

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS ESSAY GUIDE

Which Texas Schools uses which College Application Form The Common Application *

* Many Texas Schools that use the Common Application also accept ApplyTexas

The Common Application essay must be at least 250 words but no more than 650 Words.

- Austin College
- Baylor University
- The Culinary Institute of America (TX)
- Rice University
- Southern Methodist University
- Southwestern University
- St. Edward's University
- Texas Christian University
- Texas Lutheran University
- Trinity University
- University of Dallas
- University of North Texas

ApplyTexas

ApplyTexas recommends that you keep your essay to between 350 and 500 words in length, with no more than 650 words.

- Abilene Christian University
- Angelo State University
- Austin College
- Baylor University
- Concordia University
- Dallas Baptist University
- Houston Baptist University
- LeTourneau University
- McMurray University
- Midwestern State University
- Our Lady of the Lake University
- Prairie View A & M
- Sam Houston State University
- Schreiner University
- Southern Methodist
- Southwestern University
- Tarleton State University
- Texas A & M University (all campuses)
- Texas Christian University
- Texas Lutheran University
- Texas Southern University
- Texas State University
- Texas Tech University
- Trinity University
- University of Dallas
- University of Houston (all campuses)
- University of the Incarnate Word
- University of North Texas
- University of St. Thomas
- University of Texas (all campuses)
- West Texas A&M University

2017-2018 Common Application Essay Prompts

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. [No change]
 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? [Revised]
 3. Reflect on a time when you *questioned* or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your *thinking*? What was *the outcome*? [Revised]
 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. [No change]
 5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or *realization* that *sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others*. [Revised]
 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?* [New]
 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.* [New]
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Apply Texas Essay Prompts A, B, and C

For U. S. Freshman and International Freshman Applications

Essay A:

What was the environment in which you were raised? Describe your family, home, neighborhood, or community, and explain how it has shaped you as a person.

Essay B:

Most students have an identity, an interest, or a talent that defines them in an essential way. Tell us about yourself.

Essay C:

You've got your ticket in your hand—Where will you go? What will you do? What will happen when you get there?

Special Notes:

- Notice that question 1 on The Common Application is pretty much the same as Essay prompt B on Apply Texas.
- Essay prompt A could also apply to question 1 on The Common Application since your “family, home, or community” are your background.

The College Admissions Essay: Advice from the Experts

The following material is from The CollegeBoard: <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/essays/tips-for-writing-an-effective-application-essay-college-admissions>

The number one piece of advice from admission officers about your essay is “Be yourself.” The number two suggestion is “Start early.” Check out these other tips before you begin.

Choose a Topic That Will Highlight You

- **Don’t** focus on the great aspects of a particular college, the amount of dedication it takes to be a doctor or the number of extracurricular activities you took part in during high school.
- **Do** share your personal story and thoughts, take a creative approach and highlight areas that aren’t covered in other parts of the application, like your high school records.

Keep Your Focus Narrow and Personal

- **Don’t** try to cover too many topics. This will make the essay sound like a résumé that doesn’t provide any details about you.
- **Do** focus on one aspect of yourself so the readers can learn more about who you are. Remember that the readers must be able to find your main idea and follow it from beginning to end. Ask a parent or teacher to read just your introduction and tell you what he or she thinks your essay is about.

Show, Don’t Tell

- **Don’t** simply state a fact to get an idea across, such as “I like to surround myself with people with a variety of backgrounds and interests.”
- **Do** include specific details, examples, reasons and so on to develop your ideas. For the example above, describe a situation when you were surrounded by various types of people. What were you doing? Whom did you talk with? What did you take away from the experience?

Use Your Own Voice

- **Don’t** rely on phrases or ideas that people have used many times before. These could include statements like, “There is so much suffering in the world that I feel I have to help people.” Avoid overly formal or business-like language, and don’t use unnecessary words.
- **Do** write in your own voice. For the above example, you could write about a real experience that you had and how it made you feel you had to take action. And note that admission officers will be able to tell if your essay was edited by an adult.

Ask a Teacher or Parent to Proofread

- **Don’t** turn your essay in without proofreading it, and don’t rely only on your computer’s spell check to catch mistakes. A spell-check program will miss typos like these:
 "After I graduate *form* high school, I plan to get a summer job."
 "From that day on, Daniel was my best *fried*."
- **Do** ask a teacher or parent to proofread your essay to catch mistakes. You should also ask the person who proofreads your essay if the writing sounds like you.

Adapted from The College Application Essay by Sarah Myers McGinty.

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This next Section of advice comes from *PrepScholar* and was posted by Dr. Anna Wulick on June 9, 2017.

Specific advice for ApplyTexas

ESSAY A What was the environment in which you were raised? Describe your family, home, neighborhood or community, and explain how it has shaped you as a person.

1. Describe Your Environment

The first part of the prompt is about identifying and describing the overall environment in which you grew up. Of course, you'll need to hone in on particular aspects of your environment to keep your essay from being too vague. The prompt suggests using your family, home, neighborhood, or community to focus your essay.

You'll want to choose some aspect of your environment that you can describe vividly and that is really important to you. It doesn't necessarily have to be important in a positive way, but it does have to have had a significant impact on your personal development. It should also be some aspect of your environment that has been or was a part of your life for a long time. You're describing where you were "raised," after all.

2. How It Shaped You

You shouldn't just describe your environment. You also need to discuss **how that environment impacted you as a person**. How did the aspect of your environment that you selected to write about turn you into the person you are now?

It's best if you can think of one or two concrete anecdotes or stories about how your environment has shaped you. For example, don't just say that your family made you a hard-working person—describe in detail how watching your mother come home from a full day of work just to get ready to go to nighttime classes helped show you that working towards goals is worthwhile even when it's hard.

What Are Readers Hoping to Learn About You?

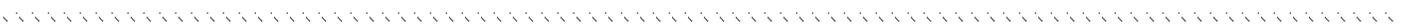
Readers are looking for two main things. First, they want to see that **you can be mature and thoughtful about your surroundings**. Are you sufficiently curious about the world around you? If you have really observed and engaged with your surroundings, you will be able to describe the people and places that have impacted you as you have grown up in a nuanced, insightful way.

Second, they want to see **how you stand out from your own environment**. This can be accomplished in two ways: first, you can emphasize how you are somehow different from your environment and how that impacted you. Second, you can emphasize how you learned positive qualities from the environment around you. Basically, how did your environment turn you into a special, interesting person?

ApplyTexas Topic A Essay Ideas

There's no one best topic for this essay prompt (or any other), but I've included some potential ideas below, to help you get started with your own brainstorming.

- Describing a time that you organized the people around you around some common local cause
- Honing in on a close relationship with one or more family members
- Identifying a particularly significant place in your neighborhood (like a certain park or tree) and why it has been so important in your life
- Being a minority in your school or neighborhood
- Going through a cultural or religious rite-of-passage
- Moving from one place to somewhere totally different and handling your culture shock



ESSAY B Most students have an identity, an interest, or a talent that defines them in an essential way. Tell us about yourself.

1. What Defines You?

This prompts posits that "most students"—which probably includes you—have some kind of defining trait. This could be an "identity, interest, or talent." So you need to express what that defining trait is. Are you an amazing knitter? Do you spend all your free time researching cephalopods? Are you a connoisseur of indie movies or mystery novels? Or maybe you have a religious, cultural, ethnic, or LGBTQ+ identity that's very important to you. Any of these things could plausibly be the main, framing theme of this essay.

2. How Does That Defining Trait Fit Into "You" Overall?

Even though you have some kind of defining trait, that's not the entirety of you. Essentially, you need to contextualize your defining trait within your broader personality and identity. This is where the "tell us about yourself" part comes in. What does your "defining" trait say about you as a person overall? How does it fit into your overall personality, values, and dreams?

What Are Readers Hoping to Learn About You?

They are hoping to learn two main things:

- 1. What you're passionate about.** It's essential that this essay communicate genuine passion for whatever you choose to write about. College is a lot of work, and passion is an important driving force when things get busy. Readers are looking for students who are really engaged in the world around them and excited about things!
- 2. How you view yourself (and how successfully you can communicate that).** A strong, well-developed sense of self goes a long way towards helping you weather all of the changes you're going to experience when you go to school. Even though you will change and grow a lot as a person during your college years, having a sense of your own core traits and values will help those changes be exciting as opposed to scary. So colleges are looking for that developed sense of self. Additionally, they are looking for students who can communicate messages about themselves in a clear, confident, cohesive way.

***Watch your tone.** It's important to watch your tone when you are writing an essay that's pretty overtly about how great you are. You want to show your own special qualities without seeming glib, staid, self-aggrandizing, or narcissistic.

ApplyTexas Topic B Essay Ideas

Again, there's no single best approach here, but I've outlined some potential topics below:

- Are you known for being really good at something or an expert on a particular topic? How does it impact your identity?
- Discuss how you got involved in a particular extracurricular activity and what it means to you. What have you learned from participating?
- Describe something you've done lots of research on in your free time. How did you discover that interest? What have you learned?
- What's your most evident personality trait? How has that trait impacted your life? (You can ask friends and relatives for help with this one)
- Relate the importance of your LGBTQ identity.
- Discuss your religious or cultural background and how it defines you.
- Describe your experience as a member of a minority community.

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ESSAY C You've got a ticket in your hand—where will you go? What will you do? What will happen when you get there?

1. Describing Long-Term Goals

One approach to this question is just to use this as a chance to describe your long-term goals for your career and life. For some students, this will be an extremely straightforward endeavor. For example, say you've always wanted to be a doctor, and you spend your whole life volunteering at hospitals, helping out in your mom's practice, and studying biology during the summer time. Then you can just frame your "ticket" as a ticket to medical school, pick a few of the most gripping moments from these past experiences and discuss the overall trajectory of your interests, and your essay will be a winner.

But what if you're not sure about lifetime goals? Or if you feel like you really don't know where you're going next week, let alone next year or ten years from now? You can still use this prompt! Read on.

2. Demonstrating Thoughtful Imagination

While you can certainly interpret this as a straightforward question about your future, you can also use it as a chance to be more imaginative. Note that this entire question rests on the metaphor of the ticket. **The ticket can be to anywhere; you decide.** So the ticket could be to a very real place, like your grandmother's house or the highlands of Scotland or the Metropolitan Museum. Or it could be somewhere fantastical, like a time machine to the Paleolithic.

The important thing here is that you use the destination you select—and what you plan to do there—to demonstrate that you are a thoughtful person who is excited and engaged with the world around you.

What Are Readers Hoping to Learn About You?

If you are on a direct path to a specific field of study or career pursuit, admissions officers definitely want to know that. Having driven, goal oriented, and passionate students is a huge plus for a university. So if this is you, be sure that your essay conveys not just your interest but also your deep and abiding love of the subject, and any related clubs, activities, and hobbies that you've done during high school.

However, if you take the more creative approach to this prompt, realize that in this essay, like in all the other essays, the *how* matters much more than the *what*. Don't worry that you don't have a specific goal in mind yet: no matter where your eventual academic, career, or other pursuits may lie, every activity that you have done up to now has taught you something. You learned about things like work ethic, mastering a skill, practice, learning from a mentor, interacting with peers, dealing with setbacks, understanding your own learning style, and perseverance. Your essay is a chance to show off that knowledge and maturity. So no matter what destination you choose for your ticket (the *what*), you want to communicate that **you can think about future (and imagined!) possibilities in a compelling way based on your past experiences** (the *how*).

Whether you take "where you are going" and "what you are doing" in a more literal direction or move the prompt towards somewhere more abstract and creative, **the admissions office wants to make sure that no matter what you study, you will be able to make something meaningful out of it.** They want to see that you're not simply floating through life on the surface, but that you are absorbing the qualities, skills, and know-how you will need to succeed in the world.

ApplyTexas Topic C Essay Ideas

I've come up with some sample essay ideas for the two different approaches to this prompt.

Possibility 1: Your Concrete Goals

- Describe your goal to pursue a particular academic field or career and discuss how specific classes and/or extracurricular activities ignited that passion
- Discuss how your plans to pursue politics, project management, or another leadership role were fostered by an experience of leadership (could be a straightforward leadership position in a club or a job, or a more indirect or unplanned leadership experience like suddenly having to take charge of a group)
- Discuss how your desire to teach or train in the future was sparked by an experience of teaching someone to do something (e.g. by being a tutor or by helping a sibling deal with a particularly challenging class or learning issue)
- Describe your goal to perform on stage in the future and discuss how your past experiences of public creativity (e.g. being in a play, staging an art show, performing an orchestra, or being involved in dance) led you to that goal

Possibility 2: Creative/Abstract Destination

- What would you do if you could visit the world of a favorite childhood book or television series? What qualities does that show about you?
- Is there a relative or friend you would like to visit with your ticket?
- Is there a particular historical period you would like to time-travel to?
- Is there a destination that you've always wanted to travel to?

Remember to tie your imaginative destination to concrete details about your special qualities!

College Admissions Essay Rubric

Ideas	Organization	Tone/Voice	Conventions, Usage, Fluency
<p>23, 24, 25 Ideas are thoughtful, engaging, fully developed and supported with clear, appropriate examples and insightful commentary. The writer demonstrates a deep understanding of the prompt and its possibilities.</p>	<p>23, 24, 25 Organization of the essay is clearly appropriate. Paragraphs and transitions are arranged in a way that enhances the reading experience, optimizing the focus and clarity of the content.</p>	<p>23, 24, 25 The voice is engaging and authentic, reflecting an honest, thoughtful response to the prompt. Writing reveals a deep engagement with the task, giving readers an insight into who you are and what you're about. Writing takes chances that work.</p>	<p>23, 24, 25 Writing shows a thorough understanding of language conventions with rare or no errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Sentence variety makes the essay a pleasure to read.</p>
<p>20, 21, 22 Ideas are thoughtful, sufficiently developed with appropriate examples and commentary. The writer demonstrates a good understanding of the prompt.</p>	<p>20, 21, 22 Organization of the essay is generally appropriate. Paragraphs and transitions are evident and do not detract from the reading experience. With some minor lapses, the focus and clarity of the content is maintained throughout the essay.</p>	<p>20, 21, 22 The voice shows some thought and feeling are invested in the prompt. Writing reveals engagement with task, giving readers a glimpse of your personality. Writing has moments that seem stilted or artificial.</p>	<p>20, 21, 22 Writing shows a good understanding of language conventions with minor errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Sentence patterns do not interfere with the reading experience.</p>
<p>16, 17, 18, 19 Ideas are insufficiently developed and lacking in clarifying examples or commentary. The writer demonstrates a superficial understanding of the prompt.</p>	<p>16, 17, 18, 19 Organization of the essay is evident but insufficient. Transitions are ineffective or inconsistent and paragraphs lack cohesion. Paper has noticeable lapses in focus and clarity.</p>	<p>16, 17, 18, 19 The voice is conventional and reveals little about the personality behind the essay. Writing comes across as mostly inauthentic with little investment in the task.</p>	<p>16, 17, 18, 19 Writing shows a fair understanding of language conventions with noticeable errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Sentence variety is lacking and detracts from the reading experience.</p>
<p>12, 13, 14, 15 Ideas are lacking in clarity and have minimal development. The writer demonstrates little understanding of the prompt.</p>	<p>12, 13, 14, 15 Organization of the essay is minimal if existent and interferes with the presentation of ideas. Paper is confusing, repetitive, or capricious.</p>	<p>12, 13, 14, 15 The voice is largely absent, providing no insight into the writer and showing no investment with the task. Writing is blander than a pot of dirt.</p>	<p>12, 13, 14, 15 Writing shows little understanding of language conventions with glaring errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Sentence problems (fragments, run-ons, etc.) severely hamper the reading experience.</p>