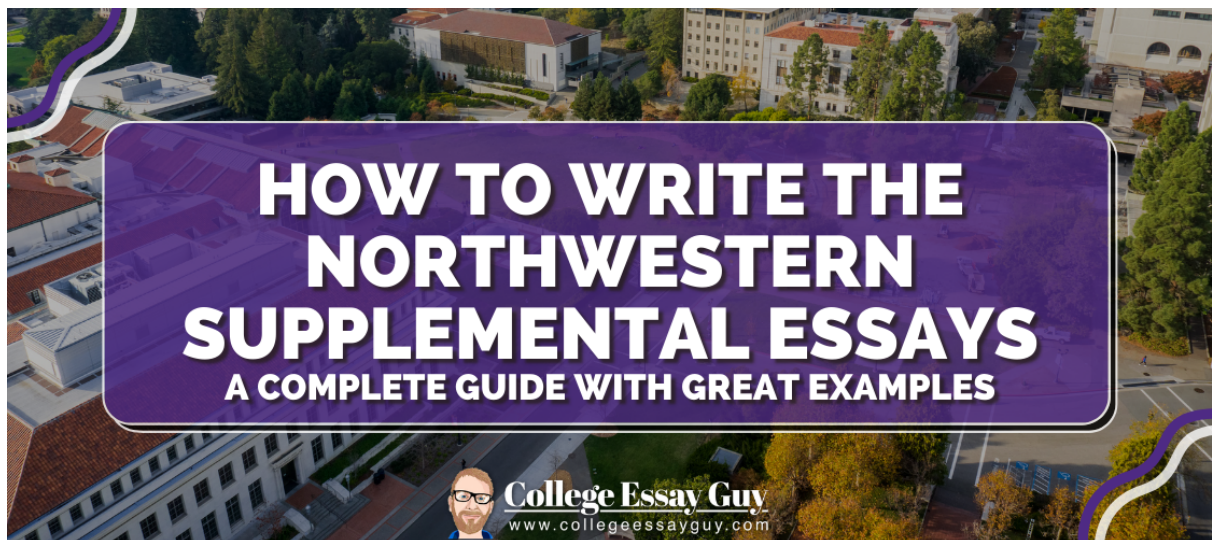


How to Write the Northwestern Supplemental Essay: Examples + Guide 2022/2023



Congratulations! You've chosen a school that asks for only one supplemental essay! Take a moment to rejoice, but before you start planning how you're going to spend all this extra free time, realize that this relatively light writing assignment comes with an extra challenge: This will be your one chance to speak directly to Northwestern admissions officials, show them who you are, and why you're the right fit for their school.

Because this is a highly selective university, this essay may weigh heavily in your application, separating you from the other students with high GPAs and SAT scores. Take a little extra time to communicate why you've chosen Northwestern over other schools, what you plan to get out of your four years there, and how you'll add to the campus community.

Not sure how? We've got you. Read on for a step-by-step guide, tips, and examples.

WHAT IS THE NORTHWESTERN SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT?

In 300 words or less, help us understand how you might engage specific resources, opportunities, and/or communities here. We are curious about what these specifics are, as well as how they may enrich your time at Northwestern and beyond.

HOW TO WRITE THE SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT FOR NORTHWESTERN

This is the classic “Why us?” essay. Northwestern wants to know why you’ve chosen this school—its academic programs, its campus life, its extracurricular offerings—above the others (“what aspects of Northwestern appeal most to you”). In other words, why it meets your needs and goals.

And, of course, every “Why us?” essay also needs to explain “why you” (that’s the “how you’ll make use of specific resources and opportunities here” part). In other words, why you’re what Northwestern is looking for in a student who will add something meaningful to its campus. That means you need a firm grasp of what you want in a college, and what Northwestern wants in a student—or put another way, how Northwestern’s values align with yours.

How do you do that exactly? Follow these three steps:

Step 1: Do your research

Think about what you’re looking for in a college experience. What major would you pursue? What courses are you interested in? What social life do you want—filled with clubs and activities? Greek life? Sports? Do you want a

school that offers internship opportunities? One that puts a premium on philanthropy and community involvement? Once you start formulating your answers, add them to the left column of this handy-dandy “Why us?” Essay Research Chart, which will help you start building the bones of your outline (Step 2).

Because values—yours and Northwestern’s—will play an important role in your essay, take the time, if you haven’t already, to complete the Values Exercise and the Everything I Want Colleges to Know about Me Brainstorming Exercise. These will help you get a clearer idea of what you want out of college.

Research how to write the “Why us?” essay. Start here. This comprehensive guide goes over common mistakes, research tips, favorite examples, and analyses of what makes them work, and so much more.

Get to know all you can about Northwestern and what it offers. Dig deep on its website, including classes you’d want to take, professors you find interesting, clubs you’d want to join, internships you’d apply for. (The “Why us?” Essay guide has lots more research tips!) Add these details into your “Why us?” Research Chart.

Want to really know what Northwestern is looking for? You can find an extensive, by-the-numbers look at Northwestern’s offerings, from enrollment and tuition statistics to student life and financial aid information, by checking out its Common Data Set. For deep insights into how this private research university envisions its role and how it wants to grow and evolve, read its strategic plan, Northwestern WILL. Reading through this will give you a strong idea of what Northwestern values.

Step 2: Write an outline

By now, you should have a “Why us?” Research Chart chock-full of color, examples and detail—on what you’re looking for in a college, and what Northwestern is looking for in a student. Use an outline to plan out how you want to organize your thoughts in a 300-word essay. If you’re not the outline type—plenty of us just want to get started already—and you have a strong sense of how you’re gonna do this, skip to Step 3.

If outlines help, take a few minutes to map one out. Here’s an example of the structure for a basic, solid “Why us?” essay (taken from the “Why us?” Essay guide):

Clear thesis that names the academic area(s) you want to pursue and maybe charts the path of the essay

Main reason #1 and 2-3 specific details

Main reason #2 and 2-3 specific details

Main reason #3 and 2-3 specific details

An ending that maybe discusses what you'll give back

Use the examples and details you've provided in your chart and start your outline, using the structure above or another one of your choosing.

Step 3: Write a draft (or five)

You've got lots of material, and a structure for how this important essay will unfold. Start writing!

Given its importance, this essay will likely not be written in one try, or even two or three. Be patient and give yourself permission to write multiple drafts. We thought it would also help to see how other students wrote this essay, so check out the examples and analysis below.

Pro tip: Try to get at least eight to 10 "why us?" reasons into your essay. Once you've written your first draft, bold each reason for yourself. This will offer visual confirmation that you're sprinkling your reasons evenly throughout the essay (rather than clumping them at the top or bottom, for example). Just be sure to unbold them before you submit.

Northwestern Supplemental Essay Example:

On my visit to Evanston, my tour guide walked backwards facing me the entire time. This struck me as symbolic of Northwestern.

Firstly, while walking backwards my guide made a special effort to connect with me, and I too shall reach out to my communities at Northwestern. As a member of the undergraduate chemistry team, I will join the Chemistry Council and connect with local students to mentor green chemistry projects for their schools, expanding on my work with high school ChemClub.

My guide also walked without seeing, venturing into the unknown. I shall complement my primary training in chemistry with The Institute for Sustainability and Energy's certificate program--to study disciplines unknown to the core science curriculum that nonetheless impact science research: Environmental Law & Policy interests me since law and policy govern the limitations with which chemists design

products. The pending Personal Care Products Safety Act will require safety assessments of ingredients, thereby expanding innovative research to transform the cosmetics industry. ISEN also supports multi-discipline research, and I hope to research toxicology of ingredients.

Finally, my guide took us on detours into Norris, an empty classroom and even to the Lakefill. I too hope to take inspiring digressions. The amazing theatre community at Northwestern excites me the most, as I've been a performer since preschool, studying ballet, singing, and theatre. Acting on stage is the most exhilarating experience I know, and working with the theatre tech staff on stage makeup is a great way to build teamwork and make new friends. I hope to get off my main academic track often, enroll in Acting for Non-Majors and Stage Makeup courses, and join the many student theatre groups.

Four years at Northwestern will seem too brief.

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Tips + Analysis

Give some thought to your opening, but don't overthink it. Spend a few minutes thinking up a clever hook to open the essay. Why just a "few minutes"? Because, while a clever opening is nice, it will not make or break your essay. The specific reasons you cite in the essay—and the way you connect each one back to you—will be much more important. In this case, the author thought back to what she liked about her tour, then used a few double meanings—see the start of each paragraph—to give the essay a sense of playfulness. How might you do this? But again: Don't stress over this! Write the middle first if you get stuck.

Weave your "why you" details in with the "why us" reasons. This student finds opportunities to weave her "why you" reasons in with "why us" reasons, like this: "As a member of the undergraduate chemistry team, I will join the Chemistry Council and connect with local students to mentor green chemistry projects for their schools, *expanding on my work with high school ChemClub.*" This detail shows how her ChemClub experience (why you) is a fitting foundation for what she'll learn in Chemistry Council (why us). Bonus points: This student names a Northwestern value (connection) and says how she'll exercise this value on campus: "my guide made a special effort to connect with me, and I too shall reach out to my communities at Northwestern." Love.

Consider naming your major (if you've chosen one) or academic focus up front. Since your major is likely to play a large role in your college experience, and why you chose Northwestern, consider adding that detail in your first or second paragraph. And be clear in describing why this major/academic focus at Northwestern *in particular* appeals to you *in particular*. This student seamlessly folds her major into the second sentence of the second paragraph (“As a member of the undergraduate chemistry team ...”), then quickly follows up with a specific “why us” reason: Chemistry Council.

Show a range of interests. The broad scope of this prompt (“what aspects of Northwestern”) is intentional. It’s not just asking about your chosen major or your academic interests; it’s probing for details about the breadth of your interests. So after talking about, say, courses and professors and programs that interest you, talk about campus life—clubs, activities, sports and other extracurriculars. This is a great way to show you’re more than just a reading machine (although, hey, be that too). For this student, her reasons for choosing Northwestern weren’t just about the Chemistry Council and The Institute for Sustainability and Energy; she was also interested in the theater community, in particular the Acting for Non-Majors and Stage Makeup courses. And fun fact: This student’s personal statement was on cosmetics, so this detail is a little callback to her application’s theme.

Northwestern Supplemental Essay Example:

In the words of Will, who spent six years inside the California Youth Authority: “It doesn’t make sense to take a kid out of the community to show him how to live in the community”. Confining 60,500 youth like Will every night, our dysfunctional juvenile justice system lies at an insidious intersection of racism, poverty, and unequal educational opportunity. Addressing these underlying injustices requires the interdisciplinary approach that Northwestern has perfected.

As the sole school of its kind in the nation, SESP will help me navigate this web of issues. As a Social Policy major, I’ll learn to develop policies targeting the school-to-prison pipeline or youth homelessness. Practical experience is paramount in understanding how institutions impact individuals, and vice versa. SESP provides this through research and the practicum internship, while Summer and Chicago Field Studies offer even more ways to get involved with criminal and social justice organizations. Specifically, I want to work with Ascend Justice to advocate for those affected by the child welfare system.

Northwestern also nurtures my fascination with math. By participating in MMSS, I'll merge my love for numbers and analysis with my ardent interest in the social sciences, building an intensive foundation in mathematical models to understand concepts that drive decision-making and collective action. Or through MENU, I'll explore exciting advanced mathematical topics, like geometric topology and combinatorics.

SESP's flexible coursework and the quarter system let me dive deeper into other academic interests: linking policy in times of political transformation to environmental studies, taking classes in psychopathology to better understand the criminalization of mental illness, and pairing French with philosophy in "Les Formes du Mal."

Northwestern gives me the profound and focused education I seek, while fostering all my AND's, providing me with the tools and perspective I need to strive toward my goals.

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Tips + Analysis

Show them you know your stuff. This is what we at College Essay Guy affectionately call "geeking out"—flexing your academic muscle by demonstrating the depth of your knowledge in a particular subject. You can do this in a few ways. One is by citing facts, statistics, or anecdotes, like this student does with the reference to Will. After reading that first paragraph, you get a keen sense of the writer's command for juvenile justice reform issues. And she uses it to introduce her summary "why us" reason: Northwestern's interdisciplinary approach. Brava.

Another way to geek out is by using language that would only be familiar to those who are proficient in that topic. Take this sentence, for example: "Or through MENU, I'll explore exciting advanced mathematical topics, *like geometric topology and combinatorics.*" See how she tucks that in there, not in a show-offy way, but to demonstrate a little of her expertise? If you don't know what those math topics are, you probably don't care, but you know (or suspect) the writer does. But heads-up: Do this sparingly. If you do it too much, it can be distancing or seem braggy.

Talk about *why* Northwestern is different. It's not enough to say Northwestern is one of a kind, or unique, or "the sole school of its kind in the nation." If you say something like this, make sure to back it up by saying, specifically, why. This student reinforces the "sole school" statement with

these details: “SESP provides this through research and the practicum internship, while Summer and Chicago Field Studies offer even more ways to get involved with criminal and social justice organizations.” This is great and, when possible, go even further by saying specifically why a program is *different* from other programs that also offer research, internships, summer studies and social justice opportunities. This isn’t always possible, by the way, but if you can find 2-3 unique opportunities that a) the school offers and b) connect back to you, they can make a huge difference in your “Why us?” essay.

Be specific. We’re talking about courses, professors, research studies, clubs: Use their formal names, and make sure to spell them right! After this student talks about her interest in the practical experience opportunities at Northwestern, for example, she follows up with this nugget: “Specifically, I want to work with Ascend Justice to advocate for those affected by the child welfare system.” Notice she doesn’t just mention the organization, but what she’ll do with the opportunity. That leads us to the next point:

Talk about what you’ll get out of your Northwestern education.

Remember the second part of the prompt: “how you’ll make use of specific resources and opportunities here.” So, for the purposes of this essay, *what* you’re interested in is just as important as what you’ll *do* with it. That may mean detailing how you’ll use your newfound knowledge either after college, or while you’re there—to improve the campus community or further your own studies. Like this: “SESP’s flexible coursework and the quarter system let me *dive deeper* into other academic interests: *linking policy* in times of political transformation to environmental studies, taking classes in psychopathology to *better understand the criminalization of mental illness*, and *pairing French with philosophy* in ‘Les Formes du Mal.’” The writer also offers an example of how she’ll use the experiences she’ll gain with Ascend Justice to better her community by advocating for “those affected by the child welfare system.”

Bonus Northwestern Supplemental Essay Example:

Northwestern stands out as the perfect place for my undergraduate studies.

I adore the International Studies major. Even though Economics will be my primary major, I’ve always been highly interested in the intersection of Economics and culture and IS will allow me to examine the effects of capitalist expansion across national boundaries. I want to find a way to stimulate globalization without deteriorating the cultural heritage of the international community and classes such as “Economics of Developing Countries” and “Global Capitalism” are perfect for

the purpose as I hope they will elucidate specific instances of neoliberal culture bleaching and allow me to theoretically develop methods for breaking down perpetual inequality. Furthermore, with my regional focus on the Asia in the IS major, I plan to combine my interests in Economics and culture through research on the socio-economic impact of immigrant entrepreneurs in South Korea since undergraduate research is widely available. Furthermore, I want to supplement my regional IS education with a study abroad program that ties Economics classes into language study, and the Yonsei University program fits that criteria perfectly. I want to explore Korean economics while studying advanced Korean composition and literature because the best way to deeply understand the political and social issues of Korea's government is to fully immerse myself in its culture and business life.

My academic and multicultural background will allow me to be a meaningful and contributing member of the Northwestern community and especially the International Studies community. Northwestern is the perfect fit for my educational goals in Economics and culture.