This is to help you build a pool of information. Not all of it will be used in the essay; but it should provide a start to forming main points. After answering all of these questions, you may have crafted the first draft of your essay without even realizing it.

1. **Make yourself stand out by writing about something that makes you unique:**
   - What is most unusual thing about you as a person—not you as an applicant or you as a student—but you as a unique and unusual person?
   - What is something you’ve experienced, or done, or are that will not seem common to the people reading?
   - What is unusual about you, your family, your upbringing, your travels, and your college?

2. **Remember your intellectual influences:**
   - What writers in a particular field have made you think the most?
   - Who were your favorite professors?
   - What is the best paper you’ve ever written or speech you’ve presented?
   - What is the most important book you’ve read?
   - What is the single most important concept you’ve learned in college?

3. **Remember the compliments and words of encouragements others have said to you:**
   - Who has said these things?
   - What were the specific words they used?
   - How did these people or words encourage you to go beyond your abilities to accomplish a goal or dream?

4. **Think about what made you pursue this particular direction of graduate study:**
   - What were you doing when the light went off?
   - Who were you with?

5. **Think about the history of your graduate study decision:**
   - How have your interests evolved over time?
   - What specific turning points were there?
   - What professional experiences have led you to pursue graduate school?
   - What volunteer/service experiences have led you to pursue graduate school?
   - How has your family influenced you?

6. **Define your career goals as clearly as you can:**
   - What attracts you to this career?
   - What do you hope to gain?
   - How will you go about achieving these goals?
   - What are you manageable goals?
   - What are your stretch goals?

7. **Consider your academic background:**
   - How have you prepared yourself to succeed in graduate school?
   - What body of relevant knowledge will be taken with you?
   - What study, laboratory, or computer skills have you acquired?
   - What personal strengths make you particularly likely to succeed?
   - What are some of your educational achievements?
8. Consider your research interests and experience:
   - What research have you conducted to date?
   - If you were to publish your research, what would you title it?
   - Would you consider talking to a professor about the path to publication?
   - How would you describe your level of participation in your research experiences?
   - How would you describe the hypotheses, methods, findings, and discussions?
   - What was the overall purpose of the research and what were the ramifications of it?
   - What did you learn overall from your research?

9. Identify people with common interests:
   - What professors are currently associated with your target school?
   - What professors are conducting research in your area of interest or expertise?
   - Who can you identify to become a possible graduate advisor for a thesis or dissertation?
   - What major thinkers, theorists, and authors could you reference?

10. Name drop the people who are most important to you:
    - Who were your influential undergraduate professors?
    - What specific professors interest you at your target school?
    - Who are the major writers and thinkers in your field of interest?
    - What professors have you spoken to or corresponded with already?

11. Think about your social life:
    - What extracurriculars are you involved with?
    - What are you hobbies or favorite past time?
    - What helps you soften areas of stress in your life?
    - Why do people enjoy being in your company?

12. Consider the inconsiderable:
    - What are all of the things you hope the admissions committee doesn’t find out about you?
    - What is so obvious about you that you sometimes fail to recognize?

13. Relate to the school and city of choice:
    - What do you know about the geographic location of your target school?
    - Why would you be happy there?
    - What kind of physical, cultural, relational connections have you established?

14. Look into the immediate future
    - What classes will you take between now and arrival at school?
    - What research or projects will you complete between now and then?
    - What will you try to accomplish at work?
    - What are specific post graduate plans?
    - How will this graduate program help facilitate those plans?
    - What do you want to be doing in 5 years? 10 years?
    - What additional education will you pursue beyond the programs you’re applying to now?