

Counseling and Test Preparation



The Common App Essay

Agenda

1. About
2. Timeline
3. Guided Approach
4. Summary and Takeaways

Purpose

- Allows you to showcase
 - Who you are
 - Why you are unique
 - What matters to you
- Creates a narrative that supports other parts of your college application portfolio
- Arguably the most important part of the college application process

Logistics

- Choose and answer 1 prompt
- 650 word limit
- Submitted through the common app portal **once**

2020/21 Prompts

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest or talent so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, 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 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 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?

Timeline

- Summer - brainstorming and writing
- Fall - feedback, revision and submission
- Note: process can take 1-2 months, so please make sure you start early

Phases

1. Brainstorming
2. Choosing a topic + common app question
3. Brainstorming part 2 + first draft
4. Feedback
5. Second draft
6. (Optional: more drafts and more feedback)
7. Final draft + submission

Phase 1: Brainstorming

- Process
 - Set a up a large chart paper in your room
 - Have sticky notes/a notebook and pen with you
 - Every day when you wake up/go to your room/go somewhere outside your house write down topics you might write about
- What types of topics are these exactly?
 - Incidents that have occurred in your life (large/small, positive/negative)
 - Observations you've made about your surroundings (family, friends, your culture, upbringing)
 - Your personal quirks - things that make you unique, observations your friends/family/others have made about you
- A few pointers
 - Don't toss anything out - write it all down
 - Make small notes of potential things you could write about concerning that topic

Phase 2: Choosing a topic + common app prompt

- Choosing a topic
 - After you've brainstormed 5-10 ideas, take out a piece of paper and underneath each idea write down answers to the following questions:
 - How will this topic showcase
 - Who I am?
 - What is unique about me?
 - What matters to me?
 - Then choose one topic that **authentically** answers the above questions **for you**.
- Choosing a prompt
 - After choosing a topic, choose a common app question that fits well with the topic you've chosen
 - Highlight and underline the key terms within the prompt you chose.

Phase 3: Brainstorming part 2 + first draft

- Brainstorming pt 2 (very important)
 - Jot down points/ideas for the following
 - The story
 - The experience
 - The mood/setting
 - How you felt during the experience
 - The overall takeaway
 - What did you learn about yourself/others/your surroundings as a result of that experience?
 - How did it make you feel?

Phase 3: Brainstorming part 2 + first draft, Ctd

- First draft
 - How
 - Show don't tell
 - Be specific - helps you set the mood/engage the reader
 - Use the active voice
 - Approach
 - Traditional: construct a narrative
 - Creative
 - Action: sit down in a quiet space and write continuously for 1:30 hours using your brainstorming guide
 - Don't stop to edit anything
 - Once you're done, close your laptop and don't look at your essay for at least 48 hours
 - After time has passed, edit for the following
 - Structure + organization
 - Flow
 - Check to see if you are answering the question

Phase 4: Feedback

- Send your 1st draft essay to a teacher/parent/college student/ctp mentor and ask to receive feedback
 - Make sure to include the question at the top
 - Let them know you would like to get feedback on organization, flow, ideas reader's engagement and how well you've answered the prompt
 - Give them ample time (1 week is usually good, check in and remind them if it takes them longer)
 - Once you've received their feedback, set up a call to receive verbal feedback

Phase 5: 2nd draft

- Make edits according to feedback you've received
 - Don't be afraid to cut out/rewrite entire chunks of your essay
 - Spot and avoid cliches
 - Make sure your structure, organization, ideas and flow are up to par
 - Start working on sentence structure/grammar/spelling

Phase 6: Optional round of feedback

- Send essay to another person and ask them to review your essay for
 - Ideas
 - Flow
 - Sentence structure
 - Grammar

Phase 7: Final draft + submission

- Incorporate second round of feedback and edit
- Edit your grammar and spelling + check your word count
 - remove/shorten unnecessary sentences to reach the 650 word count
 - Print your essay to help you identify spelling mistakes
 - Read your essay out loud to identify awkward/long sentences
 - Ditch the thesaurus - use simple, clear, concise english
 - Include varied sentence structure
 - Be mindful of when you're repeating certain words in your essay
- Review one final time and submit!

Takeaways

1. Start early
2. Don't skip the brainstorming process
3. Be authentic to your own story
4. Show don't tell
5. Feedback is important
6. When you think you're ready to submit, review one last time!

**Thanks and good
luck!**

End of presentation
