

Writing a Good College Application Essay



Most Important



- Think about your audience. Ask yourself, “How will this essay motivate them to admit me?” ◦
- ◦ Analyze – do not just describe a situation or tell a story. Self-awareness is key. ◦
- ◦ Do not write about a common experience unless your take on it is unique. ◦
- ◦ Do not just repeat information that is already in your application. ◦
- ◦ Make sure the essay is about you no matter what the prompt is. ◦
- ◦ Use details to show – do not just tell. ◦
- ◦ Proofread every word. ◦

Deciding What To Communicate



- Consider the topics covered already.
 - The practice questions from class.
 - The 10 questions you completed for brainstorming
 - Go to the website of a school you are interested in and find their questions.

Five Practice Questions



College Application Practice Questions

The college application essay is your chance to show what makes you unique. Admission officers read hundreds of these every year. Don't write about the same subjects as every other applicant. Here are some common essay questions with tips to help you craft a great response.

1. Write about someone you admire.

Many people write an ode to Gandhi, Mother Teresa or Martin Luther King, Jr. These leaders are admirable and heroic, but you shouldn't write about them unless you have a strong, genuine and very personal reason to do so. Otherwise, ask yourself what individual has actually had the greatest influence over your life. Describe the impact they've had on you. The more specific details you include, the better.

2. Write about something you have read.

This question is not asking for a book report! Don't just summarize the plot; detail why you liked this particular selection and what it meant to you. Your book choice should make it clear that you read outside of class—stay away from high school mainstays like *The Catcher in the Rye*.

3. Why do you want to attend this school (or join the military or attend trade school) or whatever your plans after high school are? Write about the reasons for the post high school choices you are planning.

Unless your real reason is something better left unsaid (hint: avoid mentioning keg parties), you should be truthful in responding to this question. Steer clear of generalities (e.g. "to get a good liberal arts education," "to broaden my knowledge") and stay specific (e.g. "I'm a future doctor and your science department has a terrific reputation"). Colleges are more likely to admit students who can articulate specific reasons why the school is a good fit for them (beyond its reputation or ranking on any list).

4. What will you be doing ten years from now?

It's okay to be creative and ambitious, but don't be silly. And don't feel that you need to talk about the ways in which your college education will help you snag a dream job.

5. Write about a meaningful activity.

Careful—it's easy for this response to read as clichéd and uninspired. Don't just say that your service on student council was significant because it taught you the importance of effective leadership. Push yourself to really examine what experiences have been valuable to you. Maybe you learned more from your after-school job at a burger joint than you did as president of the student council. Admissions officers can tell when you're being genuine and when you're just saying what you think they want to hear.

Ten Brainstorming Questions



Brainstorming for the College Application Essay

Answer the following questions:

1. What are your major accomplishments, and why do you consider them accomplishments? (Do not limit yourself to accomplishments you have been formally recognized for since the most interesting essays often are based on accomplishments that may have been trite at the time but become crucial when placed in the context of your life).
2. Does any attribute, quality, or skill distinguish you from everyone else? How did you develop this attribute?
3. Consider your favorite books, movies, songs, works of art, etc. Have these influenced your life in a meaningful way? Why are they your favorites?
4. What was the most difficult time in your life, and why? How did your perspective on life change as a result of the difficulty?
5. Have you ever struggled mightily for something and succeeded? What made you successful?
6. Have you ever struggled mightily for something and failed? How did you respond?
7. Of everything in the world, what would you most like to be doing right now? Where would you most like to be? Who, of everyone living or dead, would you most like to be with? (These questions can help you to realize what you love the most).
8. Have you experienced a moment of epiphany, as if your eyes were opened to something you were previously blind to? Describe.
9. What is your strongest, most unwavering personality trait? Do you maintain strong beliefs or adhere to a philosophy? How would your friends characterize you? What would they write if they were writing your admissions essay for you?
10. What are your dreams for the future? When you look back on your life in thirty years, what would it take for you to consider your life successful? What people, things, and accomplishments do you need?

Common Application Questions



The 2020-2021 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. 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.

If you're stuck, think about what the following might reveal about you: You don't have to write about them, but they might give you some ideas.



- A member of your family whom people say you resemble (Make sure this essay is really about you.)
- A situation where you felt inadequate and how you handled it.
- An unusual nickname, if you have one, and how you got it
- Something you want to do before you die and why ‘
- Your relationships with your family members
- A situation where you felt uncomfortable
- A small experience that had a big impact
- Your proudest moment (Don't brag.)
- Your most embarrassing moment
- An unusual hobby or pastime
- Things that makes you smile
- Things that make you angry
- A dilemma you faced
- A phobia

Choosing A Topic



- 1. Before you respond to the prompt, think about what you would like to communicate about yourself.
- 2. Write about something that the admissions officers may not learn from the rest of your application. For example, if you have done a lot of community service, you can tie your essay into that, but don't just write about how much you enjoy helping people – that is obvious.
- 3. If you write about an interesting experience, make sure it shows something appealing about you. Think about a revealing moment and not just a broad story.
- 4. DO NOT WRITE ABOUT A MISSION TRIP OR A BOOK THAT EVERYONE READS. (No Gatsby or The Catcher in the Rye)
- 5. Consider a creative approach to a standard prompt: Someone who has influenced you – a literary character or a historical figure A work of art – a classic car or a beautiful building **Do not write about a common experience unless you have a unique situation or creative perspective. Essays on the following topics usually sound the same:**

Hints:



- Write an essay within 50 words under or over the word limit. If no length is suggested, aim for 500 words for the main essay and 200-300 words for smaller ones.
- Make sure every sentence in your essay adds to what you are telling the admissions officers about yourself.
- Do not add extra details just because they occurred to you.
- Don't use the words "I" and "me" too much.

Finally:



- 1. Proofread every word. Don't offend the admissions officers with grammar or punctuation errors or misspelled words.
- 2. DO USE Spell Check or Grammar Check
- 3. I highly recommend using Grammarly.com if you can.
- https://www.grammarly.com/?q=brand&utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=brand_f1&utm_content=229892403778&utm_term=grammarly&matchtype=e&placement=&network=g&gclid=Cj0KCQjwzN71BRCOARIsAF8pjfijtp9KylMBJ2P87no4REAc9cEvEizcLcbP3GTcCXISgonIIRGtYAaA

Format of Essay



- 1. If you absolutely have to use an outline, I will supply a few for you to choose from.
- 2. This is more of a narrative essay.
- 3. Using our traditional MELCON format can work, but you will have to modify it to “fit” your story or narrative.

Simple Narrative Outline Form

Introduction

- Hook
- Significance of topic to you & reader
- Thesis statement

Body paragraphs

- Setting, background about the event
- Characters (people involved)
- Short anecdote or foreshadowing
- Onset of the event
- Climax
- Ending/resolution

Conclusion

- Moral of the story
- Significance of the overall subject
- Call-to-action (if applicable)

- This format could work.
- Set it up as three paragraphs.
- Your goal is to write about 500 words, not five paragraphs.

Alternative Narrative Format

This is a slightly longer format. This could work for your essay too.

I. Introduction

A. Attention-getter/hook

B. Significance of topic

1. Significance of topic to you

2. Significance of topic to your reader

C. Thesis (What is the central idea you want to get across with your essay?)

II. Set-up

A. Background about event—to allow a reader to understand

1. History of people or event

2. Relevant details about the event

B. People involved

1. Description of relevant physical characteristics

2. Description of relevant personality characteristics

C. Setting

1. Description of setting using five senses

2. Explanation of significance of the setting

D. Short anecdote or foreshadowing

1. Details establishing conflict

2. Details establishing the stakes for people

III. Beginning of Event

A. Explain how things started to happen

B. Show what people did to reach the point where the event was imminent—point of no return.

C. Detailed sensory description of what happened

D. Feelings about what happened

IV. Climax of Event

A. Things come to a head

B. Detailed sensory description

C. Feelings about what happened

V. Resolution of Event

A. Tell how things end up

B. Sum up the event


Melcon



If you choose to use the Melcon format, you will still need to add an introduction and a conclusion.

MEL-Con Paragraphs:

A Graphic Organizer to help you write the best paragraphs

M= Main Idea (topic sentence) L= Links (your explanation of how the example links to or supports the main idea) E= Evidence / Example (facts) Con= Concluding Statement (recap / summary)	
Indent 	M Topic Sentence
<div>(transition to 1st example)</div>	E First Example or Evidence
	L Link to topic (Explain)
<div>(transition to 2nd example)</div>	E First Example or Evidence
	L Link to topic (Explain)
<div>(transition to 3rd example)</div>	E First Example or Evidence
	L Link to topic (Explain)
<div>(transition to conclusion)</div>	Con Concluding Statement RECAP your 3 examples

Sample Essay #1



- Example Essays

Please read these two example college application essays.

From: <http://www.collegeconfidential.com/admit/great-common-application-essays/>

#1 Sibling Success

I vividly recall asking my mother why her waistline was steadily expanding. She took my hand, placed it on her stomach, and said, “Meet your baby sister!” I was six years old and family life had always been focused on me and my needs. Suddenly, I felt uncertain about my future. How would my life change? Would my new sister and I like each other? My father assured me that I would be a kind, loving brother, but I was not so sure!

Hours after Lauren’s birth, on a snowy February day, my dad took me to the hospital to meet her. I insisted on wearing my souvenir Burger King crown because I liked it, and thought that she’d like it, too! Amid all the fanfare and excitement, somehow there was a special gift from Lauren to me: a shiny red fire truck! As I opened my gift, I wondered how she could have known that trucks were among my favorite toys (although I didn’t ponder that too long).

Essay #1 (continued)



Daily life quickly changed for me in ways I hadn't imagined. Initially, my big brother role was mostly that of helpful assistant, who dutifully gave her a bottle or held her. After I had been assisting with her physical care for some time, I volunteered more meaningful contributions, such as encouraging her to crawl and walk. To my surprise, I secretly started to enjoy my new role. I was getting unexpected pleasure from my increasing responsibilities and from my rising family status. No longer was I simply the older brother; now I was also her close friend, teacher, and coach. Her respect for me made (and makes) me feel more mature, capable, adult-like. I treat her questions seriously and trust that she finds the lessons I teach her from my experience helpful and relevant. I welcome the opportunity to mentor her and she shows me her appreciation.

Lauren has definitely benefited from my help, and I can see that our relationship is more mutually beneficial than I had anticipated. The lessons that I have taught Lauren have shown me the benefits of compassion, patience, communication, and understanding the so-called feminine "mystique." When she broke her collarbone, I helped her with daily duties, such as getting dressed and carrying her books. I was pleased to be able to help her during this difficult and awkward time. I'm also patient with her when we're active in shared interests like music, swimming, or tennis.

Essay #1 (continued)



As Lauren matures into more of a peer, I value her feminine point of view. Despite our age and gender differences, my parents enabled a lifelong bond between us, and I foster that bond as we grow. I appreciate Lauren's opinions about things. She feels sufficiently comfortable to comment on my friends ("they dress funny"), my clothes ("too preppy"), and my haircut ("grow it out; it's too short!"). We laugh and sometimes get angry with each other, but we always resolve our differences, which serves to strengthen relationship.

Thinking back to the year she was born, I realize that my dad's prediction was accurate. I have become the wise older brother, with a greater appreciation for the dimension and richness that a positive sibling relationship can bring. Our mutual support, trust, and love have brought out the best in me, and I know that the best is yet to come.

Essay #2



- #2 Breaking Into Cars —Stephen
- From: <https://apply.jhu.edu/apply/essays-that-worked/#essay1>
- Johns Hopkins' Essay's That Worked —Class of 2019

Essay #2



I had never broken into a car before.

We were in Laredo, having just finished our first day at a Habitat for Humanity work site. The Hotchkiss volunteers had already left, off to enjoy some Texas BBQ, leaving me behind with the college kids to clean up. Not until we were stranded did we realize we were locked out of the van.

Someone picked a coat hanger out of the dumpster, handed it to me, and took a few steps back. “Can you do that thing with a coat hanger to unlock it?” “Why me?” I thought.

More out of amusement than optimism, I gave it a try. I slid the hanger into the window’s seal like I’d seen on crime shows, and spent a few minutes jiggling the apparatus around the inside of the frame. Suddenly, two things simultaneously clicked. One was the lock on the door. (I actually succeeded in springing it.) The other was the realization that I’d been in this type of situation before. In fact, I’d been born into this type of situation.

Essay #2 (continued)



My upbringing has numbed me to unpredictability and chaos. With a family of seven, my home was loud, messy, and spottily supervised. My siblings arguing, the dog barking, the phone ringing—all meant my house was functioning normally. My Dad, a retired Navy pilot, was away half the time. When he was home, he had a parenting style something like a drill sergeant. At the age of nine, I learned how to clear burning oil from the surface of water. My Dad considered this a critical life skill—you know, in case my aircraft carrier should ever get torpedoed. “The water’s on fire! Clear a hole!” he shouted, tossing me in the lake without warning. While I’m still unconvinced about that particular lesson’s practicality, my Dad’s overarching message is unequivocally true: much of life is unexpected, and you have to deal with the twists and turns.

Living in my family, days rarely unfolded as planned. A bit overlooked, a little pushed around, I learned to roll with reality, negotiate a quick deal, and give the improbable a try. I don’t sweat the small stuff, and I definitely don’t expect perfect fairness. So what if our dining room table only has six chairs for seven people? Someone learns the importance of punctuality every night.

Essay #2 (continued)



But more than punctuality and a special affinity for musical chairs, my family life has taught me to thrive in situations over which I have no power. Growing up, I never controlled my older siblings, but I learned how to thwart their attempts to control me. I forged alliances, and realigned them as necessary. Sometimes, I was the poor, defenseless little brother; sometimes I was the omniscient elder. Different things to different people, the situation demanded. I learned to adapt.

Back then, these techniques were merely reactions undertaken to ensure my survival. But one day this fall, Dr. Hicks, our Head of School, asked me a question that he hoped all seniors would reflect on throughout the year: “How can I participate in a thing I do not govern, in the company of people I did not choose?”

Essay #2 (continued)



The question caught me off guard, much like the question posed to me in Laredo. Then, I realized I knew the answer. I knew why the coat hanger had been handed to me.

Growing up as the middle child in my family, I was a vital participant in a thing I did not govern, in the company of people I did not choose. It's family. It's society. And often, it's chaos. You participate by letting go of the small stuff, not expecting order and perfection, and facing the unexpected with confidence, optimism, and preparedness. My family experience taught me to face a serendipitous world with confidence.

- “We liked Stephen’s essay because it catches your attention right away and continues to demonstrate critical thinking, initiative, and problem solving. His personality comes through as he naturally conveys humor. Through his anecdotes from growing up, we got a sense of how he might approach his studies here at Hopkins.”
- —Johns Hopkins Undergraduate Admissions Committee

For the purposes of a college/scholarship essay, please choose a story that...



- Features YOU as the main character.
- Answers the prompt, but matters to YOU.
- First, make sure YOU care about it.
- Then, make sure your reader will understand WHY you care about it.
- Involves a transformation/growth.
- This can involve you learning to accept something, changing your perspective, surviving a big (or tiny) ordeal, or just learning something really basic.
- Highlights personal strengths.
- Think of what you'd like the admissions committee to know about you.
- Some characteristics you may want to highlight include: perseverance, integrity, commitment, critical thinking, a willingness to challenge yourself, grit, and compassion, among others.
- Is full of lively details.
- Work to bring your story to life with details.

Links to outline forms



- Narrative Outline Form:
- http://drgranata.tripod.com/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/narrative_outline_2020.pdf
- Five paragraph MELCON format:
- http://drgranata.tripod.com/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/five_paragraph_essay_college_essay.pdf
- Five paragraph form with my sample essay:
- http://drgranata.tripod.com/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/five_paragraph_essay_college_essaymarked2019.pdf
- Ms. Granata's sample essay as one paragraph or multi-paragraph:
- http://drgranata.tripod.com/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Ms_G_Sampleessay.pdf

Let's Get Started!



- I will upload several outline forms you can use or follow to begin writing.
- Don't forget to use transitions!
<http://drgranata.tripod.com/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/transitionsfocuswords.pdf>
- ALL ESSAY LINKS ARE HERE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE PAGE!
- <http://drgranata.tripod.com/essaytemplatesandresources/>