



Show. Don't Tell: The College Essay

A joint venture brought to you by VES College Counseling and the English Department

The college essay is your chance to transcend the numbers that speak to admissions officers—your chance to let those kind, sometimes weary people, reading through file after file, hear your honest, *sincere voice* and make them want to include your voice in their college's community. It's a chance to grab their attention.

When you return to school in August, during the first week of classes you will need to submit to your English teacher and your college counselor a complete rough draft of your main college essay. Your English teacher will be grading your essay primarily on your sincere effort. They don't expect perfection, but they will be able to tell if your work was thrown together hastily. Please know that your college counselor and English teacher are eager to support you with your essay writing process throughout the fall. Your college counselor would even be happy to set up some summer meetings with you so you can start out the school year already well on your way to college application success.

Most colleges expect an essay that is approximately 550 - 650 words in length, so that is what we ask you to produce this summer. Below you will find the writing prompts provided on *The Common Application*. Use those questions to help generate ideas. As you determine your direction, we recommend that you check out the resources provided on [The College Essay Guy Website](#) for examples of essays that work and suggestions to make your writing experience meaningful and successful. Most importantly, as you write, remember to *show* rather than tell.

We are all excited to see what you come up with and to help you in the fall semester. Please email a copy of your essay to collegecounseling@ves.org as soon as you have finished.

Instructions (from the Common Application)

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 ONE option that best helps you to 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.

Below is the full set of Common App essay prompts for 2021-2022.

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.