



## How to Choose a Topic for the Common App Personal Statement

One of the most intimidating aspects of the college application process is writing the Common App Personal Statement. Because many college admissions officers place a good deal of weight on the essay — more so this year because a majority of colleges and universities are test-optional — some students may become preoccupied with finding the "perfect" essay topic, while others make the mistake of writing what they think admissions officers want to read. As a result, their essays often end up being forced and inauthentic, especially if parents have a heavy hand in the process.

When they first meet with our tutors, some students are convinced that they need to write about a life-changing adventure or an enormous personal challenge. But students don't need to volunteer on a mission trip abroad or launch a non-profit organization to get into a competitive college, as New York Times columnist Frank Bruni pointed out in a column titled, "To Get to Harvard, Go to Haiti?"

Below are some tips for how to come up with compelling ideas for the Common App essay:

- Choose a topic or theme that you care about, and something the reader wouldn't know about you by looking at the rest of your application;
- Think about something you want college admissions officers to know about you — what you value, character traits, how you think about or see the world — then look for a topic you can use to showcase these attributes;
- Brainstorm with your parents or friends, look at photo albums, a diary or journal, or create a timeline tracking key milestones in your life.

Admissions officers read thousands of essays so you want yours to stand out. But the goal of the college application essay is not simply to impress the admissions office; a thoughtful, well-written essay gives colleges insight into who you really are and what's important to you.

During college info. sessions, admissions officers from Maine to California have echoed the same advice: write about something you are passionate about, and make sure your essay reveals something about you. As an admissions officer at one college said, "You are not going to make me care about something you don't care about."

So when you sit down to write your essay, and you need to start soon since the ED/EA deadline is on November 1st, remember that some of the most memorable essays are about mundane, everyday topics. In fact, you can find something to write about right in your hometown — or even in your own home.

Finally, keep in mind a piece of advice every aspiring writer has heard: "Write what you know." When it comes to the college essay, you probably know more than you realize.