



## COLLEGE ESSAY GUIDELINES

After test scores and grade transcripts, the essays are easily the next most important part of the college application. Assuming that there's more to you than just test scores and grades, essays provide the most insightful component of your application; they enable you to use your own voice to fill in the rest of the picture of who you are as an applicant.

When you write your required essays, have them edited by one or two adults (no more than that) whom you trust. You can start writing your essays before the applications open. Essays are your chance to tell the admission committee who you are, your personal story, and things about you that cannot be captured by numbers. **Decide what you want to tell about yourself first, and then figure out how to use the essay prompts to accomplish this goal.** At 500 words or less, these essays need to be concise and specific about you. Consider these guidelines when planning your essays:

1. Be yourself. Who are you and what makes you unique and a good fit to the college that you're applying to? You'll need to make sure this theme comes out in your essays.
2. Be natural. Write in first person as if you are talking to the person who is reading the essay.
3. Be specific. These essays are all about you; they need to include specific examples/stories/anecdotes from your life experiences. If you step back and think the essay could apply to anyone, start rewriting.
4. Be creative. Admissions officers are going to be reading thousands of essays in a short time span. Just as you would with a first, in-person meeting, you need to make a positive, memorable impression.

Generally speaking, essays should be between 350-500 words (1-1½ pages double-spaced). For more information, read through these essay writing guidelines from the CollegeBoard: <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/essays>.

The following pages contain writing guidelines as well as the essay prompts for Apply Texas and the Common App and some specific Texas school essay requirements.

# WRITING COLLEGE ESSAYS

## General Guidelines

- Create and save in Word and then copy and paste into actual applications.
- Conform to length guidelines. Generally, essays should be 350-500 words (1-1½ pages double-spaced).
- Write directly from your own experience and write in first person.
- Use your own voice – informal, conversational, not stilted.
- Do not let anyone else (especially Mom or Dad) write your essay!
- Have essays reviewed and edited for spelling and grammar – this is important!
- Limit editors to 1 or 2 – don't allow others to edit your voice out of the essay.
- Do not repeat lists of activities or information already included in your application.
- Do not write about writing, SATs, or the college process.
- Accentuate the positive, even in a painful experience.
- Do not write a traditional introductory paragraph.
- The first few sentences are critical and must engage the reader.
- The five-paragraph essay format is too repetitive and there is no room for a classical argument.

## Goals of the Essay

- To help the reader get to know you—regard the essay as a window to your personality, values and goals
- To illustrate your uniqueness
- To enable the reader to evaluate your writing
- To help the reader create a fuller picture of you

## How to Write:

- Decide on your message first, and then choose the essay prompt that best helps you communicate your message.
- Carefully read the essay question and make sure that you answer it specifically.
- If you write about an activity or experience, focus not on how good you are or what you've accomplished, but on what it means to you.
- Be specific in your examples and stories and avoid generalities and clichés.
- Don't ask yourself (or anyone else) "What should I write about?" The appropriate question is, "What should I tell them about me?"
- Test your essay's success by asking someone else to read it and then asking NOT "Do you like it?" but rather "What do you think it says about me?"

## 2018-19 ESSAY PROMPTS

### APPLY TEXAS ESSAY PROMPTS

Different schools require different combinations of prompts, so check on which ones are required for each school to which you apply. (Specific prompts for Baylor, TAMU, and UT requirements listed below.)

#### 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 a ticket in your hand - Where will you go? What will you do? What will happen when you get there?

### 2018-2019 COMMON APPLICATION ESSAY PROMPTS

For your main application, you pick the one essay prompt you want to answer. In addition, many schools require a writing supplement, which varies by school. You can find out the detailed requirements for each school from your Common App account.

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. 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.
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.

## **BAYLOR UNIVERSITY 2018-19 PROMPTS**

### **Short Answer Response Questions (answer all three)**

1. What are you looking for in a university?
2. Why do you want to attend Baylor?
3. How do you see yourself contributing to the Baylor community?

## **TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY 2018-19 PROMPTS**

### **Apply Texas Essay Topics**

Topic A – required (See Above)

## **UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS 2018-19 PROMPTS**

### **Apply Texas Essay Topics**

Topic A – required (See Above)

### **Short Answer Prompts**

#### **Short Answer 1: Career Plans**

If you could have any career, what would it be? Why? Describe any activities you are involved in, life experiences you've had, or even classes you've taken that have helped you identify this professional path.

**Tips to consider:** This is an opportunity to describe your academic and future professional interests. You may not yet be 100% certain about what you want to do, but is there a particular field that you think you want to work in, or a certain path you want to pursue after college? How have your interests and experiences influenced your choice of majors or your plans to explore in college?

#### **Short Answer 2: Academics**

Do you believe your academic record (transcript information and test scores) provide an accurate representation of you as a student? Why or why not?

**Tips to consider:** Feel free to address anything you want the Office of Admissions to know about your academic record so that we can consider this information when we review your application. You can discuss your academic work, class rank, GPA, individual course grades, test scores, and/or the classes that you took or the classes that were available to you. You can also describe how special circumstances and/or your school, community, and family environments impacted your high school performance.

#### **Short Answer 3: Leadership**

How do you show leadership in your life? How do you see yourself being a leader at UT Austin?

**Tips to consider:** Leadership can be demonstrated by positions you hold as an officer in a club or organization, but other types of leadership are important too. Leaders can emerge in various situations at any given time, including outside of the school experience. Please share a brief description of the type of leadership qualities you possess, from school and non-school related experiences, including demonstrations of leadership in your job, your community, or within your family responsibilities, and then share how you hope to demonstrate leadership as a member of our campus community.

**Short Answer 4: Contribution to Learning Environment**

At UT Austin, we value, embrace, and encourage a wide range of diverse experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, and talents. This diversity strengthens our university and supports an open and supportive educational environment in which ideas are freely exchanged alongside thoughtful consideration of our differences.

As you consider attending our University that values a learning environment enhanced by the diverse contributions, perspectives, and experiences of our students, please share how you believe you might contribute to our community of scholars.

**Short Answer: Art and Art History Applicants only**

Personal interaction with objects, images and spaces can be so powerful as to change the way one thinks about particular issues or topics. For your intended area of study (art history, design, studio art, visual art studies/art education), describe an experience where instruction in that area or your personal interaction with an object, image or space effected this type of change in your thinking. What did you do to act upon your new thinking and what have you done to prepare yourself for further study in this area?

**Short Answer: Social Work Applicants only**

Discuss the reasons you chose social work as your first-choice major and how a social work degree from UT Austin will prepare you for the future.