

What are the different types of essays?

There are typically three types of essay questions: the "you" question, the "why us" question and the "creative" question.

The "you" question

This question boils down to **"Tell us about yourself."** The college wants to know students better and see how students introduce themselves.

Example: "The University of Vermont values a diverse student body. What contributions might you make to our campus community outside of academic achievement?"

Plus: This type of direct question offers students a chance to reveal something about themselves other than grades and test scores.

Danger: The open-ended nature of these questions can lead to an essay that's all over the place.

Tips:

- Focus on just a few things and avoid the urge to "spill everything" at once.
- Do not simply write out your resume in paragraph form. It's better to develop one small event, person, place or feeling with a lot of narrative and specifics.
- This is a "tell us a story" question. You should tell a story that only you can tell.

The "why us" question

Some institutions ask for an essay about a student's choice of a college or career. They're looking for information about the applicant's goals, and about how serious the student's commitment is to this particular college.

Example: "How did you become interested in American University?"

Plus: This type of question provides a focus for the essay; that is, why the student chose this particular college or path — and the answer to that will (hopefully) be clear.

Danger: Any factual errors in the essay will reveal that the student really hasn't thought deeply about the choice. For example, writing about attending Carleton College to major in agriculture would be a blunder, because Carleton doesn't

have an agriculture major.

An upside to this type of question is that while working on the essay, the student might realize that the college is not a good match — and it's better to know that sooner than later.

Tips:

- Make absolutely sure that you know the subject well.
- Do not go overboard with flattery. You should sound sincere but not ingratiating.

The "creative" question

The goals of the "creative" question are to evaluate a candidate's **ability to think and write creatively** and to assess the breadth of the student's knowledge and education.

Example: "Sharing intellectual interests is an important aspect of university life. Describe an experience or idea that you find intellectually exciting, and explain why."

Plus: This kind of question gives students an opportunity to convey their personalities and views.

Danger: Some students may take the "creative" aspect of the question as license to be obscure, pretentious or undisciplined in their writing.

Tips:

- It is important to write an informed essay. For example, you should not write about a fantasy meeting with a famous artist and get the titles of the artist's paintings wrong.
- Use common sense ("creative" doesn't mean eccentric or self-indulgent).
- Do not write about high-minded topics or exotic locales simply to impress the reader.