

College Essay Topics

1. What have you undertaken or done on your own in the last year or two that has nothing to do with academic work? (Northwestern)
2. Imagine that you have the opportunity to travel back through time. At what point in history would you like to stop and why? (Swarthmore)
3. What is the best advice you ever received? Why? And did you follow it? (University of Pennsylvania)
4. Select a creative work -- a novel, a film, a poem, a musical piece, a painting or other work of art -- that has influenced the way you view the world and the way you view yourself. Discuss the work and its effect on you. (New York University)
5. What do you think has been the most important social or political movement of the twentieth century? Do you share a personal identification with this cause? (Trinity College, CT)
6. If you were to look back on your high school years, what advice would you give to someone beginning their high school career? (Simmons)
7. It has been said [Andy Warhol] that “in the future everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes.” Describe your fifteen minutes. (New York University)
8. What single adjective do you think would be most frequently used to describe you by those who know you best? Briefly explain. (Stanford)

9. Describe an intellectual experience of the past two years that has given you great satisfaction.

(Amherst)

10. Create a question we haven't asked and then provide the answer. (Something to that effect anyway. Dartmouth used this a few years ago. I had a student who posed the following question and wrote a seven-page response: "Write about a time when life threw you a curve and how you handled it.")

11. If you were to describe yourself by a quotation, what would the quote be? Explain your answer. (Dartmouth)

12. Tell us about the neighborhood that you grew up in and how it helped shape you into the kind of person you are today. (Yale and the University of Chicago)

13. You've just written a 300-page autobiography. Send us page 217. (University of Pennsylvania)

14. If you could be a "fly on the wall" to observe any situation -- historical, personal, or otherwise -- describe what you would choose to observe and why. What would you hope to learn and how would it benefit you? (University of Pittsburgh/94)

15. If we could only admit one more student to the University of Pittsburgh, why should it be you? (University of Pittsburgh/94)

16. Describe a risk that you have taken and discuss its impact on your life. (Kalamazoo College/93)

17. If you could spend a year with any real or fictional person in the past, present, or future, whom would you choose? Why? (Kalamazoo College/93)
18. What invention would the world be better off without, and why? (Kalamazoo)
19. Write your own essay question and answer it. (Kalamazoo College/93)
20. If you had the power to change three things in your community or in the world, what would you change and why? (Middle East Technical University in Turkey/93, provided by an exchange student)
21. If you had the gift of telepathy, the ability to read other people's minds, would you use this gift or not? Explain. (Middle East Technical University/93)
22. Tell us about one of the best conversations you've had. (Stanford/93)
23. If you were to write a book, on what theme or subject matter would it be based, and why? (Stanford/93)
24. Tell us how a particular book, play, film, piece of music, dance performance, scientific theory or experiment or work of art has influenced you. If you choose a novel, film or play, assume we know the plot. (Notre Dame/93)
25. Select a technological innovation of this century and discuss its effects on your family, local community or nation. (Notre Dame/93)

26. Read Annie Dillard's *An American Childhood*. Choose one of her observations or ideas and write a creative, reflective or provocative essay. (Notre Dame/93)

27. Read Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail." Drawing upon personal experience, write a creative, reflective or provocative essay. (Notre Dame/93)

28. Attach a small photograph of something important to you and explain its significance. (Stanford)

29. Tell us about a conversation you've had that changed your perspective or was otherwise meaningful to you. (Stanford)

30. Evaluate a significant experience or achievement that has special meaning to you. (Harvard)

31. Tell one story about yourself that would best provide us, either directly or indirectly, with an insight into the kind of person you are. For example, the story can simply relate a personal experience, or a humorous anecdote; it can tell about an especially significant academic encounter or about an unusual test of character. The possibilities are unlimited (well, almost so). You choose. Just relax and write it. (Princeton)

32. Sartre said "Hell is other people," while Streisand sang, "People who need people are the luckiest people in the world." With whom do you agree? (Amherst)

33. If you could hold a conversation with someone (living or deceased) you consider significant, whom would you talk to and what would you talk about? Describe your conversation. (University of Oregon)

34. Describe your hometown and how you are a product of this environment. (Puget Sound)
35. You are on your dream vacation and have just finished shooting a roll of film. As you go to develop the film, the local merchant offers to make a postcard of one of your photos. Describe the photo, why you selected it and write a brief note to your friends back home. (Be sure to include where you are and what you have been doing there.) (University of the Pacific)
36. Select any issue that is of importance to you and discuss your views. (New College of University of South Florida)
37. Describe how a piece of art, a work of literature, or a dramatic presentation has had a significant impact on your intellectual development and your appreciation of the fine arts. (Santa Clara University)
38. If you could go back and change one day in your life, what would you change and why? (Santa Clara University)
39. Tell us about the most embarrassing moment of your life. (Santa Clara University)
40. Seattle Pacific University seeks to admit students who will best succeed in and benefit from an environment where learning and Christian faith are integrated (although a profession of Christian faith is not required for admission). How would enrolling at SPU help you accomplish your educational and personal goals? (Seattle Pacific University)
41. Why are you interested in attending Willamette? (Willamette)

42. What are the responsibilities of an educated person? (University of Puget Sound)
43. Explain how your experiences as a teenager significantly differ from those of your friends. Include comparisons. (University of Puget Sound)
44. Who are the people who have done the most to influence your personal development and in what ways were they influential? (Carleton College)
45. Ask and answer the one important question which you wish we had asked. (Carleton College)
46. If you had a day to spend as you wish, how would you use your time? (Carleton College)
47. At Colorado College, diversity is considered an integral component of every student's liberal arts education. Discuss your division of "diversity" and the ways in which you expect it to affect your college experience. (Colorado College)
48. Name one book you have read in the past year, describe your reason for considering this book significant and what you gained from reading it. (Lewis and Clark College)
49. Describe your most important academic accomplishment or intellectual experience to date. We don't want to know about test scores or course grades, rather we want to know about your creativity, your willingness to take intellectual risks or your affinity for scholarly endeavors. (MIT)

50. Tell us about yourself. (University of California)

51. Please provide information that you feel will give a more complete and accurate picture of yourself, e.g., background, personal philosophy or traits, goals, etc. Be sure to describe the influence of these factors. Please be concise and limit your response to one or two pages.

(Pomona College)

52. The subject of food is never far from our minds here in College Admissions. It is a topic of serious conversation this year on campus, too, with the publication of a book called *The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of our Nature*, by Leon Kass, M.D., a Chicago faculty member who teaches in the College. The book takes a philosophical look at what food, eating, and table manners have to tell us about our human estate. Compose an essay about a memorable meal you have eaten. We are especially interested in the details: the occasion, your company at this meal, its physical setting, the kinds of foods you ate, or their preparation. (University of Chicago)

53. Discuss a significant experience or achievement that has influenced your life.

54. Discuss how some negative experience (disability, illness, failure) has had a positive influence on your life.

55. Discuss an important personal relationship you have had and explain how it has changed your life.

56. Discuss how your travel experiences have affected you as a student and a citizen of the world.

57. Describe a personal habit that helps to define you as a person.
58. Discuss the most important piece of advice you have ever received and explain its effect on your life.
59. Discuss how a specific place can be used to help illustrate your personality.
60. Select three adjectives that describe you and explain.
61. Describe a fictional character. Be sure to point out what you do or do not like about the character and relate these attributes to yourself.
62. Discuss how something you have read has affected you or changed your mind about something.
63. Discuss an activity, interest, experience, or achievement in your life (this could be a book, movie, or an activity or experience at work, home, or at school) that has been particularly meaningful for you. (University of Florida)
64. How has your family history, culture, or environment influenced who you are? (University of Florida)
65. What qualities or unique characteristics do you possess that would allow you to contribute to the University community? (Florida State)
66. Pick a story of local, national, or international importance from the front page of any

newspaper. Identify your source and give the date the article appeared. Then use your sense of humor, sense of outrage, sense of justice—or just plain good sense—to explain why the story engages your attention. (University of Chicago)

67. At a crucial point in his career, the African-American writer James Baldwin withdrew to a secluded spot in the Swiss Alps. “There,” he later wrote, “in that absolute alabaster landscape, armed with two Bessie Smith records and a typewriter, I began to try to recreate the life that I had first known as a child and from which I had spent so many years in flight... It was Bessie Smith, through her tone and her cadence, who helped me to dig back to the way I myself must have spoken... and to remember the things I had heard and seen and felt. I had buried them very deep.” Inevitable, certain things—songs, household objects, familiar smells—bring us instantly back to some past moment in our lives. Start an essay by describing one such thing and see where it takes you. (University of Chicago)

68. Modern improvisational comedy originated in Hyde Park on the campus of the University of Chicago with the Compass Players. Some of the Players went on to form the Second City comedy troupe, precursor to the Saturday Night Live show on TV. With this essay option we invite you to test your own improvisational powers by putting together a story, play, or dialogue that meets all of the following requirements:

1. You must begin with the sentence, “Many years later, he remembered his first experience with ice.”
2. All five senses—sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell—have to figure in the plot.
3. You have to mention the University of Chicago, but please, no accounts of erstwhile high

school students applying to the University—this is fiction, not autobiography.

4. These items must be included: a new pair of socks, a historical landmark, a spork (the combination of spoon and fork frequently seen among airline flatware), a domesticated animal, and the complete works of William Shakespeare.

Have fun, and try to keep your brilliance and wit to three pages max. (U of Chicago)

69. One of Ramapo's goals is to increase your capacity for learning and to teach you to think "outside the box." Describe an experience that has had a significant impact on your intellectual development. (Ramapo College)

70. React to a crisis or critical moment in your life at which time thinking as usual was no longer possible. Such a situation may have occurred after the death of a loved one, a drastic move from one part of the country to another, or during a public catastrophe. Do not feel limited by these examples. Describe the event and tell us how it changed your thought process. (Ramapo College)

71. Write about a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence. (Hope College)

72. There are many ways to define words like diversity and multi-cultural. However, what defines our culture as much as anything is the food we eat. Please explain how food plays an important part in your family's culture. Provide examples as to how food defines you, your family, and your ethnicity. Be as specific as possible.

73. Write about some issue of local, national, or international concern and its significance to you.

(Hope College)

74. Write about something that is important to you. (Hope College)

75. Community service can be a valuable part of the college experience. If you were to devote one year of service to a volunteer project, what would it be, and what would you hope to accomplish? (Goucher)

76. What do you think has been the most important social or political movement of the 20th century? Do you share a personal identification with this cause? (Goucher)

77. Discuss some issue of personal, local, or national concern and its importance to you. (Hood)

78. If you could travel through time and interview any historical figure, whom would you choose, what would you ask, and why? (Hood)

79. Explain why and how you would, if given the opportunity, change a decision you made in the past. (Salisbury State)

80. Describe how the character of a literary work you have read recently has made a lasting impression on you. (College of Notre Dame of Maryland)

81. Optimistic futurists envision a world without boundaries; an interdependent global society. Write about your personal impression of this idea. (College of Notre Dame of Maryland)

82. Select two people who have been role models in your life and describe why. (College of

Notre Dame of Maryland)

83. State in a well-written essay: a) your reason for selecting Loyola College and b) your personal goals and professional plans upon completion of college. (Loyola)

84. You are encouraged to use the space below to supply any additional information or background you believe will be of assistance or service in the consideration of your application. We would also be interested in knowing how you would analyze your academic strengths and weaknesses as a potential University student. (Towson State University)

85. Please complete a one-page personal statement and submit it with your application. (James Madison University)

86. How would you describe yourself as a human being? What quality do you like best in yourself and what do you like least? What quality would you most like to see flourish and which would you like to see wither?" (Bates College)

87. Do you believe there's a generation gap? Describe the differences between your generation and others. (Denison University)

88. Write a brief essay about your activities, interests, achievements and talents. 89. The goal of the essay is to help us to get to know you as an individual. Point out your strengths, and explain any inconsistencies in your record.

90. Describe a humorous experience you have had.

91. Please write about a life experience that has influenced your intellectual and personal growth.
92. If you had to formulate the perfect admissions question, what would it be, and how would you answer it?
93. Briefly describe how [the name of the college] can help you to achieve your academic and personal goals.
94. Choose one of the following topics about which you would like to write: your family, friends, or another person who has influenced you, the best and worst features of your secondary school, a recent development in your community, a scientific or other problem which you would like to solve, travel or living experiences in other.
95. Select a technological innovation of this century and discuss its effects on your family, local community or nation. (Notre Dame)
96. Look through old family photos and pull out a few that remind you of important times or significant moments. (Remember that the impact of a moment is what makes it significant. A hike through the woods can sometimes be more significant than a birthday.) Choose one of these "Kodak Moments" to describe and explain its significance to you. Speak about the photograph and your feelings about what you see in it.
97. If you were to develop a Mt. Rushmore representing the 20th century, whose faces would you select and why? (William and Mary)
98. History has recorded the American Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the Sexual

Revolution. Today we are witnessing a revolution in the way we receive information. What do you think will be the next great revolution, and what will be its impact on you and your society?
(Northwestern)

99. Using a piece of wire, a car window sticker, an egg carton, and any inexpensive hardware store item, create something that would solve a problem. Tell us about your creation, but don't worry: we won't require proof that it works. (Johns Hopkins)

100. Princeton's unofficial motto is "Princeton in the Nation's Service and in the Service of All Nations." In what ways do you imagine using your talents and convictions in service to communities—large or small—during your lifetime? (Princeton)

101. "The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when one contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries to comprehend only a little of this mystery every day." ~ Albert Einstein. Write about a personal experience or an aspect of the world that has engaged your curiosity or inspired awe in you. (Princeton)

102. What historical event of the 1990's has most influenced your perspective on the world or your approach to life, and how? (Princeton)

103. Tell us about a person who influenced your life in a significant way. (Princeton)

104. What is your favorite quotation and why? (Princeton)

105. Elvis is alive! Okay, maybe not, but we have been persuaded that recent Elvis sightings in

highway rest areas, grocery stores and laundromats are part of a wider conspiracy involving five of the following: the metric system, the Mall of America, the crash of the Hindenberg, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, lint, J.D. Salinger, and wax fruit. Construct your own theory of how and why five of these items are related. (University of Chicago)