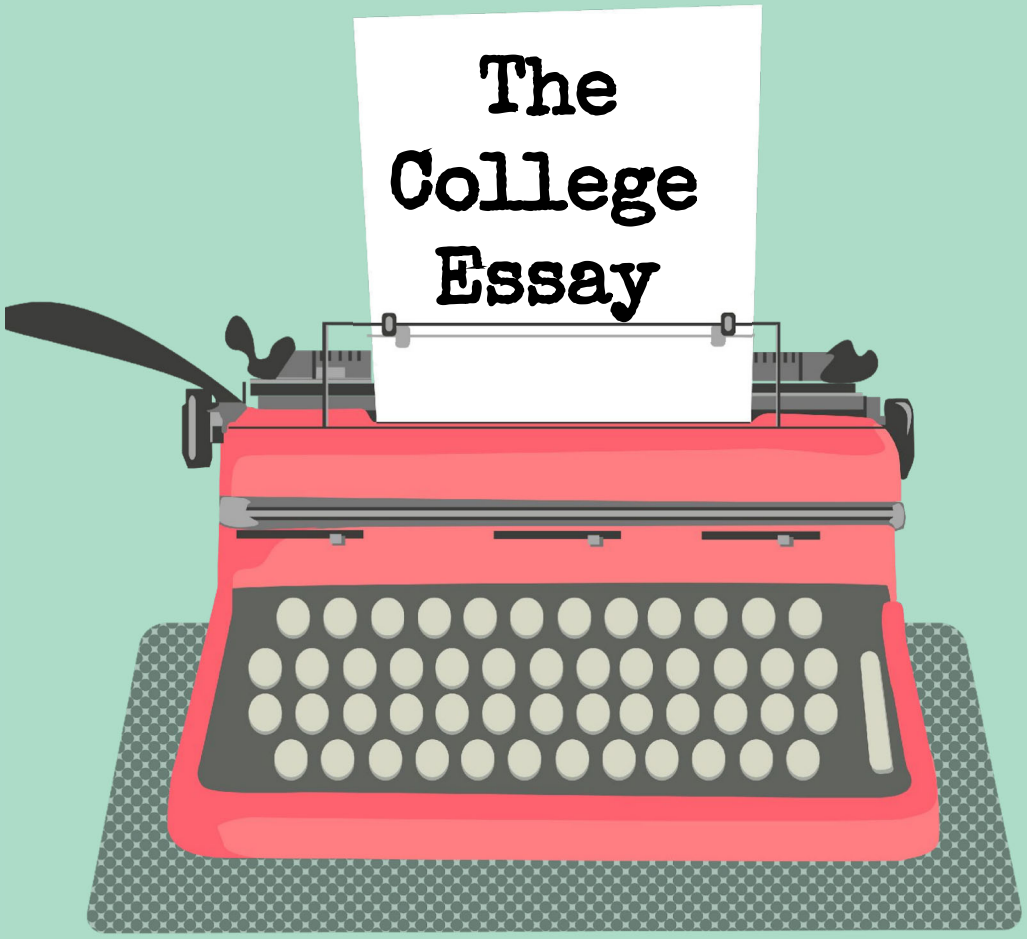
The College Essay



Tracy Betts
Seneca HS English Teacher

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The College Essay: WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

This is your opportunity to showcase WHO YOU ARE and why YOU would enrich their school community.

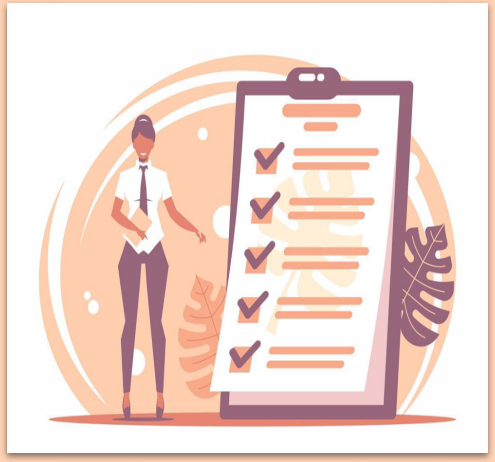
A lot of applicants have similar GPA, extracurricular involvement, and SAT scores; your essay is your chance to set you apart.

This is your time to tell your "story" to the admission officers.

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The College Essay: TIMELINE

What will students do at Seneca?



English 3—End of Year

- brainstorming, tips, sample essays, rough draft

English 4—Beginning of Year

- revise, edit, get ready to send

What can YOU do NOW?

Research essay questions/topics for all schools to which you are applying.

What can YOU do THIS SUMMER?

Refine and revise your essay … or even start over!

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The College Essay: DOs

- ➔ Tell a story
- ➔ Follow the "What, So What, Now What" format
- ➔ Use descriptive language
- ➔ Be authentic
- ➔ Adhere to the word limit
- ➔ Highlight something that isn't already shared elsewhere in the application
- ➔ Write several drafts over a few months and get feedback
- ➔ Keep in mind … you don't have to have an extraordinary life experience to write an extraordinary essay!

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The College Essay: DON'Ts

When it comes to college essay writing, avoid the following:

- Using AI (ChatGPT) to write the essay
- Retelling information that is already evident in your application (GPA, extracurriculars, volunteerism)
- Writing about overused topics (sports injury, lost the big game/won the big game, getting your license, pets)
- Trying to "sound smart" with the overuse of a thesaurus
- Waiting until the last minute to start
- Restricting the essay to a traditional five paragraph essay



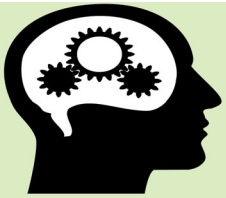
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The College Essay: PROMPTS

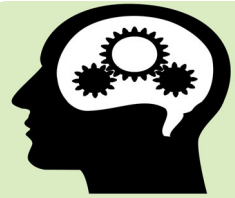
- Over 1000 colleges/universities use the **Common App** essay prompts for admissions.
- Over 150 colleges/universities use **Coalition App** essay prompts for admissions.
- Some schools create their own essay questions, so be sure to research your schools of interest!



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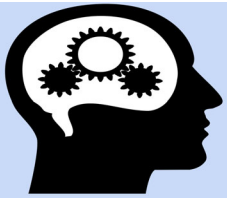


Common App Essay Prompts 2025-2026

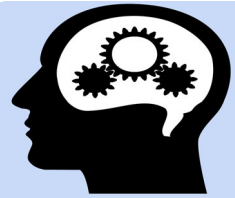


1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
2. The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount 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. 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?
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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Coalition App Essay Prompts 2025-2026



1. Tell a story from your life, describing an experience that either demonstrates your character or helped to shape it.

2. What interests or excites you? How does it shape who you are now or who you might become in the future?

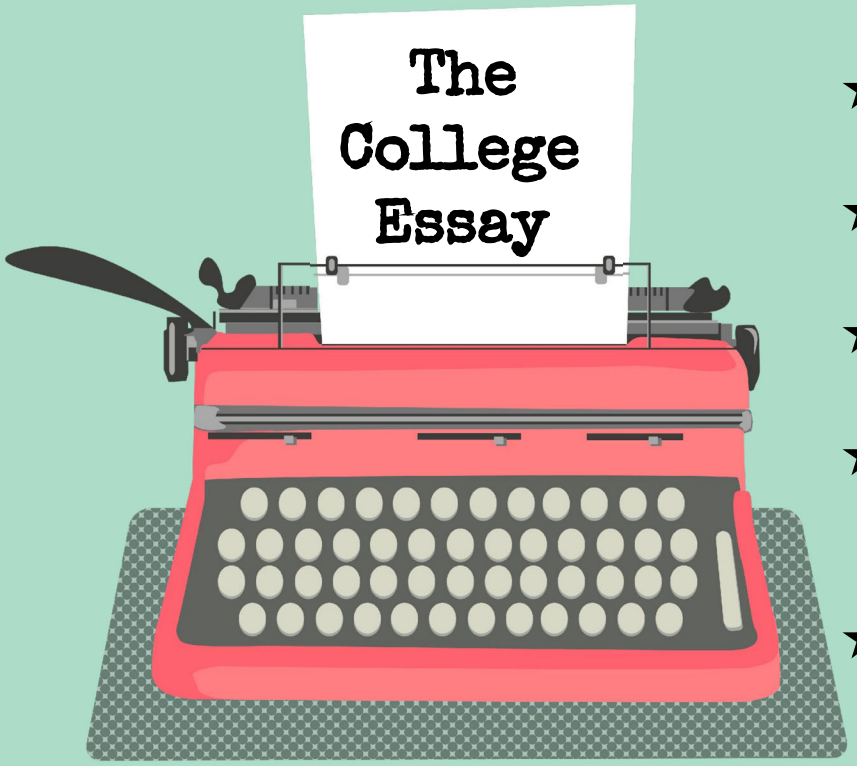
3. Describe a time when you had a positive impact on others. What were the challenges? What were the rewards?

4. Has there been a time when an idea or belief of yours was questioned? How did you respond? What did you learn?

5. What success have you achieved or obstacle have you faced? What advice would you give a sibling or friend going through a similar experience?

6. Submit an essay on a topic of your choice.

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NEXT STEPS ...

- ★ Read some example essays (in packet provided)
- ★ Check out additional online resources
- ★ Start brainstorming ideas for your college essay
- ★ Consider taking the College Application Essay Writing course this summer
- ★ Stay focused in your English 3 and English 4 classes to write your best essay!

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