

**The Common App essay is 650 words, and contains 7 prompts to pick from.**

## *Here are those Common App 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.

So before diving into our Common App essay examples, here's what to keep an eye on.

### **College admissions officers are looking for three things in your essay:**

1. Who is this person?
2. Will this person contribute something of value to our campus?
3. Can this person write?

The reader should get a clear picture of what you value and how you'll put that into action.

### **How do you write a great common app essay?**

1. Brainstorm (I think it's the most important step).
2. Structure your essay according to your topic.
3. Draft. Revise. Repeat.

# COMMON APP ESSAY EXAMPLE #1

## HOME

As I enter the double doors, the smell of freshly rolled biscuits hits me almost instantly. I trace the fan blades as they swing above me, emitting a low, repetitive hum resembling a faint melody. After bringing our usual order, the “Tailgate Special,” to the table, my father begins discussing the recent performance of Apple stock with my mother, myself, and my older eleven year old sister. Bojangle’s, a Southern establishment well known for its fried chicken and reliable fast food, is my family’s Friday night restaurant, often accompanied by trips to Eva Perry, the nearby library. With one hand on my breaded chicken and the other on *Nancy Drew: Mystery of Crocodile Island*, I can barely sit still as the thriller unfolds. They’re imprisoned! Reptiles! Not the enemy’s boat! As I delve into the narrative with a sip of sweet tea, I feel at home.

“Five, six, seven, eight!” As I shout the counts, nineteen dancers grab and begin to spin the tassels attached to their swords while walking heel-to-toe to the next formation of the classical Chinese sword dance. A glance at my notebook reveals a collection of worn pages covered with meticulously planned formations, counts, and movements. Through sharing videos of my performances with my relatives or discovering and choreographing the nuances of certain regional dances and their reflection on the region’s distinct culture, I deepen my relationship with my parents, heritage, and community. When I step on stage, the hours I’ve spent choreographing, creating poses, teaching, and polishing are all worthwhile, and the stage becomes my home.

Set temperature. Calibrate. Integrate. Analyze. Set temperature. Calibrate. Integrate. Analyze. This pulse mimics the beating of my heart, a subtle rhythm that persists each day I come into the lab. Whether I am working under the fume hood with platinum nanoparticles, manipulating raw integration data, or spraying a thin platinum film over pieces of copper, it is in Lab 304 in Hudson Hall that I first feel the distinct sensation, and I’m home. After spending several weeks attempting to synthesize platinum nanoparticles with a diameter between 10 and 16 nm, I finally achieve nanoparticles with a diameter of 14.6 nm after carefully monitoring the sulfuric acid bath. That unmistakable tingling sensation dances up my arm as I scribble into my notebook: I am overcome with a feeling of unbridled joy.

Styled in a t-shirt, shorts, and a worn, dark green lanyard, I sprint across the quad from the elective ‘Speaking Arabic through the Rassias Method’ to ‘Knitting Nirvana’. This afternoon is just one of many at Governor’s School East, where I have been transformed from a high school student into a philosopher, a thinker, and an avid learner. While I attend GS at Meredith College for Natural Science, the lessons learned and experiences gained extend far beyond physics concepts, serial dilutions, and toxicity. I learn to trust myself to have difficult yet necessary conversations about the political and economic climate. Governor’s School breeds a culture of inclusivity and multidimensionality, and I am transformed from “girl who is hardworking” or “science girl” to someone who indulges in the sciences, debates about psychology and the economy, and loves to swing and salsa dance. As I form a slip knot and cast on, I’m at home.

My *home* is a dynamic and eclectic entity. Although I’ve lived in the same house in Cary, North Carolina for 10 years, I have found and carved homes and communities that are filled with and enriched by tradition, artists, researchers, and intellectuals. While I may not always live within a 5 mile radius of a Bojangle’s or in close proximity to Lab 304, learning to become a more perceptive daughter and sister, to share the beauty of my heritage, and to take risks and redefine scientific and personal expectations will continue to impact my sense of home.

# COMMON APP ESSAY EXAMPLE #2

## EASTER

It was Easter and we should've been celebrating with our family, but my father had locked us in the house. If he wasn't going out, neither were my mother and I.

My mother came to the U.S. from Mexico to study English. She'd been an exceptional student and had a bright future ahead of her. But she fell in love and eloped with the man that eventually became my father. He loved her in an unhealthy way, and was both physically and verbally abusive. My mother lacked the courage to start over so she stayed with him and slowly let go of her dreams and aspirations. But she wouldn't allow for the same to happen to me.

In the summer before my junior year I was offered a scholarship to study abroad in Egypt. Not to my surprise, my father refused to let me go. But my mother wouldn't let him crush my dreams as well. I'd do this for myself and for my mother's unfulfilled aspirations. I accepted the scholarship.

I thought I'd finally have all the freedom I longed for in Egypt, but initially I didn't. On a weekly basis I heard insults and received harassment in the streets, yet I didn't yield to the societal expectations for women by staying indoors. I continued to roam throughout Egypt, exploring the Great Pyramids of Giza, cruising on the Nile, and traveling to Luxor and Aswan. And before I returned to the U.S. I received the unexpected opportunity to travel to London and Paris. It was surreal: a girl from the ghetto traveling alone around the world with a map in her hands. And no man or cultural standards could dictate what I was to do. I rode the subway from Cambridge University to the British Museum. I took a train from London to Paris and in two days I visited the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre, Notre Dame Cathedral, and took a cruise on the Seine. Despite the language barrier I found I had the self-confidence to approach anyone for directions.

While I was in Europe enjoying my freedom, my mother moved out and rented her own place. It was as if we'd simultaneously gained our independence. We were proud of each other. And she vicariously lived through my experiences as I sent her pictures and told her about my adventures.

Finally, we were free.

I currently live in the U.S. with my mother. My father has gradually transformed from a frigid man to the loving father I always yearned for. Life isn't perfect, but for the moment I'm enjoying tranquility and stability with my family and are communicating much better than ever before.

I'm involved in my school's Leadership Council as leader of our events committee. We plan and execute school dances and create effective donation letters. I see this as a stepping-stone for my future, as I plan to double major in Women's Studies and International Relations with a focus on Middle Eastern studies. After the political turmoil of the Arab Spring many Middle Eastern countries refuse to grant women equal positions in society because that would contradict Islamic texts. By oppressing women they're silencing half of their population. I believe these Islamic texts have been misinterpreted throughout time, and my journey towards my own independence has inspired me to help other women find liberation as well.

My Easter will drastically differ from past years. Rather than being locked at home, my mother and I will celebrate outdoors our rebirth and renewal.

## COMMON APP ESSAY #2: EASTER SPANISH VERSION:

Era Pascua y deberíamos haber estado celebrando con nuestra familia, pero mi padre nos había encerrado en casa. Si él no iba a salir, tampoco mi madre e yo.

Mi madre vino a los EE.UU. desde México para estudiar Inglés . Había sido una estudiante excepcional y tenía un futuro brillante por delante de ella . Pero se enamoró y se fugó con el hombre que sería mi padre. La amaba pero de una manera destructiva, y era a la vez física y verbalmente abusivo. Mi madre no tuvo el valor para empezar de nuevo así que se quedó con él y poco a poco puso a un lado sus sueños y aspiraciones. Pero ella no permitiría que me ocurriera lo mismo que a ella.

El verano pasado, en mi primer año me ofrecieron una beca para estudiar en el extranjero en Egipto. No, para mi sorpresa , mi padre se negó a dejarme ir. Pero mi madre no permitió que mi padre arruinara mis sueños también. Yo haría esto no sólo por mí sino también por mi madre y sus aspiraciones que no había cumplido. Acepté la beca.

Pensé que por fin tendría toda la libertad que anhelaba en Egipto, pero al principio no lo tuve. Diario escuché los insultos y recibí el acoso en las calles, pero no me sometí ante las expectativas que la sociedad tenía para las mujeres por quedarme en casa. Seguí viajando por todo Egipto, las grandes pirámides de Giza, crucero por el Nilo, y viajes a Luxor y Aswan. Y antes de regresar a los EE.UU. recibí la inesperada oportunidad de viajar a Londres y París. Fue surrealista: una chica del barrio viajaría sola por el mundo con un mapa en sus manos y ningún hombre o norma cultural podría dictar lo que iba o podía a hacer. Me subí a un tren desde la Universidad de Cambridge hasta el Museo Británico. Tomé un tren de Londres a París y en dos días visité la Torre Eiffel, el Louvre , la Catedral de Notre Dame, y tomé un crucero por el río Sena. A pesar de la barrera del idioma me di cuenta que tenía la confianza en mi misma para acercarme a cualquier persona en mi camino.

Mientras estaba en Europa disfrutando de mi libertad, mi madre se mudó y alquiló su propio lugar . Era como si al mismo tiempo habíamos ganado nuestra independencia. Nos sentimos orgullosos de una misma. Y ella vivía vicariamente a través de mis experiencias por medio de las fotos que le envié lo que le conté de mis aventuras.

Finalmente, éramos libres.

Ahora vivo en los EE.UU. con mi madre. Mi padre se ha transformado gradualmente de un hombre frígido a el padre amoroso que siempre anhelaba . Mi vida no es perfecta, pero por el momento estoy disfrutando de la tranquilidad y la estabilidad con mi familia y nos comunicamos mucho mejor que antes.

Yo estoy involucrada en el Consejo de Liderazgo de mi escuela como líder de nuestro comité de eventos. Planificamos y ejecutamos los bailes escolares y creamos cartas de donación efectivas. Veo esto como un comienzo hacia mi futuro , ya que tengo pensado en obtener una doble licenciatura en Estudios de la Mujer y Relaciones Internacionales con énfasis en estudios de Medio Oriente. Después de la rebeldía civil de la primavera Árabe muchos países del Medio Oriente se negaron a concederles a las mujeres la igualdad en posiciones en la sociedad, ya que estaría en contradicción con la religión de Islam. La opresión de la mujer está silenciando a la mitad de la población. Creo que estos textos islámicos han sido mal interpretados a través del tiempo, y mi trayecto hacia mi propia independencia me ha inspirado a ayudar a otras mujeres a encontrar su liberación también.

Mi Pascua cambió drásticamente en comparación con los últimos años. En lugar de estar encerrados en casa, mi madre y yo celebramos al aire libre nuestro renacimiento y renovación.

# COMMON APP ESSAY EXAMPLE #3

## MAKEUP

In eighth grade, I was asked to write my hobbies and career goals, but I hesitated. Should I just make something up? I was embarrassed to tell people that my hobby was collecting cosmetics and that I wanted to become a cosmetic chemist. I worried others would judge me as too girlish and less competent compared to friends who wanted to work at the UN in foreign affairs or police the internet to crack down on hackers. The very fact that I was insecure about my "hobby" was perhaps proof that cosmetics was trivial, and I was a superficial girl for loving it.

But cosmetics was not just a pastime, it was an essential part of my daily life. In the morning I got up early for my skincare routine, using brightening skin tone and concealing blemishes, which gave me the energy and confidence throughout the day. At bedtime I relaxed with a soothing cleansing ritual applying different textures and scents of liquids, creams, sprays, and gels. My cosmetic collection was a dependable companion - rather than hiding it away, I decided instead to learn more about cosmetics, and to explore.

However, cosmetic science wasn't taught at school so I designed my own training. It began with the search for a local cosmetician to teach me the basics of cosmetics, and each Sunday I visited her lab to formulate organic products. A year of lab practice taught me how little I knew about ingredients, so my training continued with independent research on toxins. I discovered that safety in cosmetics was a contested issue amongst scientists, policy makers, companies, and consumer groups, variously telling me there are toxic ingredients that may or may not be harmful. I was frustrated by this uncertainty, yet motivated to find ways of sharing what I was learning with others.

Research spurred action. I began writing articles on the history of toxic cosmetics, from lead in Elizabethan face powder to lead in today's lipstick, and communicated with a large readership online. Positive feedback from hundreds of readers inspired me to step up my writing, to raise awareness with my peers, so I wrote a gamified survey for online distribution discussing the slack natural and organic labeling of cosmetics, which are neither regulated nor properly defined. At school I saw opportunities to affect real change and launched a series of green chemistry campaigns: the green agenda engaged the school community in something positive and was a magnet for creative student ideas, such as a recent project to donate handmade organic pet shampoo to local dog shelters. By senior year, I was pleased my exploration had gone well.

But on a recent holiday back home, I unpacked and noticed cosmetics had invaded much of my space over the years. Dresser top and drawers were crammed with unused tubes and jars — once handpicked with loving care — had now become garbage. I sorted through each hardened face powder and discolored lotion, remembering what had excited me about the product and how I'd used it. Examining these mementos led me to a surprising realization: yes, I had been a superficial girl obsessed with clear and flawless skin.

But there was something more too.

My makeup had given me confidence and comfort, and that was okay. I am glad I didn't abandon the superficial me, but instead acknowledged her, and stood by her to take her on an enlightening and rewarding journey. Cosmetics led me to dig deeper into scientific inquiry, helped me develop an impassioned voice, and became a tool to connect me with others. Together, I've learned that the beauty of a meaningful journey lies in getting lost for it was in the meandering that I found myself.

## COMMON APP ESSAY EXAMPLE #4

### TRANSFORMERS ARE NOT JUST FOR BOYS

Transformers are not just for boys. I loved these amazing robots that could transform into planes and cars the first time I saw them in the toy store. The boys had all the samples, refusing to let me play with one. When I protested loudly to my mother, she gently chided me that Transformers were ugly and unfeminine. She was wrong.

When I moved from China to Canada, my initial excitement turned to dismay as my peers were not as understanding of my language barrier as I'd hoped. I joined the robotics team in a desperate attempt to find a community, though I doubted I would fit into the male-dominated field. Once I used physics to determine gear ratio, held a drill for the first time, and jumped into the pit to fix a robot, I was hooked.

I went back to China that summer to bring robotics to my friends. I asked them to join me in the technology room at my old school and showed them how to use power tools to create robot parts. I pitched my idea to the school principal and department heads. By the time I left China, my old school had a team.

Throughout the next year, I guided my Chinese team-only one of three that existed in the country-with the help of social media. I translated instructions, set building deadlines and coached them on how to answer judges' questions.

I returned to China a year later to lead my team through their first Chinese-hosted international competition. Immediately upon arrival to the competition, I gave the Chinese head official important documents for urgent distribution. I knew all the Chinese teams would need careful instructions on the rules and procedures. I was surprised when the competition descended into confusion and chaos. Government policies against information sharing had blocked the Chinese teams from receiving information and the Chinese organizers hadn't distributed my documents. I decided to create another source of knowledge for my fledgling robotics teams.

It took me several weeks to create a sharing platform that students could access through the firewall. On it, I shared my experience and posted practical practice challenges. I received hundreds of shares and had dozens of discussion questions posted.

My platform's popularity created an unintended issue; it garnered the attention and reprimand of the Chinese robotics organizations. When a head official reached out to my Canadian mentors, warning them to stop my involvement with the Chinese teams, I was concerned. When a Chinese official publicly chastised me on a major robotics forum, I was heartbroken. They made it clear that my gender, my youth, and my information sharing approach was not what they wanted.

I considered quitting. But so many students reached out to me requesting help. I wanted to end unnecessary exclusion. I worked to enhance access to my platform. I convinced Amazon to sponsor my site, giving it access to worldwide high-speed servers. Although I worried about repercussions, I continued to translate and share important documents.

During the busy building season, my platform is swamped with discussions, questions and downloads. I have organized a group of friends to help me monitor the platform daily so that no question or request is left unanswered. Some of my fears have come true: I have been banned from several Chinese robotics forums. I am no longer allowed to attend Chinese robotics competitions in China as a mentor. The Chinese government has taken down my site more than once.

Robotics was my first introduction to the wonderful world of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. I am dedicated to the growth of robotics in places where it is needed and wanted. I have used my hands and mind to tear down all barriers that separate people, no matter gender or nationality, from the inspiration and exploration of STEM.

Transformers, robotics and STEM are for boys and girls, even in China.

# COMMON APP ESSAY EXAMPLE #5

## THE INSTAGRAM POST

On “Silent Siege Day,” many students in my high school joined the Students for Life club and wore red armbands with “LIFE” on them. As a non-Catholic in a Catholic school, I knew I had to be cautious in expressing my opinion on the abortion debate. However, when I saw that *all* of the armband-bearing students were male, I could not stay silent.

I wrote on Instagram, “pro-choice does not necessarily imply pro-abortion; it means that we respect a woman’s fundamental right to make her own choice regarding her own body.”

Some of my peers expressed support but others responded by calling me a dumb bitch, among other names. When I demanded an apology for the name-calling, I was told I needed to learn to take a joke: “you have a lot of anger, I think you need a boyfriend.” Another one of my peers apparently thought the post was sarcastic (?) and said “I didn’t know women knew how to use sarcasm.”

One by one, I responded. I was glad to have sparked discussion, but by midnight, I was mentally and emotionally exhausted.

Completely overwhelmed by the 140+ comments, I looked to my parents for comfort, assuming they would be proud of me for standing up for my beliefs. But instead, they told me to remove the post and to keep quiet, given the audience. I refused to remove the post, but decided to stay silent.

For months, I heard students talking about “The Post,” and a new sense of self-consciousness felt like duct tape over my mouth. As I researched the history of Planned Parenthood (to respond to someone accusing it of “the genocide of black babies”), I became interested in the history of the feminist movement. At the same time, I was studying the Civil Rights Movement in my history class, and researching my feminist critique of Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*. I gradually began to realize that refusing to conform to the conventions of society is what propels us toward equality. Martin Luther King was arrested nearly thirty times for ‘civil disobedience’ and Susan B. Anthony for ‘illegal voting.’ Letting the social media backlash silence my own fight for social justice seemed silly and unacceptable.

Before The Post, I naïvely thought that sexism was dead, but I came to see its ubiquity, whether it’s painfully conspicuous or seemingly innocuous. Knowing that young girls are especially vulnerable to constricting gender stereotypes, I Googled “girls empowerment programs” and called Girls on the Run to see how I could help. As a junior coach, I spend my Monday and Thursday afternoons with middle school girls, running, singing Taylor Swift songs, discussing our daily achievements (I got 100 on my math test!), and setting goals for the next day. The girls celebrate their accomplishments and talk about themselves positively, fully expressing their self-esteem.

After The Post, I also Googled ‘how to be politically active,’ and signed petitions for the Medicare for All Act, the Raise the Wage Act, and the EACH Woman Act, among others. In response to the transgender military ban, I called the White House (they hung up as soon as I said “as a human rights advocate...,” but I tried). It feels good to sign petitions, but I’m still not doing enough. I want to fight for social justice in the courtroom.

My role model Ruth Bader Ginsburg says, “dissent[ers] speak to a future age... they are writing not for today but for tomorrow.” Retrospectively, I realize that The Post was my voice of dissent—through it, I initiated a campus-wide discussion and openly challenged the majority opinion of my school for the first time. As I aspire to become a civil rights attorney and the first Asian woman on the Supreme Court (I hope it doesn’t take that long!), I am confident that I will continue to write and speak out for justice —for tomorrow.

# COMMON APP ESSAY EXAMPLE #6

## ¡YA LEVANTATE!

“¡Mijo! ¡Ya levantate! ¡Se hace tarde!” (Son! Wake up! It's late already.) My father's voice pierced into my room as I worked my eyes open. We were supposed to open the restaurant earlier that day.

Ever since 5th grade, I have been my parents' right hand at Hon Lin Restaurant in our hometown of Hermosillo, Mexico. Sometimes, they needed me to be the cashier; other times, I was the youngest waiter on staff. Eventually, when I got strong enough, I was called into the kitchen to work as a dishwasher and a chef's assistant.

The restaurant took a huge toll on my parents and me. Working more than 12 hours every single day (even holidays), I lacked paternal guidance, thus I had to build autonomy at an early age. On weekdays, I learned to cook my own meals, wash my own clothes, watch over my two younger sisters, and juggle school work.

One Christmas Eve we had to prepare 135 turkeys as a result of my father's desire to offer a Christmas celebration to his patrons. We began working at 11pm all the way to 5am. At one point, I noticed the large dark bags under my father's eyes. This was the scene that ignited the question in my head: “Is this how I want to spend the rest of my life?”

The answer was no.

So I started a list of goals. My first objective was to make it onto my school's British English Olympics team that competed in an annual English competition in the U.K. After two unsuccessful attempts, I got in. The rigorous eight months of training paid off as we defeated over 150 international schools and lifted the 2nd Place cup; pride permeated throughout my hometown.

Despite the euphoria brought by victory, my sense of stability would be tested again, and therefore my goals had to adjust to the changing pattern.

During the summer of 2014, my parents sent me to live in the United States on my own to seek better educational opportunities. I lived with my grandparents, who spoke Taishan (a Chinese dialect I wasn't fluent in). New responsibilities came along as I spent that summer clearing my documentation, enrolling in school, and getting electricity and water set up in our new home. At 15 years old, I became the family's financial manager, running my father's bank accounts, paying bills and insurance, while also translating for my grandmother, and cleaning the house.

In the midst of moving to a new country and the overwhelming responsibilities that came with it, I found an activity that helped me not only escape the pressures around me but also discover myself. MESA introduced me to STEM and gave me nourishment and a new perspective on mathematics. As a result, I found my potential in math way beyond balancing my dad's checkbooks.

My 15 years in Mexico forged part of my culture that I just cannot live without. Trying to fill the void for a familiar community, I got involved with the Association of Latin American students, where I am now an Executive Officer. I proudly embrace the identity I left behind. I started from small debates within the club to discussing bills alongside 124 Chicanos/Latinos at the State Capitol of California.

The more I scratch off from my goals list, the more it brings me back to those days handling spatulas. Anew, I ask myself, “Is this how I want to spend the rest of my life?” I want a life driven by my passions, rather than the impositions of labor. I want to explore new paths and grow within my community to eradicate the prejudicial barriers on Latinos. So yes, this IS how I want to spend the rest of my life.



# COMMON APP ESSAY EXAMPLE #7

## NO STRANGER TO CONTRAST

I'm no stranger to contrast. A Chinese American with accented Chinese, a Florida-born Texan, a first generation American with a British passport: no label fits me without a caveat.

But I've always strived to find connections among the dissimilar. In my home across the sea, although my relatives' rapid Mandarin sails over my head, in them I recognize the same work ethic that carried my parents out of rural Shanghai to America, that fueled me through sweltering marching band practices and over caffeinated late nights. I even spend my free time doing nonograms, grid-based logic puzzles solved by using clues to fill in seemingly random pixels to create a picture.

It started when I was a kid. One day, my dad captured my fickle kindergartner attention (a herculean feat) and taught me Sudoku. As he explained the rules, those mysterious scaffoldings of numbers I often saw on his computer screen transformed into complex structures of logic built by careful strategy.

From then on, I wondered if I could uncover the hidden order behind other things in my life. In elementary school, I began to recognize patterns in the world around me: thin, dark clouds signaled rain, the moon changed shape every week, and the best snacks were the first to go. I wanted to know what unseen rules affected these things and how they worked. My parents, both pipeline engineers, encouraged this inquisitiveness and sometimes tried explaining to me how they solved puzzles in their own work. Although I didn't understand the particulars, their analytical mindsets helped me muddle through math homework and optimize matches in Candy Crush.

In high school, I studied by linking concepts across subjects as if my coursework was another puzzle to solve. PEMDAS helped me understand appositive phrases, and the catalysts for revolutions resembled chemical isotopes, nominally different with the same properties.

As I grew older, my interests expanded to include the delicate systems of biology, the complexity of animation, and the nuances of language. Despite these subjects' apparent dissimilarity, each provided fresh, fascinating perspectives on the world with approaches like color theory and evolution. I was (and remain) voracious for the new and unusual, spending hours entrenched in Wikipedia articles on obscure topics, i.e. classical ciphers or dragons, and analyzing absurdist YouTube videos.

Unsurprisingly, like pilot fish to their sharks, my career aspirations followed my varied passions: one day I wanted to be an illustrator, the next a biochemist, then a stand-up comedian. When it came to narrowing down the choices, narrowing down myself, I felt like nothing would satisfy my ever-fluctuating intellectual appetite.

But when I discovered programming, something seemed to settle. In computer science, I had found a field where I could be creative, explore a different type of language, and (yes) solve puzzles. Coding let me both analyze logic in its purest form and manipulate it to accomplish anything from a simple "print 'hello world'" to creating functional games. Even when lines of red error messages fill my console, debugging offered me the same thrill as a particularly good puzzle. Now, when I see my buggy versions of Snake, Paint, and Pacman in my files, I'm filled paradoxically with both satisfaction and a restless itch to improve the code and write new, better programs.

While to others my life may seem like a jumble of incompatible fragments, like a jigsaw puzzle, each piece connects to become something more. However, there are still missing pieces at the periphery: experiences to have, knowledge to gain, bad jokes to tell. Someday I hope to solve the unsolvable. But for now, I've got a nonogram with my name on it.

# COMMON APP ESSAY EXAMPLE #8

## THE “NOT BLACK ENOUGH” EAST-ASIAN INFLUENCED BIBLIOPHILE

Growing up, my world was basketball. My summers were spent between the two solid black lines. My skin was consistently tan in splotches and ridden with random scratches. My wardrobe consisted mainly of track shorts, Nike shoes, and tournament t-shirts. Gatorade and Fun Dip were my pre-game snacks. The cacophony of rowdy crowds, ref whistles, squeaky shoes, and scoreboard buzzers was a familiar sound. I was the team captain of almost every team I played on—familiar with the Xs and Os of plays, commander of the court, and the coach’s right hand girl.

But that was only me on the surface.

Deep down I was an East-Asian influenced bibliophile and a Young Adult fiction writer.

Hidden in the cracks of a blossoming collegiate level athlete was a literary fiend. I devoured books in the daylight. I crafted stories at night time. After games, after practice, after conditioning I found nooks of solitude. Within these moments, I became engulfed in a world of my own creation. Initially, I only read young adult literature, but I grew to enjoy literary fiction and self-help: Kafka, Dostoevsky, Branden, Csikszentmihalyi. I expanded my bubble to Google+ critique groups, online discussion groups, blogs, writing competitions and clubs. I wrote my first novel in fifth grade, my second in seventh grade, and started my third in ninth grade. Reading was instinctual. Writing was impulsive.

I stumbled upon the movies of Hayao Miyazaki at a young age. I related a lot to the underlying East Asian philosophy present in his movies. My own perspective on life, growth, and change was echoed in his storytelling. So, I read his autobiographies, watched anime, and researched ancient texts—*Analects*, *The Way*, *Art of War*. Then, I discovered the books of Haruki Murakami whom I now emulate in order to improve my writing.

Like two sides of a coin, I lived in two worlds. One world was outward—aggressive, noisy, invigorating; the other, internal—tempestuous, serene, nuanced.

Internal and external conflict ensued. Many times I was seen only as an athlete and judged by the stereotypes that come with it: self-centered, unintelligent, listens to rap. But off the court, I was more reflective, empathetic and I listened to music like Florence and the Machine. I was even sometimes bullied for not acting “black enough.” My teammates felt that my singular focus should be basketball and found it strange that I participated in so many extracurriculars.

But why should I be one-dimensional? I had always been motivated to reach the pinnacle of my potential in whatever I was interested in. Why should I be defined by only one aspect of my life? I felt like I had to pick one world.

Then I had an ACL injury. And then another. And then another.

After the first ACL surgery, my family and I made the decision to homeschool. I knew I wanted to explore my many interests—literature, novel writing, East Asian culture, and basketball—equally. So I did. I found time to analyze *Heart of Darkness* and used my blog to instruct adult authors how to become self-published authors. I researched Shintoism, read dozens of books on writing and self-improvement. My sister and I had been talking for a while about starting a nonprofit focused on social awareness, education, and community outreach. Finally, we had the time to do it.

While basketball has equipped me with leadership skills and life experiences, it is only one part of who I am. As a socially aware, intellectual, and introspective individual, I value creative expression and independence. My life’s mission is to reach my full potential in order to help others reach their own.

# COMMON APP ESSAY EXAMPLE #9

## SUPERPOWERS

When I was a little girl, I imagined I had superpowers. Deadly lasers would shoot from my eyes pulverizing the monsters hiding under my bed. Mom would wonder where I had magically disappeared to after I turned invisible as she forced me to eat that plate of broccoli. It was the wish I made on every birthday candle and upon every bright star.

Who knew my dream would come true.

I discovered my first power when I turned 14. My mom had been diagnosed with Ovarian cancer my freshman year of high school. Seated alone in my room, I became lost in a cycle of worry and panic. In the midst of my downward spiral, I reached out for a small bristled paintbrush, guiding it across the canvas--the motion gave me peace. My emotions spilled out onto the canvas, staining my clothes with a palette of blues and blacks. A sense of calm replaced the anxiety and fear which had gripped me tightly for so many months. Painting gave me the power to heal myself and find peace in a scary situation.

Little did I know, sharing my superpower would lead me to unfamiliar parts of my city. I was alerted to trouble at an elementary school in Dallas where students' access to the arts was under threat from budget cuts. I joined forces with the principal and the school's community service representative to create an afterschool arts program. From paper masks in October to pots of sunshine crafts in March, it did more than teach students to freely draw and color; it created a community where kids connected with the power of art to express joy, hope, and identity. The program, now in its third year, has succeeded in reaching kids deprived of art. Sharing art with these students has given me the power to step outside of my familiar surroundings and connect with kids I never would have met otherwise. I am grateful for the power of art to not only heal but to also connect with others.

I knew my powers worked on a local level but I wanted to reach out globally. For four years, I have been searching for a way to defeat the scourge of child marriage, a leading cause of poverty in rural India. I discovered a formula in which girls' education successfully defeats child marriage as part of my capstone project through the Academy of Global Studies (AGS) program at my school.

I took my powers overseas, flying 8,535 miles to arrive at a dilapidated school in the bleak slums of Jaipur, India. While conducting interviews with pre-adolescent girls stuffed into dusty classrooms, I learned of their grey routines: rising early to obtain well-water, cooking, cleaning and caring for younger siblings prior to rushing to school. Despite the efforts of keeping these girls in school to prevent child marriage, their school relied on rote memorization without any creative arts programming. As I organized my art project for these girls, I was unsure if my powers would reach them. Their initial skepticism and uncertainty slowly transformed into wonder and joy as they brought their bright paper fish cut-outs to life. The experience opened my eyes to the power of art to form universal connections, and it inspires me to share and strengthen its force within the lives of all children.

Much of the little girl yearning for superpowers remains a part of me. But now I have moved beyond wishing for powers to acquiring a deeper understanding of how superpowers work. While I never fulfilled my wish to run at lightning speeds or shoot spiderwebs from my fingers, my experiences with art have taught me that the greatest superpowers lie within each of us -- the powers to create, express, and connect in meaningful ways. Every girl deserves the chance to dream, I am just lucky mine came true.

# COMMON APP ESSAY EXAMPLE #10

## DOES EVERY LIFE MATTER?

Does every life matter? Because it seems like certain lives matter more than others, especially when it comes to money.

I was in eighth grade when a medical volunteer group that my dad had led to Northern Thailand faced a dilemma of choosing between treating a patient with MDR-TB or saving \$5000 (the estimated treatment cost for this patient) for future patients. I remember overhearing intense conversations outside the headquarters tent. My dad and his friend were arguing that we should treat the woman regardless of the treatment cost, whereas the others were arguing that it simply cost too much to treat her. Looking back, it was a conflict between ideals--one side argued that everyone should receive treatment whereas the other argued that interventions should be based on cost-effectiveness. I was angry for two reasons. First, because my father lost the argument. Second, because I couldn't logically defend what I intuitively believed: that every human being has a right to good health. In short, that every life matters.

Over the next four years I read piles of books on social justice and global health equity in order to prove my intuitive belief in a logical manner. I even took online courses at the undergraduate and graduate level. But I failed to find a clear, logical argument for why every life mattered. I did, however, find sound arguments for the other side, supporting the idea that society should pursue the well-being of the greatest number, that interventions should mitigate the most death and disability per dollar spent. Essentially, my research screamed, "Kid, it's all about the numbers."

But I continued searching, even saving up pocket money to attend a summer course on global health at Brown University. It was there that I met Cate Oswald, a program director for Partners in Health (PIH), an organization that believed "the idea that some lives matter less is the root of all that is wrong with the world." It was like finding a ray of light in the darkness.

Refueled with hope, I went back to find the answer, but this time I didn't dive into piles of books or lectures. I searched my memories. Why was I convinced that every life mattered?

When the woman with MDR-TB came to our team, she brought along with her a boy that looked about my age. Six years have passed since I met him, but I still remember the gaze he gave me as he left with his mother. It wasn't angry, nor was it sad. It was, in a way, serene. It was almost as if he knew this was coming. That burdened me. Something inside me knew this wasn't right. It just didn't feel right. Perhaps it was because I, for a second, placed myself in his shoes, picturing what I'd feel if my mother was the woman with MDR-TB.

Upon reflection, I found that my answer didn't exist in books or research, but somewhere very close from the beginning--my intuition. In other words, I didn't need an elaborate and intricate reason to prove to myself that health is an inalienable right for every human being--I needed self-reflection.

So I ask again, "Does every life matter?" Yes. "Do I have solid, written proof?" No.

Paul Farmer once said, "The thing about rights is that in the end you can't *prove* what is a right." To me, global health is not merely a study. It's an attitude--a lens I use to look at the world--and it's a statement about my commitment to health as a fundamental quality of liberty and equity.

# COMMON APP ESSAY EXAMPLE #11

## THE DAILY SHOW

For over two years, my final class of the day has been nontraditional. No notes, no tests, no official assignments. Just a twenty-three minute lecture every Monday through Thursday, which I watched from my couch. Professor Jon Stewart would lecture his class about the news of the day, picking apart the absurdities of current events.

*The Daily Show* inspired me to explore the methods behind the madness of the world Stewart satirized. Although I'd always had a passion for the news, I evolved from scrolling through *Yahoo's* homepage to reading articles from *The New York Times* and *The Economist*. I also began to tie in knowledge I learned in school. I even caught *The Daily Show* inexcusably putting a picture of John Quincy Adams at a table with the founding fathers instead of John Adams! Thanks, APUSH.

Clearly, *The Daily Show* has a political slant. However, Stewart convinced me that partisan media, regardless of its political affiliation, can significantly impact its viewers' political beliefs. I wrote a psychology paper analyzing the polarizing effects of the media and how confirmation bias leads already opinionated viewers to ossify their beliefs. As a debater, I've learned to argue both sides of an issue, and the hardest part of this is recognizing one's own biases. I myself had perhaps become too biased from my viewing of *The Daily Show*, and ultimately this motivated me to watch CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News, allowing me to assimilate information from opposing viewpoints.

I embraced my new role as an intellectual moderator in academic discourse... at my friend's 17th birthday party. It was there that two friends started arguing over the Baltimore riots. One argued that the anti-police rhetoric of the protest was appalling; the other countered by decrying the clear presence of race discrimination still in the country. Both had their biases: the friend who argued on behalf of the police was the son of a police officer, while my friend who defended the protests personally knew people protesting in Baltimore. I questioned both on their positions, and ultimately, both reconsidered the other's perspective.

However, I began to wonder: was I excusing myself from the responsibility of taking a position on key issues? Perhaps there are times that I shouldn't merely understand both sides, but actually choose one. In biology, for example, we studied the debates over evolution and climate change. Is it my role, as an informed student, to advocate both sides of the debate, despite one side being overwhelmingly supported by scientific evidence? Maybe I must sometimes shed my identity as Devil's advocate and instead be an advocate for my own convictions.

Although I don't have a news (or fake news) network where I can voice my opinions, I look towards further assessing my own viewpoints while maintaining my role as an impartial academic debater. I am eager to delve into an intellectual environment that challenges me to decide when to be objective and when to embrace my bias and argue for my own beliefs.

# COMMON APP ESSAY EXAMPLE #12

## MAZES

My story begins at about the age of two, when I first learned what a maze was. For most people, solving mazes is a childish phase, but I enjoyed artistically designing them. Eventually my creations jumped from their two dimensional confinement, requiring the solver to dive through holes to the other side, or fold part of the paper over, then right back again. At around the age of eight, I invented a way for mazes to carry binary-encoded messages, with left turns and right turns representing 0s and 1s. This evolved into a base-3 maze on the surface of a tetrahedron, with crossing an edge representing a 2. For me, a blank piece of paper represented the freedom to explore new dimensions, pushing the boundaries of traditional maze making.

I found a similar freedom in mathematics. Here's what I wrote when I was 9:

$N+B=Z$   
 $M^2=P$   
 $E-(L+B)=G$   
 $C/Y=Z-Q$   
 $B+B=Y$   
 $(D-V)^9-(P*L)=J$   
 $W=(I-V)^2$   
 $Y+B+C=R$   
 $O^2+(Y*O)=T$   
 $F^3-(T+W)=F^2$   
 $V-R=H-U$   
 $A^3-C=N$   
 $Y^2+B=L$   
 $J^2-J=J+(P+I)$   
 $Y^3=X$   
 $X-R=M-O$   
 $D*A-B-(V+Y)=E$   
 $U-X-O=W$   
 $P/P=B$   
 $S-A=U$   
 $(Z+B)*C=P$   
 $C(+/-)B=A$   
 $U+C=H$   
 $R-L=S-T$

The object of puzzles like these was to solve for every letter, assuming they each represented a unique positive integer, and that both sides of each equation are positive. These are not typical assumptions for practical mathematics, and I didn't even need 26 equations. Upon formally learning algebra, I was dismayed that "proper math" operated under a different set of assumptions, that two variables can be equal, or be non-integers, and that you always need as many equations as variables. Yet looking back, I now see that mathematics was so inspirational because there really is no "proper" way, no convention to hold me from discovering a completely original method of thought. Math was, and still is, yet another way for me to freely express my creativity and different way of thinking without constraint.

It's all about freedom. The thoughts are there, they just need a way to escape. The greatest single advancement that delivered even more freedom was my first computer, and on it, one of the first computer games I ever played: "Maze Madness." It was a silly and simple game, but I remember being awed that I could create my own levels. Through the years, I've made thousands (not exaggerating) of levels in a variety of different computer games. I get most excited when I discover a bug that I can incorporate to add a new twist to the traditional gameplay.

A few years ago I grew tired of working within the constraints of most internet games and I wanted to program my own, so I decided to learn the language of Scratch. With it, I created several computer games, incorporating such unordinary aspects of gameplay as the avoidance of time-travel paradoxes, and the control of "jounce," the fourth derivative of position with respect to time. Eventually, I came to realize that Scratch was too limited to implement some of my ideas, so I learned C#, and my potential expanded exponentially. I continue to study programming knowing that the more I learn, the more tools I have to express my creativity.

To me, studying computer science is the next step of an evolution of boundary breaking that has been underway since my first maze.

# COMMON APP ESSAY EXAMPLE #13

## GROWING UP IN LEBANON

I am [Student's name]. I was named after my father and grandfather. I was born, raised and currently reside in the Phoenician city of Sidon, a port city in the south of Lebanon along the Mediterranean. I was raised speaking Arabic and, at age 6, I began attending French Community School where the language of instruction is French. Thus, English is my third language.

While I have been fortunate in many ways, I have had my share of challenges growing up in Lebanon. In 2006, I witnessed my first war, which broke in the south of Lebanon and resulted in the displacement of thousands of people into my hometown. Hearing the bombs and seeing the images of destruction around me certainly impacted me. However, the greater impact, was working with my father to distribute basic aid to the refugees. I visited one site where three families were cramped up in one small room but still managed to make the best of the situation by playing cards and comforting each other. Working with the refugees was very rewarding and their resilience was inspiring. The refugees returned home and the areas destroyed were largely rebuilt. This experience showed me the power of community and the importance of giving back.

I am blessed with a family who has supported my ambitious academic and social pursuits. My parents have always worked hard to provide me with interesting developmental opportunities, be it a ballet performance at the Met, a Scientific Fair at Beirut Hippodrome, or a tour of London's Houses of Parliament. Because of the value they placed on education, my parents placed me in a competitive Catholic school despite my family's Muslim background. Today, my close friends consist of my classmates from various religious and social backgrounds.

In 2012 and 2013, I had the opportunity to attend summer programs at UCLA and Yale University. The programs were incredibly rewarding because they gave me a taste of the excellent quality and diversity of education available in the United States. At Yale University, my roommate shared with me stories about the customs in his hometown of Shanghai. Other experiences, such as the mock board meeting of a technology company to which students from different backgrounds brought in divergent business strategies, affirmed my belief in the importance of working toward a more inclusive global community. I believe the United States, more so than any other country, can offer a challenging, engaging and rewarding college education with opportunities for exposure to a diverse range of students from across the globe.

I intend to return to Lebanon upon graduation from college in order to carry on the legacy of my grandfather and father through developing our family business and investing in our community. My grandfather, who never graduated from high school started a small grocery store with limited resources. Through hard work, he grew his business into the largest grocery store in my hometown, Khan Supermarket. My father, who attended only one year of college, transformed it into a major shopping center.

Like my father, I grew up involved in the business and have a passion for it. I've worked in various roles at the store, and, in 2012, I worked on a project to implement an automated parking system, contacting vendors from around the globe and handling most of the project on my own from planning to organization and coordination. I enjoyed every bit of it, taking pride in challenging myself and helping my father.

My hard work has driven me to become the top-ranked student in my school, and I am confident that my ambition and desire to contribute to the community will ensure my success in your program. I look forward to learning from the diverse experiences of my peers and sharing my story with them, thus enriching both our learning experiences. And I look forward to becoming the first man in my family to finish college.