College application essays information

First, some don’ts

Don’t write in academic third-person

Don’t write in clichés or trite phrases (predictable writing is boring)

Please go to this link; it is a really good article on writing application essays.

Read “Sometimes we teach them too well,” “What is creative nonfiction?”, and Workshops 2, 3, and 4.

<http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&ved=0CD4QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.nwp.org%2Fcs%2Fpublic%2Fdownload%2Fnwp_file%2F13803%2Fit_sounds_like_me_using_creative_nonfiction_to_teach_college_admissions_essays_%282%29.pdf%3Fx-r%3Dpcfile_d&ei=umQzUsOtMIqLiALY6IDIDQ&usg=AFQjCNFBOu6DJiJX9x5nQm77cCIL7BdM-Q&bvm=bv.52164340,d.cGE>

Here’s some info about the **Common App**

Three other big changes came to the **Common App** essays this year -- and I'm just as happy about them. 1. The essay can be longer -- between 250 and 650 words. 2. There is a precise limit on the 650 words, which clears up ambiguity ("Can I go over 650, even a little?" "No.") 3. The second essay, about a job or an extracurricular activity, has been ditched.

And keep in mind that even though the questions are user friendly, even a little chatty, you are applying to an educational institution, for the position of "student." The questions want you to reflect more on how you think and process information, knowledge, and experience, rather than on your feelings, your friends, and/or your Netflix activity.

**Prompt #1. Some students have a background or a story that is so central to their identity that they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.**The first student I showed this to said, "This is the diversity question." It could be, if that's an essential feature of someone's identity, but the question is much more open-ended. It invites you to talk about anything from being a triplet to growing up in Alaska; from growing up on a farm to having a particular medical condition.

**Prompt #2. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn.** Discussing "failure" is a tricky proposition. You don't want to seem like someone who fails regularly or spectacularly. But if, for instance, you have academic absence to explain (you flunked out of school and then returned and are now a great student), this might be a good place to tell that story, with the emphasis on "what you learned." There are other "failure stories" that are fine too.

**3. Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?** I think this is a great question for students who are activists and others who have challenged policies promoted by church, school, government, or their families. The incident you describe could be speaking up at Thanksgiving dinner or organizing a campaign to promote sex education or LGBT tolerance. Be sure to keep the focus on what you did, and not the details of the issue. You're not trying to persuade the reader to take your side. You're describing your role in challenging an idea.

**4. Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?** This seems to be a popular question, and can encompass anyplace from a science lab to a swimming pool. I try to steer students away from places that are too comfortable. "I feel perfectly content in bed listening to my iPod and watching *The Hunger Games*'" is a topic I would avoid, unless there is a specific backstory that would make this set-up "meaningful." In other words, it might represent a triumph of some kind.

**5. Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.**Several weeks ago, I was surprised to see an essay counselor on-line say that since people don't become "adults" until they are older, this question seems misguided. I couldn't disagree more. At every age, we are always marking transitions, and there are rarely any clear lines. There are indeed specific moments when children feel more grown up and when teenagers feel more like adults than they did the day before. The question is an occasion to consider such a moment, experience, or accomplishment.

See this link for specific hints on responding to the Common App prompts. EACH is specifically referred to in links at this site.

<http://in.princetonreview.com/in/2013/07/dissecting-the-new-common-app-essay-prompts.html>

See these actual college admission essay writing prompts for this year’s applications. Note: I copied and pasted from their web pages. Some of them have tips for writing their essays included.

*Boston College (Catholic)*

*Please select****one****of the questions below and write an essay of****no more than 400 words.***

1. St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus, encouraged his followers to live their lives in the service of others. How do you plan to serve others in your future endeavors?

2. From David McCullough's recent commencement address at BC:

“Facts alone are never enough. Facts rarely if ever have any soul. In writing or trying to understand history one may have all manner of 'data,' and miss the point. One can have all the facts and miss the truth. It can be like the old piano teacher's lament to her student, 'I hear all the notes, but I hear no music.”

Tell us about a time you had all of the facts but missed the meaning.

3. In his novel,*Let the Great World Spin*, Colum McCann writes:

“We seldom know what we're hearing when we hear something for the first time, but one thing is certain: we hear it as we will never hear it again. We return to the moment to experience it, I suppose, but we can never really find it, only its memory, the faintest imprint of what it really was, what it meant.”

Tell us about something you heard or experienced for the first time and how the years since have affected your perception of that moment

Candidates respond to all three essay topics using at least 250 words, but not exceeding the space provided.

1. Stanford students possess intellectual vitality. Reflect on an idea or experience that has been important to your intellectual development.
2. Virtually all of Stanford's undergraduates live on campus. Write a note to your future roommate that reveals something about you or that will help your roommate—and us—know you better.
3. What matters to you, and why?

Notre Dame (Catholic)

Please select three of the following five prompts and provide a response of approximately 150 words to each.

1. In his 2005 inaugural address, Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C., president of the University of Notre Dame, challenged our community: “We at Notre Dame must have the courage to be who we are. If we are afraid to be different from the world, how can we make a difference in the world?” When you leave Notre Dame, what is one way you will bravely face the world, stay true to your values, and make a difference large or small?
2. What is your proudest accomplishment that doesn’t appear on your résumé — an act for which you did not receive a trophy, grade, or other type of outward recognition?
3. Tell us about a time you fell in love… with an academic concept. What excited you about this idea, project, or lesson?
4. Why are you interested in attending the University of Notre Dame?
5. By the end of the college application process, you will have probably written dozens of essays and responded to a multitude of questions. Use this opportunity to try something new.   University of Virginia  **1.**We are looking for passionate students to join our diverse community of scholars, researchers, and artists. Answer the question that corresponds to the school you selected. Limit your answer to a half page or roughly 250 words.
	* **College of Arts & Sciences:** What work of art, music, science, mathematics, or literature has surprised, unsettled, or challenged you, and in what way?
	* **Engineering:** If you were given funding for a small engineering project, what would you do?
	* **Architecture:** Students in the school of architecture study the physical design of the environment in which we live, including cities, landscapes, and buildings. That environment has a profound effect on the way that people and societies interact and develop. Describe how a particular physical place has influenced your growth as a person.
	* **Nursing:**Discuss experiences that led you to choose the School of Nursing.
	* **Kinesiology:** Discuss experiences that led you to choose the kinesiology major.
6. **2.**Answer one of the following questions in a half page or roughly 250 words:
	* What is your favorite word and why?
	* The Honor Code at U.Va. states that students will not lie, cheat, or steal. This strengthens our Community of Trust. What would you add to the Honor Code and why?
	* In 2006, graduate student Robert Stilling discovered an unpublished poem by Robert Frost while doing research in U.Va.’s Small Collections Library. Where will your Stilling moment be in college?
	* We are a community with quirks, both in language (we’ll welcome you to Grounds, not campus) and in traditions. Describe one of your quirks and why it is part of who you are.
	* To tweet or not to tweet?
7. Yale Writing Supplement required for all freshman applicants:

*In this second essay, please reflect on something you would like us to know about you that we might not learn from the rest of your application, or on something about which you would like to say more. You may write about anything—from personal experiences or interests to intellectual pursuits.* *We ask that you limit your essay to fewer than 500 words.*

**university of california**

Your personal statement should be exactly that — personal. This is your opportunity to tell us about yourself — your hopes, ambitions, life experiences, inspirations. We encourage you to take your time on this assignment. Be open. Be reflective. Find your individual voice and express it honestly.

As you respond to the essay prompts, think about the admissions and scholarship officers who will read your statement and what you want them to understand about you. While your personal statement is only one of many factors we consider when making our admission decision, it helps provide context for the rest of your application.

**Directions**

All applicants must respond to two essay prompts — the general prompt and *either* the freshman or transfer prompt, depending on your status.

1. Responses to your **two** prompts must be a maximum of 1,000 words total.
2. Allocate the word count as you wish. If you choose to respond to one prompt at greater length, we suggest your shorter answer be no less than 250 words.

**The essay prompts**

**Freshman applicant prompt**

Describe the world you come from — for example, your family, community or school — and tell us how your world has shaped your dreams and aspirations.

**Prompt for all applicants**

Tell us about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment, contribution or experience that is important to you. What about this quality or accomplishment makes you proud and how does it relate to the person you are?

**Tips and techniques**

**Start early.**

Allow time for reflection, thoughtful preparation and revision.

**Choose a topic for both essays.**

Look critically at the information in your application: your grades, awards, activities and work experience, family and income. Anticipate questions an admissions evaluator will have after reading your application. The personal statement is your opportunity to answer those questions.

**Write persuasively.**

Present your information and ideas in a focused, deliberate and meaningful manner. Provide specific, concrete examples to support your point. A personal statement that is simply a list of qualities or accomplishments usually is not persuasive.

**Proofread.**

In addition to checking your spelling, be sure your grammar is correct and your essays flow smoothly.

**Solicit feedback.**

Your personal statement should reflect your own ideas and be written by you alone, but others — family, teachers and friends — can offer valuable suggestions. Ask advice of whomever you like, but do not plagiarize from sources in print or online and do not use anyone's published words but your own.

**Relax.**

This is one of many pieces of information we consider in reviewing your application. An admission decision will not be based on your personal statement alone.

**TUFTS**

Short Responses (Required of all Applicants)

Think outside the box as you answer the following questions.  Take a risk and go somewhere unexpected.  Be serious if the moment calls for it but feel comfortable being playful if that suits you, too. The suggested length for question 3 is 200-250 words.

1. Which aspects of Tufts’ curriculum or undergraduate experience prompt your application? In short: “Why Tufts?” (50–100 words)
2. There is a Quaker saying: “Let your life speak.” Describe the environment in which you were raised – your family, home, neighborhood or community – and how it influenced the person you are today. (200–250 words)
3. Now we’d like to know a little bit more about you.  Please respond to one of the following six questions:  A) “If you do not tell the truth about yourself you cannot tell it about other people,” Virginia Woolf.  Respond to Woolf’s quote in the medium of your choice: prose, video (one minute), blog, digital portfolio, slam poetry...  For media other than writing, please share a link (video can be submitted via YouTube but we recommend using a privacy setting) that is easily accessible.
4. B) What makes you happy?  C) Sports, science and society are filled with rules, theories and laws like the Ninth Commandment, PV=nRT, Occam’s Razor, and The Law of Diminishing Returns. Three strikes and you’re out. “I” before “E” except after “C.” Warm air rises. Pick one and explain its significance to you.   D) Celebrate your nerdy side.
5. E) The ancient Romans started it when they coined the phrase "Carpe diem." Jonathan Larson proclaimed "No day but today!" and most recently, Drake explained You Only Live Once (YOLO).  Have you ever seized the day? Lived like there was no tomorrow?  Or perhaps you plan to shout YOLO while jumping into something in the future. What does #YOLO mean to you?
6. F) Boston is famous for its teams, its fans and its rivalries.  Whether you are goaltending or cheering from the stands, celebrate the role sports plays in your life.

**STANFORD**

**Essays**

We want to hear your individual voice in your writing. Write essays that reflect who you are; use specific concrete details and write in a natural style. Begin work on these essays early, and feel free to ask your parents, teachers and friends to provide constructive feedback. Ask if the essay's tone sounds like your voice. If those closest to you do not believe your essay captures who you are, we will not be able to recognize what is distinctive about you. While asking for feedback is suggested, do not enlist hired assistance in the writing of your essays.

**The Stanford Writing Supplement Short Essays**

Candidates respond to all three essay topics using no more than 250 words.

1. Stanford students possess an intellectual vitality. Reflect on an idea or experience that has been important to your intellectual development.
2. Virtually all of Stanford's undergraduates live on campus. Write a note to your future roommate that reveals something about you or that will help your roommate—and us—know you better.
3. What matters to you, and why?

dickinson college pennsylvania Writing Tips

**Tell your story.** It may be trite advice, but it’s also true. Admissions counselors develop a sixth sense about essay writers who are authentic. You’ll score points for being earnest and faithful to yourself.

**Write with focus.** Another very simple tip, but many of the less compelling essays we read each year fail to focus. Think about the special nugget of information you want the reader to know about you at the end of your essay and write with that central theme in mind.

**Answer the question.** At the end of your focused essay, be sure that what you have written directly responds to the request or question presented in the essay prompt you have selected.

**Throw out your thesaurus.** Parading your highly evolved vocabulary in front of the admissions committee in order to impress is a very seductive trap. The most sophisticated writers can convey a message in simple and concise language. Being able to cut to the heart of a complex issue is one of the greatest signs of intelligence!