



College Essay Cheat Sheet

THE COLLEGE & CAREER CENTER WILL NOT REVIEW ANY PERSONAL STATEMENTS AFTER 8/12/2024

Common App Essay Topics (Be YOU!):

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.)

Below is the full set of Common App essay prompts for 2024-25.

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.

The following Florida public schools do not *require* admission essays, but if it is optional we still strongly encourage you submit one:

1. UWF
2. USF
3. FAU
4. FIU
5. FGCU
6. UNF

Writing the Perfect College Essay

The essay is one of the most important parts of the college application. It is really the only way you set yourself apart from thousands of other students who have good grades, high scores, rigorous academics, and of course, numerous extracurricular activities, leadership and community service. It is your opportunity to shine, to show the college your personality and let them hear your voice! Admissions officers have shared with me that they read approximately 4 applications an hour. When they go into their “reading period” they are very skilled at what they are looking for and can easily detect an essay that may not match the rest of the application. It is critical that you write your own essay!

How to Begin – Start by brainstorming several ideas. What are you passionate about? This is NOT the time to write about your community service project that you did to help beef up your college application. Think about something that motivated you, changed you, inspired you, and frustrated you. Write about the “thing” you have been doing your whole life ... football, singing, compensating for a learning disability, babysitting your sister. Think of the time you were most proud or disappointed of yourself and what you did to accomplish that feeling. Think about the lessons learned from that experience. Some students have shown me essays where they write about a meaningful person. The problem with that is more times than not, the essay becomes about them. You can write about a person as long as you focus more on what that person meant to you, how you learned from them, and what impact that will have on your future. Some schools are very interested in hearing about what you are bringing to their campus community. Make sure you don’t throw that in as a last line or an afterthought. Doing a bit of research about the campus and how it will affect programs they already have in place is a great idea. Make sure you don’t regurgitate their website back to them!

Start Writing – The essay is usually not a one-shot, 15-minute deal. You should write several drafts and make each word count. The first draft should not be about word count, grammar, spelling or even flow. Get your thoughts out and then walk away. Make sure it is your voice and someone who knew you well would recognize it as your essay!!

Edit, Edit and Edit it Again – This is now the time to look at spelling, grammar, flow, punctuation, tenses, addressing the prompt, word count. Ask yourself, does this essay tell the story I want it to tell and is it the best reflection of who I am? This is the time to get a second and third opinion...have people who you **respect** read the essay and take their comments to heart. Remember, everyone is going to have a different opinion, so the more people you ask, the more opinions you will get.

Review One Last Time – Incorporate changes that you are comfortable making. Remember, it is your essay and you should have the final say. Try not to over think it or do any massive re-writes after you had it close to finalized. Feel confident about your essay and include it in the application.

REMINDERS:

- If someone else can tell your story, then think of another story to tell!
- Don't shy away from non-traditional writing styles- this should not be your standard 5 paragraph essay
- If you are writing about a lesson someone else taught you, the essay should not be entirely about the other person- it is you applying to the school
- Most schools will not interview you- the only way they will hear your voice is through your essay
- Start by choosing two prompts and write the first paragraph for each of the two prompts. Share those paragraphs with Dr. Taylor (Kristina.taylor@browardschools.com) or Ms. Tamara (tamara.labossiere@browardschools.com) and we will provide insight as to how you should proceed
- For many schools (primarily out of state and in-state private) you will be required to write supplemental essays. These prompts are released later on in the Summer and you should work smarter not harder and keep a running document of all of your supplemental essays in case any schools/prompts overlap. Our office will review supplemental essays after the first day of school, but we will NOT review any personal statements after the first day of school. Take advantage of our Summer hours and send us your personal statements!!!