

Writing the Admissions Essay

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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 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 teach Les Mills BodyPump and have earned the credential of Advanced Instructor
- I read 54 books last year—my favorites were Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow by Gabrielle Zevin and Other Birds by Sarah Addison Allen
- 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 like guinea pigs, rabbits, mice, rats and chinchillas
- I am a 9x half marathoner and 1x sprint triathlete



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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

4. 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?
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.

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

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)

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 1978 in a renovated gas station in Burlington, VT, Ben and Jerry's is synonymous with the ice cream business. The company's success and unique brand identity are due in part to their one-of-a-kind flavors. Which Ben & Jerry's ice cream flavor (real or imagined) best describes you?
3. Whether they are constructing a robot, a stronger sense of community or an identity, UVM students are builders. What would you like to build?
4. At UVM, learning extends far beyond the walls of our classrooms. From student-led organizations, to internships and study abroad experiences, UVM students are encouraged to pursue knowledge in all environments. Describe a time when you've learned in a non-traditional setting.
5. Communities and organizations are stronger when they value diversity of thought. How do you create meaningful connections or conversations with others when they express opinions that differ from your own?

**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?

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