

# Composition: Personal Paper

## Required:

- 600 - 1000 words
- narrative (event) plus reflection (comment on event)
- typed, double-spaced
- shared (anonymously) in silent readaround

## Process:

1. **Prewrite** (choose topic and brainstorm parts to include)
2. **Draft** (write body paragraphs)
3. **Revise** (introduction, conclusion; add/remove/reorganize as needed)
4. **Edit** (polish spelling, grammar, punctuation: 200-word challenge!)
5. **Publish** (turn in for grade and anonymous readaround)

Option #1: Write a **personal narrative** about a significant event in your life: an event you can remember in detail, and one that influences who you are today.

Option #2: Write a **personal essay** for college or scholarship applications. (If the rules for your school/scholarship do not permit at least 500 words, write on two or more topics.)

Option #3: *If you have a future opportunity that will require a different kind of personal writing, please discuss with MsB; projects like a formal business plan or job application letter may also be suitable for this assignment.*

# Personal Narrative Brainstorming

Situations or events that led up to the event

Where/when the main action started

How old you were

What you intended or expected to happen

Background information that will help us understand the situation and events:

Who, What, When, Where, How, Why

Background information we need to understand why it is significant to you

Who was involved (star\* most important)

Places where things happened (star\* most important)

Mini-events that make up the overall event (star\* most important)

Sensory details (sight, sound, touch, taste, smell) that are strong in your memory:

people, place/s, objects, events, actions, reactions (star\* most important)

Dialogue you remember: what people said

Anything especially funny / sweet / scary / confusing / memorable

At key moments, exactly what you were thinking / feeling

What you understood about the experience at the time

What other people thought/think about the experience

What you understand about it now

What went into your decision/s or reactions (values, advice, emotions,

information, misinformation...)

How it all turned out in the end

How it affects you now

Why this event is significant/meaningful

\_\_\_\_\_ add categories here!

\_\_\_\_\_ and here!

\_\_\_\_\_ and here!

\_\_\_\_\_ and here!

\_\_\_\_\_ and here!

# Essay prompts from the Common Application for college admission

**PROMPT #1: Some students have a background or story that is so central to their identity that they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, please share your story.**

This question is beautiful and broad. What, in your seventeen years on this earth, has helped shape the person you are today? It can be something as small as seeing an episode of a television show, or as large as moving to a foreign country. That said, it has to be... specific to you and who you are and no one else. Did a Wednesday night family bowling tradition help shape the way you think about family, teamwork and the power of rituals? Does your crazy dyed-blue hair define you? What do you love and why do you love it? What funny story do you tell friends and family over and over again, and why do you think it always comes up?

**PROMPT #2: Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what lessons did you learn?**

While the prompt is asking about failure, what admissions really wants to know is, when have you experienced failure and turned it into a personal success? How do you deal with hardship? Are you the kind of person who can rebound - who turns every experience, good or bad, into one from which you can learn something? Students should be careful not to choose failures that might seem trite (failure to get an A on an exam), or that illustrate a lapse in good judgment (that time you crashed your car). Did your failed attempt to become a child actor introduce you screenwriting, your professional goal and biggest passion? Try to keep these stories as positive as possible. Remember, these essays are not really about losing the election...; they are about overcoming obstacles.

**PROMPT #3: Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?**

This is perhaps the most challenging prompt of the Common App's selection. It requires a student to speak passionately about beliefs and ideology... Responses to this prompt can be incisive and deeply personal. They can also be quite controversial, and students need to carefully assess the risks of espousing beliefs that might be polarizing for the readers of their applications. When has your opinion been unpopular? Why are you the kind of person who is willing to stand up for what you believe in? What is important to you on a fundamental level of morals and values?

**PROMPT #4: Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?**

What is a place, really? It can be a physical location, a state of mind, even a period in time. Students can really have fun addressing this question from a quirky perspective. Are you a board game addict? Maybe your favorite place is the "GO" square in Monopoly, which marks the start of a fresh journey around the board. What might that place say about you? How might it relate to the way you attack life's journey? If you are a swimmer, maybe your favorite place is mid-stroke. Maybe that place is deep in your thoughts right before the start of a meet. If you do have a physical place worth writing about, go for it. Be descriptive. Be specific. And don't forget to link your place back to its overall meaning in your life and experiences thus far.

**PROMPT #5: Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.**

A formal event or accomplishment might encompass anything from obvious landmarks like birthdays and weddings, to achievements like earning an award or receiving a promotion. More informal examples might include something as simple as meeting a special person in your life, taking a car ride, or eating a particularly meaningful meal. When did you learn something that made you feel more adult, more capable, more grown up? Maybe rescuing a child from the deep end of the community pool reminded you that you're not a kid anymore. When you got your license and started to drive to school on your own, did you miss those regular car rides with your mom? What did you learn about your desire for independence on that first ride alone? The event or accomplishment you discuss should be something that helped you understand the world around you through a different, more mature lens.