

100 College Application Essay Prompts

1. Most people belong to many different communities-groups defined by (among other things) shared geography, religion, ethnicity, income, cuisine, interest, race, ideology, or intellectual heritage. Choose one of the communities to which you belong, and describe that community and your place within it. Limit your response to half a page, or approximately 250 words. (University of Virginia all applicants)
2. “The instructor said./Go home and write/a page tonight./And let that page come out of you-/Then, it will be true.” The second line of this poem by Langston Hughes, “Theme for English B,” goes on to ask: “I wonder if it’s that simple?” We ask you here to write a truthful page about yourself, beginning where Hughes begins: “I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem./I went to school there, then Durham, then here/to this college on the hill above Harlem./I am the only colored student in my class.” That is to say, each of us is at a certain stage of life and has a history. Each of us has lived somewhere and gone to school. We each are what we feel and see and hear, as the poem goes on to say. Begin there and see what happens. (University of Chicago)
3. Names have a mysterious reality of their own. We may well feel an unexpected kinship with someone who shares our name, or may feel uneasy at the thought that our name is not as much our own as we imagined. Most of us do not choose our names; they come to us unbidden, sometimes with ungainly sounds and spellings, complicated family histories, allusions to people we never knew. Sometimes we have to make our peace with them, sometimes we bask in our names’ associations. Ruminates on names and naming, your name, and your name’s relationship to you. (University of Chicago)
4. The late William Burroughs once wrote that “language is a virus from outer space.” We at the University of Chicago think he’s right, of course, and this leaves us wondering what else came here with it. Could this finally explain such improbable features of modern life as the Federal Tax Code, non-dairy creamer, Dennis Rodman, and the art of mime? Name something that you assert cannot have originated any other way. Offer a thorough defense of your hypothesis for extraterrestrial origins, including alternate explanations and reasons for eliminating them from consideration. (University of Chicago)
5. Pose a question of your own, the answer to which you believe will display your best qualities as a writer, thinker, visionary, social critic, sage, sensible woman or man, citizen of the world, or future citizen of the University of Chicago. (University of Chicago)
6. What effect has any voluntary or independent research, reading or study, work in the arts, science project, etc. (outside of school), had on your intellectual and personal growth in recent years? Discuss what influence this involvement has had on your academic goals. (Northwestern)
7. Anatole France said, “If 50 million people say a foolish thing, it is still a foolish thing.” On what subject do you disagree with most people, and why? (Northwestern)
8. Northwestern is a community of individuals from diverse cultures and regions of the world and with a myriad of interests and talents. Is there a type of individual you have not had much contact with in your community whom you would like to meet on campus? What do you think would be the outcome of that meeting, and what would be its effect on you? (Northwestern)
9. Imagine you have written a short story, film, or play about your last four years. Briefly describe the one moment or scene that your audience will most remember from this autobiographical piece. What will they learn about you from that moment? (Northwestern)
10. Tell us how a particular book, play, film, piece of music, dance performance, scientific theory or experiment or work of art has influenced you. If you choose a novel, film or play, assume we know the plot. (University of Notre Dame)
11. Reflect on these words of Dorothy Day: “No one has the right to sit down and feel hopeless. There’s too much work to do.” What is “the work to be done” for your generation, and what impact does this have on your future as a leader? Write a creative, reflective, or provocative essay. (University of Notre Dame)
12. Read Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” It can be found in several anthologies, most recently King Remembered (W.W Norton & Company, 1986). Drawing upon personal experience, write a creative, reflective or provocative essay. (University of Notre Dame)
13. You have just completed your 300-page autobiography. Please submit page 217. (University of Pennsylvania)
14. First experiences can be defining. Cite a first experience that you have had and explain its impact on you. (University of Pennsylvania)

15. Recall an occasion when you took a risk that you now know was the right thing to do. (University of Pennsylvania)
16. Respond to the question: How can I prepare educationally for a global society? (Hampton University)
17. The Committee on Undergraduate Admissions is interested in learning more about you. Please use this essay to relay information about you that cannot be found elsewhere on your application. You may choose to write about your future ambitions and goals, a special talent or unusual interest that sets you apart from your peers, or a significant event or relationship that has influenced you during your life. (George Mason University/Virginia Tech)
18. What book, poem, piece of music, or artwork has influenced you? Write down your thoughts and feelings about this work and write a dialogue in which the work responds to you.
19. Name one book you have read in the past year. Describe your reason for considering this book significant and what you gained from reading it. (Lewis and Clark College)
20. Discuss how something you have read has affected you or changed your mind about something.
21. Tell us about a situation where you have not been successful and what you have learned from that experience (William and Mary)
22. Tell us about the biggest mistake you've ever made, or heard of. (University of Virginia)
23. Describe a risk that you have taken and discuss its impact on your life. (Kalamazoo College)
24. Tell us about the most embarrassing moment of your life. (Santa Clara University)
25. Once you have completed your education, would you return to your hometown to begin your adult life? Why or why not? (William and Mary)
26. Tell us about the neighborhood that you grew up in and how it helped shape you into the kind of person you are today. (Yale and the University of Chicago)
27. Read Annie Dillard's "An American Childhood." Choose one of her observations or ideas and write a creative, reflective or provocative essay. (Notre Dame)
28. What are the responsibilities of an educated person? (University of Puget Sound)
29. Tell us what you think about a current scientific or social controversy. (William and Mary)
30. What can you contribute to a multi-cultural world? (William and Mary)
31. Identity and culture are clearly intertwined. How has your experience of culture influenced the development of your own personal identity? (NYU)
32. At Colorado College, diversity is considered an integral component of every student's liberal arts education. Discuss your division of "diversity" and the ways in which you expect it to affect your college experience. (Colorado College)
33. Of all the activities you listed above, which one has proved to be the best, or the worst, use of your time, and why? Use one specific example to illustrate how this activity has, or has not, been worthwhile. (University of Virginia)
34. Sartre said "Hell is other people," while Streisand sang, "People who need people are the luckiest people in the world." With whom do you agree? (Amherst)
35. Discuss an important personal relationship you have had and explain how it has changed your life.
36. Who are the people who have done the most to influence your personal development and in what ways were they influential? (Carleton College)
37. Defend your least conventional belief. (University of Virginia)
38. If you were to protest something, for or against, what would it be and why.
39. Are you honorable? How do you know? (University of Virginia)
40. Relate a personal experience that caused you to discern or refine a value that you hold. (University of Virginia)
41. Relate an incident in your life in which honesty or character (or both) were at issue. (University of Virginia)

42. Describe a situation in which your values or beliefs were challenged. How did you react? (NYU)
43. As a prospective 21st century college graduate, you will enter a workforce and live in a society with an increasingly global perspective. How will your current knowledge of international issues and cultures influence your undergraduate study? (NYU)
44. If you could invent something, what would it be, and why? (University of Virginia)
45. What invention would the world be better off without, and why? (Kalamazoo College)
46. If you were to write a book, on what theme or subject matter would it be based, and why? (Stanford)
47. What is your favorite word, and why? (University of Virginia)
48. What effect has any voluntary or independent research, reading or study, work in the arts, science project, etc., had on your intellectual and personal goals in recent years? Discuss what influence this involvement has had on your academic goals. (Northwestern)
49. Describe your most important academic accomplishment or intellectual experience to date. We don't want to know about test scores or course grades; rather we want to know about your creativity, your willingness to take intellectual risks or your affinity for scholarly endeavors. (MIT)
50. Describe an intellectual experience of the past two years that has given you great satisfaction. (Amherst)
51. Do you believe that your academic record accurately reflects your abilities? Explain.
52. What confuses you most in life, and why? (University of Virginia)
53. George Washington said, "Associate with men of good quality, if you esteem your own reputation; it is better to be alone than in bad company." About which of your friends do you and your parents disagree? Why do you feel that the continued company of this friend is a good thing? (Northwestern)
54. Explain how your experiences as a teenager significantly differ from those of your friends. Include comparisons. (University of Puget Sound)
55. Imagine you have written a short story, film, or play about your last four years. Briefly describe the moment or scene that you think your audience will most remember after they have finished this autobiographical piece. What will they learn about you from that moment? (Northwestern)
56. If you were to look back on your high school years, what advice would you give to someone beginning their high school career? (Simmons)
57. Imagine that you are a "hero" or "heroine" for one day during any time period and under any circumstances. Write a creative essay describing your experience. (Notre Dame)
58. What is the best advice you ever received? Why? And did you follow it? (University of Pennsylvania)
59. Tell us about a conversation you've had that changed your perspective or was otherwise meaningful to you. (Stanford)
60. If we could only admit one more student to _____ University, why should it be you? (University of Pittsburgh)
61. Of all the things you hope or expect to gain from your college experience, which two or three would you place at the top of your list? Explain what you want to gain and why these experiences are most important to you.
62. You are about to write your future college roommate a letter. Please provide the roommate with a personal story that will give him/her some insight into your personality. (St. Mary's College, MD)
63. Tell one story about yourself that would best provide us, either directly or indirectly, with an insight into the kind of person you are. For example, the story can simply relate a personal experience, or a humorous anecdote; it can tell about an especially significant academic encounter or about an unusual test of character. The possibilities are unlimited (well, almost so). You choose. Just relax and write it.

(Princeton)

64. Please provide information that you feel will give a more complete and accurate picture of yourself, e.g., background, personal philosophy or traits, goals, etc. Be sure to describe the influence of these factors. Please be concise and limit your response to one or two pages. (Pomona College)
65. What single adjective do you think would be most frequently used to describe you by those who know you best? Briefly explain. (Stanford)
66. If you were to describe yourself by a quotation, what would the quote be? Explain your answer. (Dartmouth)
67. Create a metaphor for yourself using something you would find in your kitchen or your garage. List as many similarities or relationships between yourself and this object as you can think of, then elaborate on this comparison in an essay. Why is this object a good representation of you? (adapted from U. of Chicago)
68. Discuss how some negative experience (disability, illness, failure) has had a positive influence on your life.
69. Describe a personal habit that helps to define you as a person.
70. Discuss how a specific place can be used to help illustrate your personality.
71. If you had to describe yourself as an animal, what animal would you select and why?
72. Describe a fictional character. Be sure to point out what you do or do not like about the character and relate these attributes to yourself.
73. What have you undertaken or done on your own in the last year or two that has nothing to do with academic work? (Northwestern)
74. Discuss how your travel experiences have affected you as a student and a citizen of the world.
75. If money and family obligations left you entirely free, how and where would you spend the summer before college?
76. If you were given the opportunity to spend one year in service on behalf of others, which area would you choose? Explain what you would do and why.
77. If you had a day to spend as you wish, how would you use your time? (Carleton College)
78. Imagine that you have the opportunity to travel back through time. At what point in history would you like to stop and why? (Swarthmore)
79. What do you think has been the most important social or political movement of the twentieth century? Do you share a personal identification with this cause? (Trinity College, CT)
80. History has recorded the American Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the Sexual Revolution. Today we are witnessing a revolution in the way we receive information. What do you think will be the next great revolution, and what will be its impact on you and your society? (Northwestern)
81. If you were to develop a Mt. Rushmore representing the 20th century, whose faces would you select and why? (William and Mary)
82. If you could be a fly on the wall to observe any situation-historical, personal, or otherwise-describe what you would choose to observe and why. What would you hope to learn and how would it benefit you? (University of Pittsburgh)
83. If you could spend a year with any real or fictional person in the past, present, or future, whom would you choose? Why? (Kalamazoo College)
84. If you could hold a conversation with someone (living or deceased) you consider significant, whom would you talk to and what would you talk about? Describe your conversation. (University of Oregon)
85. If you could meet any famous person, living or dead, who would it be? Write a dialogue between you and that person.
86. If you could become another person, real or fictional, for one day, who would you become and why?

87. If you had the power to change three things in your community or in the world, what would you change and why? (Middle East Technical University in Turkey)
88. If you could change the course of a singular event in history, what event would you affect, and why? In addition, please provide insight on how you would implement your decision. (St. Mary's College, MD)
89. If you could go back and change one day in your life, what would you change and why? (Santa Clara University)
90. Please write a personal journal entry as if the date were Sept. 20, 2030. (St. Mary's College, MD.)
91. It has been said [by Andy Warhol] that in the future everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes. Describe your fifteen minutes. (New York University)
92. Recent developments in technology have revolutionized the way we gather information, communicate with one another, and even express ourselves as individuals. If there is a computer in your life, tell us how you use it. If there is not a computer in your life, tell us how you would. (William and Mary)
93. Select a technological innovation of this century and discuss its effects on your family, local community or nation. (Notre Dame)
94. Look through old family photos and pull out a few that remind you of important times or significant moments. (Remember that the impact of a moment is what makes it significant. A hike through the woods can sometimes be more significant than a birthday.) Choose one of these "Kodak Moments" to describe and explain its significance to you. Speak about the photograph and your feelings about what you see in it.
95. Attach a small photograph of something important to you and explain its significance. (Stanford)
96. You are on your dream vacation and have just finished shooting a roll of film. As you go to develop the film, the local merchant offers to make a postcard of one of your photos. Describe the photo, why you selected it and write a brief note to your friends back home. (Be sure to include where you are and what you have been doing there.) (University of the Pacific)
97. Using a piece of wire, a car window sticker, an egg carton, and any inexpensive hardware store item, create something that would solve a problem. Tell us about your creation, but don't worry: we won't require proof that it works. (Johns Hopkins)
98. Elvis is alive! Okay, maybe not, but we have been persuaded that recent Elvis sightings in highway rest areas, grocery stores and laundromats are part of a wider conspiracy involving five of the following: the metric system, the Mall of America, the crash of the Hindenberg, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, lint, J.D. Salinger, and wax fruit. Construct your own theory of how and why five of these items are related. (University of Chicago)
99. The subject of food is never far from our minds here in College Admissions. It is a topic of serious conversation this year on campus, too, with the publication of a book called *The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of our Nature*, by Leon Kass, M.D., a Chicago faculty member who teaches in the College. The book takes a philosophical look at what food, eating, and table manners have to tell us about our human estate. Compose an essay about a memorable meal you have eaten. We are especially interested in the details: the occasion, your company at this meal, its physical setting, the kinds of foods you ate, or their preparation. (University of Chicago)
100. Tell us the question you think a selective college should ask. Why? (William and Mary)