



## Personal Essay Competition 2021

Each student may submit only one essay for this competition. They should be allowed guidance, but no direct editing assistance from teachers (i.e. teachers may read the essay and offer critiques on content should they so choose, but not on grammar and spelling). The essays must be truthful and original.

All essays should be on A4 paper in Times New Roman 12-pt font, double-spaced. Essays should be **no longer than 500 words**, title and heading excluded.

The following prompts are suggestions for topics. However, if you have another topic you would like to write about please feel free to explore that. Your essay should remain personal, however. It should still tell me something special about you!

*These prompts are from the US Common Application for the 2019-2020 year*

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe an application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
2. Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
3. 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.
4. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

Use this essay as an opportunity to practice writing about yourself. Since these prompts are from the common college application in the USA, they are written to allow you to market yourself as a person. Can you write in a convincing manner about **yourself** and your life experiences? There is no exact formula for writing a good personal essay, so you have the wheel!

Please submit your essay in a Word file by email to [rudykammel@gmail.com](mailto:rudykammel@gmail.com) by midnight on **April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021**. The awards ceremony for all participants will be held on a later date.

See the next page for an example of the formatting for the heading and body of the essay.

Rudy Kammel (Your full name)  
Central High School (Your school)  
Personal Essay Competition 2021  
26<sup>th</sup> April, 2021 (The due date)

The Title of Your Essay **(centered, not bolded, with proper capitalization)**

For essays in American high schools and beyond, each paragraph should be indented by hitting the “tab” button on your keyboard. There should be no space between paragraphs, and only one line between the title of the essay and the body. Notice that in this essay, the heading is single-spaced, while the body is double-spaced. This allows the readers to read and write comments on the essay more easily. Paragraphs are normally between 5 and 6 sentences long, although that is just a suggestion. You may have longer or shorter paragraphs, but in no instance should your paragraph be a whole page. If that is the case, find a place to break it into two smaller paragraphs.

Like this. Make sure to check for pesky misspellings, especially those in which you have accidentally typed another English word other than that which you intended. A great example of this is “defiantly” being typed in the place of “definitely”. As your teacher cannot spell check your essay for you, read it back sentence-by-sentence from the end to the beginning to make sure all of your grammar is in place. Additionally, make sure to tell your story. Treat this essay as if you were applying to a college and trying to convince them that you are a good candidate for their school. To give you a better idea of how long five hundred words is, this sample writing has already used almost half of that amount. We look forward to reading your work!

## Personal Essay Scoring Rubric

Criteria to be Assessed	4	3	2	1
1. Ideas	Writing successfully presents the topic in a novel or unique way. Writing includes excellent and specific concrete detail and insightful commentary.	Writing presents the topic in an interesting way. Writing includes good concrete detail and some insightful commentary.	Writing presents the topic in an ordinary way. Writing includes concrete detail, but commentary is obvious, simplistic, or generic.	Writing presents topic in an ordinary way. Concrete details and commentary are either weak or missing.
2. Organization	Writing has a compelling and logical flow of ideas.	Writing has a logical flow of ideas.	Organization is rough but workable. It sometimes gets off topic.	Writing is aimless and disorganized.
3. Topic Sentences and Transitions	Paragraphs have focused and poignant topic sentences and smooth, almost seamless transitions.	Paragraphs have focused topic sentences and obvious transitions.	Paragraphs have topic sentences that need to be more focused and rough transitions.	Paragraphs lack topic sentences and transitions.
4. Description	Writing consistently and effectively shows rather than tells through specific and vivid details.	Writing shows rather than tell, but details could be more specific and vivid.	Writing includes some showing but needs more.	Writing uses all telling and no showing.
5. Voice	Writing reveals your unique personality and view of the world, leaving the reader to want to know more about who you are.	Writing reveals some of your thoughts and feelings, but needs more personality behind it.	Writing is bland. There is either no hint of a real person behind the writing.	Writing is too informal. It sounds like you don't care about the topic of the essay.
6. Word Choice	Writing uses words that are striking and fresh but natural, varied, and vivid.	Writing makes some quality but also some routine or ordinary word choices.	Writing uses words that are dull or uninspired. Writing sounds like you are trying too hard to impress.	Writing uses the same words over and over. Some words may be confusing or inappropriate.
7. Grammar Usage and Sentence Fluency	Writing uses proper grammar 100% of the time. Sentences flow well and vary in construction and length.	Writing has a few grammar problems. Sentences flow well but do not vary much.	Writing has enough grammar errors to distract a reader. Some sentences do not flow well and/or are not varied at all.	Writing has numerous grammar mistakes and poor sentence construction that make the paper hard to read.
8. Spelling and Punctuation	Writing uses correct punctuation and spelling 100% of the time.	Writing has a few errors to fix, but generally uses correct conventions.	Writing has enough errors in the essay to distract a reader.	Writing has numerous errors that make the paper hard to read.

**Total Score** \_\_\_\_\_ **X 3.13 =** \_\_\_\_\_ **/100**

## Let's Get Started!

Here are the prompts again to get you started thinking. Jot down (write) some notes and ideas under each one. Remember, these are just suggested prompts - you are of course free to explore any topic you desire.

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe an application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
2. Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
3. 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.
4. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

If you have a story in mind...

- What happened?
- Where were you?
- Why did this happen?
- Who else was there?
- How did you feel?
- What happened?
- Where were you?
- Why did this happen?
- What is the idea?
- Where/whom does this idea come from?
- When did you discover this idea?
- What have you done with this idea? (Research/articles/classes)
- How does this idea fit into your future plans?

**YOUR STORY** | INSPIRE | INNOVATE | IGNITE  
**Changemaker Story Canvas**

<b>WHO AM I?</b>	<b>PAST</b>				<b>WHO AM I?</b>
	I grew up in ...	Memorable incidents are...	I studied....	I worked at...	
<b>PRESENT</b>					
The challenges I face are....	My partners are....	What I do is...	The problem I am solving is....		
<b>FUTURE</b>					
In year ----- the world will be like this...	I will be doing this....	I want you to....	My message to the world is....	My tips to other changemakers are....	

As you're writing, remember:

- **There is no formula.** This means that there is no one perfect way to write about yourself. Even if you look for example essays online, these are likely not going to be a good way to write your own. There is no one answer!
- **It's easier to edit something than to write it.** If you're stuck, try to do what we call a "brain dump". Just start writing about the prompt, using keywords that make you think of different stories. Don't worry about not knowing the word in English, write the word that's in your brain and return when you're done. Next, come back and see if there are any parts of your brain dump that are useful. This is how I write all of my essays.
- **You are allowed to use "I" in this essay.** You may have been told before to avoid the first person in essays, but this is where you can break free of that. You're talking about yourself, sound like it! Make yourself the main character in this essay.
- **Don't just tell, show.** Don't just write: "After my experiences, I became a more empathetic person." Instead write: "Keeping my experiences in mind, the next time Mrs. Donohue was crossing the street, I raced to take her arm and help her across."
- **Use the hero story (Americans love these!)** Yes, be open about past failures if your story requires it, but make sure that you end this essay on a good note. Imagine you are trying to get us to hire you for a job. Make us believe that you ended up a stronger person than at the beginning, if that's the story you choose to tell.
- **Plagiarism will not be tolerated.** Plagiarism is the presentation of another person's work as if it is your own. This includes your teacher's work, Google Translate, using essays that you found online, and having another student write or rewrite portions of your essay. Essays will be put through a plagiarism checker before being graded. ***By submitting an essay into this competition, you certify that the essay is written wholly by you in your own words, except for quotations from published or unpublished sources which are clearly indicated as quotations.***