

## Assignment: Your Personal Essay

- Tackle the essays in steps. 1: Brainstorm & generate ideas; 2: Write 6ish paragraphs, each with the germ of an idea; 3. Extend two+ ideas into drafts; 4. Get feedback, extend, & develop. 5. Refine, get feedback, reflect.
- Which questions to use? If you are not applying to UW Seattle, then use at least two different options from the Common Application prompts. If you are applying to UW, then at least one of your drafts should use a UW prompt.
- If one of your school targets has different prompts than these (i.e., Western), go ahead and use those as your options.

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### 2018-19 Common Application Essay Prompts 650 word limit

From: [2018-2019 Common Application Essay Prompts](#)

Over 700 schools; look for member colleges at [www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org). Choose from these seven options:

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.

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### University of Washington 2019 Personal Statement Prompt 500 word limit

From: [UW 2019 Freshman Writing Section](#)

UW Instructions: At the University of Washington, we consider the college essay as our opportunity to see the person behind the transcripts and the numbers. Some of the best statements are written as personal stories. In general, concise, straightforward writing is best; good essays are often 300 to 400 words in length. UW will accept any of the five [Coalition prompts](#). Choose from the options below.

1. Tell a story from your life, describing an experience that either demonstrates your character or helped to shape it.
2. Describe a time when you made a meaningful contribution to others in which the greater good was your focus.  
Discuss the challenges and rewards of making your contribution.
3. Has there been a time when you've had a long-cherished or accepted belief challenged? How did you respond?  
How did the challenge affect your beliefs?
4. What is the hardest part of being a teenager now? What's the best part? What advice would you give younger siblings or friends (assuming they would listen to you)?
5. Submit an essay on a topic of your choice.

The [UW 2019 Freshman Writing Section](#) also has two other parts (see site for complete instructions):

- Short Response (max 300 words)

Our families and communities often define us and our individual worlds. Community might refer to your cultural group, extended family, religious group, neighborhood or school, sports team or club, co-workers, etc. Describe the world you come from and how you, as a product of it, might add to the diversity of the University of Washington.

- Additional information about yourself (max 200 words). *Tip: They mark this as optional, but do not regard it as such!*

# Tips for your Personal Essay

The schools want to know two main things: 1) who you are and 2) how you write.

DO be honest.

DO be yourself (not your impression of the perfect college applicant) and reveal something about you that the numbers, checkboxes, and lists of activities do not convey.

DO focus in on a particular incident/ activity/ object. Be specific and *show* rather than tell.

DO have something like a thesis statement. This does not have to be as formal as an argumentative or research paper; simply make sure that, somewhere near the beginning, the reader knows where you are headed.

DO answer the question you have chosen, but don't restate the question in your essay.

DO take time. After this summer, set the essay aside for a few weeks and then go back to make sure it rings true.

DO get some feedback on your essay, but make sure it still sounds like you.

DO have others proofread your final product to catch errors.

DO NOT make things up. Do not fabricate a hardship to provide drama.

DO NOT plagiarize.

DO NOT be afraid to start anew, which is not the same as starting over. Sometime you have to write to see what will work best.

DO NOT try to include everything. The essay is not an autobiography.

DO NOT write a "what the admissions committee wants to hear" essay.

DO NOT write a standard five paragraph essay. Don't worry too much about paragraphs or sections at first.

DO NOT sabotage your chances by portraying yourself as difficult, uncooperative, or closed-minded.

DO NOT use the essay as a bragfest/ puff piece.

TRY NOT make the essay *too* personal. Really shocking or traumatic events are not good topics, and if the essay is completely interior, there is no context for a reader to make sense of who you are in relation to your environment.

TRY NOT to choose a clichéd topic. College representatives read too many essays about: tough athletic contests; sports injuries; trips to developing countries; inspiring landscapes; influential grandfathers.

**Note: fabrication and plagiarism are academically dishonest, and are grounds for:**

- 1) serious disciplinary consequences at Shorewood;
- 2) rejection of you as an applicant from the school to which you are applying;
- 3) rescission of an acceptance if you do make it in to the school; and
- 4) expulsion from a school if you enroll.



**SHOREWOOD HIGH SCHOOL COLLEGE & CAREER CENTER**

[www.shorelineschools.org/swcollegeandcareer](http://www.shorelineschools.org/swcollegeandcareer)

[marianne.stephens@shorelineschools.org](mailto:marianne.stephens@shorelineschools.org)