

Narrative Essay

OPTION A. Common App

Directions: The essay demonstrates your ability to write clearly and concisely on a selected topic and helps you distinguish yourself in your own voice. *What do you want the readers of your application to know about you apart from courses, grades, and test scores?* Choose the option that best helps you answer that question and write an essay of no more than 650 words, using the prompt to inspire and structure your response. Remember: 650 words is your limit, not your goal. Use the full range if you need it, but don't feel obligated to do so. (The application won't accept a response shorter than 250 words.) **** I won't accept a response shorter than 500 words.****

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. Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma - anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.
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.

OPTION B. Other College/Scholarship Essay

Select a prompt from a college or scholarship application essay that requires a narrative response of 500 words or more. Make sure to include a copy of the prompt with your essay. (Note: this must be a new essay. You cannot reuse one from a previous class or application.)

OPTION C. Personal Narrative

Describe a meaningful personal experience you have had. What lessons did you learn about yourself and/or the world around you as a result of this experience?

Requirements:

- 500-750 words (650 is the max for Option A; 500 is the minimum for either option)
- MLA Format (typed, double-spaced, Times New Roman, and 1" margins)
- Narration and/or description included in your essay
- Thesis is present (either implied or clearly stated)
- Selected prompt attached as cover page

Due Dates:

- Prompt selection and your brainstorm notes on that prompt due in class on **Monday, September 23.**

- One typed (double-spaced) copy of rough draft due in class on **Wednesday, September 25** for Peer Workshop.
- Final essay due on Turnitin.com by **midnight on Tuesday, October 1.**

Conferences:

Conferences are optional but highly recommended. Please sign up for a time and come prepared with specific questions and a particular section of your essay that you would like help with. I will not read your entire essay and be your personal editor for this assignment. The goal of these conferences is to specifically help you work on aspects of your essay that you are truly struggling with.

7 Cliché College Application Essays You Should Avoid

By Gianna Sen-Gupta

"Tell us about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment or experience that is important to you." In some form or other, this prompt will be on almost every college application this fall, leaving admissions officers inevitably to read hundreds of college essay topics that are far too similar.

So how do you distinguish yourself from the sea of other applicants in your personal statement? It all starts with the right topic that simultaneously shows your ability to write well while painting a picture of who you are in a simple and authentic fashion.

No doubt this is easier said than done.

Before you begin brainstorming, make sure you know which college essay topics to avoid and why. Here are a few of the most common.

1. A service project shows your passion for helping others.

"Many students choose to write about their participation in a community service project or a church mission trip," says Marie Schofer, director of admission at Cornell College. "These are fantastic experiences that are personally meaningful and reflect on your character. The only problem: Regardless of where you traveled or what type of service you performed, the conclusion is always the same. You like to help people. This is great," she explains, "but unfortunately, it won't differentiate you from other applications."

2. Your family's history in a specific profession.

"Being proud of family heritage is a wonderful thing, but expanding on family and the roots the family may have in a specific profession is not helpful in selling [yourself]," says Christopher Hall, associate professor at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. "Mick Jagger may be a fantastic performer and singer," he adds, "but this does not mean that his children will have the same potential. [You] should discuss personal talents and abilities and not the legacy of talents and abilities of [your] great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers."

3. Overcoming an athletic injury.

As Drew Nichols, director of freshman admission at St. Edward's University, explains, "Most university applicant pools are diverse, and many include prospective students who have overcome substantial hardships such as growing up in poverty, difficult family situations or serious illness. The 'athletic injury' essay often indicates a lack of self-awareness on behalf of the applicant regarding their own privilege. If not being able to play soccer for a semester is the most difficult thing [you have] had to encounter," he says, then it "doesn't serve to demonstrate significant resilience or an understanding of the considerable challenges some of [your] peers have faced."

4. A rundown of a national disaster.

The point of a college essay is to get to know you, which gets lost when current events are the main focus, says Michelle Curtis-Bailey, senior admissions advisor and Educational Opportunity Program coordinator at Stony Brook University. After Hurricane Sandy hit New York in 2012, she says, "Many students in the application cycle wrote about the hurricane, as it occurred in late October, peak college application time. Once again, the message is lost as the whole focus was more like a journal entry recounting what

happened in the life of the students and their family without a clear connection to the individual. On a whole, we are aware of the impact that disasters have on the lives of our applicants," she says, but "the full scope of the college essay shouldn't recount those types of experiences."

5. A mission trip helped you to understand the struggles of impoverished youth in the U.S.

"We often get essays which describe wonderful experiences working in impoverished international countries doing such things as building houses, helping community members learn English and so on," says Hall. "But as soon as a connection is made by applicants that this experience can help them understand the plight of inner-city youth of America, or that that they have acquired special skills through these experiences to emotionally connect with impoverished U.S. youth, the power of their service work is diminished." Hall says, "Comparing U.S. inner-city youth and communities to Third World or impoverished countries demonstrates a lack of empathy and understanding of the differences in culture."

6. The sports game highlight reel.

"The game-winning catch or other sports highlight is another popular essay topic," Schofer says. "It is important to understand that the admission counselor reading your essay may not be familiar with your sport and will probably have no emotional attachment to the outcome of the District 5 semi-final game." If you do choose to write about a sports topic, Schofer recommends "an essay that debates the merits of the baseball's infield fly rule or a descriptive essay of your warm-up routine."

7. Talking about your role model.

"The challenge with this topic is that we often see essays written about the parent, grandparent, teacher, or coach," says Curtis-Bailey, adding that "most of these essays are written solely about the 'other person' with no reference to the student." She suggests avoiding this topic if you "are unable to show the connection of how the traits and characteristics of that individual are similar or even a model of tangible action that [you desire to take] or have taken."

"While it might be true that a grandparent has been of great influence to the applicant," Nichols points out that "this essay has been written hundreds of times over. When you're competing against hundreds of other students who have submitted the same answer to the prompt," he says, "it becomes more difficult to make your essay distinctive and to really stand out."

Authenticity matters most.

In all, essay readers want to know about you from your point of view. "Think about what is distinctive about [your] particular story," says Nichols, "and articulate that in an honest and meaningful way."

Don't pretend to be someone you're not simply to impress the readers. As Curtis-Bailey points out, "It's evident in reading many essays when a student is using words not commonly used in day-to-day communication that would often give the impression of a unique vocabulary." There's no need to use complex words and jargon, she says, "when all we want to see is [you], not pull a dictionary to gather the context of the terms used."