

**Prompt #1:** A person does not simply “receive” his or her identity. Identity is much more than the name or features one is born with. True identity is something people must create for themselves by making choices that are significant and that require a courageous commitment in the face of challenges. Identity means having ideas and values that one lives by. [Adapted from Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action*]

**Assignment:** **Is identity something people are born with or given, or is it something people create for themselves?** Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

**Prompt #2:** In many circumstances, optimism—the expectation that one’s ideas and plans will always turn out for the best—is unwarranted. In these situations what is needed is not an upbeat view but a realistic one. There are times when people need to take a tough-minded view of the possibilities of success, give up, and invest their energies elsewhere rather than find reasons to continue to pursue the original project or idea. [Adapted from Martin E.P. Seligman, *Learned Optimism*]

**Assignment:** **Is it better for people to be realistic or optimistic?** Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

**Prompt #3:** Winning feels forever fabulous. But you can learn more from losing than from winning. Losing prepares you for setback and tragedy more than winning ever can. Moreover, loss invites reflection and a change of strategies. In the process of recovering from your losses, you learn how to avoid them the next time. [Adapted from Pat Conroy, *My Losing Season*]

**Assignment:** **Do people learn more from losing than from winning?** Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

**Prompt #4:** Often we see people who persist in trying to achieve a particular goal, even when all the evidence indicates that they will be unlikely to achieve it. When they succeed, we consider them courageous for having overcome impossible obstacles. But when they fail, we think of them as headstrong, foolhardy, and bent on self-destruction. To many people, great effort is only worthwhile when it results in success. [Adapted from Gilbert Brim, *Ambition*]

**Assignment:** **Is the effort involved in pursuing any goal valuable, even if the goal is not reached?** Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

**Prompt #5:** What determines success in life is not intelligence or talent, but character: those qualities gained both from living in an honorable and straightforward manner and from learning to deal with disappointment and hardship. Without character, an individual has no hope of true success. Even when competing against opponents of considerable intelligence or strength, those individuals who possess strong character will ultimately win.

**Assignment:** Does a person's character determine that person's success in life? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

**Prompt #6:** When someone has the same ideas or views as most people do, we tend to believe that the person is reasonable and correct. Often, however, views that are considered reasonable or commonsensical are anything but sensible. Many widely held views regarding current events, science, education, arts and literature, and many other topics ultimately prove to be wrong. The fact that an idea or view is widespread—held by many people—does not make it right.

**Assignment:** Are widely held views often wrong, or are such views more likely to be correct? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.

**Prompt #7:** Today many young people spend their time developing one special talent. But such devotion to a single special ability or skill, whether in the arts, in sports, or in any other area, may not be a good idea. While the challenge of becoming an expert is exciting and can lead to extraordinary rewards, narrowly focusing one's efforts limits new experiences and meaningful interactions with people who have other interests.

**Assignment:** Should young people focus their efforts on developing just one talent? Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations.