

Personal Statement Writing Prompts

Grades 9-12

Are you thinking about applying to college, interviewing for a job, or writing a cover letter for a scholarship? Students in these scenarios and beyond can benefit from knowing how to answer personal statement prompts, or short autobiographical pieces that supplement an application.

When responding to personal statement prompts, students strengthen their writing by crafting strong beginnings and endings, elaborating on relevant topics, considering their audience, and writing authentically about their experiences.

This guide includes prompts that provide practice writing personal statements for teens in Grades 9-12. While originally intended for use at home as a college preparation resource, these prompts would also be appropriate for classroom use.

For more information on writing prompts, read our [“Understanding and Responding to Writing Prompts Guide.”](#)

Generating Ideas

Not sure where to start? Here are some tips to get you thinking about your strengths and experiences. Personal statement essays take time and reflection, and it can be helpful to organize your ideas before diving into a first draft.

Making Lists

If you're applying to multiple colleges or jobs, you will likely be writing many essays with similar prompts. Creating lists of relevant personal information can serve as a source to draw from.

- What professional development experiences have you had? This could include jobs, internships, and volunteering.
- What notable academic experiences have you had?
- What extracurricular experiences have you had?
- What transferable skills have the previously listed experiences helped you develop? Some examples include time management skills, communication skills, leadership skills, and experience with a type of software, to name a few.
- What leadership roles have you occupied, or what experiences have you had working as part of a team?
- What are your strengths that would be relevant to what you're applying to?
- What are your weaknesses, and how can you use this knowledge to your advantage?

Find a Reader

When you're writing about yourself and relying on memory, it's easy to leave out background information or include details irrelevant to the prompt. Finding a friend or family member to help review your personal statement can be a great resource! This can be someone who you bounce ideas off of at the beginning of the process, or they can give you feedback on a completed draft. You can offer to provide feedback on a friend or classmate's essays as well. Not only will they appreciate your insight, but you may pick up strategies you like from their own writing process. Reflecting on what you like and why you like it can give you ideas to implement in your own writing. Read some [examples of personal statements](#) and make note of things that work well so you can implement them in your own writing.

Personal Statement Prompts

Personal statements can vary in length and content, but many prompts will contain similar themes to the ones included below. Let your ideas take you wherever they go! You can respond to these prompts in as many words as you like, but try to aim for at least 250 words.

Community and Identity

- Identify a group you're a part of and explain its importance in your life.
- Write about an important figure in your life and how they have impacted your values.
- Describe an aspect of your identity that you feel is important to celebrate, either privately or publicly. How do you do this?

Experience and Aptitude

- Explain why you would be a good fit for [insert school or job]. What skills and experiences do you have that would make you a good candidate?
- Describe an experience that you believe has prepared you for [insert school or job].
- What do you consider to be your greatest accomplishment? What obstacles did you have to overcome in order to achieve your goal?
- Think of a situation where your beliefs were challenged or you learned something new. What happened? How did it affect your views of the past and future?

Interest and Expectations

- Explain why you want to apply for [insert school or job].
- Describe your ideal first month at [insert school or job]. What skills or experiences do you want to be working toward during this time? Are there any social or environmental factors that may be important to you?
- What short-term and long-term goals are most important to you?
- Write about a project you are passionate about or a topic that excites you.

Creativity and Character

- Tell a story from your childhood that illustrates your values.

- What is the best piece of advice you've received? Why? How have you applied it in your life?
- Identify a piece of media (i.e., book, movie, music, etc.) that has had a great impact on your life and describe how it challenged your perspective on a topic or idea.
- If you could travel anywhere with all expenses paid, where would you go and why?

Post-Writing Questions

Now that you've drafted a personal statement, it's time to revise! Before you find a reviewer for your response, make sure you've considered the following questions.

- Have you answered every part of the prompt with relevant information and appropriate elaboration?
- Do your ideas connect and flow together well? If you're unsure, read them aloud and see how it sounds!
- Have you considered your audience? What experiences or values are they looking for? Have you used an appropriate tone?
- Do you have a strong, engaging first line and a memorable last line?
- Do your words positively reflect your accomplishments and experiences? Be honest, but be confident too!

While these prompts closely align with common college application essays, the skills used in these responses are useful in interviews and other interpersonal situations as well. The ability to talk about yourself and highlight your strengths is key to making connections in the world of academic opportunities and professional networking—it's never too early to start practicing how to write personal statements!