



College Essays: Applications, Prompts, and Tips

HARRIS COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY'S FUTUREU PROGRAM

THE COMMON APP

<https://www.commonapp.org/>

The Common Application is admission application that applicants may use to apply to 1,000+ colleges and universities in all 50 U.S. states, as well as in Canada, China, Japan, and many European countries.

This is probably the program you've already been using to apply to your colleges. It is what you will use to answer supplemental essays, provide relevant information, and submit your applications to your schools.

However, it does not include University of California schools—which we will cover in a later slide.

The Common App has seven potential prompts to choose from for what is known as the "Common App essay," which almost every school you apply to will require for submission.

This is a 650-word personal essay.
Applications typically open August 1st and end January 1st.



COMMON APP ESSAY PROMPTS, 2024-2025

- 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.



APPLY TEXAS

<https://www.applytexas.org/>

If you're **ONLY** applying to schools in Texas, then you also have the option to use ApplyTexas, another website for submitting college applications.

ApplyTexas is a centralized means for both Texas and non-Texas students to apply to the many outstanding postsecondary institutions available in Texas.

The only difference between ApplyTexas and CommonApp are the prompts and the word-count of your essay. ApplyTexas gives you a whopping 50 extra words for your essay: 700 words total.

If you must choose one, I'd recommend the CommonApp in case you decide to apply out of state.

ApplyTexas typically opens June 1st and closes in early December.





APPLY TEXAS PROMPTS, 2024-2025

- **Essay A:** Tell us your story. What unique opportunities or challenges have you experienced throughout your high school career that have shaped who you are today?
- **Essay B:** Some students have an identity, an interest, or a talent that defines them in an essential way. If you are one of these students, then tell us about yourself.
- **Essay C:** You've got a ticket in your hand – Where will you go? What will you do? What will happen when you get there?



SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAYS

- Supplemental essays are additional prompts that certain universities require in addition to the 650-word personal essay.
- Sometimes, these are just as—or even more important—than your Common App to some schools.
- Each school has different, unique prompts. They can require anywhere from 10-word short answers about your favorite snack, to 350-word answers about your academic intentions, heritage, interests, or career goals.
- We'll briefly go over the most common question types, but do remember that what supplementals you may get greatly depends on where you apply.



MOST COMMON SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTIONS

- "Why us?"
 - The "Major" essay
 - Your extracurriculars, volunteering, work, and internships
 - The diversity essay
-



This is definitely not a comprehensive list!



SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY DOS AND DON'TS:

DO

- Talk about academic interests, professional goals, extracurricular intentions, and your future with your degree.
- Be genuinely passionate about what you love and who you are.
- Research your schools; if you went on a tour, mention it!
- Name drop professors, articles, and programs: it shows you're serious about the school's academic achievements.



DON'T

- Talk about location, weather, sports teams, or the school's reputation.
- List things dryly as you would in a resume; talk about your autonomous reaction to these experiences and accomplishments.
- Mention familial alumni, unless explicitly asked to.





SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAYS ARE NOT AS NARRATIVE-DRIVEN!

- "The innovative and exciting curriculum offered at UT's **Cockrell School of Engineering** fascinates me. From the **brand-new computational engineering program**, to **Professor David DiCarlo's** research on thermodynamics, Cockrell is where I see my future unfolding. As a **dual major in physics and engineering**, I feel as though I will fit in with the energetic staff and student body, and hopefully contribute just as much as they have."
- "Walking beneath the willow trees overlooking the campus, I stared in fascination at the beautiful buildings, the cool wind rustling my hair as I excitedly looked through the curriculums offered in my brochure..."



- Mentions your major
 - Shows you did research on the school
 - Academic interests mentioned
-
- Too visual-focused for the short word count
 - All college campuses are beautiful, so nothing new said
 - No mentions of academic intentions

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA ADMISSIONS



- If you are applying to ANY school in California that falls under the UC umbrella, you need to apply through the University of California admissions website:
<https://apply.universityofcalifornia.edu/my-application/login>
- You must respond to **at least four out of eight** of the prompts offered.
- Each prompt has a maximum of **350 words**.
- Obviously, this application does not include the Common App essay; therefore, you can reuse material in that essay!
- UC applications open **August 1st** and close **November 30th**.



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PROMPTS

- Describe an example of your leadership experience in which you have positively influenced others, helped resolve disputes or contributed to group efforts over time.
- Every person has a creative side, and it can be expressed in many ways: problem solving, original and innovative thinking, and artistically, to name a few. Describe how you express your creative side.
- What would you say is your greatest talent or skill? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time?
- Describe how you have taken advantage of a significant educational opportunity or worked to overcome an educational barrier you have faced.
- Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement?
- Think about an academic subject that inspires you. Describe how you have furthered this interest inside and/or outside of the classroom.
- What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?
- Beyond what has already been shared in your application, what do you believe makes you a strong candidate for admissions to the University of California?





WRITING TIPS

- Start early.
- Make a list of colleges you want to apply to.
- Be persuasive and informative.
- Put the admissions officer in your shoes when you can.
- Read other students' essays.
- Generate potential prompts with AI.



WHICH OPENER GRABS YOUR ATTENTION MORE?

- "The summer of my junior year, I became so sick that I vomited by the pool on my first day off."
- "The Baja Blast came back up only minutes after I finished it, dying my vomit a vivid blue as it landed on the poolside concrete."



BODY PARAGRAPHS: CONTEXT

"One Christmas Eve we had to prepare 135 turkeys as a result of my father's desire to offer a Christmas celebration to his patrons. We began working at 1pm all the way to 5am. At one point, I noticed the large dark bags under my father's eyes. This was the scene that ignited the question in my head: 'Is this how I want to spend the rest of my life?'"

"The answer was no."

Starts off by describing his obstacle/conflict with a scene; it then quickly sums up the amount of labor he must do, and transitions to an event/sight that makes him want to change.

This paragraph is effective, because it puts you in the middle of the action and begs the question: what *does* he want to do instead?

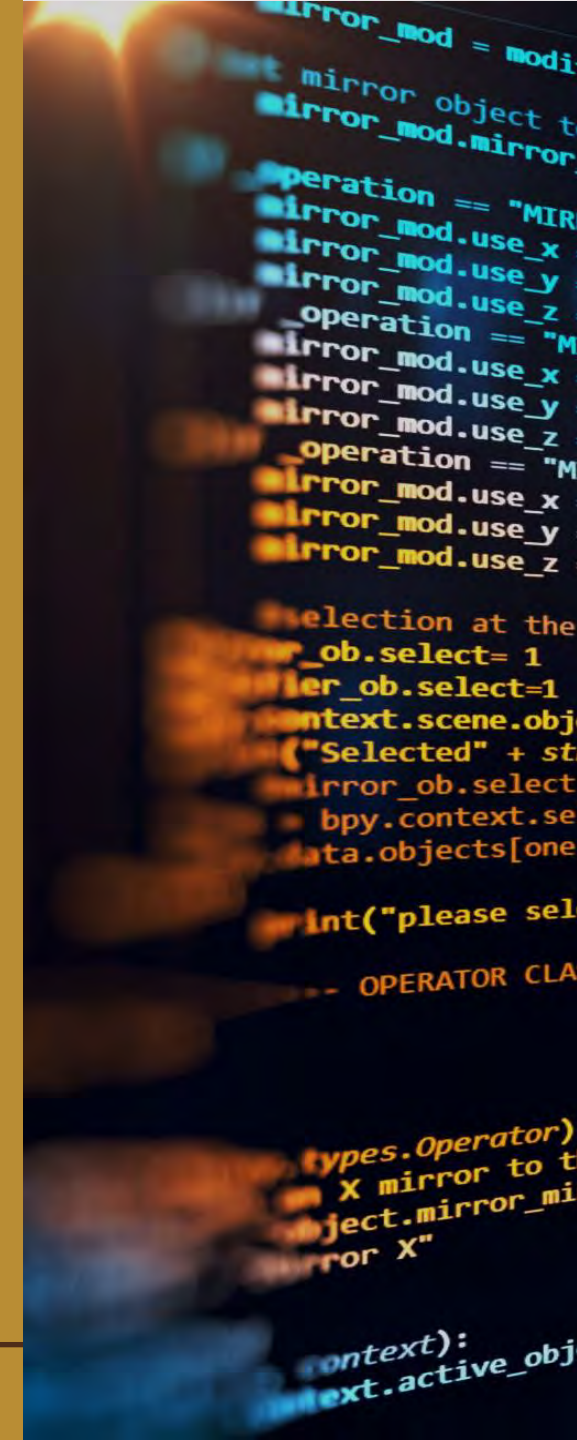
Answer to "period of realization" prompt



BODY PARAGRAPHS: CONTENT

"As I grew older, my interests expanded to include the delicate systems of biology, the complexity of animation, and the nuances of language. Despite these subjects' apparent dissimilarity, each provided fresh, fascinating perspectives on the world with approaches like color theory and evolution. I was (and remain) voracious for the new and unusual, spending hours entrenched in Wikipedia articles on obscure topics, i.e. classical ciphers or dragons, and analyzing absurdist YouTube videos."

This entire essay cannot be a narrative; instead, you can break the rule of "show, don't tell" to tell the reader about yourself as a person. Show expression, interests, thought processes, and beliefs.



BODY PARAGRAPHS: RESOLUTION

"However, I began to wonder: was I excusing myself from the responsibility of taking a position on key issues? Perhaps there are times that I shouldn't merely understand both sides, but actually choose one. In biology, for example, we studied the debates over evolution and climate change. Is it my role, as an informed student, to advocate both sides of the debate, despite one side being overwhelmingly supported by scientific evidence? Maybe I must sometimes shed my identity as Devil's advocate and instead be an advocate for my own convictions."

Shows the development of your thoughts. What is the point of your essay? If you described an event, what impact did it have on you? If you described an interest, how has it changed since you first engaged in it? These essays are all about personal growth; this is where you show it.

Answer to "changed perspectives" prompt



WHICH CLOSER IS MORE IMPACTFUL?

- "I learned that, despite our differences, he would always be my brother, and I would always love him."
- "Watching my brother close his car door behind him felt, to me, like it was the final time I'd see him; as his car disappeared over the horizon, I felt tears well up in my eyes—once again, caused by him."



QUESTIONS?

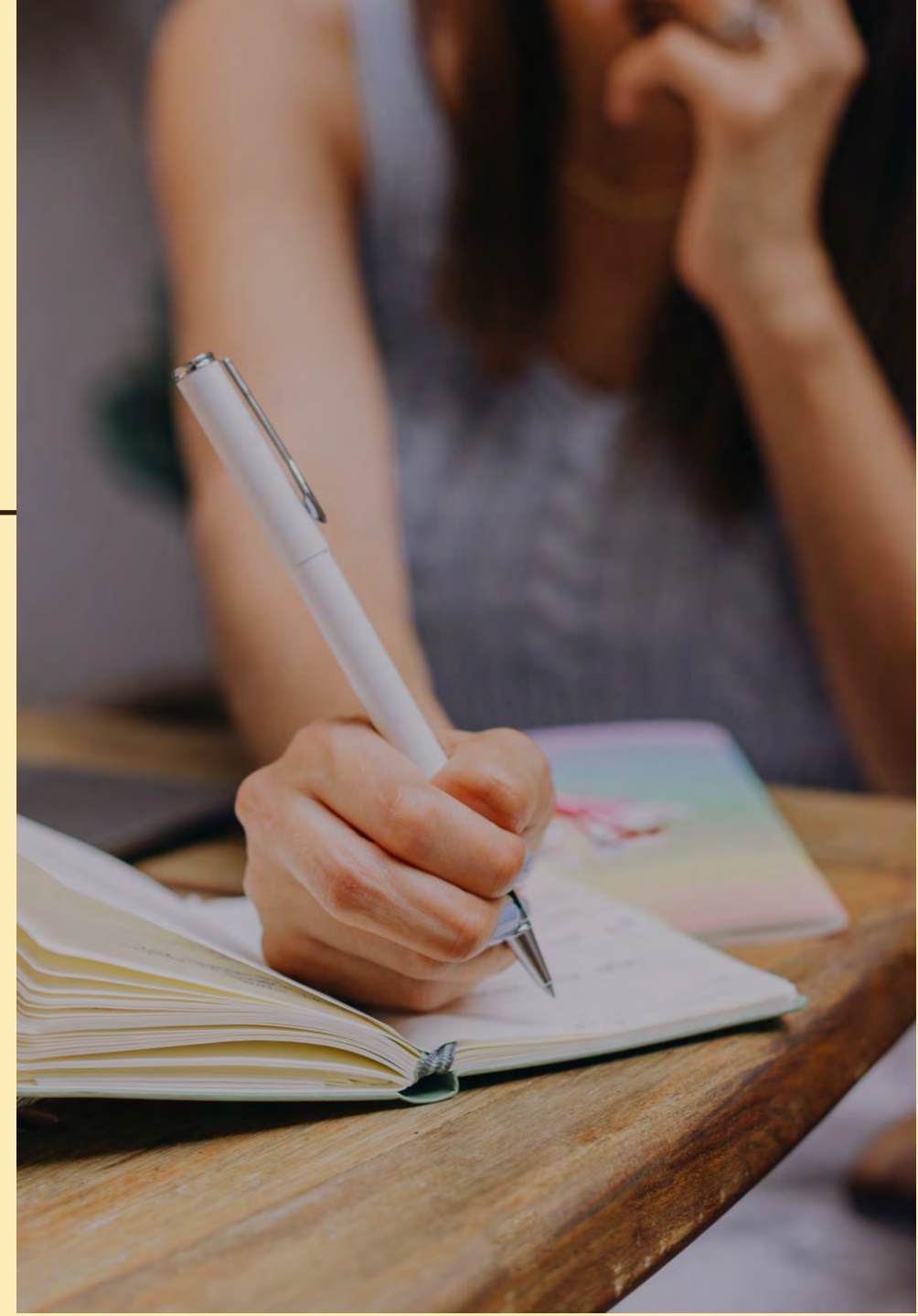


- There is an endless wealth of things you can write about; every day in your life includes something significant, even if you think it doesn't!
- If you are unsure of what to write or how to approach the subject matter, take advantage of our program and consult our advisors!

SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT WITH FUTURE U



Schedule an appointment with any of our college & career specialists for help on your essays!



Follow us!



CONTACT INFO

- <https://hcpl.net/>
- Instagram:
harriscountypl
- X: harriscountypl
- Facebook: Harris
County Public Library
- Tik Tok: harriscountypl
- Youtube:
harriscountypl (Harris
County Public Library)

