

Dear Soon-To-Be Rising Seniors,

Welcome to the home stretch! You have, by now, navigated the most treacherous and, I hope, rewarding stretch of junior year. As you complete your final major exams and do your best to maximize your SAT/ACT scores, it's time to begin putting some serious thought into how you will present yourself to college admissions officers. To that end, today an opportune time to start ***brainstorming*** and ***envisioning*** the kind of candidate you are.

In short, you are a step and stumble away from adulthood, and you can no longer get by through charm and precocious wit—you must begin crafting your professional persona for an outside audience.

BRAINSTORMING STAGE:

Step 1:

Identify your defining qualities and characteristics

- i. Scan the words below and write down the ones you think most apply to you. Ask a peer to help you. Pick out as many as possible.

**Acceptance Accomplishment Accountability Achievement Acquisition Action
Adventure Alignment Altruism Amusement Art Assistance Athleticism
Attractiveness Authenticity Awareness Beauty Being Bliss Boldness Calm Career
Change Charity Civil rights Coach Collaboration Committed Community
Compassion Competition Comprehending Connection Consciousness
Consideration Constancy Contentment Contribution Control Cooperation
Courage Create Creativity Curiosity Danger Dare Debate Delight Democracy
Dependability Detection Dignity Direct Discovery Discrimination Distinguish
Diversity Do good Economic Security Education Effectiveness Elegance
Emotional Wellbeing Empathy Encourage Encouragement Energy
Enlightenment Entertainment Environment Equality Ethics/Ethical Excellence
Excitement Experience Experiment Expertise Explain Exquisiteness Facilitation
Fairness Faith Fame Family Feeling good Fitness Freedom Friendship Fun
Generosity Grace Gratitude Growth Guidance Happiness Harmony Healing
Health Honesty Honor Hope Humility Imagination Improvement Independence
Influence Information Inner peace Innovation Insight Inspiration Instruction**

Integrity Intelligence Introspection Inventiveness Involvement Irony Joy Justice
 Kindness Knowledge Laughter Leadership Learning Longevity Love Loyalty
 Magnificence Mastery Meaning Merriment Mindfulness Money Morality Music
 Nature Nobility Nurturance Observation Openness Optimism Order
 Organization Originality Patience Patriotism Peace Peacefulness Perception
 Personal Development Philosophy Play Pleasure Positive attitude Power
 Practicality Preparation Presence Principle Proficiency Progress Provider
 Purpose Quest Questioning Radiance Recognition Relatedness Relationships
 Relaxation Reliability Religious/Religion Resourcefulness Respect
 Responsibility Responsiveness Risk Safety Schooling Security Self-awareness
 Self-worth Sensations Sensuality Serenity Service Simplicity Skepticism
 Social responsibility Spirituality Stability Status Stimulation Strength Strengthen
 Success Superiority Support Sustainability Talent Teaching Tenderness Touch
 Tranquility Trust Truth Truthfulness Understanding Victory Vision Wealth
 Wholeness Winning Wisdom Wit

- ii. Some more: Able, Accepting, Accurate, Achieving, Adaptable, Adorable, Adventurous, Affectionate, Alert, Alive, Altruistic, Amazing, Ambitious, Analytical, Appreciative, Appealing, Artistic, Assertive, Astonishing, Attentive, Attractive, Authentic, Aware, Awesome, Balanced, Beautiful, Blissful, Blooming, Bold, Bountiful, Brave, Breath-Taking, Bright, Calm, Capable, Careful, Carefree, Caring, Cautious, Centered, Certain, Charitable, Charming, Cheeky, Cheerful, Chirpy, Civic-Minded, Clean, Colorful, Competitive, Clear-Thinking, Communicative, Compassionate, Compatible, Competitive, Complete, Confident, Conscientious, Considerate, Conservative, Consistent, Content, Co-operative, Courageous, Conscientious, Courteous, Creative, Cuddly, Curious, Cultural, Cute, Decisive, Deliberate, Delicate, Delicious, Delightful, Dependable, Desirable, Determined, Devoted, Disciplined, Discrete, Discriminating, Dynamic, Easy-Going, Eager, Efficient, Elegant, Empathetic, Enduring, Energetic, Enlightened, Enthusiastic, Entrepreneurial, Excellent, Exciting, Experienced, Fair-Minded, Faithful, Farsighted, Fast-learner, Feeling, Fierce, Flexible, Flourishing, Focused, Forgiving, Fortuitous, Free, Fresh, Friendly, Frugal, Funny, Generous, Gentle, Good, Glorious, Graceful, Gratuitous, Great, Groovy, Handsome, Happy, Harmonious, Healthy, Heavenly, Helpful, Holistic, Hopeful, Humble, Humorous, Honest, Humble, Idealistic, Imaginative, Having Integrity, Independent, Individualistic, Industrious, Innovative, Insightful,

Inspirational, Interesting, Intelligent, Intense, Intuitive, Inventive, Invigorating, Joyful, Juicy, Just, Kind, Leading or Leader, Learned, Loving, Loyal, Lucky, Luscious, Luxurious, Macho, Magical, Manly, Magnificent, Masculine, Mature, Moral, Motivating, Natural, Neat, Needed, Noticeable, Nurturing, Obedient, Objective, Open, Optimistic, Original, Organized, Outgoing, Outstanding, Passionate, Patient, Peaceful, Perceptive, Persevering, Persistent, Persuasive, Playful, Poetic, Polite, Popular, Powerful, Practical, Precious, Precise, Profound, Progressive, Proud, Professional, Punctual, Pure, Purposeful, Questioning, Quick-witted, Ravishing, Realistic, Refreshing, Reliable, Resilient, Resourceful, Respectful, Responsible, Rich, Romantic, Rosy, Seductive, Selfless, Self-Aware, Self-Confident, Self-Disciplined, Sensitive, Serene, Sexy, Sharp, Simple, Sincere, Sizzling, Skilled, Smart, Smooth, Soft, Special, Spectacular, Spiritual, Splendid, Spontaneous, Stable, Steadfast, Strategic, Stunning, Strong, Strong-willed, Stylish, Successful, Supportive, Supreme, Sympathetic, Tactful, Talented, Tasty, Tenacious, Tender, Terrific, Thinking, Thorough, Thoughtful, Thrifty, Thriving, Tolerant, Tough, Trusting, Trustworthy, Unassuming, Understanding, Unwavering, Uplifting, Useful, Valuable, Verbal, Vibrant, Vital, Warm, Wholesome, Willing, Wise, Worthy, Youthful, Yummy.

Step 2: Narrow down to 3-5 qualities. See if any words in particular seem related—create webs, try to chart out what defines you as an individual.

Step 3: What qualities about you best suit a college campus? Which qualities make you a strong student in the classroom? A strong leader? A supportive part of a larger community? An innovator? A social butterfly? Basically, which words show how you fit into the student life of the campus, the college classroom, and a potentially successful future following college?

Step 4: Find the “problem.” Every story has a conflict. In order to have a good personal narrative, you need to find stories in which you, the main character, face a conflict. It need not be a HUGE conflict; the most mundane topics often make for the best stories. The key isn’t the nature of the conflict, **but the way you respond to it.** The most common mistake students make is going for death, divorce, immigration; these topics often focus on what a student suffered rather than how a student reacted to an issue. Take a look at next year’s topics and, AFTER choosing the defining qualities you want to convey, after isolating a handful of conflicts in which you show those qualities, see which of the prompts below allows you to write the best possible response.

2019-2020 Common Application Essay Prompts

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful 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 obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
3. Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
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, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
6. Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?
7. Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.