

# Writing the Admissions Essay

Carrie Pratt, M.Ed  
Senior Assistant Director of Admissions  
University of Vermont



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## Carrie Pratt, M.Ed



- Essex High School, 2005
- Saint Michael's College, BA in English, 2009
- University of Vermont, M.Ed in Interdisciplinary Studies, 2016
- 13 years of experience in higher education, including Admissions, career services, community engagement, campus recreation and an appointment as adjunct faculty
- Read over 5,000 admissions essays
- Currently work as the Senior Assistant Director of Admissions Communications at UVM, recruit students from Michigan and serve as the Admissions liaison for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
- College Board Enrollment Leadership Academy class of 2022 with enrollment colleagues from all over the nation



## Carrie

- I am an Advanced Les Mills BodyPump Instructor
- I read 77 books last year—my favorites were Project Hail Mary by Andy Weir, A Woman is No Man by Etaf Rum and Age of Miracles by Karen Thompson Walker
- I am part of a bicultural family - my husband is from Cyprus and we have family all over the world, including our nephew, Marcos, in England
- I've been skydiving and learned to waterski while working at a summer camp
- I experience chronic migraine
- I volunteer every Sunday at the Humane Society of Chittenden County caring for cats and small animals
- I am currently training for my 10th half marathon
- I have committed to jump in Lake Champlain once every month in 2024



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**So What?**  
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Application



Essay

Different elements of the same person that, together, give you a sense of who I am!

# Today's agenda

- What is the Common App Essay?
- Purpose of the essay
- Picking a topic
- Writing tips
- Approaching supplemental essays
- Questions

# What is the Common App Essay?



- Mandatory section of the Common App
- 7 prompts to choose from (including topic of your choice!)
- 650 word maximum
- Goes to ALL the colleges you apply to on Common App

## The essay is...

- for sharing more about who you are as a person
- for providing a sense of your personality
- for going beyond the numbers
- for showing your writing skills
- for telling *your* story



## The essay is not...

- a place to talk about your high grades (I've already seen those!)
- for talking about why you want to attend a specific school
- a recycled essay from English class
- a list of activities or resume
- your entire life story

## According to others...

“Ask your friends what they are writing, and then don’t write about that!”

- National Association of College Admissions Counseling

“The best way to tell your story is to write a personal, thoughtful essay about something that has meaning for you. Be honest and genuine, and your unique qualities will shine through.” - Princeton Review

# Choose your topic **BEFORE** your prompt??

- A good topic is one that **YOU** are excited to write about. Period.
- What are your key moments?
- What is important to you?
- What do you want your reader to know about you?
- What would your application be incomplete without?

## Consider which prompt that topic fits...

- Which prompt is going to be the best vehicle for me to tell my story?
- Which prompt will push my writing to the next level?
- What haven't I thought to address?

# Common App 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.
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?

# Common App Essay Prompts

1. Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?
2. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
3. 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?
4. 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.

Don't worry about impressing the Admissions  
Counselor or writing what you think we want to  
read...

**just be you!**

# How does a counselor review an essay?

- What else can I learn here? What gaps can I fill in?
- What are the key takeaways?
- What does the student want me to know?
- We are looking at your writing skills and evidence that you put time and effort into your essay



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It is less important what you write about and more important HOW you write it.

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**Focus on:**  
**reflection**  
**analysis**  
**outcomes**  
**learning**

# Make your English teacher proud!

- Use paragraph breaks
- Proper spelling/grammar
- Don't use too much dialogue - if you're quoting others you're not focusing enough on reflection/analysis/outcomes/learning
- Don't use a thesaurus to sound lofty or "smart"
- Be sure to proofread, and ask others to proofread as well!

- Raw processing of unresolved personal issues
- Topics that lack respect or sensitivity for your audience
- Writing about a challenging time you've had just because you think it will "sell."

*If you need help, please reach out to a trusted adult, the National Suicide Prevention Hotline (800-273-8255) or the SAMHSA National Hotline (800-662-4357)*

## Do we talk about COVID? What about other difficulties I had during high school?

- There is a specific section on Common App to explain any COVID-related disruptions to your life or education.
- Additional Information section
- Don't use your precious essay space to just be a continue list of activities or additional information—there is appropriate space for that!

# School-specific optional essays

- Think of them as an opportunity to show your interest, talent and individuality. (in short: write them)

## CRAFTING AN OPTIONAL ESSAY

The optional essay is a chance for us to get to know you better – a wonderful way to share your interests while demonstrating your creativity. Applicants can submit their optional essay through the Common Application or the Coalition Application; you can also submit the essay after the application deadline by uploading through the application status page.

Please answer one of the five questions:

1. Why UVM?
2. Established in Burlington, VT, Ben & Jerry's is synonymous with both ice cream and social change. The "Save Our Swirled" flavor raises awareness of climate change, and "I Dough, I Dough" celebrates marriage equality. If you worked alongside Ben & Jerry, what charitable flavor would you develop and why?
3. UVM is a community that celebrates the unique identity of every student, faculty and staff member. Tell us how your identities have shaped the ways you interact with the world.
4. From the Green Mountains to Lake Champlain to our campus, UVM students are inspired by our location to think about their relationship to the environment. What does your relationship with your environment look like?
5. If you could pick one song to be the soundtrack of your life, what would it be? What is your connection to the song?

**Don't even  
think about  
plagiarizing.**

# Chat GPT is plagiarism...



James Miller ✓  
@JimDMiller



Candidate for worst ever ChatGPT answer.



Joke: Why was six afraid of 7?



Because 7 8 9.



Explain your answer.



The punchline of the joke is a play on words. The number "6" sounds like the word "afraid" when spoken out loud, and the number "7" sounds like the word "seven." So the joke is asking why "six" (afraid) is afraid of "7" (seven). The punchline, "because 7 8 9" is a reference to the numbers that come after "7" (seven) which is 8 and 9. So the joke is a pun on numbers and words that sound similar to numbers. The joke is simply a play on words and doesn't have any deep meaning behind it. It is just a way to make people laugh.



...and also not capable of writing an authentic college admissions essay.



# **Final Thoughts:**

**Be yourself**

**Showcase your writing skills**

**Focus on growth, learning, outcomes and analysis**

**If all of your friends could write the same essay...consider writing something else!**

**Questions?**

Carrie Pratt  
carrie.pratt@uvm.edu



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