

# Coalition Prompt Decoder

## PROMPT #1

### What it says

“Tell a story from your life, describing an experience that either demonstrates your character or helped to shape it.”

### What it means

**This prompt should be the litmus test for any essay you write.** If it doesn't "demonstrate character," you could be doing it wrong. So, to get started on this bad boy, think about how you define yourself. What characteristics form the foundation of your personality? What are your proudest moments? What stories do you always tell? And what do they say about how you see the world (and your place in it)? One last thing to note, though, is that although this prompt is broad, it does ask that you describe a concrete experience. Save the mushy stuff for a different prompt.

## PROMPT #2

### What it says

“What interests or excites you? How does it shape who you are now or who you might become in the future?”

### What it means

**You could argue that college is largely about the pursuit of knowledge, so you can imagine why it would be quite appealing for an admissions officer to better understand what makes you tick.** This prompt is an invitation to offer admissions a peek into your brain: what you find compelling, how your interests fit into your identity, and how your curiosity might impact your future. The answer to this prompt should also reveal something to admissions about the breadth or depth of your interests.



## PROMPT #3

### What it says

Describe a time when you had a positive impact on others. What were the challenges? What were the rewards?

### What it means

**We all love making a positive difference in the lives of others, no matter how big or small, and admissions wants to hear about a time when you went out of your way to make an impact.** Your thoughts may immediately head in the direction of community service and volunteer work, and while a story about those experiences could make for a wonderful essay, it is hard to stand out with a straightforward description of a service effort. Instead, we recommend isolating a specific element/moment of your service to focus on or reflecting on a time when you felt proud, accomplished, or humbled by extending yourself.

## PROMPT #4

### What it says

Has there been a time when an idea or belief of yours was questioned? How did you respond? What did you learn?

### What it means

**This prompt sets the stage for applicants to thoughtfully reflect on their worldview and demonstrate an openness to the ideas and perspectives of others.** If you choose to respond to this prompt, you'll want to be sure that you're not presenting something so polarizing you're likely to alienate your reader. That being said, a strong response to this prompt could make for a distinct, memorable essay that is revelatory and deeply personal.



## PROMPT #5

### What it says

“  
What success have you achieved or obstacle have you faced? What advice would you give a sibling or friend going through a similar experience?  
”

### What it means

**The most important things to keep in mind when mining your brain for a success or obstacle to address are the elements of growth, understanding, and transformation.** Regardless of whether you write about a challenge or achievement, admissions wants to know what advice you'd give to a sibling or friend going through a similar experience. In other words, they want to see you reflect and reveal what you learned from dealing with struggles or triumphs.

## PROMPT #6

### What it says

“  
Submit an essay on a topic of your choice.  
”

### What it means

#### **This is the Coalition's gift to you.**

You have most likely already started working on your Common Application essay, and now you have an easy way to repurpose it for the Coalition! That said, if you are approaching the personal statement for the first time, trying to find a place to begin, the topic of your choice may not be the place you want to start. Having a wide-open runway for topic selection can be debilitating for some, so if your creativity flourishes under stricter parameters, by all means, use on of the other awesome prompts to guide your inspiration.



### ★ IMPORTANT ★

We've said it before and we'll say it again: the prompts don't really matter. Whether you're writing your personal statement for the Common App or the Coalition, the content of your story always comes first. Speak to admissions in your own unique (and awesome) voice.

