

WRITING APPLICATION ESSAYS

Some college and scholarship applications require essays. Some of these ask you to briefly respond to a specific question, while others require longer responses. Use these writing tips, then practice with the sample prompts or with one from 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 University! 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.

College Application Sample Essay Prompts

Common Application

The Common Application is a standard application used by most independent colleges in Oregon as well as more than 900 colleges around the U.S. so you can apply to multiple schools with just one application. Some colleges may have additional essay questions. Opens August 1: commonapp.org

Choose one of the prompts to write an essay of *between 250–650 words*.

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.

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 commitment to diversity.

The University of Oregon values difference, and we take pride in our diverse community. Please explain how you will share your experiences, values and interests with our community. In what ways can you imagine offering your support to others?

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

Scholarship Application Sample Essay Prompts

OSAC Scholarship Application

One application for over 600 scholarships only for Oregon students. You are required to complete four personal statements for all OSAC scholarships. Some scholarships may have additional essay questions. Applications open November 1 and are due March 1: oregonstudentaid.gov/scholarships.aspx

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?

Ford Scholars

The Ford Family Foundation covers 90% of unmet need for 125 students who will be attending a 4-year college in Oregon. Applications open November 1 and are due March 1: tfff.org/scholarships

Limit per statement is 150 words.

1. What have you done for your family or community that you care about the most and why?
2. *Choose one:* Describe a skill or ability you have developed that you are proud of. How did you develop it and why is it important to you? **-or-**
Describe a topic idea or concept you find so engaging it makes you lose track of time. Why does it interest you and what do you do when you want to learn more?
3. *Choose one:* Think of the place(s) you grew up or consider home. What lessons have you learned living there and how have they shaped who you are today? **-or-**
What are you known for among people who know you well? What would you like to be known for and how will college help you achieve that?

PNACAC Scholarship

A scholarship for students with a 3.0 GPA who plan on attending a regionally accredited college or university. Due March 1: pnacac.org/pnacac-student-scholarship

Record a video (no more than one minute in length) responding to one of the following prompts.

1. What would you like to be doing in 10 years, and how does college help you get there? **-or-**
How has your college/career counselor, school counselor or advisor helped you (and/or others) in finding the right college fit and what would you like to say to them?