



SOAR

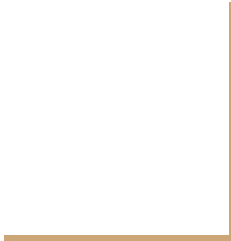
College Boot Camp

Summer/2025



College Essay Writing

July 7, 2025





Hillary Dickman

Senior Assistant Director of Admission
at Colorado College

"When it comes to the personal statement, which prompt you choose doesn't mean much to me. In fact, I generally don't look at the prompt when I'm reading the personal statement – I just dive right into the essay! I want to know how you became who you are. **What matters to you.** How you show up in your community, and how you'll show up on our campus."



CONSIDER

1.) What's "normal" at your high school, may not be "normal" among all the applicants to this college/university (in other words: you're in a bubble)

Example 1: Your family immigrated to this country and you've faced challenges as a result— but keep in mind that this may not be true generally

2.) There's probably more complexity to be found within your intersecting identities



**COLLEGE
ADMISSION
OFFICERS ARE
ASSEMBLING A
COMMUNITY**

The reader is interested in 4 things. This will make them to dive right into your essay. These 4 **PERSONAL STATEMENTS** are great for when you're sending your College Essay to Multiple Schools in once.



**DEMONSTRATE COLLABORATION
OR RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING**

Avoid Common Topics:

LIST OF COMMON TOPICS

ANIME	LACROSSE	SINGING
BASEBALL	MARCHING BAND	SKIING
BASKETBALL	MISSION TRIP	SOCCER
BOY SCOUT	JUNIOR STATEMENT OF	SPEECH
CODING	AMERICA	SWIMMING
CROSS COUNTRY	MARTIAL ARTS	THEATER
DANCE	MENTORING	TENNIS
DEBATE	MOCK TRIAL CLUB	TRACK & FIELD
FILMMAKING	MODEL UNITED NATIONS	TUTORING
FOOTBALL	PHOTOGRAPHY	VIDEO GAMES
FBLA	RELIGIOUS GROUPS	VOLLEY BALL
GIRL SCOUT	ROBOTICS	WATER POLO
GOLF	RUNNING	YEAR BOOK

Keep these topics in your activities' list/Supplement Essay instead..

Common App--Prompts

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. [No change]

- Broadest topic--still means you have to write about a singular moment
- DO NOT simply repeat something from your resume
- That has to be a reason why your story only fits this prompt. If it can go somewhere else with some editing, do that.

Prompts

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? [Revised]

- DO NOT write about too big of a failure (nothing illegal)
- DO NOT write about a time when you did not make a sports team (unless it is the Olympics/you are the only one in NJ who plays the sport)
- Write about a time when you *actually* failed (getting a B on an English test does NOT count)

Prompts

3. Reflect on a time when you *questioned* or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your *thinking*? What *was the outcome*?

- This can be as serious as you want it to be. It does not need to be about politics, religion, or something else life-changing.
- Make sure you answer all parts of the question. Start with a single narrative, then say why, then say the outcome
- The old prompt asked if you would do it again

Prompt

4. Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?

- 4 allows you to turn positivity in your life circumstances — as opposed to adversity — into an opportunity to showcase your capacity for gratitude and how gratitude shapes your character and actions.
 - Begin by reflecting on moments when someone's unexpected act of kindness caught you off guard.
 - Was it the sheer selflessness of the act, or was it the combination of the gesture and its unexpected nature that evoked gratitude?
 - How did this act redefine your understanding of family, friendship, community, or even the benevolence of strangers?

Prompt

5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or *realization* that *sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.*

- DON'T write about bar/bat mitzvahs, quinceaneras, Eagle Scout awards, driver's tests or anything else that happens to a TON of people every year.
- This prompt is the most frequent place for tragedies. If you want to write about something like that, go for it, but remember to make it a story of strength, not weakness. You're not searching for pity.
- Again, make sure it is specific and meaningful (and legal)
- This prompt was the 2nd most popular in 2018-19

Two more!

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?

- If you say Facebook or Netflix, be careful!
- This might be something that was inspired by your time in quarantine

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.

- If you have strong creative writing skills, this might be a good option
- This was the most popular one in 2018-19



Reminders

The essay should be **extraordinarily unique**. If you think your story could happen to someone else, think about how to make it more personal.

You are always trying to convince a person/group that you belong to the university/college.

You don't want pity--you want them to think you would be a **great** person to have on campus. Sometimes you can do that through humor and grit; sometimes you can prove yourself by simply using a semi-colon correctly.

WORD LIMIT: 650

Tips

- You might need to write more before you reduce it---find your story!
- This is a PROCESS. You cannot WING it.
- Be GENUINE. When you make up things/over exaggerate, you are setting yourself up for failure.
- Make sure you are answering all of the prompt (not just the first sentence).
- Be sincere, honest, and tell YOUR story.
- Try to illustrate growth or maturity
- Show - don't tell. Use one or two specific, detailed examples

Resources

US News and World Report

- [Quiz - Should this go in a college essay?](#)
- [10 Tips for Writing the College Application Essay](#)
- [Learn how to write a great college essay \(20 min\)](#)

College Board - Essay Resources

- <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/essays>

Videos

- [Expert Advice from Admissions Officers](#)
- Watch the short videos from this link:
<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/essays>

Samples

Common App Essay

- <http://www.commonapp.org/whats-appening/application-updates/common-application-announces-2017-2018-essay-prompts>

Sample Essays

Sample Essay Link: <https://www.shemmassianconsulting.com/blog/college-essay-examples>

Sample Essay: Khan Academy (with feedback):

<https://www.khanacademy.org/college-careers-more/college-admissions/applying-to-college/admissions-essays/a/sample-essay-1-with-admissions-feedback>