



Writing the Personal Statement

Purpose of the Personal Statement

- To help the college get to know you beyond your GPA, class rank, and test scores
- To determine if you are a good fit for their school
- To make you “real”

Tips for Writing

- o Start early
- o Consider your audience
- o Be yourself (don't write what you think they want to hear)
- o Be honest
- o Tell your story in your own voice
- o “Show” don't “tell”
- o Take a risk (don't write what everyone else is writing)
- o Keep in focus/answer the question
- o Write and rewrite!
- o Get a second opinion (show it to someone who doesn't know you well)
- o Proofread

What to Avoid

- o Listing activities or anything else that can be found in another part of your application
- o Exceeding the allotted length
- o Being too cute or silly/inappropriate humor
- o Generalities
- o Take care in touching on subjects that are too personal

Common Topics

- o Extracurricular (what learned, how grew)
- o Obstacle or challenge (avoid sports injury)
- o Person of influence (no mom)
- o Significant experience
- o Tell us about yourself
- o Why us?
- o The creative question (creative = good, wacky = not!)

U of A Honors Essay Prompt

- o Select an inspirational quote that you would put on the wall of your room as you begin your freshman year at the University of Arizona Honors College. Why did you pick this quote? Explain why you see its message as enduring rather than situational. 500 words max.

Barrett, the Honors College at ASU Essay Prompt

- o In an essay of no more than 500 words, discuss one of your intellectual virtues (e.g. curiosity) or vices (e.g. arrogance). Briefly explain why you characterize it as such. Share a story that illustrates the ways in which your intellectual virtue or vice influenced a decision you made, with positive or negative consequences. Keep in mind that we are interested in how you will inform, affect, and/or strengthen the honors college experience and academic environment for others

Common Application Essay Prompts

- 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.
- The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later success. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
- Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?
- 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.
- Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family

Get started!

- Brainstorming exercises handout