

## **How to Write the Supplemental Essay: “Why Do You Want to Attend this University?”**

Why do some schools require this supplemental essay? They want students who will thrive on their campus, take advantage of what they have to offer, and contribute to academic and social life. They want to know that you understand something about their programs, philosophy, traditions, student life, etc., and that you’re a good fit.

**Research:** Before you start writing, do some research so that you understand what makes this school different from other schools. Read the website thoroughly (not just the home page). Watch videos (for example on [www.youniversitytv.com](http://www.youniversitytv.com)). Check the entry in the Fiske guide or other reference book. Visit the school if you can.

**Talk to someone, if possible:** Whether it’s a tour guide, admissions counselor, college rep, coach, professor, or alum, making personal connections shows initiative and enthusiasm. Mention what you learned, and specifically how it pertains to you. For instance, “My tour guide was excited about his classes” is too general. But, “My tour guide told me how accessible all my bio profs will be” is specific.

**Don’t give vague answers** such as: “Your school really inspires me” or “The campus is amazing,” or “I can really see myself here.”

**Do give specific answers** such as: “Your travel abroad program allowing hands on experience at an archeological dig in Turkey is an opportunity I’ve always dreamed of,” or “I was so excited to tour the beautiful new Walter White Chemical Engineering Building, and when my guide mentioned Professor Pinkman’s fascinating Thermodynamics course, I couldn’t wait to sign up.”

**Don’t tell the school what it already knows**, for example: “I’m looking forward to going to Super University because it has a Division I soccer team.” They already know they have a Division I soccer team. Or, “Super University is in the exciting city of New York.” They know. So are 50 other schools.

**Do personalize:** “I’ve been following Division I soccer for years and was psyched when Super University made it to the NCAA Soccer finals last December. I’ll be in the stands cheering when I get to campus next fall,” or “I am excited to be in New York, so close to the fashion industry I plan to be a part of, where I hope to take advantage of several internships during my time at Super University.” Say HOW you’ll fit in.

**Don’t use the same essay for different schools:** You must be specific in this essay. And, for heaven’s sake, don’t use the wrong school name.

**Don’t** talk about parties, easiness of classes, or hotness of girls/guys on campus.

**Do** talk about clubs, sports, curriculum, departments, professors, student body diversity, size, campus community, internships, study abroad, research opportunities, campus culture, class size, or location.

**Don’t make comparisons** with other schools. Just focus on the positive things you like about this school, not negative things about other schools.

**Do talk about yourself.** This is an essay about why YOU will thrive at that college. The admissions committee already knows their school is great; they want to know why the school is great for you, and you for them. So write about how you will contribute to campus life, how you can enrich the community, how you will take advantage of the college's offerings, and how the college will help you to achieve your goals. If you visited the school, write about your personal reflections on the campus, students, and classes. Anecdotes and details are always the best approach.

The following examples are not complete essays, just sample portions.

**Example #1:** "I like Bowdoin College because it's a highly acclaimed school with excellent academics. I especially like that it's close to Canada." This doesn't work because you're telling the school what it already knows ("highly acclaimed," "excellent academics," "close to Canada"). Instead, tell the school why this is important, and how you'll take advantage of it.

**New Version:** "Bowdoin's proximity to Canada is important to me because my family is French Canadian. I'm excited to be able to immerse myself in a premier liberal arts education, while being close enough to Quebec to learn more about my heritage and practice my language skills." This works because the answer is specific.

**Sample #2:** "Your school really inspires me. The students were friendly, and the campus is amazing. I can really see myself going there." This doesn't work because it's generic; almost any campus can be inspiring, and lots of students are friendly. It's impersonal—there's no sense that the student connects with this school.

**New Version:** "I introduced myself to some of the students who were on their way to Dr. Gruber's psych class. As we walked across the quad, they told me how exciting his lectures were and how much they liked him as a teacher. My high school psych course really made me want to learn more about psychology, and if I'm admitted, the first class I'm signing up for is Dr. Gruber's." This works because the student has made her answer personal. By referencing an instructor and a course that interests her, she's able to give the school a clear picture of how she sees herself fitting in.

**Sample #3:** "During the campus tour, my guide gave me a great inside view of the University. He told me about the school culture, and I knew this was the place for me." This doesn't work because it's vague. It doesn't mean anything to say you have an "inside view" or that "this is the place for me." You need specifics to back it up.

**New Version:** "After I got home, I remembered my tour guide played cello in the orchestra, so I shot him an email asking what it was like. He replied right away and told me he'd definitely recommend it, especially because of the great friendships he'd made. That's the kind of experience and camaraderie I'm looking for." This works because the writer has made a personal connection.

Adapted from [getintocollegeblog.com](http://getintocollegeblog.com) and [applyingtocollege.org](http://applyingtocollege.org).