

Activity

Brainstorm and Write Your Essay

A successful college essay tells an authentic, unique story. Use this activity to brainstorm topics that tell your story. Don't overthink your lists for Part A and Part B, or your brainstorm for Part E. Consider setting a timer and writing your lists without pausing to review what you've written.

A. List four things that you love, find joy in, care about, or are good at.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

B. Make a second list of four important experiences, people, or places in your life.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

C. Write down two items from A and two items from B that best tell colleges about your strengths, abilities, passions, or dreams.

List A: _____

List B: _____

D. Look at the 2026-2027 Common App essay prompts below. Identify at least two prompts that would allow you to write about an item from List A, an item from List B, or a topic that combines items from both lists.

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. Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?
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.

E. Fill out the chart below for two of the prompts you selected.

Prompt Number	Item from List A, List B, or topic that combines items from both lists	Details or story I would use to: • Answer the prompt, and • Develop my item from List A, List B, or topic that combines items from both lists