

WRITING APPLICATION ESSAYS

A lot of students are nervous about writing essays for college and scholarship applications. Use these tips for successful essay writing, then practice with a sample prompt on the following page or from one of your applications.

Follow directions.

This simple tip is the most important one – pay attention to what is being asked of you. Answer the question asked of you, keep within page or word limits, and pay attention to any special formatting requests.

Write your best.

For most applications, you will only be submitting one or two written pieces. The people who read your applications assume that what they see is the best you can do. It's your job to make sure you prove them right! Your essays should be examples of your best writing.

Proofread.

This is good practice no matter what you're writing, but you'll want to make sure you proofread these essays extra carefully. Better yet, have a friend or trusted adult proofread for you, too. You'd be surprised at the number of applicants who write that they really want to go to Oregon State University on their application to Linfield College! Thorough proofreading can prevent these simple mistakes.

Be yourself.

Essays are an opportunity for the admissions and scholarship committees to learn about the parts of you and your experiences that aren't captured by the "numbers" (*i.e.* GPA and test scores). Use your essay to show them what's important to you and to let your personality shine through. For example, some students wonder if it's okay to write a humorous essay. The best advice we've heard about this is "Funny essays can be great to read, but if no one's ever told you you're funny, this isn't the time to try."

Remember you have an audience.

Most of the time you won't meet the person who is reading your application, so it can feel like you don't have an audience. It's important to remember that you do. While it's okay to write about the things that matter to you, it's always wise to consider that you don't know the politics, religion, or personal beliefs of the person who is reading your application. Choose a topic that interests you, but be careful not to offend.

Reduce, reuse, recycle.

There's no question that writing essays can be time consuming. Reduce the amount of time you spend by reusing your work when possible. Many prompts are just slightly different from one another, and with some careful editing (and proofreading!), you should be able to recycle an essay for one application into a usable essay for another.

SAMPLE ESSAY PROMPTS

Some applications require longer essays, while others ask you to briefly respond to a specific question. The following prompts and specific directions are ones you'll be most likely to see on applications to Oregon's colleges and universities, as well as the OSAC scholarship application form. You'll notice similarities among the prompts – remember to reduce, reuse, recycle.

Common Application

The Common Application is a standard application used by most independent colleges in Oregon as well as more than 800 colleges around the U.S. so you can apply to multiple schools with just one application.

Write an essay of **between 250–650 words**, using the prompt to inspire and structure your response. Remember: 650 words is your limit, not your goal. Use the full range if you need it, but don't feel obligated to do so.

Some colleges may have additional essay questions; check specific colleges for details.

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?
4. Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma - anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.
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.

Source: commonapp.org, 2019-20

Other College Applications

Many colleges ask additional essay questions. Often the admissions committee is looking to see you understand how the college would be a good fit for you and your future goals.

Why do you want to attend [college name]?

Other colleges may ask you to focus on specific skills that will help you succeed in college, such as leadership, community service or goal achievement.

In 100 words or less, describe examples of your leadership experience in which you have significantly influenced others, helped resolve disputes, or contributed to group efforts over time. Consider responsibilities to initiatives taken in or out of school.

Source: Oregon State University, oregonstate.edu/admissions/publications-and-forms

Many colleges offer students who don't meet minimum entrance requirements or who have struggled in school an opportunity to explain their specific circumstances.

The essay can be a good place to explain in more detail any ups or downs on your transcript or a significant experience that has impacted your academics. You can, however, also write a separate letter explaining those circumstances if you'd like to write your essay on another topic.

Source: Lewis & Clark College, college.lclark.edu/offices/admissions/apply/essay_topics

OSAC Scholarship Application

Completing four personal statements is required for all OSAC scholarships. Let your Personal Statements tell your story. Donors are looking for reasons why they should choose you for their scholarship award. Show the "unique you" in your Personal Statements and use correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Limit per statement is 1,000 characters (approximately 150 words).

1. What are your specific educational plans and career goals and why? What inspires you to achieve them?
2. What have you done for your family or community that you care about the most and why?
3. Describe a personal accomplishment and the strengths and skills you used to achieve it.
4. Describe a significant change or experience that has occurred in your life. How did you respond and what did you learn about yourself?

Source: OSAC, oregonstudentaid.gov/scholarships-statements-essays.aspx