

Sample Essay Questions

Thoughtful prompts that invite applicants to share their goals, resilience, and hopes — written with care for foster youth experiences, and never requiring anyone to relive their worst days.

How to choose prompts

- Pick one required prompt and one optional prompt. Two is plenty.
- Set a short word range (150–300 words) and mean it — say that longer is not better.
- Choose prompts a student could answer honestly whether or not they want to discuss foster care.
- Score for clarity of goal and self-knowledge, not grammar or polish.

Prompts about the future

- What are you working toward, and what will this training or degree let you do?
- Describe one thing you want to be doing five years from now. What is the next step?
- What would this award make possible for you in the next twelve months?
- What kind of work do you want to be known for?

Prompts about a person who helped

These fit scholarships created to honor a teacher or mentor especially well.

- Tell us about someone who believed in you. What did they do or say?
- Who is the first person you will call with good news, and why them?
- If you could thank one adult from your life, who would it be, and what would you say?
- Who taught you something you still use? What was it?

Prompts about strength and skill

- What is something you are good at that people are surprised to learn?
- Describe a problem you solved that no one helped you with.
- What is a decision you made that you are proud of?

- Tell us about a time you kept going when it would have been reasonable to quit.

Prompts about community

- How do you want to show up for someone else once you are established?
- What would you change for the next young person in a situation like yours?
- Describe a place, group, or team where you felt like you belonged.

Optional, clearly labeled foster-care prompt

If you include a prompt about foster care, make it genuinely optional, say so, and keep the framing forward-looking.

Sample — optional prompt with framing

Optional. If you would like to, tell us anything about your time in foster care that you think matters to your education or your goals. You are not required to answer this question, and choosing not to answer will not affect your application in any way. Please share only what you are comfortable sharing.

Alternatives to written essays

Offering a choice of format widens your applicant pool and often produces better answers.

- A 2-minute video or voice recording answering the same prompt
- A short phone or video conversation with a committee member
- A portfolio, work sample, or photo of something they built, repaired, or made
- A bulleted answer instead of paragraphs

Sample — format choice wording

You may answer in writing (150–300 words), or record a video or voice memo of up to two minutes, or ask for a 15-minute phone call instead. All three options are weighted equally. Choose whichever lets you say what you mean.

Prompts to avoid

- “Describe the greatest hardship you have overcome.”
- “Why were you removed from your home?”
- “How has your family shaped your values?” (assumes a family narrative)
- “Describe your parents' influence on your education.”
- Anything requiring paid test scores, travel, or a printer to answer.

Important

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