

Unit 2—Personal Narrative/College Essay

Writing Assignment: College Essay/Personal Statement

The next essay you are about to begin essentially serves two functions as part of the course curriculum. It's a pragmatic endeavor in the hope that many of you—especially seniors—will use the essay for one or more of your college applications. On the other hand, it is also another attempt at writing a personal narrative essay as we've thoroughly discussed the stylistic features and purposes of this type of writing. There are a variety of options for this assignment, all of which have validity as part of the unit, regardless of whether or not you submit your essay to a college.

This type of essay is perhaps the most daunting; you are asked to create an honest, vivid approximation of yourself on paper in a manner that engages your reader and provides a deeper understanding of you as an individual. You will read and hear many examples of other students' attempts at personal statements. We will also survey tips, advice, and opinions from guidance and admission counselors, and others familiar with the nuances of the college admissions process. You will have ample opportunity to reflect on yourself as a person, and tap into creative thoughts to find the right voice for your audience.

Below is a list of choices for writing the college essay in this class. I've divided the prompts into categories in the hope that you will address a prompt that fits the school(s) where you expect to apply. There is an alternative essay for those who have already written their college essay, those applying solely to a California State University, community college or junior college, as well as anyone who is unsure about which other prompt to select.

This essay should be between 500-600 words, depending on the prompt you choose. The essay must be typed in 12-point font and double-spaced.

Note that these responses are relatively short. Hence our practice with the short form Why I Write essay. This type of writing requires focus, specificity, and exceptionally thoughtful reflection. Use everything we've practiced thus far regarding specific detail, description, writing lean prose, organization and structure. Remember, you are trying to construct a vivid, three-dimensional portrait of yourself in eloquent, convincing language. Start with what you know; focus on what's important to you, including changes/events/relationships that have been truly meaningful to you. The subject of this essay is you, period.

Due dates TBA. NB: if you are currently working on a college essay you must see me about how that may or may not become this assignment. Do not assume you don't need to write anything if you've already written a college essay. Also, we will spend a reasonable amount of time on this particular essay, but not at the expense of other units.

You may arrange to meet with me if your interest in revising your essay extends beyond the time allotted for this unit.

Prompts:

1. University of California prompts (see page 3)—choose one of the prompts and write a 600-word response.
2. Common Application—choose one of the prompts listed below and address it in a 500-word response:
 - a. Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.
 - b. Discuss some issue of personal, local, national, or international concern and its importance to you.
 - c. Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.
 - d. Describe a character in fiction, a historical figure, or a creative work (as in art, music, science, etc.) that has had an influence on you, and explain that influence.
 - e. A range of academic interests, personal perspectives, and life experiences adds much to the educational mix. Given your personal background, describe an experience that illustrates what you would bring to the diversity in a college community, or an encounter that demonstrated the importance of diversity to you.
 - f. Topic of your choice.
3. Program/Department Specific—address the prompt below in a 500-word response:
 - a. Briefly state your reason for wanting to attend _____ and how you came to select your major.
4. Prompt of your choice (school specific).
5. Statement of Personal Philosophy—system of thought/values to which you adhere described and/or illuminated in 500 words.

Personal Statement Questions on the 2008-09 Undergraduate Application

The University of California has approved new prompts for the Personal Statement of the 2008-09 application for undergraduate admission.

Applicants will now be asked to respond to two prompts instead of three, using a maximum of 1,000 words total. The first prompt for transfer students remains the same as last year. The Additional Comments box that follows the Personal Statement has been expanded to 500 words to accommodate information students aren't able to address sufficiently elsewhere in the application.

University faculty approved the revisions to the prompts with the goal of eliciting information from students that is more helpful in the comprehensive review process. Admissions Directors hope the broadness of these questions will result in better answers – and better clues about who students really are.

The new prompts are posted at

http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/admissions/undergrad_adm/apply/how_apply/personal_statement.html .

***** THE PROMPTS *****

Instructions:

- Respond to both prompts, using a maximum of 1,000 words total.
- You may allocate the word count as you wish. If you choose to respond to one prompt at greater length, we suggest your shorter answer be no less than 250 words.
- Stay within the word limit as closely as you can. A little over—1,012 words, for example—is fine.

Prompt #1 (Freshman):

Describe the world you come from – for example, your family, community or school – and tell us how your world has shaped your dreams and aspirations.

Prompt # 1 (Transfer):

What is your intended major? Discuss how your interest in the subject developed and describe any experience you have had in the field – such as volunteer work, internships and employment, participation in student organizations and activities – and what you have gained from your involvement.

Prompt #2:

Tell us about a personal quality, talent, accomplishment, contribution or experience that is important to you. What about this quality or accomplishment makes you proud and how does it relate to the person you are?

Note: There is a UC Berkeley step-by-step tutorial on how to write your personal statement online at: <http://students.berkeley.edu/apa/personalstatement/index.htm>