

## 2020 ESSAY HELPER

1. You should create a list of colleges you intend to apply to and write down the following;
  - a. Common App (also note whether or not there is a supplement(s)), or
  - b. College's own app
  - c. Coalition App (also note whether or not there is a supplement(s))
  - d. Your admission plan (ED, EA, Regular/Rolling)
  - e. Date app due for the plan you have chosen
2. Next, start a document for your colleges that use the Common Application. List the applicable college and the specific supplemental essay prompt in your document that you submit to me in addition to the corresponding word limits.
  - a. Write **“Short Answer”** or **“Supplement(s)”** and then the prompt. This will be where you write that short essay. Note these essays typically have a 100 - 650 word limit.
  - b. Next write **“Personal Essay”** and the prompt you are responding to. This is where that essay will go. It should be no more than 650 words, one full page at a normal font size.
3. You can find the supplemental essays for Common App colleges **after Aug 1**. (DO NOT write supplemental essays prior to August 1 **unless you received confirmation from the admissions rep at that college that the essays are the same as last year**. Otherwise you risk wasting time writing essays that are no longer valid for that college).
  - a. After August 1 you can click on the specific college on the Common App site to find the college's supplemental questions.
4. For each of your colleges that does not use the Common App, go to the admission site, find the application, and separately for each non-Common App college show each essay question you plan to answer with the college clearly identified. This also applies to colleges requiring the Coalition Application.
5. **Grammatical, context, syntax, should be reviewed by you but you are encouraged to either have your English teacher review or run the essay(s) through a software to ensure all grammar is correct.**
6. Then when you are comfortable with your work, you will share the essays with your parents and upon their approval you will transfer the essays to your application.

### On the main essay

As you begin to write, think about your essay in the context of having a conversation with an admission person. A conversation in which you tell a story about something you experienced that reveals characteristics about you that helps the reader understand more about what kind of a person you are beyond grades and activities. Our goal is to ensure it will be interesting and enlightening so that it makes you a more attractive candidate.

We recommend that, if at all possible, you refrain from the overused “I want to make the world a better place”, Sports cliché, etc. unless we discuss prior and have a solid theme or conclusion. Instead of such a

lofty goal, make your topic more “local” and about you as you are today, and perhaps how those traits apply to you as a prospective college student. It is also important to strive for a good opening sentence, one that will catch the reader’s interest in a way that will overcome the tendency for the admission person to simply scan your essay.

### **On the typical supplement essay**

Usually on the college’s own app, or in the Common App supplement, admissions will ask why you want to attend that college and what you plan to study. Give some thought to these questions. You should have a different response for each college and it should mention something specific about that college -- an academic department, program, faculty member whose class you would like to take, a special academic offering, a unique facility, the high quality of the activity you plan to participate in, a characteristic of the college that they pride themselves on , etc. Good answers to these questions usually require some “digging” into various sections of the college’s Web site or some other form of research.

## **BRAINSTORMING GUIDE**

### **\*MY PERSONAL INTERVIEW**

My dream job:

A (unique) talent I have:

I can’t live without:

My rituals:

My creed / I believe:

Things that fill me with wonder:

The greatest thrill would be:

Most people don't know this, but I'm...:

If I could change one thing:

Don't ask me to...:

Something I hated, until...:

I have to change:

A challenge I met:

I took a chance:

I did it!:

The best thing I ever learned:

Not all lessons are in class:

I won't part with...:

Just once I'd like to...:

What makes me laugh:

What makes me cry:

The best of times:

The worst of times:

Words I love:

Words I hate:

I'm so frustrated/outraged by...:

Something I'm ashamed of is:

Temptation (avoided or given in to):

An ethical dilemma I faced:

A disaster (comic, real, or imagined):

I've never told anyone...:

I wish I knew...(person or character):

I wish I knew...(ideas):

An opinion I changed (and why):

First loves:

My secret haunt:

Best friends or old friends or lost friends or new friends:

My unsung hero:

What a character!:

The best book I've read this year (why?):

My favorite paintings or artists (why?):

The song that moves me most (why?):

My favorite movie (why?):

A time period I wish I had lived in (why?):

There will never be another...:

An emotional tug of war:

I'm a survivor:

A secret desire:

Driving:

The joys of nature:

My favorite place on Earth:

Colors in my life:

The greatest gadget:

Stick with me kid, I'm going places:

Food, glorious food!:

But you can't choose your family...or can you?:

My road not taken:

The sweetest sounds I ever heard:

I get a kick out of...:

\* Loosely excerpted from McGraw Hill's Writing an Outstanding College Application Essay.

## Is an “A” English Paper a College Essay?

Posted by Kim Lifton, President Wow Writing Workshop

English paper not a college essay, Year after year, students send us college application essays to review that were written for English class. Most of the essays earned A's.

Unfortunately, we've never read an essay written for English class that was ready to submit to college.

Danny sent a beautifully written piece recounting many fabulous trips overseas; his essay offered vivid descriptions of buildings and places and emphasized how much he loved traveling. The sentences flowed; the spelling was perfect; the essay had a beginning, middle and end. This boy knew how to write.

While his essay was excellent by high school standards, it lacked reflection and needed more focus to catch the attention of an admissions officer.

It's important to keep in mind that the application essay is not an English paper; it is an opportunity to show admissions officers who you are, that you will fit in, and that you can write well enough to succeed at their school. The admissions team that is responsible for making recommendations for next year's class reads a lot of applications. So be careful: You don't want to bore them or submit a piece that is simply uninspiring.

Forget about rubrics and grades. Ditch the five-paragraph essay format. Just write something genuine that is reflective, and that will make the person reading your essay smile and want to know more about you.

Danny turned his broad story into a more insightful piece about a single night out in Spain when he realized how much culture and community mean to him. Getting there took time and reflection, which was encourage. It was all worth it when he landed a coveted spot at his first-choice college, one of the most competitive public institutions in the nation.

Think of that college essay you write in English class as a draft, just as Danny did. He wrote it for his teacher – a person who already knew quite a bit about him. He later revised it for the admissions counselor. Don't assume the college essay you give to your teacher is finished and will cut it for college.

**Sample Common App- Long Essay-** 750 not 650 words but great example of sharing personal traits

She thinks impact is impact, big or small. She doesn't believe in global warming, but she believes in recycled paper products and generating new eco-friendly fuel sources. She believes in taking risks, but is skeptical of the stock market. She'll never judge a book by its cover, but won't let an open-mind blind her gut instincts. Despite her love of modern new age writers, in her opinion Bret Easton Ellis will never hold a candle to Jane Austen. She isn't necessarily into camping, but she appreciates Thoreau and everything he discovered at Walden Pond. She's fascinated by the human mind, because she thinks it's the only thing we can never fully understand. She is a Cosmopolitan.

Cosmopolitan: a rather archaic word, typically meaning cultivated and urbane, this clever catchall embodies the intellectual, cultured, adventurous, and spontaneous life she leads; it's a throwback to the classics. And she is just that, in a modern sort of way, a throwback to the classic concepts of morals and class with a fresh take on candor and avant-garde fashion sense.

She is a coyly confident woman, dressed with chic ease, wearing what would appear to be uncomfortably high power heels, yet comfortable in her own skin. Toting a glossy copy of Newsweek in her vintage carryall, she is up to date on the current political issues and the latest current events. Camouflaged beneath her All-American exterior, she is anything but ordinary. Behind bright eyes lies a head chock-full of ideas, bursting from the seams with vibrant scholarly inquiry just waiting to be purged upon society. She lives each day fully intent to make it different than the one before and tries to leave each place a little better than she found it.

She loves coffee, and is possibly slightly addicted to caffeine, but feels Red Bull is far too un-natural to come anywhere close to her digestive system. She prays on the daily, but believes she and God have a special relationship where she can ramble on to him whenever she needs. She is all for technological innovation, but she will never buy an Ipad or a Kindle; there's just nothing like a good, old, musty book with scribbles in the margins and spaghetti stains on the binding. She takes Pilates. She loves to dance, not only on a stage, but down grocery aisles and in her kitchen, too. She thinks people are the meaning of life, forming relationships and bettering each other's existence here- that's what matters. She wants to live life, learn all she can, and apply it, make sense of the muddle of a world and impact it for the better.

Deep down I've always known who I wanted to be, able to vividly see her in my mind; yet in my youthful naivety, I couldn't find the right word to classify her. Well, Cosmopolitan is it. She is a Cosmopolitan, and I am she.

That I know. I am determined to be a Cosmopolitan. No single label of chemist, dancer, or psychiatrist, will fit me. I want to be a person, a living, breathing, well rounded, whole being, with humor, wit, and happiness. A person is more than a job, more than a career. A person is a member of society; I've learned that. Sure, you can define someone by what they do. But I myself would much rather be defined by who I am. Define me by my morals, my values, my character. A Cosmopolitan is just that: me, a character, with funky quirks and little idiosyncrasies that make me an individual.

I am eager to find my niche in an environment that will feed the cosmopolitan's caffeine habit and her curiosity about the human psyche. I feel the right university for me will supply an immensity of experiences to become mine, a diverse population of which I can become a member, and a philosophy that allows its students to become themselves. The next four years are a time to build upon the cosmopolitan foundation I have set forth, expanding the breath of my knowledge, and from that breath, deepening the understanding of what I love to use it in practical application. They are a time for becoming a thinker, a learner, a leader, a philanthropist, a friend, a professional. A time for becoming myself.

## Man Cave – Stream of Consciousness Essay

I am in the oasis of introspection that my family refers to simply as “Matt’s Man Cave.” Truth be told, it’s just the boiler room in my basement where the only light reflects off a dusty aluminum furnace from a low-hanging bulb. But here, in my Camelot, I am surrounded by steel and iron and the vibrations of my favorite tunes played at a decibel level that would warrant sharp rebuke in any other room in the house. I squeeze my hands into my gloves and lie down on my weightlifting bench. As my body tenses, my mind relaxes. Exercise is my antidote to writer’s block, my meditation, my time to sort things through. I slowly drift into tranquility as the bar rises and falls in synch with my breathing. Suddenly, my five-year-old brother bursts into the room dressed in a Superman costume, his mouth and fingers covered in chocolate. Resisting the urge to scold the intruder, I suggest that he quickly go wash the kryptonite off his hands and face before his super powers are permanently drained. Closing the door behind him, I smile at the thought that next year I will actually miss the little guy we affectionately call our “evil genius.”

Once again, my mind begins to wander as I push my body to its physical limits. Is Middle East peace possible? What should our nation’s role be in the global community? Where do our obligations lie? How can an omniscient God be reconciled with human free will? I spend countless hours researching the world’s great questions, often clicking away at my laptop in the wee hours of the night. My need for greater understanding is borderline obsessive. But as the bar thuds against my chest, I tell myself that I can’t get caught up in another intellectual vortex tonight. I have too much to do: I need to finish Plato, write my analysis, study for a science quiz and rework the opening of my debate. As I complete the last few repetitions of the set with my arms quivering, I contemplate the physiology of muscle control. Maybe I will read about that tonight as well....

I switch to the next song on my playlist and prepare for my next exercise. Again, my mind fills with thoughts of the day ahead. I need to start training for track season; my knees are too stiff when I throw the discus South African style. Mostly, I really do need to rework the opening of my debate. I am startled by a buzzing sound as my vibrating phone reminds me how precious my time in the cave is. I close my eyes and finish the last repetitions of the set. As my mind returns to debate, I smile. It finally hits me; I know how I can make my opening argument work. Why didn’t I think of that before?

I love my man cave, my time in it and what it does for my mind and body.

### **Sample Extracurricular Essay**

I love bulk garbage day. As a little boy, I would race up and down my street looking for “buried” treasures. As I’ve grown, I’ve become increasingly aware of the amount of excess and waste in our lives. It troubles me. That’s why when I heard about Pedals for Progress a few years ago, I knew I had to get involved. As community organizer for this group, I advertise, staff and run collections for unwanted bicycles. We prepare the bikes for shipping to remote areas in third-world countries with little access to transportation. These bicycles allow people to find work, attend school and get clean drinking water – all in an environmentally sustainable way. It’s amazing that something considered disposable in the western world can make a significant difference in the lives of other people. Being involved in Pedals for Progress gives me great satisfaction and keeps me cognizant of my carbon footprint.

## The Set-Up - Fun Example

My perfect Friday night consists of my “usual” take-out order from my favorite Italian restaurant, my purple Snuggie, and a box of tissues so I can watch *The Notebook*. Don’t get me wrong, I’m not anti-social; I’m actually quite the opposite. I have a great group of friends and love to go out with them. However, when it comes to my weekends, I always save a night for what I call my set-up.

Ever since I was younger when my parents left me home alone to go out, instead of begging to have a sleepover or a playdate, I’d have my set-up: dinner, a comfortable blanket, and a sad movie. Of course my set-up has evolved over time, from clutching my Minnie Mouse stuffed animal and staying up “late” to watch *Finding Nemo* or *The Lion King* to texting on my couch before the movie starts, crying for hours and eating Ben and Jerry’s Milk and Cookies ice cream after the tragic scene at the end of the movie which I will not divulge in case you haven’t seen it.

As simple as my set-up sounds, it’s my only explanation for how I operate. I’m Zen, but extremely bubbly. I love Taylor Swift, but also love rocking out to Jay-Z. I’m perfectly comfortable being alone, but love being with my group of friends. I love predicting the ending in books and movies, but have this natural ability to live in the moment. I’ve achieved what I feel is a way to live in the present. I don’t dwell on my past experiences or results and I don’t fear the future. This mind set allows me to tackle what life presents with confidence. Despite my rigorous academic schedule or confusing social conflicts, I’m usually able to concentrate on the present day.

My set-up is and will always be a way for me to just take a moment out of my week to relax and regroup. While others would rather go to a party or see the latest movie, I’m perfectly fine staying home to give my mind a deserved break. I tend to be one of those people who is constantly thinking and curious about how things work and where they came from. Whether it’s solving a math equation or resolving a conflict between two friends, I love thinking about the situation and the process of finding answers. However, because of my passion for problem solving, my brain does sometimes get overworked and need a time-out. That’s where my set-up comes in and is not only beneficial for me, but also for my mind.

So, even though today is Thursday and I’m focusing on writing this essay, I already know what my plans will be tomorrow night...I just need to make sure I have my Milk and Cookies ice cream in the freezer.