

# Common App Prompt Decoder

## PROMPT #1

### What it says

“ 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. ”

### What it means

**How lucky are you?** This is a super versatile, catch-all prompt. Use it to describe any experience large or small that defines you and that does not fit anywhere else on the application (including the other prompts!). What do you love, and why do you love it? How would you define yourself? What funny story do you tell friends and family over and over again, and why do you think it always comes up? How are these stories and qualities representative of who you are at your core?

## PROMPT #2

### What it says

“ 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? ”

### What it means

**Remember this simple equation: on your college application, failure = success.** How do you deal with hardship? Are you the kind of person who can rebound- who turns every experience, good or bad, into one from which you can learn something? Above all else, positivity is key.



## PROMPT #3

### What it says

“ Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome? ”

### What it means

This is **your chance to take a stand!** When has your opinion been unpopular? Why are you the kind of person who is willing to stand up for what you believe in? What is important to you on a fundamental level of morals and values? Prompt #3 can also be one of the riskiest prompts, so think carefully about the story you want to tell or opinion you want to share.



## PROMPT #4

### What it says

“ 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. ”

### What it means

This prompt is meant to **tease out your problem-solving skills** and provide a glimpse into your frame of mind when dealing with challenges. Think about everything from more traditional obstacles you have had to overcome to the small predicaments that have helped you discover what you really value. How might you positively contribute to a cause that is important to you? If you had the power to make a lasting impact in any area at all, what would it be? Specificity makes all the difference.



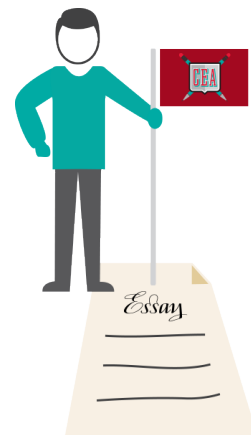
## PROMPT #5

### What it says

“ Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others. ”

### What it means

We've often found that the **smaller, less formal events** make for **more surprising and memorable essays**; but as with any of the other prompts, as long as you can answer with originality and put a unique twist on your subject matter, all ideas, formal and informal, big and small, are fair game. Keep in mind that “accomplishment,” “event” and “realization” are words that leave themselves open to interpretation. What were the moments in life that fundamentally changed you as a person? When did you learn something that made you feel more adult, more capable, more grown up?



## PROMPT #6

### What it says

“ 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? ”

### What it means

**It's time to tap into your inner nerd!** Open up your amazing brain and give admissions officers a peek inside. What do you love and why do you love it? How far will you go to pursue your curiosities? What do you usually do when you want to learn more about a topic or idea? Where do you go and who do you ask? What do you love about learning and what motivates you to learn more? When was the last time a teacher, book, or even a TV show made you perk up your ears and really focus?



## PROMPT #7

### What it says

“ 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. ”

### What it means

It’s time to choose your own **adventure**. Can you taste the freedom? It’s exhilarating and scary, and while this prompt may seem ideal, it may not be right for everyone. Prompt #7 is perfect for folks with very specific ideas that don’t quite fit with any of the other options; it’s not the best for people who are still trying to figure out what they want to say. If it’s guidance you seek, flip back to the beginning of this guide. Otherwise, dive in. Maybe jot down your own unique prompt idea and begin to brainstorm. The world is your oyster!

### ★ IMPORTANT ★



Keep the Common App prompts in the back of your head, but don’t let them monopolize your brainstorming sessions. Think about what you want to say first—you can fit your best stories to the prompts later. So take a minute to run through the above advice one more time. **NOW** fold these prompts away and hide them in the back of your brain (or under your bed) until further notice.

