

Advanced Composition
2019-2020 Summer Reading and Writing Assignments

You will have TWO assignments due on the first day of school:

1. Compose TWO common app prompts to begin the college application process.
2. Research and annotate THREE in depth articles about a social issue.

Rationale:

The ubiquity of technology seems to negate the importance of reading and writing in today's classroom and curriculum; in fact, the ability of a student to read and write well is essential to his success outside the school arena. According to the International Reading Association,

“Adolescents entering the adult world will do more reading and writing tasks than at any other time in human history. They will need reading and writing to cope with information they will find the world as it exists. They will also need to use literacy to feed their imaginations so that they can create the world of the future. In a complex and diverse world, their ability to read is crucial, and therefore, it is essential not only to help them survive, but also to help them thrive.”

Objectives:

Students will read for a deeper understanding with a common focus that will permit deep instruction on the first day of class.

Students will compose narrative essays to prepare for the college application process as well as engage in a reflection of himself and his abilities.

I. ASSIGNMENT #1: COMMON APPLICATION ESSAY

Your goal is to compose TWO essays that reveal who you are through a memorable experience or significant event. Your essay should show evidence of careful reflection and brainstorming, revision, and style. This is your chance to present yourself as a college-ready student with a work ethic and level of ambition.

At the beginning of school, I will work together to help you craft your essays so that you have two strong essays in your college portfolio.

General Guidelines:

1. Keep all brainstorming and drafts.
2. Your work should be your own. It will be submitted to a plagiarism site for evaluation.
3. Your work should be in final draft format, clean and free of typos and editing errors.
4. Your final draft should be typed and ready to turn in prior to the beginning of school. Electronic submissions are acceptable, but they must be from your school gmail account and on google docs.
5. Check your email! We will send you updates and information during the summer.

The 2019-2020 Common App Prompts

Select TWO prompts from the list to compose an essay:

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 an incident or 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 or 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?

Note: If you are applying to a school with a specific prompt, you may use that prompt in place of a common app prompt.

See Appendix A

II. ASSIGNMENT #2: IN-DEPTH ARTICLE ANALYSIS

This semester, you will compose an argument essay on a contemporary issue. To help you begin this process, you must first decide on a contemporary issue. Select a topic that interests you and that can be developed into a 5 page paper with academic sources.

#1 Determine your topic. A list of suggested topics will be uploaded to the class folder, but you may already have a topic that is of particular interest to you. Once you determine your topic, you must notify me via email for approval. Once you receive approval, begin your research.

#2 Research a minimum of THREE in-depth articles about your topic.

- Articles must be 1000+ words.
- Articles must be pulled from Alabama Virtual Library's online database, Opposing Viewpoints in Context. You must print, read, and annotate your articles.
- For each article, write a one paragraph summary (8-12 sentences) of the article. You may discuss things such as the main idea, any background information discussed in the article, different sides of an issue, or how this issue might be resolved.

Your responses may be typed or handwritten, and must be stapled atop your annotated article.

APPENDIX: An Admissions Dean Offers Advice on Writing a College Essay

Prospective students will often ask me if a good essay will really get them accepted. The truth is that while no essay will make an unqualified student acceptable, a good essay can help a qualified applicant stand out from the competition. A good essay just might be what turns a "maybe" into a "yes."

The college application process takes time, preparation and creativity, which is a lot for any active senior to handle. Summer, however, typically offers about 10 weeks free of classes and homework and many of the other stresses that come with high school. The pressure of the looming college application deadline is still months away, which allows students the freedom to play around with different ideas, test different angles and solicit feedback from friends and family.

Another reason to focus your summer energy on crafting a quality essay: at this point in the admission process, it is one of the few things you can still control. This is your chance to show us what you are capable of when you have time to think, prepare, rewrite and polish.

While there is no magic formula for the perfect admission essay, there are a few things prospective college students should know. Here are my Top Ten tips:

- **Write about yourself.** A great history paper on the Civil War might be very well written, but it doesn't tell me anything about the writer. Regardless of the topic, make sure you shine through your essay.
- **Use your own voice.** I can tell the difference between the voice of a 40-year-old and a high school senior.
- **Focus on one aspect of yourself.** If you try to cover too many topics in your essay, you'll end up with a resume of activities and attributes that doesn't tell me as much about you as an in-depth look at one project or passion.
- **Be genuine.** Don't try to impress me, because I've heard it all. Just tell me what is important to you.
- **Consider a mundane topic.** Sometimes it's the simple things in life that make the best essays. Some of my favorites have included essays that reflect on the daily subway ride to school, or what the family goldfish observed from the fishbowl perched on the family kitchen table. It doesn't have to be a life-changing event to be interesting and informative.
- **Don't rely on "how to" books.** Use them to get your creative juices flowing, but don't adhere too rigidly to their formulas, and definitely don't use their example topics. While there are always exceptions, the "what my room says about me" essay is way overdone.
- **Share your opinions, but avoid anything too risky or controversial.** Your essay will be read by a diverse group of individuals from a wide range of backgrounds, so try to appeal to the broadest audience possible.
- **Tell a good story.** Show me why you are compassionate; don't tell me you are. Show me that you have overcome great difficulty; don't start your essay with "I have overcome great difficulties."
- **Don't repeat what is already in your application.** If you go to a performing arts school and all of your extracurricular activities and awards relate to dance, don't write about how much you love dancing. Tell me something I couldn't know just from reading the other parts of your application.
- **Finally, don't forget about the supplements.** The supplement questions are very important - you should plan to spend as much time on them as you do on your essay. A well-written essay won't help if your supplement answers are sloppy and uninformative.

By MARTHA C. MERRILL

Martha C. Merrill, the dean of admission and financial aid of Connecticut College, and a graduate of the class of 1984, encourages incoming high school seniors to begin contemplating their college essays this summer. She also offers perspective on what she looks for in an applicant's essay.

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