you
- No “right” or “wrong” topic
- Advice
  - Answer the prompt
  - Use your own voice
  - Proof read to avoid silly mistakes
  - Leave plenty of time to do supplements
  - Carefully consider your topic
  - Be genuine/authentic!



# COMMON APP PROMPTS

The 2025-2026 Common Application Essay Prompts are as follows:

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?
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.



# SHORT ANSWERS

- An overlooked part of the application that can really matter!
  - Especially at schools that don't use a personal statement or Common App essays
  - “Challenges and circumstances” and “Additional information” questions on Common App
- Sometimes a paragraph-type answer
  - Limit to 2-3 paragraphs or 250-300 words
  - Less is okay!
  - Adhere to any other limits the school imposes
- Sometimes more of a bullet-point list requested
  - If the question requests a list, don't write a paragraph
- Common question: Why this school?
  - Review the school's website and find something unique that could not apply to every competitor/conference member of that school





**QUESTIONS?**



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