

## How to Write a Remarkable Extracurricular Supplemental Essay

Most colleges require the Common Application personal statement. Many colleges also require applicants to submit additional supplemental essays. These supplemental essays ask students to respond to a wide variety of topics: their most meaningful activity or experience, an important community they belong to, even something which brings them joy. Essays – which can include short answers – can range in length anywhere from 300 characters to an unlimited amount of words.

Below you will find our top tips for crafting a strong student activity/experience essay that will not only answer the question, but will also demonstrate to the admissions committee why they should admit you over other prospective students (a necessary piece for every admissions essay).

### **Read the prompt carefully.**

Many students are eager to showcase their many talents and activities. However, follow directions and answer the prompt. If a college asks you to highlight ONE activity or experience, do not provide an exhaustive list. This one activity or experience can and should demonstrate aspects of your character that are otherwise not reflected in the application.

### **Pick your topic.**

It is important to remember that every essay is another chance for you to promote yourself as a strong candidate for the college. When choosing a topic, tie your essay into something that is meaningful to you. If you can SHOW your passion rather than just tell about it, you will have a stronger essay. Likewise, if you are passionate about an experience or activity, you will have an easier time writing about it. Make sure the activities/experiences you choose for your essays reflect personal significance, your best character traits, and your potential to succeed at the school.

You can touch on the same activity elsewhere in your application, such as in your personal statement or the Activities section of the Common Application, but in your supplemental essay, make sure you are adding something new. Do not repeat information found elsewhere in your application.

Some ideas of activities to write about:

- An activity in which you held an active leadership role.
- An activity you were or have been really committed to in terms of time and involvement.
- An activity that is meaningful, e.g., one that reflects your heritage or a challenge you or a family member faced.
- An activity that relates to your future goals.

- An activity that is meaningful to you, but you were not able to share in another part of your application.

### **Structure your essay around a story.**

Pick an anecdote that illustrates why the experience or activity is meaningful to you, how you made an impact, and what you gained from the experience. Perhaps you choose the time you were asked to spearhead a project at your internship, or when you presented your research after months in the lab. Whatever the story, do not try to cram your whole academic career into the allotted word count. Be judicious about the details you share—each detail should advance your story. The details should also demonstrate your positive character traits such as initiative, leadership, problem solving, teamwork, or one or more of dozens of others.

### **Mention leadership positions, if applicable, and quantify your impact where applicable.**

If you held a leadership position or were involved with the oversight of a major project, large group of people, etc., write about what you did, and as importantly, why you were motivated and how you were shaped by your actions. If your participation helped you grow or develop, let the college know. Moreover, if you can quantify your contributions, this will make your response really stand out. For instance, if you increased the number of subscribers for a company over the summer, try to put that into numbers -- but only if the numbers are impressive. This helps to “prove” the contribution you made.

### **Connect your activity to the school community.**

While the “elaborate on an activity or experience” essay is not, on the surface, a “why” question, schools want to see how your activity and passion will lead to your participation in the school community once you arrive on campus. This is a great opportunity to mention student clubs and organizations that you would take advantage of and what you would bring to the table. This shows a school you want to be there! Keeping this in mind, make sure what you mention connects with your essay topic.

### **A quick recap**

As you write supplemental essays, remember that this is your time to provide the admission readers with information that may not otherwise be reflected in your application. Omit details already shared in your personal statement. Demonstrate your dedication and commitment to your chosen activity or experience—and don’t be afraid to think outside the box.