

"Insider's Quick Guide: Uncommon Help on the Common App"

2015-2016 Common Application Essay Prompts:

- 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.
- 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 did you learn from the experience?
- Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?
- 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.
- Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.

I. Coming from an application essay evaluator, the single best thing you can do is ...

Reinvent! The Common App questions are a chance to *reconsider* your experiences at new depths. Redefine your characteristics by reinterpreting your past actions and results. Recreate yourself with greater depth than the academic, objective information in your application. Take yourself apart trait by trait and reassemble yourself as a unique product of your experiences.

II. Behind closed doors in evaluation committee, it'll never officially be said ...

1. If they got a little more creative with the Common App, maybe the students would have a chance to be more creative!
2. So how can students make themselves unique to our school if they give the same answer to every school?
3. The personal character and failure essays are the only ones I really pay attention to.
4. I wonder how much of that essay was true?
5. This kid must've paid a lot for this one.

III. Advice you probably haven't heard ...

1. Engage early or the rest of your essay may not get "much attention."
2. Be certain with your personal character and failure essays – they indeed often are the ones most emphasized.
3. On the failure essay, the worse it is, the better essay you'll be able to write.
4. On the problem solver/challenge essay, please - no more world saviors and Einsteins!
5. On the challenged-a-belief essay, acting differently can be the winning answer.
6. An ethical dilemmas is a catch 22-thought-everyone-is-justified situation. It is NOT a conflict of interest, temptation, or undesired moral obligation. (Ask for examples!)
7. On the youth-to-adult essay, make sure you end up as an adult!

IV. "The biggest fatal error commonly committed on the Common App": Mashing up recycled ideas from other sources – especially from that 50 Successful Harvard Essays one.