

The College Essay

○ JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY ○

Prompts

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. 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?
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.

Tips and Tricks

1. Write about something that is important to you.
2. Don't just recount–reflect!
3. Being funny is tough.
4. Start early and write several drafts.
5. No repeats.
6. Answer the question being asked.
7. Have at least one other person edit your essay.

Considerations

DO

- Start early
- Be concise
- Let your voice come through
- Proofread for errors
- Answer all parts of the question

DON'T

- Put the name of a college in your essay
- Treat the essay as a resume
- Attempt sarcasm or humor for the first time
- Be too wordy

What we are looking for:

- Write about what you want the Admissions Committee to know about you - not what you think we want to read.
- Consider sharing any relevant context that has impacted your academic performance.
- Help the reader walk away having learned something new about you that wouldn't be evident in other submitted materials.
- We read for content, not grammar. While you should proofread your essay, the most important thing is that we finish the essay knowing you better than when we started.

Next Steps:

1. Review the essay prompts.
2. Brainstorm responses to each prompt. Identify the prompt where your ideas flow best.
3. Outline your essay to ensure you answer the prompt you selected and are sharing more about yourself with the Admissions Committee.
4. Write without regard to the word limit. It is easier to cut out words than to generate additional content.
5. Proof your essay for clarity and generate a draft for a trusted advisor to provide feedback on.
6. Assess suggested changes and confirm that your voice is still present after making edits.