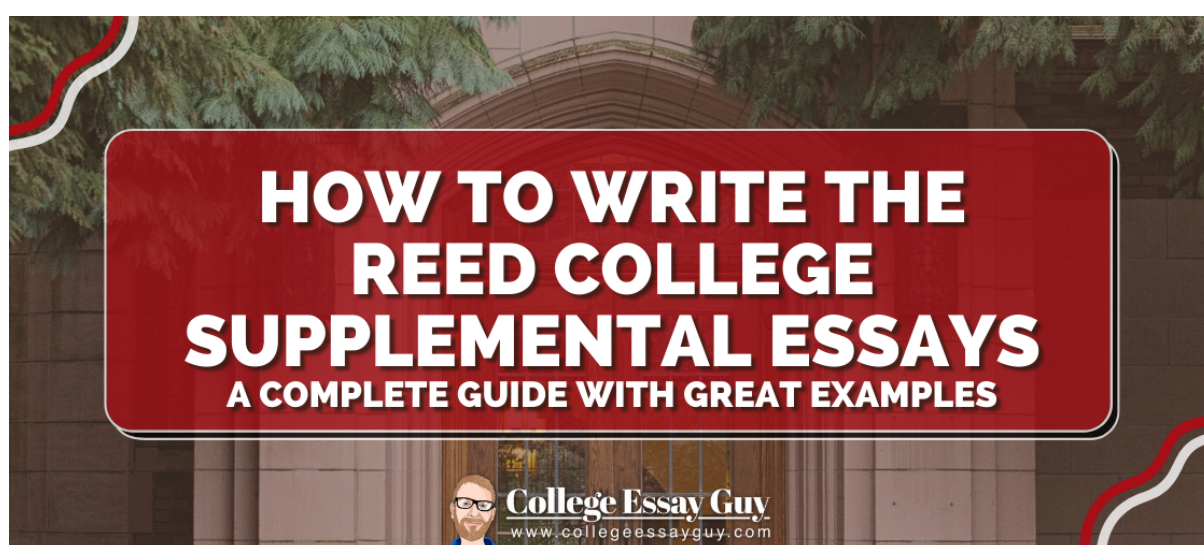


How to Write the Reed College Supplemental Essay: Examples + Guide 2022/2023



'Twas a dark and stormy night ...

Just kidding. 'Twas actually time for you to write the Reed College supplemental essay.

Maybe you don't know how to get started. Maybe you're looking for a way to avoid clichés (literary and otherwise).

Whether it's dark and stormy or bright and sunny outside, we're here to help.

Want to get a better sense of what Reed is looking for? You'll find an extensive, by-the-numbers look at Reed's offerings, from enrollment and tuition statistics to student life and financial aid information, on its [Common Data Set](#). For deep insights into how this private research university envisions student success (and how it wants to grow and evolve), read [its strategic plan](#), SP2. Reading through this will give you a strong idea of what Reed values.

WHAT IS THE REED SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT?

REED SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #1

For one week at the end of January, Reed students upend the traditional classroom hierarchy and teach classes about any topic they love, academic or otherwise. This week is known as Paideia after the Greek term signifying “education” – the complete education of mind, body and spirit. What would you teach that would contribute to the Reed community? (500 Words)

HOW TO WRITE THE SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT FOR REED COLLEGE

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This prompt should make you feel excited. Sure, it’s open-ended. But, it’s also more interesting than the average “What will you bring to our community” prompts you see on lots of other college applications. Reed lets you create your very own curriculum. You get to envision a class you might actually teach. That’s pretty cool.

One important tip: Don’t write this in the style of a syllabus. Instead, treat this in true essay format, with your ideas in paragraph form. But that doesn’t mean you can’t still envision, for yourself and the reader, the course’s name, required readings, and sample lectures—you’ll just write about them in the body of your paragraphs, perhaps by expounding on the “why” of this reading or that lecture (or even this workshop or guest lecturer).

Here are a couple general tips to remember as you’re writing your essay:

Explain how the topic would “contribute to the Reed community.” This is an important part of the prompt, and part of what makes this different from other, more standard “create your own course” essays. Take some time (and with 500 words, you have it) to elaborate not just on *what* you’d teach but

why. That “why” should help convey the significance of your topic, and why it could make an impact on your fellow Griffins.

Maybe share required readings. Give the reader a sense of your mad research skills. Look up your topic on Amazon (or better yet, on scholar.google.com or The Seminary Co-op’s catalog) to find books or articles that pique your interest on the subject. If you find one that’s slightly off-topic from your course, that’s okay. Make an **uncommon connection**. Find a unique way of linking multiple interests. Remember that classes can be interdisciplinary, so don’t limit yourself. The key here, since this essay should be written in traditional paragraph format, is not to merely list out a bunch of titles students would read—pick a few of your favorites and expound on what you hope/expect your classmates to get from reading these books or articles.

If you name sample lectures, do so in a dynamic way. Again, imagine lectures you’d like to hear. Try to find those uncommon connections. Use the sample lectures as a way to demonstrate the breadth and depth of your knowledge about your topic of choice—and again, expound on the “why” and “what for.”

Here’s a great example from an essay, written for a similar Boston College prompt, that does a nice job of imagining a dynamic course.

Example:

Humans: The Apex Predators of Earth

Why are humans dominant? Why do we have the power to decide the fate of our universe? Do we actually have as much power as we think we do? What is man's place within nature?

In my class, my students would explore the roles of humans in society. I first began to question human dominance on a service trip to Tanzania, when I experienced the Maasai tribe’s ceremonial goat slaughter. As the goat seized its last breath, I struggled to understand the precarious line between life vs. death. Prior to this experience I hadn’t contemplated our privilege as humans; I was blind towards human dominance. The goat’s fate helped enlighten me to human beings’ unlicensed power.

Why is it that we can decide the slaughtering of a goat is the circle of life, but the consumption of a dog is a sin? While I have yet to understand how and why we deserve to be the apex predator of our environment—and most likely will never know—I still enjoy raising these questions and stating my opinion. This event

helped make me aware of where I focus my privilege. Through sustainability workshops, environmental science classes, and working in gardens I have begun to concentrate more on understanding how to benefit our environment, instead of destroying it with our power.

We're destroying our environment, which is necessary for us to live. It's like we're eliminating the essentials to our existence, making it harder for ourselves to continue to grow. In nature, when there is an overpopulation of predators, there's quickly a lack of prey. What impact will we have in the future? Will we continue to allow this trend to occur, or will we make a change?

In my open-ended and philosophical class we will assess a few major topics. First, what has led to the dominance of humans? Why have we been given sole responsibility for deep cognitive theories? Second, I would extend the narrative of Apex predatory from its reference towards animals to the environment itself. Why are we here? Are we on Earth to save the planet and solve the puzzle that is our environment, or will we destroy our pure home?

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Tips + Analysis

Give the course an interesting name. Notice how this student uses the title at the top of his essay, incorporating it into the paragraph-form essay, while quickly communicating what the course will be about. Look at your title as an early chance to make an impression on not only admission officers, but also the (imagined) people searching for a class to take. The colon is a great tool here. First, it allows you to create a longer title. Second, it divides the title into academic and non-academic halves. Don't want to title the essay this way? No worries. Using paragraph form gives you a couple other options: a) opening your intro paragraph with the title, as an attention-grabber, then explaining the purpose of the class and what you hope your classmates to get out of it, or b) starting out by explaining the topic, then adding something like, "I'd call the class X."

Show you know your stuff. Reed is using this prompt to probe more deeply into how you think, and what matters to you. So make sure to choose a topic you not only know well, but you love talking about. Then use your 500 words to strut your stuff. This student has clearly thought a lot about that goat slaughter, and what it says about our role in the world as humans. But he doesn't stop at what he already knows; he wonders aloud at thoughts and questions the class will explore together. Speaking of which ...

Ask smart questions. Asking probing, insightful questions while explaining your topic, and why it's essential to share, can give the reader a sense of the deeper ideas the class will tackle as a unit. More importantly, it shows your capacity to pose, and seek answers to, higher-level questions in college and beyond. This is a chance for readers to see your mind at work. Think of these questions as tiny windows into your academic soul. They may also offer an opportunity for you to answer that last important part of the prompt—how the course “will contribute to the Reed community.”

Alert: These next examples were written to the more standard “create your own course” prompts, so as you read through what makes these strong options, think back to the tips above and determine how you can do something similar, just in traditional essay/paragraph form.

Example:

***Great American Leaders: A Historical, Sociological, and Political Perspective
On How to Get Things Done***

Course Description: Throughout history, many American leaders have been good, but what has made the most famous ones great? In this course, we will explore and apply the techniques of effective and highly regarded American leaders who have forever left their mark on our nation's society. From President Lyndon Johnson's use of “the lean” for physical intimidation to pass landmark legislation, to Martin Luther King Jr.'s use of the Old Testament to bring together Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish leaders during the Civil Rights Movement, to Eleanor Roosevelt's ability to command respect and influence at a time when women's voices were rarely heard, we will analyze the tactics that have led to lasting change. As we study the strategies pioneered by these great leaders, we will simultaneously work to find ways to apply them in the present day.

Sample lectures:

Connections During the Civil Rights Movement: A Sociological Look at the Unity of Leaders, Cultures, and Religions in Common Cause

Required readings: A Letter from a Birmingham Jail - Martin Luther King, Jr.

“I Speak to You as an American Jew” - Dr. Joachim Prinz, March on Washington

The 100 Days: FDR's Spectacular Entry into the Office of the Presidency, and his Leadership of a Congress of Action

Required readings: The Defining Moment: FDR's Hundred Days and the Triumph of Hope - Jonathan Alter

Roosevelt's First Fireside Chat- March 12, 1933

Seneca Falls: The Leaders of the Women's Suffrage Movement and their Convention that Changed Women's Rights Forever

Required readings: Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women's Rights Movement - Sally G. McMillen

Elizabeth Cady Stadam: Seneca Falls Keynote Address

At a time of ineffectiveness and gridlock, it is imperative that we study what makes a great leader and attempt to find applications of their work in the modern day, for our country and our world.

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Tips + Analysis

Mix colloquial and academic language. This author does a great job of explaining the intellectual content of the course in a way that actually makes you want to engage with the curriculum. He does that by combining expert-sounding language with the informal enthusiasm of someone who genuinely seems interested in the course he's proposing. The title is a great example of this. It tells us that we get to explore great American leaders from multiple academic perspectives, but for the purpose of learning "how to get things done." That's a super cool way of grounding the course in a practical and understandable skill. Plus, it reads like the title of a book you might see at an airport bookstore, which is a good thing.

Make the description specific. What makes an essay stand out are the details. The less specific you are, the less the reader gets to learn about you as a unique human being with individual interests and ideas. This author doesn't waste the opportunity Reed gives him to flaunt his historical knowledge and love of his chosen topic. And he doesn't just tell us the overarching themes and questions for the course; he illustrates those themes and questions with details about Lyndon Johnson, MLK, and

Eleanor Roosevelt. The particularity of these facts shows that the author has done his research. His attention to detail shows care.

Choose the readings intentionally. The author clearly connects his required readings to the initial description of the course. The readings he chooses are from a variety of sources and make sense within the context he has provided. They also connect to one another; you gain a more complete understanding of the others. That's cool. It means that the author conceived of the required readings as a cohesive whole rather than as individual units. When you're thinking about how you want to structure your course, make sure to take a step back and see the big picture. A class takes place for a whole semester, and you can create interesting parallels/connections between the readings you choose to assign.

Use something short to wrap it all up. The author gives a quick sentence or two at the end of his essay to explain why the course matters. Think of this as your elevator pitch. It's your chance to show how your interest in your topic connects to other issues or topics of note.

Here's another great essay example:

Example:

The Exalted Power of Music: How Our Ears Inspire Our Eyes

Course Description: Music dominates our society—pop songs and singers are hugely influential in today's time. But where else in our lives does the enchanting power of music hold influence? As we investigate and unravel the techniques of modern artists through a diverse slate of plays, cartoons, and films, we will discover the vital role of music in enhancing benchmark works of visual fiction. Simultaneously, through philosophical readings of Walton and Nietzsche, we will analyze the emotional and physiological effects of music, examining the dynamic interplay of visual and auditory elements. Finally, students will synthesize their research to create a short film or multimedia piece that displays their knowledge of visual aspects, music's attributes, and their combined impact on a universal audience.

Sample lectures:

How To Enjoy Murder: Alternating Major and Minor Chords in Schubert's String Quartet No. 15

Required Reading/Viewing/Listening:

The Evolution of Music in Film and its Psychological Impact on Audiences - Stuart Fischhoff, Ph.D.

Crimes and Misdemeanors - Woody Allen

Schubert's String Quartet No. 15

Why We Love Saturday Morning Cartoons: Two Mechanisms of Fictional Immersion

Required Reading/Viewing/Listening:

Fearing Fictions - Kendall L. Walton

The Birth of Tragedy, Section 7, 24, 25 - F. Nietzsche

Tom and Jerry, Episode 33 - William Hanna and Joseph Barbera

Franz Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody no. 2

How Movies Possess Our Bodies: A Physiological Analysis

Required Reading/Viewing/Listening:

Quantitative and Visual Analysis of the Impact of Music on Perceived Emotion of Film - Rob Parke, Elaine Chew, Chris Kyriakakis

The Invisible Art of Film Music, Section 7 - Lawrence E. MacDonald

Jaws - Steven Spielberg

Why Fiction Feels So Real: Analyzing Silence

Required Reading/Viewing/Listening:

Silence and Slow Time: Studies in Musical Narrative - Martin Boykan

Life Is a Dream - Pedro Calderón de la Barca

"4'33'" - John Cage

In a society propelled by media and entertainment, the study of music's influence on our lives not only can allow us to better produce captivating works, but understand our emotional responses and discover the profundity of human expression.

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Tips + Analysis

Go for a great title. This one immediately hooks you. It's not too long, and it uses the colon to separate an academic topic ("the exalted power of music") with a more basic/understandable direction for the course ("how our ears inspire our eyes"). It's punchy and makes you want to keep reading.

Get creative with the sample lectures. Just look at those titles. How to Enjoy Murder. Why We Love Saturday Morning Cartoons. How Movies Possess Our Bodies. Like, c'mon. These sound great. We don't expect to learn why we enjoy murder in a class about music. But when we hear a lecture title about something like that, we feel intrigued to learn more. The author constructs their titles so that the non-academic half comes first. If the author had titled their first lecture, "Alternating Major and Minor Chords in Schubert's String Quartet No. 15: How To Enjoy Murder," we get to the best part last. However, this means we might lose interest halfway through and never get to enjoy the most intriguing half. The part on the major and minor chords helps hint at the *why*, intriguing us further.

Consider different ways of delivering content. Readings don't necessarily have to be books or academic articles. Think outside the box. Think podcasts, newspaper clippings, art shows, dance performances, films, or even athletic events. The author of this essay does a great job of incorporating different ways of learning into their class description. This attention to detail demonstrates a deeper, more expansive understanding of the topic as well as an appreciation of multiple styles of learning.

Give the course purpose. From the very beginning, we get a sense of why a course like this has value. The author explains that we live in a world "propelled by media and entertainment." We need to understand how things like music work. Ultimately, this course is interested in the "human" aspect of music. It's about exploring how sound can act as a vehicle for larger messages about humanity. Again: so cool. That's not what we expect out of a course about music, but it also feels inevitable. Especially after all the amazing work the author has put into demonstrating that connection to us. The curriculum is interesting, but it also feels meaningful.