

Crushing your Supplement

Rachel Brown Tufts Admissions Blog Sept. 18, 2019

Ahhh, college essay writing season. I have a very vivid (and slightly stress-inducing) memory from 12th grade AP English class—having to read ALOUD my college application essay. I think about that experience with horror, first for having to share my personal statement with my peers, and second for remembering the truly dorky topic that I chose to write about. *shudders* Our class had been working for weeks on these personal statements, doing a series of peer reviews and getting feedback from our teacher. We spent a lot of time on those personal statements! When it came to the supplemental questions, though, we were on our own.

I understand why students spend so much time writing these personal statements because these get sent to most of the colleges you choose to apply to. And we here at Tufts certainly care a lot about your personal statements, don't get me wrong. But perhaps even more important in our process is our Tufts supplement. Most schools have supplements, and it's when they typically ask you a series of short questions that demonstrate fit for their school specifically. These are the questions that come AFTER the Common App essay. These are the short answer questions that you might dread because no two colleges ask you quite the same thing. They have to be tailored and customized for each institution. They require additional work. There's no cut-and-paste from College A to College B (or at least there probably shouldn't be!). But they're worth the effort, because the supplements are where your application can really stand out. They matter.

So we're here to help you crush your Tufts supplement. I've polled a few of my co-workers, and here are our top tips:

1. Be specific. Be specific. Be specific.

As I wrote above, there should be no way to copy and paste from one school to the next. If we can insert another school's name into the paragraph, then you haven't done your job, and we're not convinced you want to come to Tufts. Yes, several schools might have similar academic programs that excite you, but different institutions offer different classes, professors, extracurricular groups, campus cultures, and so on. Show us that you know us by diving into specific details you can't glean from a surface skimming of the home page of our website. Not sure how to start learning about Tufts? You can [start here](#), read a [blog or two or twelve](#), read a professor or student spotlight in [JUMBO magazine](#), email a question to a [current student](#), or [email your admissions officer](#)!

2. Have fun with it. (For Tufts, at least.)

We pride ourselves here at Tufts for offering an 'intellectually playful' community. So much so that it's part of our supplemental question! So it should come as no surprise that we look for a fun voice in the essays of applications. We're looking for people who can connect with the unique aspects of the Tufts experience, whether that's a class, a student group, the campus culture, or a campus event.

You don't have to feel like you're writing a formal essay when you're applying to Tufts. Feel free to let your personality shine through. We encourage it!

3. But intellectualism matters—we are an academic institution, after all.

Yes, I did just emphasize having fun with the essays, but we're not just looking for humor and spunk and energy. We want to see that you have an intellectual fervor since we are an academic institution. We want to learn what academic areas excite you, and we want to see that you're thinking about these academic interests in thoughtful, novel, or complex ways. That intellectualism that comes through in your supplement is going to come through in your classroom discussions and enrich our academic community. We are looking for that voice that will push along classroom conversations, be open-minded to new ideas, or bring a unique academic perspective to the table.

4. Avoid being 'listy'

'Listy' is one of our more common adjectives used to describe supplements, and it's not a good thing. It means that you are listing out all the aspects of Tufts that excite you, but it doesn't go much deeper than that. Yes, it's great you like the dining hall food, the Tisch library view, the [insert academic field] major, the [insert student group], [insert professor]'s research. But tell us why! Don't feel like you need to cover everything you love about Tufts, there's simply not enough space in the word count. So pick 2-3 things that really catch your attention and tell us why those things matter to you. Remember, the supplement isn't just about you, and it's not just about Tufts; it's about how those two FIT together.

Based on these tips, we recognize that we are asking a lot of you. Be intellectual. Be fun. Be specific. Do your research. But remember you have three opportunities through your personal statement and two supplemental questions to showcase different sides of you. We don't expect you to achieve everything in just one essay, nor should you! So think about your personal statement and supplemental questions as a set of essays for us to get to know you. One essay might be more serious in tone about your academic interests, one might provide the playful punch of personality. You have three chances to reveal your multifaceted self—use each opportunity. There's nothing more disappointing than getting to the final essay and seeing recycled content from elsewhere in the application. That's a missed opportunity. So we encourage you to think strategically about what you want to share with us and where in the application you can do that. Good luck! Crush that supplement.