

Common Application Questions, 2014-15

Some schools use the Common Application, which offers a choice of essay topics. Here are topics for 2014-15, with comments (*in italics*) written after each one.

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.

This broad question allows you to consider your family history, your living situation, or an experience that has strongly influenced you. How has your background or story shaped the values that define you? Balance general themes with specific examples.

2. Recount an incident or time when you experienced FAILURE. How did it affect you, and what LESSONS did you learn?

Be sure the particular failure you describe resulted in an important lesson learned. Also be sure you write about your response to failure and explain how you grew 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?

The belief or idea could belong to a group, another person, or your younger self. Your answer to the final question need not be "yes." Your essay, however, should express a significant value.

4. Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly CONTENT. What do you do or experience there and why is it meaningful to you?

Explain why this place and time bring you such satisfaction. Allow your answer to serve as a window into your values.

5. Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your TRANSITION from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.

Only choose this if you can point to an accomplishment or event that clearly marked a personal transition. Use your answer to describe your growth process rather than to brag.

When You Have to Decide on Your Essay Topic

Some schools allow you to write on **any topic of your choice**. Select the topic for which you have the greatest passion. If you can't think of a topic, here are some suggestions:

1. What **ACTIVITY** or achievement has been the most important to you and how has it influenced your goals?
2. What **EVENT** in your past has had the greatest impact on you and your goals?
3. What **PERSON** in your life has had the most influence on you and your goals?
4. What **IDEAS** have meant the most to you and your goals?

For each question, you might:

Describe the experience (of the activity, event, person, or ideas) in detail—what, when, where, how.

Describe how the experience affected you personally.

Explain what you learned from the experience.

Explain how this experience will influence your future.