

Personal Essay

Using the Common Application as a Guide

Personal Essay Please write an essay (250 words minimum) on a topic of your choice or on one of the options listed below. Please indicate your topic by checking the appropriate box. This personal essay helps us become acquainted with you as a person and student, apart from courses, grades, test scores, and other objective data. It will also demonstrate your ability to organize your thoughts and express yourself.

- ☐ 1 Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.
- ☐ 2 Discuss some issue of personal, local, national, or international concern and its importance to you.
- ☐ 3 Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.
- ☐ 4 Describe a character in fiction, a historical figure, or a creative work (as in art, music, science, etc.) that has had an influence on you, and explain that influence.
- ☐ 5 A range of academic interests, personal perspectives, and life experiences adds much to the educational mix. Given your personal background, describe an experience that illustrates what you would bring to the diversity in a college community, or an encounter that demonstrated the importance of diversity to you.
- ☐ 6 Topic of your choice.

Attach your essay to the last page on a separate sheet(s) (same size please). You must put your full name, date of birth, and name of secondary school on each sheet.

OKAY – NOW it's time to choose a question and write a draft.

After writing a solid draft, ask yourself some questions about your personal essay based on the Common Application's own directions:

- Is my piece at least 250 words?
- Does my piece help the college become acquainted with me as a person and student *apart from* courses, test scores, and grades?
- Does my piece reflect organization and purpose?
- Does my piece express my individuality (in content, style, and voice)?

Here's a little rubric – nothing perfect, just something to guide you as you revise:

WOW essay	Essay features engaging story (or stories linked by common idea). Story features as a metaphor for larger issue OR the author uses story to reflect on important human question. Essay features a "hook" that invites reader, bolstered by vivid details that maintain reader's attention. The conclusion contains surprising or novel analysis that makes the reader rethink assumptions. Style, diction, mechanics, and organization all enhance the story's purpose, revealing an individualistic voice and experience.
So-so essay	Essay features potentially engaging story (or stories) that reflect on larger idea or question about human nature. The essay contains an notable introduction, but may not have details or narrative power to engage the reader totally. The overall style, diction, mechanics, and organization do not interfere with meaning, but do little to offer a unique voice or experience.
Uh-oh essay	Essay presents an intelligible story, but it lacks ideas to drive the purpose or pull pieces together. The introduction is bland, and the supporting details are either undeveloped or unclear; if they are numerous, they may not be pertinent or focused. Style, diction, mechanics, and organization interfere with meaning or neglect to develop an individualistic style.

Parts of rubric adapted from Jack Powers' handout at http://web.mac.com/jackpowers13/Site/Writing_Rubrics.html