



Commonly Seen Prompts

Describe a person you admire

Things to consider: Avoid the urge to pen an ode to a beloved figure like Gandhi or Abraham Lincoln. The admissions committee doesn't need to be convinced that they are influential people.

Focus on yourself: Choose someone who has actually caused you to change your behavior or your worldview, and write about how this person influenced you

Why do you want to attend this school?

Things to consider: Be honest and specific when you respond to this question. Avoid generalities like "to get a good liberal arts education" or "to develop career skills," and use details that show your interests: "I'm an aspiring doctor and your science department has a terrific reputation."

Colleges are more likely to admit students who can articulate specific reasons why the school is a good fit for them beyond its reputation or ranking on any list. Use the college's website and literature to do your research about programs, professors, and other opportunities that appeal to you.

Avoid slipping into clichés or generalities. Take this opportunity to really examine an experience that taught you something you didn't previously know about yourself, got you out of your comfort zone, or forced you to grow. Sometimes it's better to write about something that was hard for you because you learned something than it is to write about something that was easy for you because you think it sounds admirable.

As with all essay questions, the most important thing is to tell a great story: how you discovered this activity, what drew you to it, and what it's shown you about yourself.

Ron's Things to Consider:

Schools are very interested in "yield ratios"

If someone visits your school or you visit a college, speak to someone in admissions and introduce yourself

Demonstrated interest has as much weight as your essay

Make sure it is specific to the school you are applying to

Don't use generalities that could be said about any school. (i.e., "great student body" or "great professors," etc.)

- Visit their website/blog/mission statement



- Look for things that they care about or are interesting
 - A recent visiting speaker
 - Money they spent on a remodel (i.e., they spent millions on a new gym and you love to work out)
 - Did a professor get a Nobel prize
 - Did a famous alumni just get some recognition
- Do you see any unique programs they run that they are interested in
- You want them to read the essay and think, “This sounds like our school”

Mention two to three of these things in this essay, and you will likely stand out from the crowd.

*Make sure to listen to Ron Caruthers dive deeper into this topic in Section 7 of the Essay Course

What is a book you love?

Things to consider: Your answer should not be a book report. Don't just summarize the plot; detail why you enjoyed this particular text and what it meant to you. What does your favorite book reveal about you? How do you identify with it, and how has it become personal to you?

Again, be honest in answering this question—don't choose a classic from your literature class or a piece of philosophy just because you think it will make you seem smarter. Writing fluently and passionately about a book close to you is always better than writing shakily or generally about a book that doesn't inspire you.

Information Accuracy Disclaimer:

While we strive to provide the most accurate information possible, this document reflects current knowledge as of August 2025. Due to the ever-changing nature of college admissions essay prompts, it's recommended that you conduct your own research to ensure information remains current and applicable to your specific needs.