

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

ESSAYS

- Opportunity to get to know you
- No “right” or “wrong” topic – it’s a human process
- Advice
 - Answer the prompt!
 - Use your own voice (be careful not to over edit)
 - Avoid silly mistakes (like using the wrong school name)
 - Leave plenty of time to do supplements
 - Avoid cliché topics
 - 80/20 rule, “best friend” rule
 - Be original!

INTANGIBLE OR SUBJECTIVE CHARACTERISTICS

(May be found in personal statement, resume, activity record, recommendations, interview and other letters/notifications)

- Special talents & abilities
- Resilience
- Leadership
- Commitment or perseverance
- Self motivation
- Creativity
- Character & integrity
- Emotional stability
- Potential
- Overcoming obstacles, such as family, financial, etc.

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

COMMON APP PROMPTS

The 2024-2025 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 essays
- 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

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