

NEWS & NOTES

March 2015

2015-2016 Essay Prompts

We are pleased to share the 2015-2016 Essay Prompts with you. New language appears in italics:

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 failure can be fundamental to later success.* Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
3. Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?
4. *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.*
5. Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.

The changes you see reflect the feedback and consensus of nearly 6000 individuals who responded to our recent survey. Among the survey highlights:

- 197 individual Member responses representing 110 Member institutions
- 5667 constituent responses (64% school counselors; 14% students; 11% independent educational consultants; 4% parents; 2% community based organizations; remainder = other)
- 82% of Members and 90% of constituents agree or strongly agree that the current prompts generate effective essays on the whole

- 62% of Members and 48% of constituents believe the "story/background" prompt is the most effective
- 76% of Members and 44% of constituents would like to see the "place where you're content" prompt replaced
- 35% of Members and 30% of constituents feel that analytical ability and intellectual curiosity (as a combined percentage) are most the difficult attributes to convey through the current prompts
- 85% of Members and 82% of constituents feel the prompts should be left open to broad interpretation
- 3% of Member respondents suggested Topic of Your Choice as a new prompt

6% of constituent respondents suggested Topic of Your Choice as a new prompt, with the breakdown as follows: independent educational consultants (47%), community-based organizations (7%), school counselors (5%), parents (2%), other (2%), students (<1%)

2015-2016 Application Changes

In addition to the revised Essay Prompts, next year's Common Application will include several changes to better serve Members, counselors, and applicants.

Personal Essay Requirement Changes

Beginning next year, our Member institutions will have the choice to require or not require the Common App Personal Essay. To learn more about how we will implement these modifications, we invite you to read our blog post on [essay requirement changes](#). A similar post on recommendation requirement changes will follow shortly.

Applicant Screen Print Option

In another frequently requested enhancement, next year's applicants will be able to preview their application screen by screen (Profile, Family, etc.) at any time, not just as part of the submission process. For a sample of what this new feature will look like, read this [description](#).

More changes and additions to be announced

Later this spring, we will be able to share a comprehensive list of all changes, additions, and revisions to the application and recommender systems for 2015-2016, including information on how we intend to support a college's choice to require or not require a letter of recommendation. Please be on the lookout for webinars and other training resources to help you prepare to support your students.