

Essay for College and Scholarship Applications (Personal Statement): How to begin?

Answer these questions **BRIEFLY** (truly, take no more than 15-20 minutes) and get feedback from someone (your counselor or contact a College OPTIONS/ETS advisor for feedback; call 245-1845 for an appointment or an advisor's email address). Note: there are 22 questions, and some of them have sub-questions. Do NOT worry about word count, grammar or spelling in your initial responses. An electronic version of this is available online at www.collegeoptions.org

1. How have you challenged yourself academically? What kind of classes did you take in high school (regular CP, honors, community college classes)? Did you take advanced classes in more than one area of study, or just one area? Why? Was this a "typical" pattern of classes for students at your high school?
2. Does your high school offer very many advanced level (honors or AP) classes compared to other high schools in your area? Describe your classes in your senior year. (For students taking community college classes, talk about why you decided to participate in concurrent enrollment.)
3. Some students are well-balanced across academic disciplines, others stand out in only one or two subject areas. Which kind of student are you? What are your favorite subjects?
4. Is there anything about your academic record that needs explaining? (A low grade, a repeated grade, a low semester, dramatically improved academic performance after a time of low performance, etc) What happened and what did you do to try to improve the situation (or, if your performance improved, what helped you improve)?
5. Test scores – do you truly feel that your test scores reflect your ability? Are you a natural test taker, or do you feel that you never do well on tests, even when you know the material?
6. Do you have any sort of documented learning disability? Has this impacted your ability to do well in school? If yes, how? What have you done to utilize resources to help you learn how to manage your academics in relation to the disability?
7. Do you have any sort of physical impairment/disability or have you had any sort of long-term serious illness that has impacted your ability to do well in school? What have you done to utilize resources to help you learn how to manage your academics in relation to your disability or illness?
8. Who has helped support you in your goal to go to college? A parent, a teacher, a pre-college program advisor, a friend? What have you learned from him/her?
9. Did either/both of your parents go to college? If so, what certificate/degree did they earn? How has that helped/been a challenge to your path to college?
10. Do you work while in high school? Do you have to use your earnings to pay for necessities (i.e., food, clothing, shelter)? If you use your earning to buy these kinds of things for yourself, is it because you want to, or because you need to?
11. What kinds of responsibilities do you have at home? Do you play a **major** role in taking care of siblings, grandparents, parents? Do these responsibilities leave you any time for getting involved in school or community activities?

12. Is English your native language? If not, do you still speak/write/use your native language? Do your parents speak fluent English? How do you use your native language (in the home to communicate with family, in the community to translate, etc)? Are you the family translator when it comes to official business (banking, medical care, etc)?
13. Are you a first generation American? Are you U.S. Citizen? If not a citizen, describe your situation.
14. Are your parents married? If divorced, did they divorce while you were in high school? Did/does their divorce have any effect on your academics or interest in college?
15. Describe your current living situation: who is in your household (list all members and ages).
16. Describe your hometown: extremely rural, rural, suburban, size in relation to high school, economics, political attitudes, etc. Does your town “fit” you? Do you feel like your hometown has been a “home” for you? Why or why not?
17. What is your best characteristic? How have you displayed this throughout your life?
18. What are your future aspirations? How have people, places, or events shaped these goals?
19. What have been the most challenging moments in your life? How did you react to them? How did they make you stronger?
20. List extracurricular activities using the Student Involvement Chart (sports, student government, clubs, music, drama, volunteering, church, etc). Make sure to identify your role in the activity (member, level of office) and how long you have been involved in that activity (how many hours per week, weeks per year, years involved and total hours). Be sure to be specific about any award, honor, recognition or leadership in any of the activities.
21. Do any of these activities relate to your career interests? What have you learned through your participation about your future career?
22. For students applying to a college or a scholarship affiliated with a particular religion: be prepared to write an essay about your spiritual life/journey.