

Sample Essay Prompts for College Applications

Check carefully with each college or university to which you intend to apply. Essay prompts will differ, and an essay prepared for one school may not address the prompt of another school. Prepare your essay ahead of time, and be comfortable sharing your drafts with others. Naturally, the essay should be your own work and reflect your own thinking, but the feedback and helpful edits of others can often help you to improve your work.

Essay prompts from previous University of California applications:

Example 1: Describe the world you come from — for example, your family, community or school — and tell us how your world has shaped your dreams and aspirations.

Example 2: Tell us about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment, contribution or experience that is important to you. What about this quality or accomplishment makes you proud and how does it relate to the person you are?

Essay prompts for the 2015-2016 Common Application:

Instructions: The essay demonstrates your ability to write clearly and concisely on a selected topic and helps to distinguish yourself in your own voice. *What do you want the readers of your application to know about you apart from courses, grades, and test scores?* Choose the option that best helps you answer that question and write an essay of no more than 650 words, using the prompt to inspire and structure your response. Remember: 650 words is your limit, not your goal. Use the full range if you need it, but don't feel obligated to do so. (The on-line application will not accept a response shorter than 250 words.)

- Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful that they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
- 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 lessons did you learn from the experience?
- Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?
- 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.
- Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.