



LOYOLA UNIVERSITY MARYLAND

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How to Write your College Essay

In this PDF, you will find tips and resources to help you navigate the college essay writing process.

The college essay matters: Your essay reveals something important about you that your grades and test scores can't—*personality*. It can give admission officers a sense of who you are, as well as showcase your writing skills.

The Common Application provides essay prompts that will guide you in your writing. You'll choose one of the prompts to respond to. We've provided the Common Application essay prompts below as a guide to start thinking about potential topics for your essay.

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.

In this section, we are going to lay some foundations for tips and tricks to help guide your essay development process.

1. **Brainstorm:** Brainstorming can be an effective tool that allows you to narrow your search. Perhaps you have two topics that really interest you and you can't decide what you want to write about. By writing down thoughts and ideas you may be able to help narrow your focus and effectively communicate your story.
2. **Create a draft:** Create an outline that organizes your essay and decide where you want examples to appear. Remember, this is just a draft and not a final product, you don't need to agonize over the details at this stage.
3. **Develop your essay:** A good essay will be broken down into three sections:
 - a. Introduction: Introducing your essay, giving the reader insight into the question being asked
 - b. Body: Main paragraphs of your essay exploring the question with ideas and examples
 - c. Conclusion: Closing of the essay and wrapping it all back to the question answered
4. **Write about who you are, not who you think we want you to be:** Often students can write an essay that they think college admission officers want to read. From our experience, the best essays we read are from students who are creative and answer the question honestly. That could be writing about your heritage, a family tradition or anything that you feel represents who you are.
5. **Use your own voice:** Each of us has a unique writing style and that style should shine through in your essay. Don't rely on family members to write your essay for you, we can tell when things don't line up.
6. **Feedback:** Don't be afraid to ask for feedback on your essay from your school counselor, teachers, friends, family, etc. Sometimes receiving feedback can be tough, but it is often a great tool for delivering an outstanding product.
7. **Proofread and make corrections:** Be sure to proofread your essay carefully and check your spelling and grammar. You can also show your essay to someone who has never read it before, as they may be able to spot mistakes you have missed. Another proofreading practice is to read your essay out loud. This is a good trick for identifying sentences that may read differently than you intended.
8. **Have fun:** While the college essay is important, remember to have fun and be creative! The best essays hook the reader in with a strong opening and then leave them asking for more. One of the most creative essays we have read at Loyola was one where a student talked about their best friend moving away to college. The essay had a clear structure, was engaging, and had a surprise twist! It wasn't until the very last sentence that the writer revealed the essay was written from the point of view of the family dog, and the best friend was the student!

Resources: Below are some resources that may be helpful to look at as you are looking for inspiration and ideas.

1. The Princeton Review: Popular College Application Essay Topics (and How to Answer Them)
2. The Purdue Writing Lab: The Online Writing Lab at Purdue University offers free writing services.
3. CollegeBoard BigFuture: College Board's free college planning tool with link to numerous resources
4. The College Essay Guy: Ethan Sawyer is a nationally recognized college essay expert and the author of the Amazon bestsellers *College Essay Essentials* and *College Admission Essentials*. Each year he and his team research more than one million students and counselors through the College Essay Guy blog, online pay-what-you-can courses, workshops, books, and one-on-one work. Raised in Spain, Ecuador, and Colombia, Ethan has studied at seventeen different schools and has worked as a teacher, curriculum writer, voice actor, community organizer, and truck driver. A graduate of Northwestern University, Ethan holds an MFA from UC Irvine and lives in Los Angeles with his beautiful wife and their amazing daughter. Ethan provides free resources including a College Application Hub with a list of helpful tools tailored to applicants in their college search process.