

Essay Excellence

What We Will Cover

- ❖ Apply Texas
- ❖ Common Application
- ❖ Supplemental Essays
- ❖ Merit Essays
- ❖ Scholarship Essays

Apply Texas vs. Common Application

The Apply Texas application is used by all the colleges and universities in the State of Texas.

The Common Application is used by almost all colleges and universities OUTSIDE of Texas.

Some state schools - like California and Florida - have their own applications.

Early Decision * Early Action * Rolling Admission * Regular Decision

Early Decision: You apply early and hear back early. BINDING - If you are accepted, you must pay the deposit AND withdraw all of your other college applications! November - hear mid-December. **FINANCE**

Early Action: If you are deferred, you can still apply as regular decision. No commitment.

Regular Decision: Most students choose this option. Gives you time to “spruce up” grades, gather materials (recommendations, scores), prepare essays and take (ugh) more standardized tests.

Rolling Admission: SUPER-IMPORTANT for Apply Texas. As soon as the application opens - **FIRST COME, FIRST SERVE! CHECK DATES!**

Opening Dates

- ❖ Check the websites! Often...
- ❖ Last year, Apply Texas opened July 1; UT was later
- ❖ Common App opened August 1
- ❖ BUT, you can begin filling the general portion of the Common App starting 8/1 of the PRIOR year!!

When to start?

As soon as you take your last final exam!
(NOT kidding!)

What to write?



OK - Let's Get Down to Brass Tacks!

OR - How Do I Start!!

You are being asked to write about things you love.

Have FUN~

FUN ≠ EASY!

These essays need to be:

- ❖ Informative
- ❖ Concise
- ❖ Written totally in your 17-year-old voice. That's hard.

Keep it SIMPLE

Well - you can write about really simple things - your playlist, a sunset, or a toothbrush~

You are trying to:

- ❖ Be authentic
- ❖ Be genuine
- ❖ Be informative
- ❖ Use YOUR voice.
- ❖ Write many essays

But - HOW??

- ❖ THINK
- ❖ PLAN
- ❖ Build out from a narrow focus to concrete focus
- ❖ Know how to tell a story - you *know* how to do that
- ❖ A KILLER first sentence
- ❖ A lively, unique voice - DON'T BORE the reader
- ❖ Technical Correctness - grammar, punctuation, word choice and sentence variety

Think and Plan

This is NOT a school essay; therefore, you do not have to have a 5 paragraph essay with a standard introduction, thesis and conclusion.

However, you MUST carefully follow grammar rules.

Punctuation is imperative

No spelling errors

Upper-level vocabulary - use a thesaurus; but DON'T use words you have never heard!

Use transitions

Use sentence variety

The Apply Texas Prompts

- ❖ Essay A: Tell us your story. What unique opportunities or challenges have you experienced throughout your high school career that have shaped who you are today?
- ❖ Essay B: Some students have an identity, an interest, or a talent that defines them in an essential way. If you are one of those students, then tell us about yourself.
- ❖ Essay C: You've got a ticket in your hand - Where will you go? What will you do? What will happen when you get there?

UT Short Answer Requirements

- ❖ Short Answer 1:

Why are you interested in the major you indicated as your first-choice major?

- ❖ Short Answer 2:

Leadership can be demonstrated in many ways. Please share how you have demonstrated leadership in either your school, job, community, and/or within your family responsibilities.

- ❖ Short Answer 3:

Please share how you believe your experiences, perspectives, and/or talents have shaped your ability to contribute to and enrich the learning environment at UT Austin, both in and out of the classroom.

UT Short Answers that might also be required:

- ❖ Architecture
- ❖ Art and Art History
- ❖ Nursing
- ❖ Social Work

Optional UT Short Answer

Please share background on events or special circumstances that may have impacted your high school performance.

Texas A&M University

Short Answer Question for Engineering

Describe your academic and career goals in the broad field of engineering (including computer science, industrial distribution, and engineering technology). What and/or who has influenced you either inside or outside the classroom that contributed to these goals?

Which Essay?

- ❖ Each school has different essay requirements.
- ❖ Some require one essay, some two essays
- ❖ Some, all three essays

Common App Questions

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.

UH Honors Program

- ❖ A full-length academic essay:
- ❖ A literary analysis with a strong thesis
- ❖ Strong supporting arguments
- ❖ Three to five pages

UNPACK THE QUESTION !!

This is an educational term which is super-important to explain right now.

So many students write and find themselves woefully short of the word count.

“I don’t know what else to say!!?!?!?!?”

Well, most times, the solution is to answer the ENTIRE question!

Let’s practice:

Apply Texas Question

- ❖ Essay C: You've got a ticket in your hand - Where will you go? What will you do? What will happen when you get there?

Answer ALL!!

Answer ALL the parts:

- ❖ Where will you go?
- ❖ What will you do?
- ❖ What will happen when you get there?

Common App Question

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?

Answer ALL
the parts of
the question!!

Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback or failure.

How did it affect you?

And, what did you learn from the experience?

Starting Points

It is tempting to Google other essays.

I caution you to stay true to YOUR voice.

You can get extremely discouraged when you read about other kids achievements.

I think if you want to read other essays to get an idea of what other students write about - OK.

Know the Word Count

Know the word count

Use the entire word count

When you submit essays, you will have to watch the character count, and also blank spaces.

Apply Texas is 120 eighty-character lines!!

After the end of a sentence, just use one space

When to
start?

- ❖ THREE
months
early!
- ❖ Freewrite

Write about YOU!

If you choose to give a story about someone else, you **MUST** make sure you are coming back to you!! The college is **NOT** admitting the other individual - they want to know about **YOU!**

What makes **YOU YOU!**

The college wants learn something about you.

Fears ~
Failures ~
Hardships ~
Successes

You are trying to sell yourself

You have probably been told to be humble ~~
NOT now

You do NOT have to have an extraordinary
story

An everyday experience can work

Present your unique abilities

Showcase something NOT in the applications

How to Use Full Word Count

- ❖ Treat the essay as if it matters - IT DOES!
- ❖ Optional is NOT optional
- ❖ Even the short answer and the supplemental essays deserve great importance
- ❖ If your essay is too short:
 - Add prepositional phrases
 - Add adjectives
 - Add adverbs

Strategies

- ❖ Be genuine
- ❖ Write about what YOU want to write about
- ❖ Use YOUR personal voice
- ❖ Demonstrate how you are different
- ❖ Present your unique qualities
- ❖ Tell a story
- ❖ How did the incident SHAPE you?
- ❖ How were you challenged?

More Ideas

- ❖ What drives you?
- ❖ Explain your goals.
- ❖ What makes you individual?
- ❖ What motivates you?
- ❖ You do NOT have to write about a tragedy or curing a disease!
- ❖ Have you faced a challenge - WHAT exactly IS a challenge.
- ❖ Stay true to yourself.

And MORE Ideas

Shamelessly promote yourself

Don't try to sound too impressive

WHAT???

Brag

Stay true to yourself

WHAT??

I STILL Don't Know What to Write!

- ❖ Find your AH-HA moment
- ❖ How you took a risk
- ❖ How you failed
- ❖ Something you learned from the past
- ❖ How you took a risk
- ❖ How you were open-minded
- ❖ How you became interested in something
- ❖ Where you hope to be
- ❖ Personal anecdote of realization

Telling Your Story

- ❖ Like you are having a conversation
- ❖ Captivating story
- ❖ Emotional details
- ❖ Specific examples
- ❖ Stay positive
- ❖ Passion shines
- ❖ Humor
- ❖ Stay positive
- ❖ Play list ~ ~ Santa Claus

Still Lost? Try these:

- ❖ Reflects upon previous fear(s)
- ❖ Hardships make you who you are
- ❖ Plans for the future -
EITHER WAY!

Structure

- ❖ Not a school essay - 5 paragraph
- ❖ BUT
- ❖ Paragraphs
- ❖ Topic Sentences
- ❖ Structure
- ❖ Proofread
- ❖ Revise ~ REVISE ~ REVISE!

Grammar

- ❖ All Punctuation counts:
- ❖ Commas
- ❖ Quotation marks
- ❖ Hyphens
- ❖ Semicolons
- ❖ Sentence variety
- ❖ Transition words
- ❖ Paragraphs
- ❖ Verb tense
- ❖ Subject ~ Verb Agreement

You're DONE!

Well, not really!

In order to submit your essay, you must:

- ❖ Have 500 - 700 words
- ❖ 120 eighty-character lines of text
- ❖ Including spaces and blank lines
- ❖ Use a single space after a period

Seeking Advice

- ❖ Reading essays on websites to “inspire” you
- ❖ Getting help from friends and/or relatives to “review.”

Style

- ❖ Don't write about things already in your application
- ❖ Great detailed opening
- ❖ Grab your reader with a first sentence! (read first lines of novels or short stories!)
- ❖ Use imagery
- ❖ Evoke feeling
- ❖ Make them smile

Supplemental Essays ~~~ REALLY? There's MORE??

YUP!! These are the typical supplemental essay categories:

- ❖ Why Us?
- ❖ Why Major?
- ❖ Community
- ❖ Leadership
- ❖ Diversity
- ❖ Extracurricular
- ❖ “Quotation”
- ❖ Short answer
- ❖ ~Zany~

Examples of Each Question

Do your RESEARCH!!

KNOW THE WORD COUNT!!

- ❖ WHY US?
- ❖ What specific programs do they offer?
- ❖ What majors?
- ❖ Are there specific faculty members with which you might want to work?
- ❖ What research opportunities does the school provide?
- ❖ Travel abroad?
- ❖ Did you VISIT? If so, mention your specific visit AND if you met with counselors or students; what impressed you?

Why us?

- ❖ Do your HOMEWORK! Really DIG DEEP!
- ❖ Look for a:
 - specific class
 - Professor
 - Club ***
 - travel abroad opportunity
 - internship opportunity

Why your major?

Show how your interest developed.

- ❖ Anecdote: disassembled things; played school; relative
- ❖ Coursework
- ❖ Specific examples
- ❖ Relevant extracurricular activities - internships
- ❖ Goals
- ❖ You can still be undecided in an area

Community

Admissions officers want to see how you will fit in and impact the college community. They are BUILDING a community in their admitted class - show how you will be a strong part of that community.

Describe how you impacted a community or how your community impacted you.

Community can be anything you choose! Clubs, athletics, your neighborhood, church, school, family, group that you identify with... anything you affiliate with.

What is important to portray is your GROWTH through your contributions to the greater whole - or how YOU improved the group.

Leadership

Again, you don't need an outstanding accomplishment like leading a team to the top of Mt. Everest~ leadership can be compared to almost anything!

- ❖ Try to focus on a concrete event.
- ❖ Determine for yourself what happened.
- ❖ What was the background? What were the stakes?
- ❖ What did you do specifically?
- ❖ What outcome did your involvement bring?
- ❖ This essay is meant to highlight one of your accomplishments by showing precisely what you have done.

Extracurricular

- ❖ If you have used your Extracurricular activity in another statement or supplemental essay, then avoid using it again - unless you have something truly unique to say about it for another essay
- ❖ This essay shouldn't restate the activities you've already shared in your resume, but should elaborate on their impact and significance to you as a person.

Diversity

Diversity means many things for college admissions. Diversity comes not just from ethnicity, but from nationality, socio-economic position, geographic location, intellectual positions, religious identity, and personal circumstances.

Think about how your lived experience has shaped you: how you view the world, react to it, and operate within a broader picture because of who you are. This essay is meant to describe how you are unique, and how your unique experiences and viewpoints will contribute to the campus community as a whole.

As with the rest of the essays, the college wants to learn something about you, so the extracurricular should be used as a ***lens through which one of your facets is displayed.***

Recycling Essays

If using the same essay ~~~~~

Make sure to change the name of the
college!!!!

Quotation

The same guidelines apply:

- ❖ the essay should tell the college something they don't already know about you
- ❖ give a deeper insight into how you think and approach problems.

Short Answer

Know your word count~

Don't skimp on the short answer questions!

A 50 word answer is even more difficult because you need to:

USE EVERY word wisely!

Zany

Question Examples:

1. “List five books you have read that intrigued you. (Spaces have been left for you to include each book’s title and author and mark whether the selection was required or not required.)”
 2. “Give us your top ten list.”
 3. “As part of my high-school English curriculum, I was required to read _____. I would have liked to replace it with _____. The required book I was most surprised I enjoyed was _____.”
-
- ❖ While these questions won't have the same space for details as other questions, a little effort can go a long way.
 - ❖ If asked for your favorite book, don't merely say what, but why, and take a sentence or two to explain what this book means to you specifically.

Applications

- ❖ I suggest you make a mock application
- ❖ Fill out the ENTIRE application
- ❖ You will have to fill out every course you have taken and tell how it was weighted
- ❖ The application is very long
- ❖ Your goal is to have the entire application ready to go at 12:01 of the opening date - ROLLING ADMISSION!

You CAN do it!

Everything you submit with your application should be meaningful and impactful

Make everything count!