



EMPOWERING YOUR VOICE: WRITING YOUR BEST COLLEGE ESSAY

At the University of Massachusetts Amherst, we believe that every student has a story to tell, and that grades are only one piece of that story. Students who are admitted to UMass Amherst are not only academically motivated—they are creators and innovators, writers and researchers, and leaders. Our students come from all different backgrounds and have varying experiences, all of which make up the **whole** of who they are.

When you apply to UMass Amherst, the admissions team will review your application **holistically**, taking into consideration all of the components of your application: your completed Common Application, your transcript, your letter(s) of recommendation, your list of activities or resumé, and your essay.

Your essay is your opportunity to tell us **your story**, from **your perspective**. This activity will help you start (or continue) your writing process to reveal your best college essay.

LET'S START WITH SOME OF THE BASICS ABOUT YOU!

Writing Prompt Exercise 1:

- Take two minutes to write a list of words or phrases you would use to describe yourself. Don't be shy! You will not have to share.
- Take a look at your list and select one to three words that you would like to expand on. For example, if you say you are really social and like to meet new people—tell us more about that! What opportunities does that present? Does it expand your social network, which may lead to a cool internship, job, etc.? How does being social impact your life?

Writing Prompt Exercise 2:

- If you are home, take two minutes to look around and find an object or image that has significance to you (a childhood toy, a photo of a loved one, a piece of jewelry, a trophy, a favorite item of clothing, etc.) If you are not home, take a moment to think about something that is significant to you. Spend the next three minutes writing about it. Tell us what the item is and why it is special to you.

Writing Prompt Exercise 3:

- Select two of the five phrases below and complete each phrase about you personally. Be creative and honest!
 - If you really knew me, you'd know...
 - If I had an unlimited amount of money, my ultimate dream would be...
 - What would the title of your autobiography be? Why?
 - If you could have an unlimited supply of anything, what would it be and why?
 - If you could have any superpower, what would it be? Or, if you could be any superhero, who would you be and why?

NOW LET'S LOOK AT THE 2024–2025 COMMON APP QUESTIONS:

Your Common App essay must be a minimum of 250 words and a maximum of 650 words. You only have to select one question, and you've already started your essay by exploring and reflecting about YOU. Read through the Common App questions below to start thinking about how you want to structure your response.

- 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 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?
- Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What influenced your thinking? What was the outcome?
- Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
- 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?
- 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.
- Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?

UMASS CUSTOM QUESTIONS (100 WORDS EACH):

In addition to the Common App essay, you will have the opportunity to answer UMass Amherst custom questions, which will let us know more about who you are, how interested you are in the university, and some of your thoughts behind the reason why you selected your major. Even though it is common for students to change their majors at UMass Amherst, we take your major choice into consideration when reviewing your application in order to admit you directly into your desired program. You only have 100 words to answer these questions, so be honest and creative!

- Please tell us: Why did you choose this major(s)?
- Please tell us: Why do you want to attend UMass Amherst?
- At UMass Amherst, no two students are alike. Our communities and groups often define us and shape our individual worlds. Community can refer to various aspects, including shared geography, religion, race/ethnicity, income, ideology, and more. Please choose one of your communities or groups and describe its significance. Explain how, as a product of this community or group, you would enrich our campus.