WRITERS HOOK

Summer Writing Programs

How to choose a program, write a strong application, and keep growing if you don’t get in

Alisha Shetty · Writers Hook

TODAY'S ROADMAP

Four parts, thirty minutes

1

The programs

Why go, twelve to know, what they ask for

~7 min

2

The application

Timeline, recommendations, essays, writing sample

~11 min

3

Is it right for you?

My experience, pros and cons, format, cost

~6 min

4

Wrap-up

Your to-do list and your questions

~5 min

WHY GO?

Why spend a summer writing?

1

Grow faster

Workshop feedback from working writers shows you what you can’t see alone

2

Find your people

A room full of teens who care about writing as much as you do

3

Stretch your range

New genres and forms you’d never try on your own

4

Finish real work

Deadlines and protected time turn drafts into pieces for your portfolio

THE PROGRAMS

Twelve programs worth knowing

Iowa Young Writers' Studio

Grades 10–12 · In person

Adroit Summer Mentorship

Grades 9–12 · Online

Kenyon Review Young Writers

Ages 14–18 · In person or online

Sewanee Young Writers' Conference

Grades 9–12 · In person

Juniper Institute, UMass Amherst

Grades 10–12 · In person or online

Sarah Lawrence Writers Week

Grades 9–12 · Open enrollment

Stanford Pre-Collegiate

Grades 8–11 · Online

Columbia Pre-College, NYC

Grades 9–12 · In person

Georgetown Creative Writing

Grades 8–12 · In person

Fir Acres, Lewis & Clark

Grades 10–12 · In person

BYU Young Authors Academy

Ages 14–18 · Open registration

Emerson Pre-College

Paused · check before 2027

Eligibility from each program's site, Nov 2026 · always confirm before applying

WHAT MOST APPLICATIONS ASK FOR

The application at a glance

14–16

minimum age, depending on the program

3–10

pages of writing sample in one genre

300–500

words for the personal statement

1–3

pages of supplemental essays

1 letter

of recommendation, ideally from an English teacher

$0–60

application fee; ask about waivers

Jan–Mar

deadlines, mid-January to early March

$575–5,200

typical cost before aid; Columbia ≈ $12,800

ELIGIBILITY

Age matters, but so does what you do while you wait

Most programs start at 15

Some good ones accept 14-year-olds. Almost none accept middle schoolers.

Exceptions for middle school

Stanford Pre-Collegiate (online, grades 8–11) and Georgetown Creative Writing Academy (grades 8–12)

Younger applicants are admitted less often

Older students have fewer chances left to apply, so admissions favor them. A “no” at 14 is not a verdict on your writing.

Not eligible yet? Do this

- Build a portfolio of your strongest pieces
- Read widely, beyond your usual genres
- Learn new craft techniques on purpose
- Try a genre you’re less comfortable in
- Write every week, even briefly

WHEN TO START

Start in the fall; finish over winter break

SEP – OCT

Shortlist

Pick 3–5 programs. Note age limits, genres, deadlines and aid.

NOV – DEC

Ask recommenders

6–8 weeks before the deadline. Start choosing sample pieces.

DEC – JAN

Draft

Prompts come out. Use winter break for essays and revision.

JAN – MAR

Submit

Deadlines land mid-January to early March. Submit early.

i Block off a couple of hours every week, after school or on weekends.

! Prompts not out yet? Use last year’s. Changes are usually minor.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Ask someone who knows your creative writing

1

When

- Ask 6–8 weeks before the deadline (4 at the very least)
- Follow your school's process; ask your counselor
- Get a real "yes," not just a submitted form

2

Who

- First choice: your English or writing teacher
- Next: another humanities teacher (history is a good bet)
- Or a writing mentor or counselor who knows you well

3

Share your work

- Teachers mostly read your formal essays
- Send them your strongest creative piece
- Then they can speak to your writing in detail

PERSONAL STATEMENT · 300–500 WORDS

Write an essay only you could write

Typical prompts: why this program, how you'll grow, what you'll contribute, and who you are as a writer.

Avoid

- Praising the program's prestige
- Spending most of it on how you got into writing
- An overly formal tone
- Fancy craft you aren't confident with; it gets confusing

Instead

- Name specific, unique parts of the program
- Show what makes you different, not what fits anyone
- Connect unexpected topics to your writing
- Show growth, your voice, and honest vulnerability

SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAYS · 1–3 PAGES

Pick a topic nobody else will pick

Usually: a writing influence (most common), or a piece of work you love.

Avoid

- The books everyone picks: Percy Jackson, The Hunger Games, Six of Crows
- Summarizing or praising the work itself

Instead

- Something specific to you; it needn’t be a book
- Zoom in on craft: the technique the writer uses
- Show how it changed your own writing

WRITING SAMPLE · 3–10 PAGES

Your sample matters most, so build it early

1

Write weekly

Several hours a week gives you pieces to choose from

2

Pick a genre

Fiction, poetry or nonfiction; some offer plays or screenwriting

3

Choose your best

Stay in your strongest genre unless another piece is better

4

Revise 2–3 times

At least; don’t submit a first draft

5

Get feedback

From someone honest about craft and plot

Feedback is the step people skip. On your own you miss your blind spots; ask family, friends, a mentor, or this group.

PROS AND CONS

Worth it for many writers, but not required

+ Pros

- Real workshop feedback from working writers
- Peers who take writing as seriously as you do
- Exposure to forms and genres you wouldn’t try alone
- Protected time to write and finish pieces
- Friendships and a writing network that last

– Cons

- Expensive, and aid is often partial
- Selective: rejection is common and not personal
- Takes summertime from jobs, family, other plans
- Prestige doesn’t guarantee a good fit
- You can grow just as much on your own, with feedback

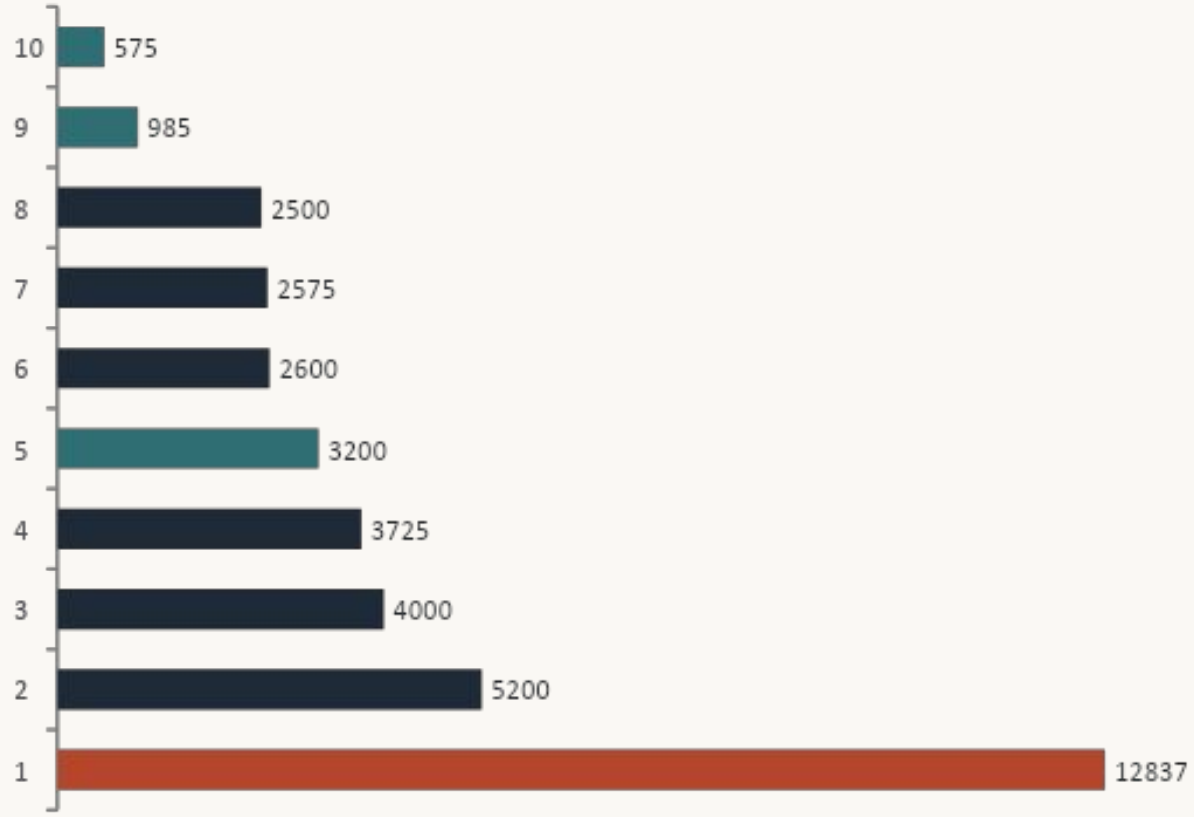
VIRTUAL OR IN PERSON?

Online is easier to reach; in person goes deeper

	Virtual	In person
Cost	Lower: about $575–1,325, no travel	Higher: about $2,500–5,200 or more
Length	A few days to 6 weeks, flexible	Usually 1–3 weeks on campus
Age	Often open to younger writers	Often 16+ to live on campus
Community	Fewer informal moments, screen fatigue	Immersive; friendships form fast
Best for	A first program, tight budget, busy summer	Total focus and a campus experience

Costs from program sites, 2026–27 · Kenyon, Juniper and Sarah Lawrence offer both

Check the aid page before you rule a program out



Teal = online · Navy = in person · latest published prices, before aid

Lowering the cost

- Many offer partial, need-based aid
- Ask for an application fee waiver
- Apply for aid at the same time
- Look for scholarships: Iowa, Juniper, Fir Acres
- Online programs cost far less

COLLEGE APPLICATIONS

A boost for college applications, not a guarantee

What it can do

- Count as an activity on your application
- Give you material for part of an essay

Its limits

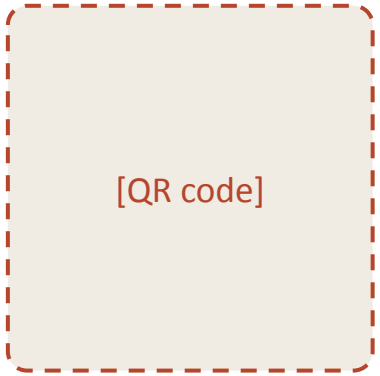
- Rarely enough content for a whole essay
- A short program only gives you so much to say

Want to write about it? Take notes

- Every day: what you did and what you were taught
- Right after it ends: your takeaways and anything relevant
- Especially if you’re in middle school or 9th grade; applications are years away

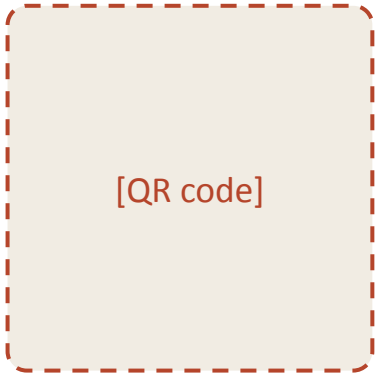
REFERENCE MATERIALS

Scan to take this with you



These slides

Everything from today’s talk



Writing program info

Program details and accepted application essays

THANK YOU

Questions?

Bring your sample pieces to Writers Hook for feedback. That’s the step most applicants skip.

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