

PERSONAL STATEMENT/COLLEGE ESSAY PLANNING WORKSHEET

Writing a college essay can seem daunting! The best thing to do is to start out with many ideas, and then narrow them down to ones that you feel confident you can write about. Remember this is the chance for admissions officers to get to know you better, and to understand who you are as a person. You don't need to feel pressured to write about the most unique experience in the world, instead, this is a time to share a bit more about yourself and what would make you such a great addition to an incoming freshman class. Remember to SHOW instead of tell.

BRAINSTORMING

Let's start by thinking about you!

What are 3 adjectives that you think best describe you? (creative, determined, passionate)

What do you think is important that colleges/trade schools/employers know about you, that they wouldn't be able to tell from your application?

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What are some of the things you consider most important in your life, and how have they shaped who you are as a person?

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Only respond to the following questions if they apply to you and connect to what you might want to write about.

Have you faced a challenge in your life that you'd want to write about? How has it shaped who you are today? How have you grown from that experience?

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Do you know what you want to study? Are there certain traits you have that demonstrate why you want to go into this field, or experiences you've had that have shaped your decision?

Look over the 2025-2026 Common App essay prompts below, and check 2 that interest you most.

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.

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?

Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?

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?

Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

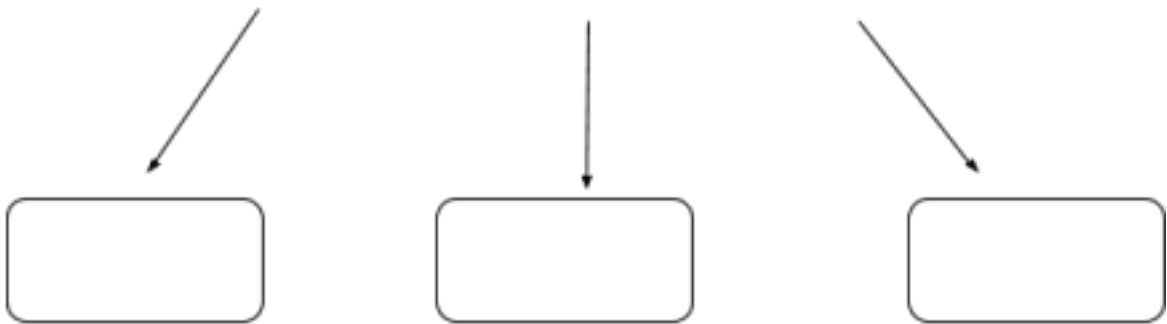
Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?

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.

OUTLINING

Essay topic:

What are some examples you can think of from your life that best answer this question?



- What message do you want to come across to admissions counselors?
- What does this example show about you?
- What details can you include about this example?
- What is the main theme you want to get across to the people reading your essay?
- How does each paragraph support this message?

WRITING A DRAFT

Keep a few things in mind as you write:

1. Focus on yourself— this is a personal statement, so make sure that even if you talk about how other people have impacted you, you bring the essay back to yourself
2. Show don't tell— be descriptive about your experiences, and add concrete details to make your stories stronger, and think of the 5 senses while writing
3. Positive v. Negative— If you're talking about an experience that was negative, remember to come back to some positive ways that it impacted who you are as a person, and how you grew.
4. Start with a strong hook that grabs the reader's attention
5. End strong to leave a lasting impression.

RESOURCES TO HELP YOU

- US News college essay tips and sample essays:
<https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/how-to-write-a-college-essay>
- Tips for writing the essay from the College Board:
<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/essays>
- Tips from Princeton Review:
<https://www.princetonreview.com/college-advice/application-essay-topics>
- Some free resources from the College Essay Guy:
<https://www.collegeessayguy.com/blog/how-to-write-a-college-essay#A>
- Resources from College Wise: <https://collegewise.com/resources>
- Prep Scholar: 10 College Essay Mistakes to Avoid
<https://blog.prepscholar.com/bad-college-essays>
- Essays The Worked
<https://essaysthatworked.com/personal-statement>
- Podcast from the College Essay Guy:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwSz_CbpQBo&list=PLb4nf3EZb-Hq92xa_ADp6eLnCxNqR_s6s&index=18
- Podcast from Inside the Admissions Office:
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/personal-statement-prep-start-practicing-reflective/id1480853742?i=1000472785765>
- Podcast from Getting In, start at 19:30:
<https://www.voiceamerica.com/episode/124652/common-app-essay-tuition-payment-plans-strengths-coaching>
- Video from US News: <https://youtu.be/ufK2Stdstrw>

