

Coalition Prompt Decoder

PROMPT #1

What it says

“Tell a story from your life, describing an experience that either demonstrates your character or helped to shape it.”

What it means

This prompt should be the litmus test for any essay you write. If it doesn't "demonstrate character," you could be doing it wrong. So, to get started on this bad boy, think about how you define yourself. What characteristics form the foundation of your personality? What are your proudest moments? What stories do you always tell? And what do they say about how you see the world (and your place in it)? One last thing to note, though, is that although this prompt is broad, it does ask that you describe a concrete experience. Save the mushy stuff for a different prompt.

PROMPT #2

What it says

“Describe a time when you made a meaningful contribution to others in which the greater good was your focus. Discuss the challenges and rewards of making your contribution.”

What it means

Warning: answers to this prompt are at increased risk of falling into the cliché trap! When you write about community service, sincerity is key. Otherwise, you could get lost in the tangles of a story that you think admissions officers want to read. Dig deeper than the typical reasons for doing community service to get to your true motivations. Why do you care about this issue? What did you do to make an impact? What relationships did you form?



PROMPT #3

What it says

“ Has there been a time when you’ve had a long-cherished or accepted belief challenged? How did you respond? How did the challenge affect your beliefs? ”

What it means

Take a long hard look in the mirror. Answering this prompt requires a great deal of introspection and self-awareness. It won't be easy, but examining your own beliefs will display a level of maturity that you couldn't possibly showcase anywhere else on your application. You can discuss a belief that has been long cherished or simply accepted. When brainstorming topics for this question, you may want to keep away from controversial subjects. You never know who will pick up your application, and you don't want personal bias about hot button issues getting in the way of a fair assessment of your passion and qualifications.

PROMPT #4

What it says

“ What is the hardest part of being a teenager now? What is the best part? What advice would you give a younger sibling or friend (assuming they would listen to you)? ”

What it means

This is the most unique prompt the Coalition has to offer. It's asking you to put your life in perspective and show how much you have grown over the past 4-5 years of your life. What are some major misconceptions people have about modern teenage life? Can you shed some light on these misunderstandings? What does it mean to be an adolescent in this day and age, with the tools you have at your disposal? And what about being a teenager today is truly awesome in a way most people wouldn't expect? In the end, the essay should not be about teenage experience in general, but rather about an aspect of teenage-hood you've chosen to highlight because of the way it affects or represents YOU.



PROMPT #5

What it says

“ Submit an essay on a topic of your choice. ”

What it means

This is the Coalition's gift to you. You have most likely already started working on your Common Application essay, and now you have an easy way to repurpose it for the Coalition! That said, if you are approaching the personal statement for the first time, trying to find a place to begin, the topic of your choice may not be the place you want to start. Having a wide-open runway for topic selection can be debilitating for some, so if your creativity flourishes under stricter parameters, by all means, use one of the other awesome prompts to guide your inspiration. No matter what, the thing that matters most is not the prompt you respond to, but instead the story you are trying to tell and what it will communicate to admissions.



★ IMPORTANT ★

We've said it before and we'll say it again: the prompts don't really matter. Whether you're writing your personal statement for the Common App or the Coalition, the content of your story always comes first. Speak to admissions in your own unique (and awesome) voice.

