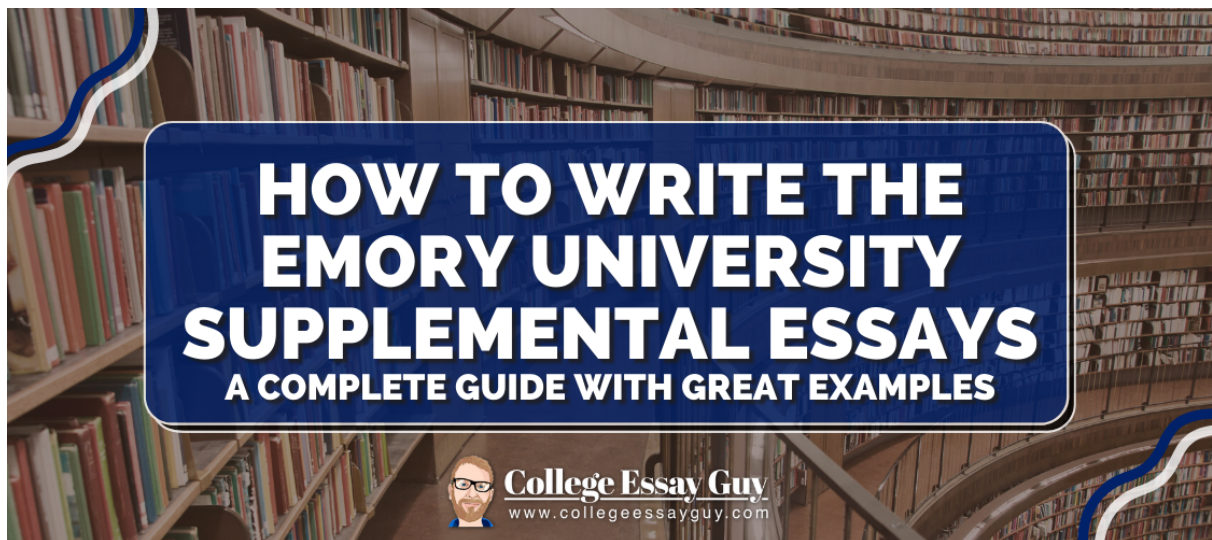


# How to Write the Emory University Supplemental Essays: Examples + Guide 2022/2023



In addition to its strong biology and writing programs, Emory University has plenty of personality: One of its more cherished traditions is Dooley's Week, in which Dooley—the unofficial skeleton mascot and spirit of Emory—hosts a variety of festive events while also randomly popping in to dismiss class. Like Dooley, Emory's supplemental essay prompts ooze with personality, and they're asking you to do the same.

But before you dive right into the prompts, you can get an extensive, by-the-numbers look at Emory's offerings in its [Common Data Set](#), and for deeper insights into how the university wants to grow and evolve, read its [strategic plan](#).

## WHAT ARE THE EMORY UNIVERSITY SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPTS?

## EMORY UNIVERSITY SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #1

*What academic areas are you interested in exploring in college? (200 words)*

## EMORY UNIVERSITY SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #2

*“Getting to know you” Category: Respond to one of the following. (150 words)*

- *Reflect on a personal experience where you intentionally expanded your cultural awareness.*
- *When was the last time you questioned something you had thought to be true?*
- *If you could witness a historic event (past, present or future) first-hand, what would it be, and why?*
- *Share about a time when you were awestruck.*
- *Which book, character, song, monologue, or piece of work (fiction or non-fiction) seems made for you? Why?*

# HOW TO WRITE EACH SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT FOR EMORY UNIVERSITY

## HOW TO WRITE EMORY SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #1

What academic areas are you interested in exploring in college? (200 words)

This essay is what we call a “Why Major” essay.

You’ll find a step-by-step guide to writing this essay [at this link](#), but here’s the short version:

**Step #1:** Imagine a mini-movie of the moments that led you to your interest and create a simple, bullet point outline.

**Step #2:** Put your moments (aka the “scenes” of your mini-movie) in chronological order, as it’ll help you see how your interests developed. It also makes it easier to write transitions.

**Step #3:** Decide if you want to include a specific thesis that explicitly states your central argument—in this case, what you want to study and why. This thesis can be at the beginning, middle, or end of your essay.

**Step #4:** Write a draft!

This is a new prompt for Emory this year, so we don’t have an Emory-specific example to share. But here’s a great example, written for another school’s very

similar prompt. Note that this example is nearly 250 words, and yours will need to be no more than 200 words.

### **Example:**

*My interest in Gender and Sexuality Studies was sparked in my eighth grade Civics class when we studied topics pertaining to sexual equality. I went into the class knowing I believed women had a right to make choices for their own bodies and that view remained the same, but I discovered the complexity of abortion debates. I challenged myself by thinking about the disparity between actual and potential personhood and the moral rights of unconscious lives. If pregnancy had the same consequences for men as it does women, how might the debate be different? Would this debate even exist?*

*A year later, I shadowed an OB/GYN at a nearby hospital. On my first shift, I watched an incarcerated woman receive a postpartum exam after giving birth in her cell toilet with just Advil, and the issues discussed in Civics suddenly became urgent and real.*

*My school projects have often focused on reproductive rights. I've spent numerous hours delving into summaries of Supreme Court cases on abortion and contraception, and I'm even known as the "Tampon Fairy" at school because I frequently restock the school bathrooms with tampons and condoms.*

*I'm interested in exploring how Gender and Sexuality Studies connect to Public Health and Reproductive Biology, as well as Public Policy and Law. The interdisciplinary nature of this major will allow me to investigate many other areas of study and create a more nuanced understanding of how this particular field interacts with our world and society. (246 words)*

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### **Tips + Analysis**

**Brevity is key.** We know what you're thinking: "Not even Quentin Tarantino can write an award-winning 200-word script!" (Are we the only ones mentally smack-talking *Pulp Fiction* right now?) True, you're not given much real estate space, but look at how much this student conveyed in fewer than 250 words. Channel your inner director and plan your script by answering three key questions: Where did my interest start? How has it evolved? What do I hope to achieve through further study?

**Think breadth over depth.** Every iconic movie has iconic scenes. Rafiki holding baby Simba in *The Lion King*. The Cantina scene in *Star Wars*. What are *your* iconic scenes? You likely have several reasons you're considering a particular major, so let's hear them. Keep it to one scene per sentence if you have a lot of ground to cover, or you may prefer a short paragraph for each scene to add more detail. Either way, each quick glance should show how your interests developed.

**Add the unexpected.** Most students with a clear academic interest have taken a course, pursued an extracurricular, or completed a project (maybe all three) related to that interest. But how many incorporate that interest into their everyday life with such zeal—like appointing themselves their school's "Tampon Fairy"? We guarantee that image is in your head right now and will stay there for a while. Why? Because we didn't see it coming. Consider how you can add impact by using unexpected (read: uncommon) language and details.

**Breathe. It's OK to not know your major.** Yes, we called it a "Why Major" essay, but not everyone applies to college knowing exactly what they want to do or be (here's us at your age, raising our hands high). And that's the great thing about college—you'll have a chance to explore and find your interests. So if you're undecided, instead of focusing on a major, select a few specific areas of interest and explain how you've satisfied your curiosity in each. Or pick a singular theme (problem solving, experimentation, etc.), share the ways that theme has shown up in your life, and explain how a particular field of study can help you further explore it.

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## HOW TO WRITE EMORY SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #2

"Getting to know you" Category: Respond to one of the following. (150 words)

- Reflect on a personal experience where you intentionally expanded your cultural awareness.
- When was the last time you questioned something you had thought to be true?
- If you could witness a historic event (past, present or future) first-hand, what would it be, and why?
- Share about a time when you were awestruck.
- Which book, character, song, monologue, or piece of work (fiction or non-fiction) seems made for you? Why?

**“REFLECT ON A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WHERE YOU INTENTIONALLY EXPANDED YOUR CULTURAL AWARENESS.”**

The word “intentionally” pops out because it highlights the active nature of how you should respond to this prompt. Cultural awareness encompasses a wide variety of experiences, so we encourage you to lean into the purposefulness of expanding yourself. It’s easy to stay in your comfort zone, but this prompt asks you to consider a time when you either stepped out of your comfort zone or sought out more information to broaden your understanding of the world around you.

**Some things to think about as you explore:**

Society is in a constant state of cultural evolution, so perhaps identify a topic that emphasizes your cultural awareness of the current times. Culture can be defined as the symbols, language, beliefs, values, and artifacts that are part of any society. In anthropology, it’s often defined as a “system of meaning-making.” Those are quite broad definitions to work with, so think through which aspects resonate with you and your experiences (race & ethnicity, socioeconomic class, learning a new language, etc.).

Maybe you have a personal experience related to your own culture or someone else’s culture and sought out more information to build on your knowledge. How did you approach the situation, and what specifically did you do? What did you learn—about yourself, about others, and about the broader community and your place in it?

This is a great opportunity to demonstrate your fit on a campus that celebrates diversity. Communicate your level of cultural sensitivity or your commitment to equity and inclusion. Perhaps you’ve reached out to community members for support and guidance with a service project. Maybe you’ve advocated for social justice by lobbying your elected officials. The key is to share how you’ve accepted, adapted, or integrated different perspectives into your own experiences.

**Example:**

*In 2018, I was eager to see the Senate vote on DACA, an issue I only knew through debate, so I sat in the Senate gallery for 8 hours, surrounded by DREAMers in neon-orange shirts. When Senator McConnell quoted the White House calling the DREAMers unlawful immigrants, we exchanged grimaces. When Senator Schumer listed all he was willing to give up to save DACA, I smiled at the woman next to me.*

*As we sat for hours with no food, water, or bathroom breaks, I began to understand the gravity of the issue, realizing the impact 60 people can have on millions, through just one vote. After the government shut down without passing protections for DREAMers, I understood the human impact of our immigration policies. This experience expanded my awareness of the struggle that immigrants go through, and I recognized my responsibility in seeking justice for others.*

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### **Tips + Analysis:**

**Keep it specific.** While “intentionally” is a key word here, so is “experience.” (Although truthfully, just as every word counts in your essay, every word in the prompt counts too.) It might seem easier to talk about something profoundly life-changing that you read or watched, but Emory wants to know how you really got to work and got your hands dirty, so to speak, to actually and purposefully *live* a moment that broadened your awareness of the world around you—like this student did in attending, and soaking in, the Senate vote on DACA.

**Remember that big things can come in small packages.** Don’t discount something “small” that expanded your awareness just because you don’t think it sounds as impressive as sitting in a Senate gallery for eight hours. The archaeologist who discovered trilobites is no less important than the one who uncovered the first T-Rex. They’re just different. Each experience is important in its own way, and it’s the way it changed you that will be more impactful to the reader.

**Connect it with the present.** Technically, the prompt is asking about a past experience, but admission officers want to know how this experience both changed you *then* and still affects you *now*. As with so many essays, you want to be able to answer, “so what?” or “Why does that matter?” Answer those questions by showing how you plan on continuing to expand that awareness. How will it impact your activities, attitude, and even intentions moving forward? That insight doesn’t have to be a whole paragraph (especially with such a small word budget). For this student, it involved just a few words: “I recognized my responsibility in seeking justice for others.”

### ***“WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU QUESTIONED SOMETHING THAT YOU HAD THOUGHT TO BE TRUE?”***

Questioning something you believe is true can be an act of courage, since belief systems are often embedded in our sense of self, and many of those around you

perhaps believe the same things. But taking the time to reflect on why we believe what we do is incredibly valuable. After all, one could argue that if we haven't examined our beliefs, those beliefs aren't truly ours. How do you question yourself and your community? This prompt invites you to expand beyond the limits of your commonly held beliefs. The key here is "questioned"—it doesn't necessarily mean you changed your belief, simply that you held it up to a mirror and considered alternative possibilities, and in doing so made it truly yours. It's important to communicate this level of critical thinking, a vital characteristic for an Emory student.

Here are some tips to get you started:

**List out some of your beliefs**, ideally ones that you've held for quite some time (the longer the better). Examine the origins of those beliefs. When did you start to believe this? Why did/do you believe it? Finally, recall any instances when you questioned those beliefs. It doesn't have to be a grand event; sometimes (probably most of the time) we question our beliefs quietly to ourselves.

**Consider replacing common approaches**, such as politics and religion, with experiences unique to you. Politics and religion are natural choices to call into question. But unless you have a vividly original story to share on these topics, we encourage you to explore other beliefs based on your lived experiences that may stand out more.

**Be clear about the outcome of your questioning.** What prompted you to question the belief in the first place? What, if anything, occurred as a result? What did you learn or gain from the experience?

We've never actually seen really great example essays for this Emory prompt, but if you have one you'd like to share, we'd love to see it! Email [help@collegeessayguy.com](mailto:help@collegeessayguy.com).

***"IF YOU COULD WITNESS A HISTORIC EVENT (PAST, PRESENT OR FUTURE) FIRST-HAND, WHAT WOULD IT BE, AND WHY?"***

This open-ended prompt invites you to share a side of yourself that may not be apparent in other parts of your application. We suggest using this prompt to highlight a specific interest, value, or intellectual insight. Also, think about the power behind time-traveling through history and witnessing an event with your own eyes. History has been shaped by countless events that have led to where we are today, so think critically about which event you'd choose. Is it connected to one of your academic interests? Do you have a personal connection? You can use this as

another opportunity to demonstrate how you think and the connections you make, which are great ways to show your core values. It's easier to write a stronger response by honing in on particular moments or events than by discussing something big and broad, like WWII. Finally, keep in mind how common certain responses might be ... and try to throw them out and write about something your readers maybe haven't encountered yet.

Here's a great example for this prompt:

### **Example:**

*The year is 1200 BCE. Strange boats make landfall on the Egyptian coast. The mysterious sea people have come to destroy civilized culture! That's what ancient Egyptian writings claim is the reason for the Bronze Age collapse. Just a few years later, all of the advanced cultures in Northern Africa and the Middle East collapsed as well.*

*Learning the truth about what caused the collapse may help save us from our current threats. A common theory, and the most plausible one, is that the empires overworked and destroyed their once fertile land. Another belief is that these civilizations fell when the gap between the poor and the rich incited catastrophic riots. Both of these theories we can see happening today. The Bronze Age empires seemed invincible, but they all crumbled. What is keeping us from facing the same fate?*

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### **Tips + Analysis:**

**Consider opening with specific imagery that draws the reader in.** Since the word count is so short, this technique may help you conserve space with a descriptive opening that transports the reader back to the event as succinctly as possible. Give a clear picture of the when and where. The student above opens with three pithy sentences that build on one another and set an intriguing scene. Providing clear visuals gives the opening a cinematic feel and immediately engages the reader.

**Establish the event.** Go deep and offer as much context as possible within the limited word count to showcase your depth of knowledge on this event. Notice how this student starts in Egypt and then explains the impact in Northern Africa and the Middle East. This technique allows her to flex her command of the topic, while also demonstrating the extent of the event's impact.



**Clarify the “why.”** Here’s the chance to demonstrate your insightfulness. Why is this event significant? What relevance have you found that goes beyond the obvious? Here, we see the student drawing a connection between 1200 BCE and our current day and age. It’s an impactful moment that encourages the reader to think.

**“SHARE ABOUT A TIME WHEN YOU WERE AWESTRUCK.”**

Emory emphasizes [on its website](#) that through your responses to its prompts, its officials hope to get “a compelling glimpse of the real you.” Let’s say that last part all together: The real you. It’s easy to want to make yourself seem a little “too you” in your application. Too polished. Too perfect. Toss those expectations aside and think of your genuine answer.

Whatever topic you choose, you won’t have the time (or words) to beat around the bush. Use some of your word count to vividly describe the experience itself, but don’t dwell on it. The bulk of your response should be spent highlighting the growth, emotions, and realizations that came from this experience.

Since this prompt is new, we don’t have an example that was written just for it, but this essay, written for a similar Stanford prompt, could work here too. It would just have to be shortened to 150 words.

**Example:**

*The amount of matter in the universe has been constant since the Big Bang. Our universe, this vast miracle, is nothing more than a sealed, endlessly twisting kaleidoscope. All earthly wonders from pyramids to pyridines are merely iterations of the same finite set of atoms. Every person that ever existed—every idea, even chemical impulses carrying revolutions—is at once the stuff of kings and beetles.*

*By necessity, new creations are permutations of existing ideas, but I used to be crushed by the weight of past ideas, shameful when I noticed the influences of masterpieces I admired seeping into my work. I felt like a thief. In my mind, the only real worth was in contributing something completely new to the world, something so alien it couldn’t possibly exist in any other mind but my own.*

*But when I learned about the law of conservation of mass, my world flipped. I realized that, for example, the fact that Forrest Gump was based off a book makes it no less extraordinary a film. Creation is not just genesis, but also synthesis, and no idea springs a fully formed Athena from the mind of Zeus. Even if everything I*

*have to say has been said before, my opinions matter. My thoughts and ideas, even if they're just cocktails of everything I've read and learned, matter.*

*What a simple yet momentous discovery, that my voice matters. (231 words)*

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### **Tips + Analysis:**

**Consider alternate definitions.** Many might define being awestruck as being impressed or filled with amazement—and this student clearly went in that direction. But here's a (maybe) shocker: The word doesn't have exclusively positive connotations. It can also mean having feelings of reverence, respect, or even dread. Any experience you've had where you simply can't believe what you're hearing or seeing (or any of the five senses-ing) can be the perfect launchpad for this prompt.

**Be genuine.** For this student, that meant being gobsmacked by the law of conservation of mass. And it works well. But keep in mind, as mentioned above, it may be tempting to want to give the "sounds good" answer, not the "sounds like the real me answer." So put your ego on Pause and your heart on Play and think about that one time when you were speechless, for whatever reason, and *why* it mattered so much to you. It's perfectly okay to be honest with an answer as simple as "Meeting Imagine Dragons backstage," when your "why" involves being their No. 1 fan but also having the opportunity to thank them for the work they're doing to normalize mental health concerns.

**Think beyond the event.** Yes, Emory is asking you to share details of that "one time," and that's important for showing what gets you fired up. But answering what they're not asking (at least, not explicitly) will provide just as much insight: How are you forever changed from that experience? This essay does a beautiful job of getting to that in a robust way in those last two paragraphs. Like this: "Even if everything I have to say has been said before, my opinions matter. My thoughts and ideas, even if they're just cocktails of everything I've read and learned, matter." And especially this: "What a simple yet momentous discovery, that my voice matters."

***"WHICH BOOK, CHARACTER, SONG, MONOLOGUE, OR PIECE OF WORK (FICTION OR NON-FICTION) SEEMS MADE FOR YOU? WHY?"***

While it may be tempting to select a work that sounds impressive, if you don't have strong feelings about it, it will be pretty difficult to explain how it represents you.

The real opportunity to impress with this prompt is not by showing off what you've read, heard, or seen, but by demonstrating the kind of reader, listener, or viewer you are.

Choosing a work (book, character, song, or piece of fiction or non-fiction) for this is tricky, but here are some questions you can ask yourself to help you get there:

Is there a work that embodies a core value or important detail I haven't shared yet?

Is there a work that marked the beginning of my interest in a certain genre, author, or movement?

Is there a work I experienced that led to a particularly vibrant conversation with friends or family? A hotly contested debate in class?

Is there a work that I thought I was going to hate, but loved? Or hated at first but grew to love?

Or maybe there's a work you could say a million things about. If so, odds are high that a work you've thought about that much has come to represent some part of you, so it could be a pretty promising topic.

Let's take a look at a strong student example:

### **Example:**

*"If You Give a Mouse a Cookie," the book goes, then the mouse will ask for a glass of milk. If you ask me a question, I'll answer with another question.*

*I'm naturally inquisitive. As a girl, I'd interrogate my parents during 13-hour flights to Beijing: "If we're traveling to a later time zone, does that mean we're entering the future?" or "If planes have autopilot, why do we need pilots?"*

*Today, my curiosity has transitioned to topics like thermodynamics. Through questioning, I've made boring lectures more engaging for me and my peers, while also helping us better internalize the information and develop an appreciation for scientific theories—the ideal gas law and atomic configuration—that help us make sense of our surroundings.*

*Questioning my surroundings has allowed me to find my voice in the crowd, letting me step out of my comfort zone, while furthering me and my peers' knowledge.*

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### **Tips + Analysis**

**Hook the reader by alluding (maybe in the first sentence) to how the work embodies you.** By focusing on the common core value you share with a particular work, you take the reins of your essay. Notice how this author compares her own curiosity and hunger for knowledge to the greedy mouse of the famed children's book—and that's the last time she mentions the book. This allows her to focus more on her value of why asking questions is important and less on the book itself. She also does a smart thing by connecting her curiosity to her academic interests.

**Employ the “super” essay approach when possible.** This tip is important because when you can use the same essay for multiple prompts (tweaking as necessary to fit each prompt), it can save you a ton of time. This essay, for example, was excerpted from another school's “Why Major” prompt. By properly strategizing what you write about in your personal statement, you can use all your supplemental essays as opportunities to talk more about what you're interested in studying or doing in the future—even if the prompts themselves aren't asking those particular questions directly.

**Consider ending with a clear “so what?”** After *showing* the way her question-asking has changed over time, this author makes sure the reader leaves with a clear takeaway: “Questioning my surroundings has allowed me to find my voice in the crowd, letting me step out of my comfort zone, while furthering me and my peers' knowledge.” These supplementals are short, but don't be afraid to show first, *then* tell the reader what's important to understanding you and why.