

Tips & Tricks for the Common App Essay

1. It's okay to be stressed. This is normal, and a sign that you care about your future.

If you didn't care, then you wouldn't be worried about this process. It's like getting the jitters before a presentation – just know that the outcome will be the sum of the best of your efforts, and that's all you can hope for.

2. Don't try to squish your entire life story into a 650-word essay.

650 words may seem like a small amount of space compared to the vast life experiences you've had. In order to avoid writing a long and boring summary of life events, opt for choosing a specific experience or area of interest. Only you have lived your life and experiences and know them as well as only you can – make a list of some past life experiences that you feel were important in making yourself who you are today. *Was it a trip somewhere? Your relationship with a friend of loved one? Your work for an organization? Your relationship to a hobby or passion?*

3. Give yourself the space and time to write – and truly enjoy it.

Write a small paragraph about how each of these experiences exhibit your strengths and unique characteristics. Focus in on one topic or moment from your life – being as specific as possible will create a more engaging and unique essay. Oftentimes, the best topic is one whose writing comes most naturally to you; it's what feels "easy." Take this topic, write about it casually; almost like you're journaling. When inspired, write bits and pieces. Don't think too much about what you're writing. Enjoy writing about a specific topic that truly interests you. It is those nuggets of invention that you can string together to create a strong essay filled with personal moments that speak to who you truly are in a genuine way.

An essay that takes an experience and breaks it down to showcase your abundance of great qualities certainly is not written in a day. It will take a period of invention to find your topic. Take your time doing edits. Fully consider what each sentence

is saying and that you are filling them with specific language. Every sentence is a chance to convey something about yourself. Afterwards, you edit this content down and screen it for relevance to your topic and whether it's appropriate or not to include in the next draft of the essay.

4. Avoid general statements about your experience – use *detail*.

Which of these two statements would you rather read? **1.** My favorite activities included fishing and cooking my daily catch. **2.** My friends and I woke up early every morning to catch bass on Lake Michigan, cooking our spoils with herbs picked from a local farm. The second statement is much more provoking because it furnishes the reader with exact detail that transports us along on that experience with you. It showcases a deeper aspect to the activity than the first statement. It shows the reader how the applicant not only had these interesting experiences, but that it was a habit and social activity that they devoted great time to. This helps your essay to break through the wall of boring, impersonal essays – and can really help you impress college admissions staff and make you memorable. Using detail makes your essay read more like an anecdote than a personal statement – a story that will keep the reader interested and invested in your story and you as an applicant.

5. Make sure to structure your essay correctly and effectively.

This means following the classic essay structure with a compelling introduction, well-organized body paragraphs that create a sense of an arc or story, and a conclusion that ties the entire narrative into a pleasing (and memorable) package.

6. How does your essay imagine you at your new school?

The Common Application essay is the perfect time for you to show what characteristics or experiences you have and how they can benefit their campus, both inside and outside of the classroom. Are you planning on being a social activism leader on your campus or excel during physics laboratory experiments? Use your past experiences to show admissions officers your vision of what you can bring to their campus community.

7. Look at and learn from past examples of Common Application essays.

Music is practically everything to me: a hobby, a journey of growth, a source of joy. But this was once not so. I started playing and learning the mechanics of the piano at the age of 12. Last summer, however, I came upon a much more provoking, powerful instrument through the encouragement of a friend: my voice.

It was from this encouragement that I auditioned and was chosen for two choral groups at my school. At that point, I had no idea what singing could do for me.

As I continued to develop my voice, something much deeper advanced out of the Christmas songs and religious anthems I had been learning to sing in choir. Singing slowly evolved from a technical struggle where hitting the notes was what mattered most, to a form of motivation. Music turned from a hobby to something that brought confidence and bravery.

A major turning point for me was performing in my school's annual talent show. Minutes before I went on stage, I had to come up with the courage to walk up there and sing in front of hundreds of people. This was my first individual use of this intrinsic instrument—and it went incredibly well—and I felt a high that I have never felt before.

As time went on, my singing progressed into an exercise in emotional relief. I attached a bit of my own emotion to everything I sang, allowing me to use another person's art to express myself. Music then became an art and a form of release for me. But that is no longer enough. I want to make music, not just play it.

Now I see music as a way to release emotions. I want to create songs as vessels for my feelings, and then release them. If they comfort others, or make them happy, or make them sad, then it's art, but that is not necessarily my goal. I want to liberate myself of emotional anguish; to be free.

Music is taking me to places I have not found before.

When I really try, the music I create thrills, surprises and scares me.

Music is making me aware.

Music makes me more than I think I am, that I can make art beyond what I thought was possible.

Music makes me write lyrics and poetry.

Music is making me a truly emotional being.

Music is making me what I aspire to be: an artist.

Music is the light in a muddled world.
Music is a compass, built for the soul.
Music is practically everything.
