

Learning Objectives

- What are the seven Common App essay prompts this year?
- What prompts do you most identify with?
- What are some possible topics you might explore for the prompts that resonate with you?
- Choose one Common App essay prompt.

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The 7 Common App Essay Prompts (2024-2025)

By this point, you're probably familiar with the [Common App](#) – one application that allows you to apply to 1000+ colleges and universities across the country. In addition to information like your transcript and extracurriculars, you have to write one Common App essay. There are 7 essay prompts you can choose from.

Read through each of the prompts in the list below and circle 2 - 3 that resonate with you.

- What prompts interest you? Do any of them immediately bring ideas to mind?
 - Cross off any that you would **not** be interested in responding to.
 - You will only write an essay for one prompt, so narrow your focus.
1. 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.
 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. 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?
 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 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?
 7. 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.

[\(See a list of the prompts on the Common App website here too.\)](#)

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BRAINSTORMING EXERCISE: Expanding on a prompt

Now, for the 2-3 Common App essay prompts that you selected above, you're going to brainstorm possible essay topics. You do NOT need to brainstorm for every prompt, just jump to the section for the prompts you've chosen. They're numbered 1-7 like the list above.

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Prompt #1: Background, Identity, Interest, or Talent

1. What aspects of your background or identity are important to you? *Set a timer for 5 minutes and jot down a quick list.*

2. Do you have a unique interest or talent that has significantly shaped who you are? *Set a timer for 5 minutes and just free associate – what interests feel central to your identity?*

3. **DO THIS:** Write down three aspects of your background or identity that you feel define you. Then, consider how one specific interest or talent has played a crucial role in shaping who you are today.

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Prompt #2: Overcoming Obstacles:

1. Write a list of specific challenges, setbacks, or failures you have faced. *Don't judge yourself – just write. Write down everything that comes to mind.*

2. Choose a few options from the question above. How did you respond to the situation, and what did you learn from it?

3. **DO THIS:** Using one of the challenges/setbacks/failures that you just elaborated on, describe the emotions you felt at the time and the steps you took to overcome it. *Reflect on the impact or the lessons you learned.*

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Prompt #3: Questioning or Challenging a Belief

1. Write down a list of beliefs or ideas that you have questioned or challenged. *Set a timer for 5 minutes. This doesn't need to be earth-shattering, just authentic and true to you.*
2. What motivated you to think differently, and what was the outcome?
3. **DRILLDOWN:** Explore the thought process behind challenging this belief. Why sparked you to question it? Where does that leave you now?

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Prompt #4: Gratitude and Surprising Moments

1. Think about times when someone did something for you that made you particularly happy or thankful. Jot down a list. *Set a timer for 5 minutes. Defer all judgment - just write.*
2. Choose 1-2 of the items above. How did this experience impact you and your perspective? *Be specific - your essay is unique to your experience.*

3. **DRILLDOWN:** Describe the situation, the emotions you experienced, and how this gratitude affected your relationship with that person or your outlook on life.

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Prompt #5: Personal Growth and Understanding

1. Reflect on an accomplishment, event, or realization that led to personal growth. *Set a timer for 5-7 minutes. Jot down a quick list, keeping in mind the theme of growth or change.*

2. How did this experience change your understanding of yourself or others?

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Prompt #6: Captivating Topic or Concept

1. Write down a list of topics, ideas, or concepts that fascinate you and get you into a **flow state**. *Set a timer for 5 minutes and just write! No thinking. Write down what comes to mind.*

2. Why does it captivate you, and who or what do you turn to for more information?

3. **DO THIS:** Write about a specific moment when you became deeply engrossed in this interest. Think about *why* it fascinates you and how it has influenced your perspectives.

9 **Prompt #7: Free Choice**

1. First, make sure this is the best prompt for you! Oftentimes, people are more creative when they have a few constraints (like a specific prompt). If you still want to choose this option, start brainstorming a list of possible topics.

Why do these topics resonate with you?

What point are you trying to get across?

10 After completing the brainstorming exercise, **choose one prompt to draft as your Common App essay.** It should be the one that resonates with you the most. Not only will it be authentic, but it will also be easier to write.

Then, refer to our [College Essay Writing Checklist](#) to start the process of drafting and revising your essay.

11 [Reuse/repurpose your ideas for scholarship essay applications on Going Merry.](#)

Many scholarships require essays that are similar to college essays. [Explore scholarships on Going Merry](#) and see if you can reuse or re-purpose parts of this brainstorming exercise to write essays for scholarship apps!