



College & Scholarship Essays:

Brainstorming Ideas



Family

- What is your most valued childhood memory?
- Have you been responsible for caring for family members? How has this affected your academics, goals and values?
- If different from your current place of residence, does your home country or place of birth have special meaning for you? Do you visit it often?
- What do your parents/other family members do for a living? How have they influenced or inspired you? How has your family's economic status affected your education and childhood?
- Have you suffered any serious hardships that affected your academic or professional performance?
- If you live in the U.S. but are not a native-born American: How did you deal with the challenges of moving to the U.S. from your home?

Activities

- How did you spend the majority of your time over the past year?
- To what non-work (or non-academic) activity did you give the most time over the past year? Or past several years?
- What has been your most significant service activity? Your most memorable one-time volunteer opportunity? Your longest regular volunteerism commitment?
- What has been your most significant cross-cultural experience? Why?
- What has been your most significant international experience?
- Can you identify trends in your commitments? What do they say about your values/abilities?
- Did you work during high school? If so, where did you work? How many hours per week? What were your responsibilities and duties? What did you learn?

Accomplishments

- What achievement are you most proud of? Why?
- What significant challenges have you overcome?
- Describe accomplishments for which you have not been formally recognized but are particularly proud. Take even more time to reflect on why these have special meaning for you.
- What was an important risk that you took? Why did you take this risk? What was the outcome? Would you do it again?
- Think of a time when you truly helped someone. What did you do? How did this impact the other person? How did your actions impact you?

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Goals

- What are your career aspirations, and how will college help you to reach them?
- What specifically do you hope to gain from the college to which you are applying?
- What unique skills and experiences do you have to offer the school--to your fellow students, to the faculty, to the broader community?
- Why do you think you will succeed in college?
- What is your dream job? What would you ideally like to be doing in five years? In ten years? In twenty years?
- Are there specific faculty members at this college whose work interests you? With whom would you most like to study or conduct research?
- What attracts you to this particular school?
- How did you become interested in your intended field of study?
- Name a current obstacle to the realization of your goals. What causes this problem? What are you doing to change it?
- What would you like to change about American Society?

Personal

- Think of a time when you truly helped someone. What did you do? How did this impact the other person and you?
- Give an example of a difficult interaction you had with someone. Describe the situation, what was difficult about it, and how you resolved it.
- Provide a candid assessment of your strengths and weaknesses.
- What person that you know personally do you admire the most or has inspired you?
- What value do you place on diversity and why?
- If you could change anything about yourself, **bad** habits or personal **faults**, what would it be?
- Think of a time when you disappointed yourself, whether **personally**, **academically**, or **professionally**. What did you learn from this experience? How did it change you? What did you do to correct this problem?
- What values are most important to you?
- Do you have strong religious convictions that have influenced your academics or outside activities?
- Think of an occasion when someone gave you negative feedback. How did you respond, both initially and in the long term? How did this experience change you? Were you able to improve yourself as a result?