

ICE Writing Supplementary Essays

Writing Supplemental Essays

What is a “supplemental essay” in the college process?

Many colleges, especially private colleges, have **additional specific writing requirements** that go beyond the main Common Application essay (personal statement) that is sent to every school you apply to. These range from short answer responses to full blown essays. Usually the more competitive the school, the more supplements required. *Not all colleges require supplemental essays.*

What makes a “strong” supplemental essay?

The most common supplement asks why you want to go to a particular school. A good response is one that provides very specific information reflecting **your knowledge about the college** and **why it is a good fit for something you** (such as a particular program that doesn't exist in other places). You should give specifics both about the school/program and yourself!

Where can I find “supplements” for the colleges I’m applying to?

The best place to find the supplement for an essay is on the college’s application.

For colleges that are on the **Common App**, they can be found under the “**My Colleges**” tab under “**Questions**” section. Usually it will say something like “Supplemental Essay” or “Additional Writing”.

Sometimes they are hidden until you answer a question, or may come AFTER you submit the application!

The screenshot displays the Common App interface. At the top, there are tabs: Dashboard, My Colleges, Common App, College Search, and Financial Aid Resources. The 'My Colleges' tab is active, showing a list of colleges: Bowdoin College, SUNY New Paltz, SUNY University at Buffalo, and University of Southern California. A pink arrow points to the 'Questions' link in the left sidebar under the 'Applications' section. The main content area is titled 'Questions' and shows a question from Bowdoin College: 'Have you ever received disciplinary action such as suspension, probation, or dismissal from any education institution you have attended for high school (or the international equivalent) related to academic or behavioral misconduct?'. The question has two radio button options: 'Yes' and 'No', with 'No' selected. There is a 'Clear answer' button and a 'Continue' button. Below the question, there is a list of application sections: Academics, Contacts, Family, Bowdoin Supplemental Essay, and Additional Application Information. A pink arrow points to the 'Bowdoin Supplemental Essay' section, which is currently hidden.

How should I stay organized with my supplemental essays?

Make a Google Doc with a list of **all of the colleges you are applying to**, and the required **supplemental essays for each**, including the word count. You can use the Tab or Bookmark function to organize your work.

You can also use [THIS spreadsheet](#) to keep track of your colleges, dates, and deadlines (link should make a copy for you)!

How should I get started on brainstorming for my supplementary letters?

- Start with YOU. Make a list of qualities, traits, activities, or other things you *know* you want to share with an admissions committee. This could be academic interests, career goals, personal background, extracurricular passions, etc. The more you can share about you that directly connects to the college's mission, programs, classes, the better. Use supplements as an opportunity to add or explain parts of your interests or personality not shown elsewhere.
- Then, research the school. Use the school's websites, visits to campus, rep visits, promotional materials, etc. Think of specific classes, majors, research opportunities, clubs, centers, etc. on campus.

Supplemental Essay Do's & Don'ts

DO: Make a list of similar prompts and figure out what you can reuse.

For example, a common prompt might be "What's an activity you are passionate about?" or "What's important to you about your community"

DON'T: Reuse a "Why X..." college supplement and **ESPECIALLY** don't put the wrong college's name in a supplement.

DO: Provide specific details, such as names of clubs, majors, classes, support programs, etc that you might like to be a part of at the college. You want to show them you've done your research.

DON'T: Focus a supplement on things that are common to many colleges, such as location in a city, small class size, study abroad opportunities, OR simply repeat what's on the website. Make sure you are making connections between the information they share and yourself.

DO: Use your counselors, teachers, and peers to review your writing. Colleges take the supplements very seriously, and they should be your best work.

DON'T: Use ChatGPT or AI to write your answers. We know it's tempting when there are so many to write. I have had *specific* conversations with admissions counselors who were put-off by seeing AI generated writing for these. They know!

FULL SAMPLE SUPPLEMENT (from a real student):

Prompt: "UVM learning experiences go far beyond the walls of our classrooms. From student-led organizations to internships, to study abroad, UVM students are encouraged to learn in any environment. Describe a time when you've learned in a non-traditional setting". (500)

When my class went to the New York Harbor to learn about its ecosystems, waste floated for miles along the coast. Not seeing a single live aquatic organism, I was frustrated and confused. How could people be comfortable with destroying an entire ecosystem? We had been learning about pollution in New York City's waterways, but I had not understood the severity until I saw the harbor for myself.

As we continued along the dock my teacher stopped and pulled oyster cages out of the water, allowing us to touch them and look at them up close. We learned about the filter feeder role that oysters play in the ecosystem, and how their population had decreased rapidly, leading to more water pollution. I was more engaged in this hands-on lab than I had ever been in the classroom, and it sparked a passion in me: Green Team.

As a founding member of my school's Green Team club, my peers and I worked to create bill New York A258 with my high school classmates. This bill focused on giving restaurants a tax break when they donate oyster shells to the Billion Oyster Project. I had never learned about policy at school, and now I was given the opportunity to help in writing and passing a bill. Invested, I delved into discovering the legislative process and was offered a spot on the bus to Albany to meet with senators and local assembly members to lobby for our bill. I did not know how to talk to these politicians, after all, that is not something that I am taught in school. At first, I skimmed my talking points, often skipping important ones or repeating myself. However, after the first two conferences, I began to speak with confidence. I was no longer uncomfortable with talking to such powerful assembly members, and even when our local assembly member arranged for a press conference, I felt at ease. Reporters sat attentively as we lined up at the podium. In school, I never had a voice in such real-world issues, and I finally could speak confidently as an activist.

Throughout high school, I have continued to make trips to Albany. Now, the thrill of speaking about our oyster bill outside of the classroom makes everything that I had been trying to understand in school come to life. However, I didn't fully understand oysters' importance until I taught other people about them. I began to chaperone trips with younger kids, who were going to the harbor to complete the same lab that I did. I saw them comprehend the value of these filter feeders, and fully grasp the severity of the New York Harbors condition when they went into the real world. When venturing into real-world non-traditional learning settings, I obtained more knowledge than I ever have in the classroom.

FULL SAMPLE SUPPLEMENT (from a real student):

Prompt: "Why NYU?"

There are many intersecting reasons why I see myself at NYU. I know that the unique opportunity to major in environmental studies with a minor in animal studies, while undertaking research supported by NYU's Center for Environmental and Animal Protection and joining student groups like the Alliance for Climate Change and the Environment, will equip me to effectively address critical issues in the environment in and out of the classroom.

I am drawn to NYU because it implements established scientific principles in innovative ways to educate students on the climate crisis and give them the tools to create real change. I want my education to include exploring possible solutions locally and globally through classes like Biogeochemistry of Global Change, Business and the Environment, and Lessons from the Biosphere, which is taught by Tyler Volk, whose book on rising levels of CO₂ and its impact is at the heart of what I want to study. I am also eager to attend events like "Educating For Sustainability: Pragmatic Actions and Policies for Sustainability."

I hope to be involved in research supported by NYU's Center for Environmental and Animal Protection based on my experience at the Wild Bird Fund, a wildlife rehabilitation center serving NYC animals who have been affected by human actions such as contaminated water and plastic ingestion. Climate justice advocates for animal protection, which is why I want to minor in animal studies.

Throughout high school, I have worked to raise awareness and take action about the climate crisis by planning my school's participation in the September 20th Global Climate Strike and working with our school leadership and teachers to plan a day each month for climate change education. Groups like the Alliance for Climate Change and the Environment and Earth Matters will provide a space for me to continue advocating for the implementation of climate change education and action alongside equally passionate NYU community members.

I am excited by NYU's encouragement of diversity and the exploration of culture and identity. The Association of Latinx Students and Allies in Public Service will allow me to celebrate and enrich my knowledge of the variety of Latinx cultures and identities, as I did at my school by starting the Viva Latinx club.

For all of these reasons and the vast and incomparable communities, opportunities and global reach it provides, I know NYU is the ideal institution for me to learn, grow, contribute and become an effective changemaker.