Common app essay topics with Guidelines!!!!!

**PROMPT #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.**

While students and parents have long lamented the exclusion of the “topic of your choice,” this year’s first prompt is as solid a choose-your-own-adventure option as any you’ll find. No matter what memory, personality trait, hobby or accomplishment a student chooses to highlight, it will likely be easily molded to fit this prompt. So ask yourself: What, in your seventeen years on this earth, has helped shape the person you are today? It can be something as small as seeing an episode of a television show, or as large as the struggle of moving to a foreign country. That said, your subject and/or perspective should be dynamic; specific to you and who you are and no one else. Did a Wednesday night family bowling tradition help shape the way you think about family, teamwork and the power of rituals? Does your crazy dyed-blue hair define you? Did going to a Picasso exhibit inspire you to start an art collection that has since expanded beyond the borders of your bedroom? What do you love and why do you love it? How would you define yourself and what influences in your life led you down your current path? What funny story do you tell friends and family over and over again and why do you think it always comes up? How are these stories and qualities representative of who you are at your core? Let these possibilities tumble about in your brain and then let out a deep exhale. You have been given a gift, dear applicants. This prompt will serve as a fabulous catch-all for subjects that don’t fit within the confines of the other four prompts. It is, in essence, a topic of grand choice, buffered by a few helpful guidelines.

## ****PROMPT #2:****The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later success. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

We have always stressed that a question about failure is, in fact, a question about success. This year’s second prompt makes this point irrefutably clear. Students should aim to showcase both a sense of humility and resilience. How do you deal with hardship? Are you the kind of person who can rebound- who turns every experience, good or bad, into one from which you can learn something? Applicants should be careful not to choose failures that may seem trite (failure to get an A on an exam and/or secure tickets to that Justin Beiber concert), or that illustrate a lapse in good judgment (that time you crashed your car or ate fifteen bags of Cheetos in one sitting). Still, if you can isolate an incident of trial in your life and how you learned from it, this can be a rewarding prompt to explore. Did your failure to follow directions lead you to a botched home science experiment (root beer explosion!) and an appreciation for a balance of creativity and planned procedure? Has your comical inability to master the game of tennis taught you that the value of your weekly games lies in the time provided to bond with friends? Did your failed attempt to become a child actor introduce you to screenwriting, your professional goal and biggest passion? Try to keep these stories as positive as possible. Remember, these essays are not really about losing the election, missing the big game and failing to meet your own academic expectations; they are about overcoming obstacles, and refusing to submit to life’s greatest challenges.

## ****PROMPT #3:****Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?

This is perhaps the most challenging prompt of the Common App’s selection. It requires a student to speak passionately about beliefs and ideology, which are often onerous topics that can be difficult to mold into a compact story. Hence, this is often one of the hardest prompts to steer in a positive, productive direction without traveling into preachy, overly didactic territory. That said, responses to this prompt can be incisive and deeply personal, as it was for a student who stood up to her parents’ old-fashioned outlook on feminism. They can also be quite controversial, and students need to carefully assess the risks of espousing beliefs that might be polarizing for the readers of their applications. If this prompt jumps out at you because you have a very specific story to tell or opinion to voice, run with it. When has your opinion been unpopular? Maybe you worked as an intern on a political campaign caught at the center of a scandal. How did you react? Are you openly gay in a strict Catholic school environment, and what has that meant for your self-esteem and personal relationships? Why are you the kind of person who is willing to stand up for what you believe in? What is important to you on a fundamental level of morals and values? These are some of the questions to which this prompt seeks answers and insight.

## ****PROMPT #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.

I’ll admit it. We nerdily excited about the reappearance of prompt #4, which asks students to talk about a problem and how they solved or are planning to solve it. This one is quite similar to prompt #2 in that it is meant to tease out a student’s problem-solving skills and provide a glimpse into an applicant’s frame of mind when dealing with challenges. But this question provides a few bonus opportunities for creative expression, leaving both the scale and the time frame for setting up a problem/solution wide open. Students should think about everything from more traditional obstacles they have had to overcome to the small predicaments that have inspired them to think about what they really value. Has your love of nature inspired you to start a charity to help save local endangered species’? Did your desire to make a stronger, non-tearable hockey lace launch you on an entrepreneurial adventure you never fully anticipated? Applicants can and should also consider this prompt from an aspirational perspective: What kind of change would you like to make in the world? How do you think you can positively contribute to a cause that is important to you?  If you had the power to make a lasting impact in any area at all, what would it be? It is important that the problem you choose is linked to your life and world in a meaningful way. Remember, the whole purpose of this exercise is to reveal something valuable about yourself to admissions. And don’t forget to detail at least a few steps you would/could take to solve your chosen quandary. While this prompt may seem to have a lot of moving parts, it also opens the door for some incredibly imaginative approaches to the personal essay. We are excited to see how students use it as a launch pad for their stories this year.

## ****PROMPT #5:**** Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.

This prompt offers endless choices and flexibility, and an essay inspired by this prompt can tackle anything from a formal event to a very small occurrence. Students should keep in mind that the words “accomplishment” and “event,” leave themselves open to interpretation. A formal event or accomplishment might encompass anything from obvious landmarks like birthdays and weddings, to achievements like earning an award or receiving a promotion. More informal examples might include something as simple as meeting a special person in your life, taking a car ride, or eating a particularly meaningful meal. We often found that the smaller, less formal events make for more surprising and memorable essays; but as with any of the other prompts, as long as you can answer with originality and put a unique twist on your subject matter, all ideas, formal and informal, big and small, are fair game. What were the moments in life that fundamentally changed you as a person? When did you learn something that made you feel more adult, more capable, more grown up? Maybe rescuing a child from the deep end of the community pool reminded you that you’re not a kid anymore. In what other ways have your lifeguarding duties shaped your sense of responsibility? When you got your license and started to drive to school on your own, did you miss those regular car rides after school with your mom? What did you learn about your desire for independence on that first ride alone? What from those everyday discussions with your mom stuck with you on that drive? The most important thing to keep in mind when searching for these moments is that element of transition and transformation. The event or accomplishment you discuss should  be something that helped you understand the world around you through a different, more mature lens.