

# IT'S A PLAN

## WRITING APPLICATION ESSAYS

You've been writing essays in your English and language arts classes for years and you've probably gotten pretty good at it. Even still, a lot of students are nervous about writing essays for college applications and scholarships. That's understandable – college is a big deal! And since it's one you're ready for, now's the time to take a deep breath, check out these tips from folks who've made a career of reading applications, then choose a prompt and start writing!

- 1 Follow Directions!** This simple tip is the most important one – pay attention to what is being asked of you. Answer the question asked of you, keep within page or word limits, and pay attention to any special formatting requests.
- 2 Write Your Best.** For most applications, you'll only be submitting one or two written pieces. The people who read your applications assume that what they see is the best you can do. It's your job to make sure you prove them right! Your essays should be examples of your best writing. That means it's important to follow tip #3.
- 3 Proofread.** This is good practice no matter what you're writing, but you'll want to make sure you proofread these essays extra carefully. Better yet, have a friend or trusted adult proofread for you, too. You'd be surprised at the number of applicants who write that they really want to go to Oregon State University on their application to Linfield College! Thorough proofreading can prevent these simple mistakes.
- 4 Be Yourself.** Essays are an opportunity for the admissions and scholarship committees to learn about the parts of you and your experiences that aren't captured by the "numbers" (i.e. gpa and test scores). It's your opportunity to show them what's important to you and to let your personality shine through. For example, some students wonder if it's okay to write a humorous essay. The best advice we've heard about this is "Funny essays can be great to read, but if no one's ever told you you're funny, this isn't the time to try."
- 5 Remember You Have an Audience.** Most of the time you won't meet the person who is reading your application, so it can feel like you don't have an audience. It's important to remember that you do. While it's okay to write about the things that matter to you, it's always wise to consider that you don't know the politics, religion, or personal beliefs of the person who is reading your application. Choose a topic that interests you, but be careful not to offend.
- 6 Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.** There's no question that writing essays can be time consuming. Reduce the amount of time you spend by reusing your work when possible. Many prompts are just slightly different from one another, and with some careful editing (and proofreading!), you should be able to recycle an essay for one application into a usable essay for another.

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## SAMPLE ESSAY PROMPTS

Some applications require longer essays, while others ask you to (very) briefly respond to a specific question. The following prompts and specific directions are ones you'll be most likely to see on applications to Oregon's colleges and universities, as well as the OSAC scholarship application form. You'll notice similarities among the prompts – remember **Tip #6** to “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle!”

### COMMON APPLICATION ESSAYS

The Common Application is a standard application used by most independent colleges in Oregon as well as more than 500 colleges around the country so you can apply to multiple schools with just one application.

The essay demonstrates your ability to write clearly and concisely on a selected topic and helps you distinguish yourself in 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.)

1. Some students have a background or story that is so central to their identity that 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 lessons did you learn?
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.

Source: <https://www.commonapp.org/>

In addition, many colleges and universities require that you submit a brief essay explaining why you are interested in attending that particular school. A scholarship application might ask you to briefly explain how you are uniquely qualified to receive the award. These may be as short as 50 words or as long as 500. **Check the instructions on your applications for details.**



## SAMPLE ESSAY PROMPTS

### OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY INSIGHT RESUME QUESTIONS

OSU would like to better understand your perspectives, contributions, qualifications, and diverse talents. Please address your experience in each category keeping in mind how you could contribute to the future community of excellence at OSU. Respond to all six questions and **limit answers to 100 words per question.**

- 1. Leadership/Group contributions:** Describe examples of your leadership experience in which you have significantly influenced others, helped resolve disputes, or contributed to group efforts over time. Consider responsibilities to initiatives taken in or out of school.
- 2. Knowledge in a field/creativity:** Describe any of your special interests and how you have developed knowledge in these areas. Give examples of your creativity: the ability to see alternatives; take diverse perspectives; come up with many, varied, or original ideas; or willingness to try new things.
- 3. Dealing with adversity:** Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to address this challenge. Include whether you turned to anyone in facing that challenge, the role that person played, and what you learned about yourself.
- 4. Community service:** Explain what you have done to make your community a better place to live. Give examples of specific projects in which you have been involved over time.
- 5. Handling systemic challenges:** Describe your experience facing or witnessing discrimination. Tell us how you responded and what you learned from those experiences and how they have prepared you to contribute to the OSU community.
- 6. Goals/task commitment:** Articulate the goals you have established for yourself and your efforts to accomplish these. Give at least one specific example that demonstrates your work ethic/diligence.

Source: <http://oregonstate.edu/admissions/publications-and-forms>





## SAMPLE ESSAY PROMPTS

### SOUTHERN OREGON UNIVERSITY ESSAYS

In addition to providing details for scholarship consideration, this personal statement is an opportunity for you to help the admissions committee become acquainted with you in a way different from courses, grades, test scores, and other objective data. **Please address, in 300 or fewer words, one of the topics listed below.**

1. Select an original work of your choice from anywhere in the world (this could be a work of art, a piece of literature, a scientific or mathematical theory, a musical composition, a film, or any other creative piece) and discuss how it has affected your thinking.
2. How has your outlook on life been shaped by your hometown? In turn, how have you influenced your hometown?
3. How has an encounter with a culture, people, or place different from your own affected your understanding of diversity?
4. Any topic of your choice.

Source: <http://www.sou.edu/assets/admissions/docs/UndergraduateApp2014.pdf>

### OSAC SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION ESSAYS

Completing four personal statements is required for all OSAC scholarships. Let your Personal Statements tell your story. Donors are looking for reasons why they should choose you for their scholarship award. Show the “unique you” in your Personal Statements and use correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling. **Limit per statement is 1,000 characters (approximately 150 words).**

1. Explain your career aspirations and your educational plan to meet these goals.
2. Explain how you have helped your family or made your community a better place to live. Please provide specific examples.
3. Describe a personal accomplishment and the strengths and skills you used to achieve it.
4. Describe a significant change or experience that has occurred in your life. How did you respond and what did you learn about yourself?

Source: <http://www.oregonstudentaid.gov/scholarship-application-tools.aspx>

