

Common Types of Essay Prompts

Essay prompts can generally be categorized into the following types:

1. Personal Statement:

Examples:

- Tell about something of personal importance and why it is important to you
- Choose an interesting or defining moment in your life and use it to illustrate a positive personal quality

Tips:

- This is the place to go beyond your transcript, activities list or points in your recommendation letter to highlight your values, beliefs, interests or something unique about you.
- This is a place to showcase your creativity, intellectual curiosity, initiative, potential, significant experience with other cultures, motivation, leadership that is not shown elsewhere in your application
- Use vivid language, examples, imagery and transitions so the reader can feel, see, or hear the moment, person or item of importance you are describing.
- Be sure to go beyond the story and explain why this moment/thing/person was important to you or how it changed your thinking/values/life.
- Give details; If it is not clear from the club or activity name what they do, give a brief description.
- Have someone who does NOT know you well read your first draft and describe what type of person you are. If the essay describes you well, STOP! This is the goal of the essay.

Should NOT contain:

- A description of a past event without including why the experience is important to you now or how it has changed you.
- More information about a significant person who has influenced you without talking about how they have influenced you.
- A superficial revelation that does not leave the reader with a clear picture of who you are as a person

2) Professional Statement:

Examples:

- What is your reason for selecting your program of study?
- What are your professional goals and previous experiences relevant to your major?

Tips:

- Be sure that your aspirations match the school to which you are applying. Do they have your academic major, required research or desired extracurricular activities?
- Give details: Be clear about your intentions. Explain why you have those aspirations in detail? What related experiences have you had to date. How have you developed your interests in this field?
- Be specific about academic, research, travel and extracurricular opportunities you hope to pursue on their campus that tie into your goals.

3) Diversity Questions:

Examples:

- How will you bring diversity to our campus?
- What will you bring to our campus community outside of academic achievement?

Tips:

- Broaden your definition of "diversity"; It is not just racial or ethnic diversity. This question is asking what is unique about you or what you bring to the campus that other students may not.
- Do not write out a long list of your accomplishments. Focus on one event, trait or story and provide a lot of detail. This question is designed for you to tell more about yourself.

4) The “Why us?” question:

Examples:

- What are the unique qualities of our school that make you want to attend?
- Tell us why you decided to apply to our school and what opportunities you would take advantage of as a student?

Tips:

- This essay must demonstrate to the school that you have researched who they are and also that you are a good fit for the school. Prove you have done your homework about the school and campus. What is unique about this school’s major, facilities, research opportunities, study abroad programs, and relationships with professors. Why are these features important to you?
- Relate your interests to what you saw on a campus visit or talk about campus programs you have attended. Been there, saw this, liked this.
- Use the college “viewbook”. What does the college highlight as their unique features? Which of these matter to you and why?
- Tell why you’re a great fit for their school.
- The response to this essay must be very specific and unique to this school alone. The essay must pass the “fill-in-the-college-name” test.

5) Creative/open ended questions:

Examples:

- If you were a shoe, what type of a shoe would you be and why?
- If you could have a super power, which would you choose and why?
- Where’s Waldo?

Tips:

- It is important to know that there is no “correct” answer to these questions. The schools are interested in how you approach an undefined problem and what this essay says about who you are as a person. Do you answer with humor, with detailed information, or with creativity?
- These questions tend to be ambiguous, creative and brain-draining

6) Discuss an intellectual issue:

Examples:

- Read Dr. Martin Luther King’s ‘I Have a Dream’ speech and describe its significance to you.
- Do you believe there is a generation gap? Describe the difference between your generation and others?

Tips:

- This type of question is measuring the student’s ability to research, analyze information and synthesize information.
- This can also be used to provide a personal perspective on the issues at hand.

7) Response to a philosophical question:

Examples:

- Describe your relationship with Jesus Christ.

Tips:

- This is designed to see how the student’s values coincide with those of the institution. Candidates can find clues to the values of the college in the viewbook, on the website and in the catalog’s mission statement.

8) Leadership Essays:

Examples:

- Give your definition of leadership
- Describe situations in which you have been a leader

Tips:

- Do not just define leadership. Use examples from your own life to illustrate leadership.
- Show how each situation fits your definition of leadership

9) Special Circumstances Essays:

Examples:

- What else do you want us to know?
- Common Application Additional Information Essay: Use the space below if you wish to provide details of circumstances or qualifications not reflected in the application.

Tips:

- While this essay is often optional, take advantage of the chance to write an additional essay. Usually the more a school knows about you the better.
- Don't hide something obvious. If you have a chance to further explain something in your application that might raise questions, do it. Examples include:
 - A dip in grades due to an illness or family problems
 - A disciplinary problem you are required to disclose
 - Highlighting that poor ACT reading sub-scores are due to English being a second language, especially if has not impacted grades.
 - The inability to take an AP class or course recommended for admission due to scheduling conflicts
 - A learning disability or 504
- Be sure to explain any problems quickly; Do not make excuses. Spend the essay explaining how you overcame the problem or how you have grown from the experience. Focus on the solution, not the problem.
- If talking about learning disabilities or a 504, explain how you have overcome hardships, what you have learned to make you successful and what accommodations you use.
- You can use this essay to highlight how you have overcome challenges even if your grades or test scores were not affected.