

## **College Application Essay Brainstorming Questions from Mrs. Stephens**

*These are not the exact essay prompts. These are warmups to get your ideas flowing. Even if you could answer in one word or a few words, freewrite for a few minutes on each question.*

What keeps you up at night?

What fascinates you?

Which of your relationships have you worked at the hardest?

What is your wildest ambition?

What has been the hardest thing you have had to face?

What is the most meaningful gift you have received?

Which two or three moments from your life stand out?

Are there some of these moments that you are proud of how you handled yourself?

Which experiences have pulled you out of my comfort zone?

What turning points have you experienced?

What object do you hold dear?

Think of some thing (object, saying), some place, or some experience with deep meaning, which few people know about you.

What has made you strong/ independent/ confident/ resilient?

Imagine your life behind a heavy theater curtain. If an admissions officer pulls back the curtain just slightly to get a peek, what would they see/ learn? What do you want them to know?

What is a silver lining or uplifting aspect of something challenging about you or your life?

What obstacle are you proud of overcoming?

What comes easily for you?

What does not come so easily? Why?

## **Personal Statement Brainstorming Questions from InGenius Blog**

Academics:

- 1 What's your main academic area of interest?
- 2 Why does this matter to you?

- 3 When did this interest first start to matter to you? Was there a specific event that sparked your interest?
- 4 How did your interest evolve over time?
- 5 Did you ever face a really big challenge in continuing to learn about or study this topic?
- 6 Was this challenge the result of your gender, race, or religion?
- 7 Was this challenge the result of your family's socio-economic background or the result of the culture of the place you lived?
- 8 Would you still pursue this academic interest if you earned a very small income with your future job in this area?

Activities:

- 1 What's an extracurricular activity you do that's incredibly rare?
- 2 What's an extracurricular activity that has shaped your personality and character?
- 3 Why does this activity matter so much to you?
- 4 When did this activity first start to matter to you? Was there a specific event that sparked your interest?
- 5 How did your interest in and commitment to this activity evolve over time?
- 6 Have you done something with this activity that no one else you know has done?
- 7 Did you ever face a really big challenge in continuing to pursue this activity?
- 8 Was this challenge the result of your gender, race, or religion?
- 9 Was this challenge the result of your family's socio-economic background?
- 10 Was this challenge the result of the culture of the place you lived?

Life-events:

- 1 Is there something you've done or experienced that changed you forever in a positive way?
- 2 How did this event make you more mature, compassionate, self-aware, determined, or strong?
- 3 Is there a day from your life that you reflect on often? Why is this day so memorable to you?
- 4 Are you similar to or different from your parents / siblings? What made you this way?
- 5 When did you feel like you didn't fit in with a group of people? What made you different than others?
- 6 Is there something (non-academic / extracurricular) that you devote A LOT of time to? Why do you do this?
- 7 What have you done that didn't earn you praise, attention, or success?
- 8 What makes you feel like your life is meaningful and important to you?
- 9 What is one thing that you would never change about yourself or your life experiences?

**InGenius Tips on Narrowing Down**

Once you've created your list of topics, you'll need to start narrowing them down. For each topic, ask yourself:

- 1 Is this a topic I care about?
- 2 Is this a topic that I've cared about for more than 1-2 years?
- 3 Is this a topic I think shows something about my character and personality?
- 4 Is this a topic that shows something impressive and / or unique about my achievements or activities?
- 5 Is this topic memorable to me? Do I think about this fairly often in my life?
- 6 Am I the only student in my high school class who would write about this topic?
- 7 Does this topic show only positive things about my character, maturity, and perspective

on life?

8 Would I be interested in reading about this topic if someone else wrote about it?

9 Could I write 10 pages about this topic (far more than you'll need to write, of course)?

If the answer to most or all these questions is "yes!" you've probably landed on an ideal topic for you! And get started with writing your personal statement!