

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING ESSAYS FOR THE COMMON APPLICATION**

These prompts are designed to elicit information that will strengthen the other components of the application. The personal essay has a 650 word limit.

**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. (2015-16 47% chose this topic)**

- Is this an activity you would expect to continue in college and if so, would the college benefit in any way from your activity?
- Is this an activity that is mentioned on your list of extracurricular activities near the top (*remember, those were in the order of importance to you*)?
- Be careful about topics that shock: sex, sometimes religion, drug use, anything illegal
- What defines you? What has made a memorable impact on you? What are you passionate about and why?
- Why are you the person you are today?
- Is there something in your culture that helps define who you are?

**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? (17%)**

- Does the failure you describe elicit concerns about you as an applicant?
- Stress what you learned, not how much you failed; how did you overcome an obstacle?
- It will be easier to tell than show on this one; be careful
- Is it possible to not be good at something and still enjoy it?
- Focus on the process, not only what you learned but how you learned

**3. Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act?  
Would you make the same decision again? (4%)**

- How global is your thinking?
- In challenging a belief or idea, did you think it through? Were your arguments logical and factual or just opinions?
- If you challenged an idea, did you do so in an adult-like manner? Did you simply use propaganda or put-down's or logical, thoughtful reasoning?
- Be careful about controversial topics. If you are the 1% on an opinion about something, the reader(s) are most likely in the 99%.
- Be careful about sounding like you know more than anyone else or your opinion is right simply because you say so.
- If you are drawn to this topic because of something deeply personal, be careful about sharing too much; less can be more

**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. (10%)**

- Be careful about world hunger, water supply, curing cancer, etc. Those topics are so large that any of them would be difficult. You may try them, but be careful.
- Research query would be good, particularly if related to your primary interest.
- Be careful about your point-of-view and whether or not the reader may be offended by your viewpoint
- Have you been involved with a "cause" in the local area and made something better?
- Students could also look at what they are currently doing and match that work to something on campus; very specific to the school and how they can use their experience to help

**5. Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family. (22%)**

- Avoid topics that are common to everyone unless you have an interesting spin (e.g., dating, Bar Mitzvahs, sex, ear piercing, learning to drive, etc.)
- Focus on what you have learned and why this accomplishment or event has made you more of an adult
- Focus on what happened that made you transform into an adult
- Sometimes the smallest topics can have the biggest impact; such as meeting your friends at a coffee shop to talk about homework or a project
- Did you need to be a caregiver?