



Wilbraham & Monson Academy College Counseling

Class of 2021 Summer Writing Assignment: The College Essay

In addition to the summer work assignments outlined on the WMA website, members of the graduating class must write their college essay — or better yet, a personal narrative — over the summer. The multiple demands on WMA students at the beginning of the senior year can make it challenging to find the time to write a self-reflective and thoughtful piece. To ensure that every senior completes a high-quality narrative in a timely manner, well in advance of college application deadlines, ***every member of the graduating class will be required to submit a carefully edited and revised college essay to his/her college counselor at the beginning of the school year.***

As Mr. Reeder discussed in the June 4 and June 11 “Common-App Chalk Talk” webinars, the college essay presents each of you with a unique opportunity to connect with admission officers in a meaningful and memorable way. The ultimate goal is to create a personal narrative — one that is uniquely yours — that will leave “admission officers feeling like they’ve had a conversation with you and want to learn more,” as described on the Yale University website.

The “Common-App Chalk Talk” serves to launch your personal narrative in a thoughtful and effective manner. As you employ the strategies and exercises described by Mr. Reeder, you begin an effective process of self-reflection by starting small. The singular moments, memories, feelings and images you identify as meaningful are also the seeds of a compelling personal narrative.

This approach in self-reflection will help to remove the biggest hurdle for many students, the notion of: “I don’t have anything to write about!” Now you do, so write, and don’t concern yourself at this point with the “worthiness” of your ideas or the quality of writing - simply write. Write a little (or a lot!) each day and be sure to write from inside the experience, keeping the reader close as you describe your recollections, images, thoughts and feelings in a sensory manner.

Below you will find a list of the 2020-2021 Common Application essay topics. Since most colleges and universities accept the Common Application, seniors can usually write one main college essay in response to one of these topics. Many colleges will also require additional supplemental essays, making it even more important that students use the summer months to focus their efforts on this main essay. If time allows, students are also encouraged to prepare drafts of any supplemental essays.

2020-2021 Common Application Essay Prompts:

The essay demonstrates your ability to write clearly and concisely on a selected topic and helps you distinguish your own voice. What do you want the readers of your application to know about you apart from courses, grades, and test scores? Choose the option that best helps you answer that question and write an essay of no more than 650 words, using the prompt to inspire and structure your response. Remember: 650 words is your limit, not your goal. Use the full range if you need it, but don't feel obligated to do so. (The application won't accept a response shorter than 250 words and any words in excess of the 650 will not transmit.)

- 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.
- 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?
- Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
- Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma - anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.
- Discuss an accomplishment, event or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
- 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?
- 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.