

Writing the “Why This College” Supplemental Essay

In addition to the main Common Application essay, many colleges will ask students to answer one or more school-specific questions referred to as supplements. One of the most common supplemental essay prompts is usually along the lines of “Why do you want to attend this college?”

This essay is designed to gauge several things: first, your interest in the school; second, how the curriculum and course offerings match what you are looking for academically; and third, how you will fit into the school community—meaning, “How will you positively contribute to campus beyond the classroom?” To be more specific, the question is asking you to show you are a great fit for the school.

DO: Gather your research.

Your essay should mention the specific majors, minors, and/or concentrations that you are interested in pursuing and that are offered by the school. Use the course catalog or general bulletin, usually found on the school’s website, to explore classes, programs, and specific opportunities that may be of interest to you. Furthermore, colleges want to see your enthusiasm for learning outside the classroom, so be sure to include extracurricular programs, activities, and organizations that appeal to you.

DON’T: Be general.

Rather than mentioning the school’s “beautiful campus” or the “amazing study abroad programs,” be *specific*. Include the most meaningful, *concrete* reasons that a school piques your interest and why.

DO: Make it personal.

Connect your reasons for applying to your background, experiences, and goals. Doing so will demonstrate in a more concrete way how and why you should become a part of the school community. You can discuss an experience related to what you plan to study; for example, if you plan to major in business, start by describing a work experience or a leadership role you had in this area. Remember to share what your experience taught you about yourself and how it has influenced your undergraduate and career goals.

DON'T: Pepper your essay with statistics and rankings from the website.

The school already knows it offers “50 majors and 35 minors,” and that they are “ranked #4 in undergraduate kinesiology programs.” Focus instead on the *specific* aspects of the school that make it the right fit for you and *why*.

DO: Name-drop when appropriate.

When done tastefully and not boastfully, mentioning the name of an admissions representative who visited your school, your campus tour guide, the professor you took a summer class with, or the interviewer you spoke with, can add a layer of credibility to your essay. Be sure to include how that interaction impacted your views and feelings about the school.

DO: Connect to the school's values or mission.

Read the college's mission statement as part of your research. Syracuse students are encouraged to take part in global study opportunities and interdisciplinary scholarship, while the students at the University of Virginia are bound by honor, integrity, trust, and respect. If the school's mission statement or values tie into your academic or extracurricular interests, be sure to draw a connection to you as an applicant, further demonstrating what a good match you are for their school.

DON'T: Mention another school.

This one may sound obvious, but you would be surprised how many students mention the wrong school in their essay! Ideally your essay should make the school feel like it's “the only one.”

DO: Proofread.

Mistakes like mentioning the wrong school or misspelling words are more likely to slip by if you do not take time to proofread. Always double-check your writing with a trusted adult or peer, especially if you are writing several of these essays. And always do a print preview of your application before pressing submit.

Keep in mind that this essay is an opportunity to demonstrate that you've done your research, that you know what the school has to offer, and that you can offer something in return. Remember, this is your chance to reveal why you're a great match for the school.

