

SUMMERTIME: WRITING YOUR ESSAY

Start college essays under a shady tree with a cold drink

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MULTIPLE ESSAY TYPES

- Common Application: Personal Statement
- Supplemental Essays: Additional essays required by many colleges & universities for general admission, honors programs, or certain majors
- University of California: Personal Insight Questions. (UC PIQs)
- Coalition Application, unique College application essays (ie Georgetown)



Pro Tips:

- Be prepared to write several drafts of each essay.
- Have one or two trusted people review, provide feedback, edit if needed.
- Writing well takes time. Make sure you plan in advance and give yourself the time you need.

UC PIQS:

- Applicant chooses 4 out of 8 PIQ prompts.
- Each PIQ essay is 350 words maximum.
- Choose topics and questions strategically to ensure readers see a multi faceted applicant. Avoid repeatedly using the same topic with different questions.
- This [UC link](#) provides excellent guidance for thinking through each question.



COMMON APPLICATION PERSONAL STATEMENT

- Brainstorm several topics before reviewing the prompts. You will find a prompt for your idea. Especially as prompt 7 is a topic of your choosing!
- Essay limit of 650 words.
- Click here for [7 prompts](#) in the 2021-2022 cycle.

SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAYS

- Word limits range from 100-650.
- "Why this school?" and "Why this major" are the most common questions.
- Colleges deeply value supplemental essays and use them to assess a student's interest in their school.
- Take these essays seriously. **Don't leave them to the last minute.**

DO'S AND DON'TS FOR ALL ESSAYS

DO'S:

- **Get to the point of the essay quickly-** Students often make the mistake of a long introduction, setting the stage, providing a backstory. Consider moving your final paragraphs to the beginning of your essay.
- Tell a story. Avoid any generalizations - use DETAILS! Provide some **specific examples** and descriptions that illustrate your point. Let the reader see or hear the situation and how you experienced it.



- Use the **Active voice:** A stronger, more concise writing style, the active voice removes unnecessary words (that, would, of, the) cluttering a sentence. Ex:
Passive:
The letter was mailed by Paul.
Active:
Paul mailed the letter.
- **Write in the first person:** Use "I" when telling your story. The admissions officer wants to hear your voice- the authentic, honest you.
- **Start writing early** and finish before deadlines.

- **Communicate your “take away”:** Also known as “so what” - what did you learn about yourself or get out of the topic you are writing about. Often (but not always) you can bring this understanding to a college community.
- **Proofread** for style and accuracy. Every word counts and should add to your essay. Be sure to proofread your final version within the application itself.



DONT'S:

- **Shop your essay around** to multiple readers or reviewers: Ask someone who knows you well and someone who writes well to review it. Too many editors can muddle your thoughts and words.



- **Reference** any specific college in your Common App Personal Statement or PIQs.
- Exceed the **word limit**.
- Write about **disciplinary or poor performance** issues. The Common App and UC app have a separate space to explain these issues.
- **Rewrite** your resume or activity list, as this information is already in the application. However, you can choose one or two activities from that section or your resume to use as a vehicle to portray yourself more completely.
- Be afraid to **change topics**: If your essay is not working- change it. You will go through several drafts.

COMMON ESSAY TOPICS NEED AN UNCOMMON TELLING

If you plan to use one of these topics, be prepared to write a strong or unusual story around them. Readers see these topics often, so choose another topic OR make yours stand out!

- **Sports:** success, injury, challenge : Must show how this shaped you as a person.
- **Immigrant story:** keep focus on you, not the relatives .
- **Academic or Artistic success, struggle:** Overall focus must be how you dealt with it, learned and grew from it.
- **Travel story:** Can be used effectively if focus on meaningful event or person during the trip and how it changed you. Beware of showing too much privilege.

- **Legos:** How a passion for legos led to an interest in engineering.
- **Tragedies or Trials:** More appropriate for the “additional information” section. Don’t let this define you.

ADDITIONAL ESSAY WRITING RESOURCES:

- One of our favorites is the [Values Exercise](#) from the College Essay Guy
- [UC official PIQ freshman guide](#) and [Essay Guy's](#) take on PIQs
- [Supplemental Guide:](#) Breaks down each supplemental question for hundreds of colleges. Useful!
- [Common Application 2021-2022 Personal Statement Prompts](#)



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