College Application Essay Assignment

Many of you will be asked to write a personal essay this year either for admission to a college/university or for consideration for a scholarship. Typically, these assignments force you to focus on **yourself**, **your values and beliefs**, the **experiences and people who have influenced you**, and **your personal and professional goals**. Your assignment is to begin the process of thinking about what you will write for your postgraduate plans. In addition to providing me with an initial sample of your writing ability, you should also be able to use some or all of what you do for this assignment for your college and/or scholarship applications.

If you have not already done so, you are to go online to the school(s) to which you expect to apply and print the required essay topics. If your school does not have essay requirements or you do not plan to attend college, choose from the topics included in this packet. Your essay should be **500 words**, and you should adhere to standard MLA format: one-inch margins, proper heading, double-spaced text, twelve-point Times New Roman font, etc. In your final draft, you are to use the topic as your title and put the name of the college in parentheses.

What is the purpose of college essays?

As an admissions officer, you realize that you can’t accept every student who applies. Since the goal is to select students who will be able to both benefit from and contribute to the educational experience at the school, the admissions officer looks for indications that the student is mentally prepared, interested in learning, and has ideas and energy to help him or her meet the challenges of college. The admissions officer looks for essays that seem genuine and that provide a real sense of who the student is. And since it may be difficult to choose among many qualified applicants and many similar admission essays, he or she keeps an eye out for any characteristic of an essay that makes the student stand out as a candidate—whether an ingenious opening, well chosen details, anecdotes about past experience that are especially appropriate, or persuasive language.

Potential Topics:

**Potential Topics from the Common Application**, *for an essay that “helps [admissions officers] become acquainted with you as a person and a student, apart from courses, grades, test scores, and other objective data. It will also demonstrate your ability to organize your thoughts and express yourself.”*

1. Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.
2. Discuss some issue of personal, local, national, or international concern and its importance to you.
3. Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.
4. 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.
5. 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.

**Potential Topics from Wake Forest**, *designed to give “insight into your character and intellect.”*

1. “In the republic of mediocrity, genius is dangerous.” ~Robert Ingersoll / How are you dangerous?
2. “Have you learned the lessons only of those who admired you, and were tender with you, and stood aside for you? Have you not learned great lessons from those who braced themselves against you, and disputed passage with you?” ~Walt Whitman
3. “I hate quotations. Tell me what you know.” ~Ralph Waldo Emerson

**Potential Topic from Duke**

1. Consider the books, essays, poems, or journal articles you have read over the last year or two, either for school or leisure. Please discuss the way in which one of them has changed your understanding of the world, other people, or yourself.

**Potential Topics from UGA**

1. Choose an intellectual or creative opportunity from your high school years that you have enjoyed and highlight how you have grown personally because of the experience.
2. “Each friend represents a world in us, a world possibly not born until they arrive, and it is only by this meeting that a new world is born.” ~Anais Nin / From freshman year to now, we know that you have interacted with a number of people in your high school who are different from you and have affected who you are now. Tell us about one such relationship, with a focus on the details of your interaction, not the person.
3. Tell us an interesting or amusing story about yourself that you have not already shared in your application.
4. “Music expresses that which cannot be put into words and cannot remain silent.” ~Victor Hugo / If someone were to look at your music collection right now, they would probably know a great deal about who you are. Individuals are drawn to music, and each song conveys something about that person. Select a musical piece to be your theme song.

**Potential Topics from UVA**

1. What work of art, music, science, mathematics, or literature has surprised, unsettled, or challenged you, and in what way?
2. What is your favorite word and why?
3. Describe the world you come from and how that world shaped who you are.
4. Discuss something you secretly like but pretend not to, or vice versa.
5. “We might say that we were looking for global schemas, symmetries, universal and unchanging laws—and what we have discovered is the mutable, the ephemeral, the complex.” Support or challenge Nobel Prize winner Ilya Prigogine’s assertion.