

How to Write the MIT Application Essays 2022-2023

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, colloquially known as MIT, is known as one of the world's most prestigious research universities with top programs in STEM. Consistently ranked in the top 5 national universities, MIT draws in accomplished students from across the globe.

Located just outside of Boston in Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT affords students the opportunity to explore their intellectual and extracurricular passions in a thriving urban setting. Beyond STEM, MIT also offers students an equally prestigious business and entrepreneurship program, making its urban environment all the more conducive for both business and engineering opportunities.

Keep in mind that MIT does not use the Common Application, and instead uses its own system called [MyMIT](#). To those seeking admission, MIT requires students to complete 5 additional essays, all of which understandably appear intimidating to approach. However, CollegeVine is here to help and offer our guide on how to tackle MIT's essays!

[Read these MIT essay examples](#) to inspire your own writing.

MIT Application Essay Prompts

Prompt 1: We know you lead a busy life, full of activities, many of which are required of you. Tell us about something you do simply for the pleasure of it. (225 words)

Prompt 2: Pick what field of study at MIT appeals to you the most right now, and tell us more about why this field of study appeals to you. (100 words)

Prompt 3: At MIT, we bring people together to better the lives of others. MIT students work to improve their communities in different ways, from tackling the world's biggest challenges to being a good friend. Describe one way in which you have contributed to your community, whether in your family, the classroom, your neighborhood, etc. (225 words)

Prompt 4: Describe the world you come from; for example, your family, clubs, school, community, city, or town. How has that world shaped your dreams and aspirations? (225 words or fewer)

Prompt 5: Tell us about the most significant challenge you've faced or something important that didn't go according to plan. How did you manage the situation? (225 words)

Prompt 6 (optional): No application can meet the needs of every individual. If there is significant information that you were not able to include elsewhere in the application, you may include it here. (Many students will leave this section blank—and that’s okay.)

Please note, we may not be able to access all links you share. If you have supplemental materials you would like to submit, please refer to our optional creative portfolios. (350 words)

Essay #1

We know you lead a busy life, full of activities, many of which are required of you. Tell us about something you do simply for the pleasure of it. (225 words)

First, remember that the prompt is asking for an activity that isn’t required of you. If you’re the captain of your school’s varsity basketball team, then don’t write about basketball (even if you do play for pleasure outside of school). MIT wants to know something about you that they can’t already find elsewhere in your application, something outside of your academic and extracurricular responsibilities. Essentially, MIT is asking you: “What do you do in your free time?”

A great way to approach this prompt is to construct a *brief* anecdote to illustrate your passions. Do you love reading because you enjoy imagining

yourself in fictional worlds? Do you find peace in painting natural scenery?

Now is a great time to describe these experiences.

Here are some examples:

- Photography – Sitting on the pier, you watch as the sky transitions from blue to yellow, and from yellow to orange. With your camera in hand, you capture the exact moment that the sun touches the horizon, the moment that the colors begin to fade into a gradient. Perhaps the sound of your camera's shutter acts as an instant stress reliever. Or perhaps you love the ability to capture nature's wonders from a different perspective. Either way, the vivid imagery here makes writing an anecdote a very powerful approach.

- Baking – Do you love the aroma of homemade baking? Do you love experimenting with new recipes and creations? Maybe you love the meticulousness of measuring out ingredients and combining them to form one cohesive unit. If this sounds like you, write an anecdote about how you use baking as an outlet for your creativity. Use sensory details to briefly go through the process of that new cupcake recipe you came up with, sharing with the reader your passion for innovative baking. You'll definitely make the admissions officer drool a little bit with this one.

- Rubik's Cube – You love the thrill of solving a challenging puzzle. Starting with no instructions, you figured out the secret behind solving the cube and how to move each square to the right place. After a few more tries, you can now solve it in just a few minutes, a reflection of your ability to quickly learn and master difficult puzzles. While this may be a "nerdier" example, don't be afraid to let your inner nerd shine (this is MIT after all).

What makes each of these examples strong is the employment of imagery and sensory details. Although the response must be brief, you want to make

the admissions officer interested in what you love; appealing to the five senses is an excellent way to do so. Don't tell them that you love photography, show them that you love it by transforming your answer into a story.

Be honest — don't lie for the sake of sounding more impressive. While volunteering at the local homeless shelter may sound very humble, don't write about that if it isn't what you actually do in your free time. MIT can spot essays that try too hard and lying about humanitarian efforts is definitely one of those instances.

While it's important to be honest, make sure to also use good judgement when articulating your response. Generally, anything goes for this prompt and you can essentially write about anything you're passionate about. But if your favorite activity is "looking at memes," it might be better to choose something else (especially after the Harvard incident).

Essay #2

Pick what field of study at MIT appeals to you the most right now, and tell us more about why this field of study appeals to you. (100 words)

Although not explicitly stated, MIT is using this prompt to combine two commonly asked questions: "[Why This Major?](#)" and "[Why This College?](#)" As with the previous essay, there's no room to provide too detailed of an

explanation, but you must still briefly justify your response. The key word here is “why.”

If you’re interested in chemistry but are also looking into a career in pharmaceutical manufacturing, you might write about your interests in MIT’s chemical engineering program. Or if you’re interested in economics, you can praise MIT’s Sloan School of Management, analyzing the ways in which the school will help you hone in and develop your leadership skills. If you want to conduct research in a STEM field, mentioning the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP) and citing some specific projects can be a great way to highlight your interests.

For those looking to study EECS, you can discuss the appeal of MIT’s new curriculum, which offers more flexibility and independence for undergraduate students. Perhaps when compared to other campuses, you find that MIT offers a stronger entrepreneurial culture, a quality that you find necessary for your academic success. If you have hopes of one day launching your own startup or designing your own program, now would be a great time to mention the program’s emphasis on entrepreneurship.

Writing about your long-term goals and connecting them back to MIT’s academic culture (demonstrated through EECS example) is a very strong way to approach this prompt, as it answers both “Why This Major?” and “Why MIT?” Avoid vague answers such as “MIT is known for its excellent STEM programs” or “the Sloan School of Management is among the best in the nation” — these types of answers do not answer the prompt nor do they highlight your interest in the school.

No matter what major you intend on studying, remember to show admission officers how you plan to take advantage of MIT's academic programs. Is there a specific professor you want to conduct research under? Is there a specific course you're really excited to take? If so, mention it AND explain how these resources can help you achieve your goals! There's no need to write a creative response to this prompt; the best approach is to be straightforward and specific.

Essay #3

At MIT, we bring people together to better the lives of others. MIT students work to improve their communities in different ways, from tackling the world's biggest challenges to being a good friend. Describe one way in which you have contributed to your community, whether in your family, the classroom, your neighborhood, etc. (225 words)

For this prompt, MIT wants to see your selfless side by looking at the strategies you take to help those around you. Don't panic if you haven't saved hundreds of lives or discovered the cure for cancer; as the prompt suggests, helping your community can be as simple as lending a shoulder for your friend to cry on.

Whether big or small, think of a time that you made a positive impact on one or more people. Maybe you have experience volunteering at the Red Cross or at your local retirement home. Or maybe you founded a club at your school with the goal of bringing education to children in need. No matter what the cause is, show the admissions officers your generosity and willingness to make a difference in your community.

Here are a few more examples:

- Tutoring a Teammate – One of your cross country teammates said that she was struggling in her Algebra 2 class, and was worried about failing. She didn't see the point of math and thought she was just "bad" at it. You volunteered to tutor her for free on a weekly basis. After just a month of your tutoring sessions, your teammate got her first A on a test. This sparked your interest in teaching math, as you were able to get your teammate to not only understand math concepts, but also appreciate them.

- Food Waste Campaign – You noticed your school cafeteria was generating tons of daily food waste, so you created a campaign to implement a composting system and encourage students to reduce their waste. You gathered a team to research different composting services, contact your principal and the school board, and create educational materials on how to compost correctly. The program was successful at your school and diverted several tons of food from the landfill weekly. You're currently working on getting the system implemented across the district.

What each of these examples succeeds in doing is describing the impact that an action has on others. Whether it be putting a smile on someone's face or preventing a child from contracting a deadly disease, remember to show the

reader what the outcome of your efforts were. Tying in your personal development is another great way to heighten the magnitude of your contribution, as it gives your actions more significant personal meaning. Ask yourself: How did you grow from this experience? What changes did you see?

Don't let the first person reading your essay be an admissions officer

Get multiple perspectives on your essay to polish your voice and style before submission—for free. Get your essay peer reviewed by our student community, and give your own feedback too!

an only child, I am surrounded by imposed
ant thing in my life. The more the outside has
want to fully have that control. For as long as
s cared about the number on the scale when
of independence from him would just cause
e then started to meticulously monitor my
and they could see how I feel.

I suggest adding more detail here. Why did he make you feel that way? What went through your mind when you had to stand up to him? Show AOs that you're kind and brave!

Review or submit an essay

Essay #4

Describe the world you come from; for example, your family, clubs, school, community, city, or town. How has that world shaped your dreams and aspirations? (250 words or fewer)

Out of the 5 questions, this one is the most open-ended. MIT is asking this question to see how you have adapted to your environment and how this environment has shaped you as an individual. A great way to start

brainstorming for this prompt is to think about your dreams and aspirations first; what do you hope to achieve in your lifetime?

Next, reflect on your surroundings (your upbringing, your neighborhood, your school, etc.) and evaluate how this environment factored into your individuality. Perhaps you were a member of your school's Model United Nations, and this fueled your desire to work in politics. Or maybe your childhood love for building Lego masterpieces contributed to your goal of becoming a civil engineer. Either way, remember to reflect on your past (or present) and use this reflection to analyze your future.

Here are a few more examples:

- You spent a few years of your life living in Beijing, China. Living in a city where the sky is rarely blue and pedestrians wear masks to avoid breathing in the smog, you realized the dire state our environment is in. Living in these conditions made you realize the need for green energy technologies and sustainable practices, inspiring your desire to study environmental engineering.
- Your mother working as a pediatric nurse meant you spent a significant amount of time watching her at the children's hospital. The hospital was almost a second home to you, as you grew to love observing and learning, eventually earning a chance to volunteer there alongside your mother. While it pained you to see the suffering, you were touched by the amount of hope and joy the staff was able to provide the patients. Seeing this motivated you to pursue pediatrics and spread an even greater amount of hope to those who need it the most.

What each of these examples succeeds in doing is analyzing the “world” that led to a specific realization. The key here is to demonstrate some sort of personal growth or moment in which you discovered your aspirations.

For the first example, this could be the juxtaposition between traditional blue skies and the thick smog in Beijing; this was an eye-opening moment and made you look at the world from a different perspective, eventually influencing your career choice. For this prompt, it’s especially important to be specific.

Essay #5

Tell us about the most significant challenge you’ve faced or something important that didn’t go according to plan. How did you manage the situation? (225 words)

While it seems like this prompt is giving you two options to respond, the idea is relatively the same: [discuss overcoming a challenge](#). Whether it is a personal struggle or a challenge you faced at school, MIT wants to know how you handle difficult situations and what you learn from such experiences.

You want to construct an anecdote that goes through both the challenging situation and your thought process. When crafting your response, start by briefly describing the challenge, making sure to answer the question, “What was so significant about the challenge?” Next, go into detail about the steps you took to tackle the obstacle and how you went about this process. Make sure to discuss the outcome of the situation and show the admissions officer

how you matured from this experience. The most common mistake students make is to focus too much on the challenge, rather than their thought process, emotions, and their growth.

As you brainstorm and begin drafting your response, here are some guided questions to get you thinking:

1. Why was this challenge so important to you? What is the significance?
2. In that moment, what was your reaction to the situation? How did it affect you (thoughts, emotions)?
3. Were the steps you took to manage the situation successful? Why or why not?
4. How did this challenge allow you to grow and mature as an individual?

Try to avoid “challenges” that are too trivial; although you may be upset that you got a B on that one calculus test, this is not a significant enough challenge to analyze. For this prompt, it’s important to demonstrate personal growth and maturity, as this shows your capacity to adapt to difficult environments.

You should also try to avoid challenges that are [cliche](#), such as:

- a sports injury
- working hard in a difficult class
- adjusting to a new culture or school
- facing tragedy (death, illness, abuse)
- romantic relationships and breakups

These tend to be very common experiences that have a predictable outcome, often focus too much on the challenge instead of your growth, or are simply inappropriate topics for your essay. Of course, you can still choose to write on

a common topic if you feel that you can write something especially meaningful, but it's better to find a more original experience to share.

You can, however, “spin” a cliché topic. For example, the “sports injury” essay tends to go: you get injured, can't play, have to go through rehab, and you eventually get back on the field and succeed. A more unique approach would be to talk about how your injury led you to start a blog while you were recovering, and that became a big passion. Or, how your injury made you realize that you actually liked the strategy of the sport more than the actual sport, which led to your interest in competitive chess.

Here are some good examples:

- You had to switch positions last-minute on your Model UN simulation of the Nuremberg Trials. You'd researched and prepared your arguments for months, but a delegate showed up late, so you needed to represent the opposite side you'd prepared for. Instead of panicking, you gather as much info as you can in a short time to argue the other perspective. When it's your turn to speak, you blank out, however, and the Committee Director says they'll come back to you. You take a deep breath, refocus, and re-outline your notes. When it's time to speak again, you present a confident and articulate argument. The experience teaches you the importance of both preparation and adaptability.

- You are passionate about robotics and wanted to start a competitive robotics club at your school. You gathered a group of interested students and began the process of getting the club approved by the administration. To your disappointment, your club was rejected. Instead of accepting defeat, you and your peers petitioned the school in hopes of having the board members

reconsider their decision. While you didn't ultimately win over the school board, you discovered your talent for persuasive speaking in the process, and decided to join the Debate Team. You've since won several awards and even got to give a local TED Talk.

Essay #6

No application can meet the needs of every individual. If there is significant information that you were not able to include elsewhere in the application, you may include it here. (Many students will leave this section blank—and that's okay.)

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This is your typical “[Additional Information](#)” prompt, and while we usually recommend that you fill out all optional prompts, this is an exception. As MIT says themselves, many students won't need this space to complete their application.

However, if you have unusual circumstances or a significant experience you weren't able to address, you should write about it here. Some potential topics include:

- Family responsibilities that prevented you from taking on traditional extracurriculars
- Illness
- Financial hardships

- Death of a loved one
- Divorce
- Unique extracurricular that can't be fully explained in the Activities section

While your other essays should have a more narrative quality, your response here can be more straightforward, and you also don't need to take up the full 350 words.

Just avoid using this space for topics that may be deemed trivial, such as explaining that B on your transcript when you otherwise have straight A's. Significant dips in grades for reasons out of your control are certainly fine to explain, but make sure that anything you cover here is actually a major part of your high school experience and development.

Final Words

Overall, there are no secrets or gimmicks to any of these essays. MIT is simply trying to get to know you better, whether it's by asking you about your interests or your personal experiences. For each of these essays, remember to ask yourself: *What do I want MIT to know about me?* Don't try to write something you think the admissions officer wants to hear; be yourself and be honest. Remember to show and don't tell, and highlight the reasons you think you would be a great fit for MIT.