



# 2016-2017 Essay Prompts Common Application & Supplements *Pitfalls, Tips, & Strategies*

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# Question

Does the college application  
essay make a *difference*?

# Common Application Essay

## Topics

- Topic #1 – Story
- Topic #2 – Experienced Failure
- Topic #3 – Challenged a Belief
- Topic #4 – Problem
- Topic #5 – Transition to Adulthood

# Common Application Essay

## Prompt #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.

# Common Application Essay

## Prompt #1

**A *final thought*:** Make sure your essay captures YOU. When I finish reading your essay, I should have a much clearer sense of who you are and what it is that interests and motivates you.

# Common Application Essay

## Prompt #2

The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later success. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

# Common Application Essay

## Prompt #2

*A final thought:* On a certain level, your essay isn't really about your failure. Rather, it is about your personality and character. Were you able to handle your failure in a positive way? If you blame your failure on others, or if you seem to have learned nothing from your failure you will have failed again.

# Common Application Essay

## Prompt #3

Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?

# Common Application Essay

## Prompt #3

***A final thought:*** A college education is not about being spoon-fed information that you will regurgitate in papers and exams. Rather, it is about asking questions, probing assumptions, testing ideas, and engaging in thoughtful debate. If you choose this essay prompt, make sure you demonstrate that you have these skills.

# Common Application Essay

## Prompt #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.

# Common Application Essay

## Prompt #4

***A final thought:*** If you thoroughly explore the "why" of this question and only briefly cover the description, your essay will provide the reader with important insight. Remember, this is not an academic research paper where the reader has to solve for "x" – focus on the "why" and the steps.

# Common Application Essay

## Prompt #5

Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, which marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.

# Common Application Essay

## Prompt #5

**A *final thought*:** The intent of this essay prompt is not to provide you with an opportunity to brag about an accomplishment. Rather, it is designed to for you to analyze cause and effect – focusing more on the effect and how you are different as a result.

# Common Application Essay

## The Numbers...

Essay Prompt	%
Prompt 1 - Story	
Prompt 2 - Failure	
Prompt 3 - Belief	
Prompt 4 - Problem	
Prompt 5 - Transition	

# Common Application Essay

## Topics to avoid...

- Your Drug Use or Sex Life
- Your run-in with the law
- Your List of Accomplishments
- One-track Social, Religious, or Political Lectures
- Woe is Me
- The Travel Journal
- A Comedy routine
- Excuses

# Common Application Essay

## Clichés...

- Sports
- Travel
- Injuries and Illness
- Childhood Anecdotes
- Community Service
- Influential Parents
- Anything Risqué
- Preaching
- Kooky Topics
- Broad Conclusions

# Common Application Essay **Supplemental Essays**

Do they matter or make a difference?

# Common Application Essay

## Supplemental Essays

- Why do you want to go to OUR UNIVERSITY?
- Why are you a ‘good match’ for OUR UNIVERSITY?
- What is it that you like best about OUR UNIVERSITY?
- How will you contribute to OUR UNIVERSITY?

# Common Application Essay

## Supplemental Essays – a wide range of questions

- What do you hope to find over the rainbow?
- Tell us about a time when your curiosity led you someplace you weren't expecting to go.
- Why do you do what you do?
- Most of us have one or more personality quirks. Explain one of yours and what it says about you.
- If you could travel anywhere in time or space, either real or imagined, where would you go and why?

# Common Application Essay

- Check for content not just spelling
- Style, flow, tone, and mechanics
- Opening sentence
- Students who take a risk with the content and structure are generally more successful
- ONE essay does not fit all schools
- Content and structure MUST make a larger point about YOU the applicant

# Common Application Essay

Standing at the ship's weathered wooden railing, the biting cold wind reaching into his very core, he gazed at the approaching island shrouded in foreboding grey clouds and realized that he, Napoleon Bonaparte, was beginning the final chapter of his once glorious life.

Napoleon Bonaparte was exiled to the island of St. Helena in 1815 where he would eventually die.

# Common Application Essay

## **The BIG answer...**

Colleges want to know something genuine about the applicant that shows reflection and/or growth. We want to know what the student wants us to know beyond grades, test scores, and the rest of the application.

Thank You ... Happy Writing...  
Go Lions!

(Beat the Eagles, Monarchs, and Friars)

