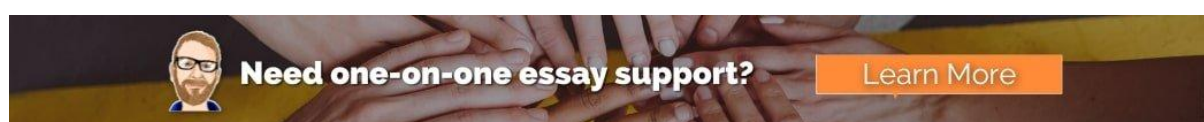
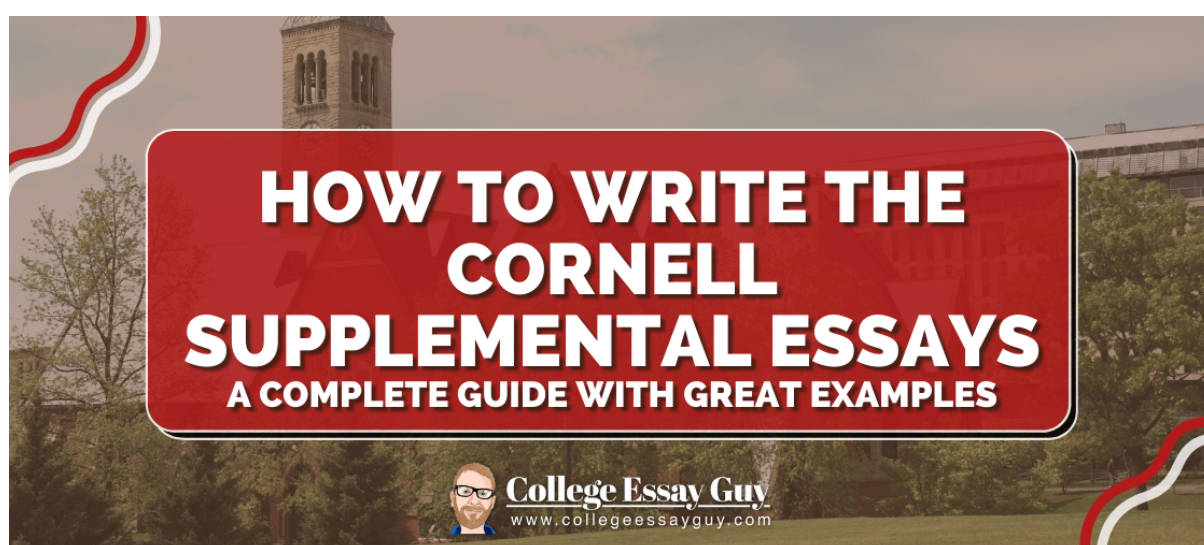


How to Write the Cornell Supplemental Essays: Examples + Guide 2022/2023



What's the meaning of life? Answer in 150 characters. That's what a lot of supplemental essay prompts can feel like: Too much content to fit in a tiny amount of space. The Cornell essays are a bit different.

Sure, on the Cornell essays, you're still going to find a lot of the same themes you see from other schools. However, the Cornell writing supplement asks you to apply to a specific school, and most give you 650 words (the length of a whole personal statement) to explain what you bring to the table. That gives you a little bit more wiggle room than the average application.

If that doesn't make you feel better and you're still scared to start writing, that's okay too. We're here to help.

WHAT ARE THE CORNELL SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPTS?

PROMPT #1

In the online Common Application Writing Supplement, please respond to the essay question below (maximum of 650 words) that corresponds to the undergraduate college or school to which you are applying.

Brooks School of Public Policy

Why are you drawn to studying the major you have selected? Please discuss how your interests and related experiences have influenced your choice. Specifically, how will an education from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) and Cornell University help you achieve your academic goals? (650 words)

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Required: *Why are you drawn to studying the major you have selected? Please discuss how your interests and related experiences have influenced your choice. Specifically, how will an education from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) and Cornell University help you achieve your academic goals? (650 words)*

Optional: *At Cornell CALS, we aim to leave the world better than we found it, so we seek out those who are not simply driven to master their discipline, but who are also passionate about doing so to serve the public good. Please elaborate on an activity or experience you have had that made an impact on a community that is important to you. We encourage you to think about community broadly - this could include family, school, or local and global communities (300-word limit).*

Optional: *The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) is dedicated to the exploration of the agricultural, life, environmental, and social sciences and welcomes students with interests that span a wide variety of disciplines. Given our agricultural history and commitment to educating the next generation of agriculturalists, please share if you have a background in agriculture or are interested in pursuing a career in agriculture. (300 words)*

Select all that apply:

- *My family owns or operates a farm*
- *I have experience working in agriculture*
- *I have interest in pursuing a career in agriculture*

College of Architecture, Art, and Planning

- 1) *What three words best describe you? (30 characters per word)*
- 2) *What is your "thing"? What energizes you or engages you so deeply that you lose track of time? Everyone has different passions, obsessions, quirks, inspirations. What are yours? (650 words)*

College of Arts and Sciences

Students in Arts and Sciences embrace the opportunity to delve into multifaceted academic interests, embodying in 21st century terms Ezra Cornell's "any person...any study" founding vision. Tell us about the areas of study you are excited to explore, and specifically why you wish to pursue them in our College. (650 words)

Cornell SC Johnson College of Business

What kind of a business student are you? Using your personal, academic, or volunteer/work experiences, describe the topics or issues that you care about and why they are important to you. Your response should convey how your interests align with the school(s) to which you are applying within the Cornell SC Johnson College of Business (Dyson School and/or School of Hotel Administration) (650 words)

College of Engineering

- 1) *What three words best describe you? (30 characters per word)*
- 2) *What are three words you would use to describe Cornell Engineering? (30 characters per word)*

Instructions: All applicants are required to write two supplemental essays. Each has a limit of 250 words. Essay 1 is required of all applicants. For Essay 2, you must choose between Question A and Question B.

Essay 1

Required response (250 word limit) How do your interests directly connect with Cornell Engineering? If you have an intended major, what draws you to that department at Cornell Engineering? If you are unsure what specific engineering field you would like to study, describe how your general interest in engineering

most directly connects with Cornell Engineering. It may be helpful to concentrate on one or two things that you are most excited about.

Essay 2 Choose either Question A and Question B. (250 word limit)

- *Question A: Describe an engineering problem that impacts your local community. This could be your school, neighborhood, town, region, or a group you identify with. Describe one to three things you might do as an engineer to solve the problem.*
- *Question B: Diversity in all forms is intrinsic to excellence in engineering. Engineering the best solutions to complex problems is often achieved by drawing from the diverse ingenuity of people from different backgrounds, lived experiences, and identities. How do you see yourself contributing to the diversity and/or the inclusion of the Cornell Engineering community? What is the unique voice you would bring to the Cornell Engineering community?*

College of Human Ecology

How has your decision to apply to the College of Human Ecology been influenced by your related experiences? How will your choice of major impact your goals and plans for the future? (650 words)

School of Industrial and Labor Relations

Using your personal, academic, or volunteer/work experiences, describe the topics or issues that you care about and why they are important to you. Your response should show us that your interests align with the ILR School. (650 words)

HOW TO WRITE EACH SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT FOR CORNELL UNIVERSITY

HOW TO WRITE THE “WHY US” ESSAYS FOR CORNELL

Sure, 650 words can be daunting. But that also means you have tons of space to inject your own personality and creativity into the mix.

While all the Cornell prompts ask slightly different things, they essentially boil down to the same questions:

What excites you intellectually and extracurricularly?

How do your experiences reflect that excitement?

How will you bring those skills or experiences to Cornell?

And while we'll look at the prompt for the College of Arts and Sciences as an example, the tips below apply to the other Cornell prompts.

Here's the prompt one more time: *Students in Arts and Sciences embrace the opportunity to delve into their academic interests, discover new realms of intellectual inquiry, and chart their own path through the College. Tell us why the depth, breadth, and flexibility of our curriculum are ideally suited to exploring the areas of study that excite you.*

This is your classic "Why us?" essay, but it asks you to be a bit more specific about a particular part of Cornell College of Arts and Sciences. Here's a quick step-by-step guide to getting started:

Spend 1 hr+ researching 10+ reasons why Cornell might be a great fit for you (ideally 3-5 of the reasons will be unique to Cornell *and* connect back to you).

Use [this chart](#) to map out your research.

Create an outline based on either Approach 1, 2 (recommended), or 3.

Bonus points: Write a first draft!

Some tips before you start writing your essay:

Remember that this is not just another personal statement. Don't repeat ideas that readers can find in other parts of your application. Bring something fresh to the table or add new dimensions to topics you've already mentioned.

Don't feel pressured to use all 650 words, but take advantage of how much space Cornell gives you. As you'll see in the example below, great essays don't need to reach the word limit to do their job. Sometimes, in fact, less is more.

Be specific. Whenever possible, offer memorable details or specific experiences. Don't just say you like science. Name the particular areas that interest you, what classes you've taken to foster your interest, what research you've done, how you've brought that interest to a certain community, or offer a (short!) specific story you associate with that interest. In addition, a little descriptive language (you'll see some in the example below) can help the reader understand you in a more visceral way. In other words, the *way* you describe something is just as important as *what* you're describing.

Show the reader you know your stuff. Cornell explicitly requires students to apply to a specific college. While you could include (perhaps at the end) a few details on why you're interested in Cornell in general, be sure to first share the specific programs, classes, clubs, events, and professors you're interested in *at the specific school you're applying to*.

Lastly, have some fun with it. Don't let a dull prompt prevent you from getting creative. As you'll see in the example below, some of the most impressive essays are the ones where applicants think outside the box.

Without further ado, here's a great essay sample for this prompt:

Example:

Dear Cornell,

When I discovered you, first through Andy Bernard's resounding a cappella in The Office and then by your amazing stem cell research, I couldn't help but think how perfect we'd be together. I would chart an educational path centered on interdisciplinary learning in your collaborative community, merging stem cells with linguistics; biology with beatboxing; outdoor adventure with poetry.

Cornell offers unique opportunities to expand my medical research interests. Advanced classes like the Regulation of Cell Proliferation, Senescence, and Death—one of the few classes in the country offered on epigenetic regulation and signal transduction-induced pluripotency—perfectly match my interests in stem cells. I am excited by the work of Dr. Brian Rudd at the Cornell Stem Cell Program, as it will allow me to build on my previous work in CRISPR-mediated T-cell development. To my knowledge, similar research is not being conducted anywhere else in the world, and I hope to study signaling pathways and T-cell development under his guidance.

Although I have remained focused on stem cell research, I also have great aspirations beyond molecular biology. A double minor in economics and linguistics will allow me to study interdisciplinary mechanisms and examine humanistic issues through a cultural lens. I relish analyzing market trends as my high school's Investment Team co-leader, and look forward to courses like Behavioral Economics and Public Policy, which will help me build a theoretical understanding of financial markets and relate individual behavior to public policy. A minor in linguistics will further my seven-year-long Spanish journey, and I look forward to academic opportunities encompassing Spanish poetry and poetry of the Americas.

While I may not be the archetype paper salesman (think Andy!), I too share a special connection with Cornell A Cappella. Many a middle school car ride were spent listening to Cornell Tarana, and it feels surreal that I may be experiencing campus life with the group I've loved and admired for so long. I hope to merge my background in beatboxing and Hindustani Classical music by singing with Tarana, learning from peers and sharing my love of South Asian music with the Cornell community.

A kid who grew up racing Hot Wheels on top of my mother's medical books, medicine was always prevalent in my life. Medicine now excites me because it is a perfect balance between intense scientific inquiry and dedicated personal connection. With Cornell's unique interdisciplinary environment, I would have the ability to expand my endeavors in medicine, develop a global view of community healthcare, and explore new avenues essential to my diverse aspirations.

Oh, Cornell, you are gorges. I long to hold your hand as I walk along the Beebe's scenic waterfront, take in picturesque sunsets on the Slope, put on awesome Tarana concerts on your hallowed ground. It is the perfect harmony of research, music, and holistic approach to my aspirations, that tells me you are the ideal place to nurture me into a globally aware physician-scientist!

Sincerely,

[Student Name]

— — —

Tips + Analysis

Be creative and add personality. This essay is essentially a love letter from the applicant to the College of Arts and Sciences. The author is able to weave her skills and experience into a really engaging structure that showcases both her sense of humor and playful nature.

Even if we didn't look too closely at the substance of this essay, we'd get a sense of who the author is just by how she approached the prompt and the way she chose to frame her answer. She loves watching *The Office* and has fond memories of racing Hot Wheels. Those details may not seem important, but they give us a fuller picture of who this person is and what kind of energy she would bring to a community.

Just because the prompts here are relatively generic doesn't mean your

answer should be. Invest some time in thinking about how you can stand out, and inject personality into your answer.

Combine the unconventional. The best essays come out of nowhere.

They take ideas, disciplines, and experiences that you wouldn't necessarily associate with one another and somehow make them seem like the perfect combination.

We wouldn't necessarily expect one person to enjoy "biology and beatboxing," but through the course of the essay, the author shows us how her love of both can be fostered at Cornell.

Be specific. Clearly, this applicant has done her research. She references specific programs, clubs, and classes she would like to explore if she were admitted. If you're a Cornell admission reader, the specificity of those references makes you feel the student values the school. That's why it's so important to look through a college's website before you apply. Think about your core values or what resources you absolutely need in a college setting, then try to find places for that within Cornell. Doing that research pays off in the long run.

HOW TO WRITE THE SHORT ANSWER ESSAYS FOR CORNELL

College of Architecture, Art, and Planning:

What three words best describe you? (30 characters per word)

Get creative. These don't all need to be adjectives. Also, hyphenated words of your own creation or short three-word phrases (like "nerdy animal whisperer") are fair game. Just watch the per-word character count.

Here's how other students have handled this type of prompt.

Examples:

1. *Sister*

2. *Athleisure-lover*

3. *Hermione*

— — —

1. *Hungry*

2. *Petrichor*

3. *Retrouvailles*

— — —

1. *Nocturnal*

2. *Expressive*

3. *Nurturing*

— — —

HOW TO WRITE THE CORNELL UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING SHORT ANSWER PROMPTS #1 & #2

1) What three words best describe you? (30 characters per word)

2) What are three words you would use to describe Cornell Engineering? (30 characters per word)

See tips and advice above for the same “three words that best describe you” above—they apply to both these prompts, which are new this year for the Cornell College of Engineering. Short answer questions like these are kinda common for elite colleges (in fact, [USC](#) has the exact same “three words best describe you” prompt), so you may run into more of these on your college application journey. If so, you may find [this comprehensive guide to the short answer questions helpful](#).

HOW TO WRITE THE CORNELL UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING ESSAY PROMPT #3

Students applying to the College of Engineering must submit two essays, responding to two of the three essay prompts provided here. Each response should be no longer than 250 words. Please select the **two** essay prompts that you will respond to below:

Instructions: All applicants are required to write two supplemental essays. Each has a limit of 250 words. Essay 1 is required of all applicants. For Essay 2, you must choose between Question A and Question B.

Essay 1:

Required response (250 word limit) How do your interests directly connect with Cornell Engineering? If you have an intended major, what draws you to that department at

Cornell Engineering? If you are unsure what specific engineering field you would like to study, describe how your general interest in engineering most directly connects with Cornell Engineering. It may be helpful to concentrate on one or two things that you are most excited about.

Essay 2:

Choose either Question A and Question B. (250 word limit)

Question A: Describe an engineering problem that impacts your local community. This could be your school, neighborhood, town, region, or a group you identify with. Describe one to three things you might do as an engineer to solve the problem.

Question B: Diversity in all forms is intrinsic to excellence in engineering. Engineering the best solutions to complex problems is often achieved by drawing from the diverse ingenuity of people from different backgrounds, lived experiences, and identities. How do you see yourself contributing to the diversity and/or the inclusion of the Cornell Engineering community? What is the unique voice you would bring to the Cornell Engineering community?

Essay 1: *Required response (250 word limit) How do your interests directly connect with Cornell Engineering? If you have an intended major, what draws you to that department at Cornell Engineering? If you are unsure what specific engineering field you would like to study, describe how your general interest in engineering most directly connects with Cornell Engineering. It may be helpful to concentrate on one or two things that you are most excited about.*

You can treat this as a “Why us?” essay, with some optional “Why Major” flavoring—focus mostly on really specific details of what Cornell offers and how it fits with your interests and values. Because the word count is fairly short, if you want to include some Why Major details, you can, but probably keep them brief, so you can mostly focus on why you and Cornell will make a great team.

Here’s a nice example from a past student. Note that this was written when the prompt had a longer word count, but the approach to Cornell-specific details and “so what” are what you want to focus on here.

Example:

At its heart, Cornell is a research institution; at my heart, I am a researcher. With a focus in the control of multi-agent robotic systems, especially drawing inspiration from insect swarm mechanics, the Collective Embodied Intelligence Lab would be the perfect place to apply what I have learned from my own work in that area, while learning from Dr. Petersen and her groundbreaking research in termite-inspired construction robots. I think we could have some very interesting conversations since I have spent the last two years studying firefly swarm behaviors for my science fair projects. I also hope to work in the Autonomous Systems Lab under Professor Campbell and Professor Kress-Gazit as I would love to use their armada of autonomous segway robots as a platform for research.

In addition to Cornell's reputation for research, what really struck me was its unique commitment to project teams. Upon researching the teams, I realized I wanted to join all of them. Take Baja for example; the prospect of building an off-road vehicle from scratch is reminiscent of FTC competitions. Though I am well-versed in CAD, wiring, and chassis building, I'm excited to tackle bigger problems with even more freedom for creativity. On the other end of the project team spectrum is Cornell Autonomous Bicycle. From developing self-correcting gyroscopic balancing mechanisms to the physics of bicycle motion, this team faces several unique challenges. After watching YouTube videos about their work, I have discovered a few ways to improve the design. Although steering of the front wheel is the team's primary method of bicycle balancing, I wonder if robotic arms could also be incorporated in order to improve balance and allow for more complex maneuvers. (Hopefully we can have that discussion in person).

Cornell Engineering's new website CollabSpace was initially confusing to me because it seemed like a rebranding of instructables. But the more I've explored, the more I've realized what a unique and collaborative community Cornell is building. The projects on CollabSpace are held to far higher standards than most Maker websites. The fact that students at Cornell have the time, resources, and interest to pursue their own maker projects shows me that Cornell's engineering program is truly supportive and inspiring. CollabSpace shows a dedication to the maker community that I am, and will continue to be, a part of.

Between mentoring new members of my high school robotics team, working with my younger brother on science fair projects, and teaching engineering to elementary schoolers through an LEF grant, I've had ample opportunity to pass on what I've learned. Through the CURB organization's mentorship programs and poster forums, among other things, I will get to develop my passion for teaching. I've found that teaching is intrinsically tied to leadership, so I also plan to join the Cornell Engineering Leadership Program.

And, as if that weren't enough, Cornell also has its own sustainable farm. This is also a passion of mine, having spent five summers volunteering at Gaining Ground Organic Farm. I look forward to volunteering and learning from new innovations at Dilmun Hill. I'm especially excited about the new movable high tunnel installed last year because I've seen firsthand how effective they have been at Gaining Ground. The farm's other innovation, an irrigation renovation project, also includes a call for design proposals for a solar-powered fertigation unit. Answering the call is a perfect challenge for me: one that harmonizes two of my passions while simultaneously giving back to the community and the planet.

With all that, I only have one problem with Cornell: its lack of a robot soccer team. But as my tour guide mentioned, anyone can start a club that doesn't yet exist; I fully intend to add "coach" to my resume.

— — —

Tips + Analysis

Get super specific. You don't necessarily have to find things that are truly unique to Cornell, but that's the direction to aim: Find specific classes, professors, and programs that align with your specific engineering interests, and show through your discussion of why you connect with them that you and Cornell fit perfectly. Speaking of which ...

Show you belong together. One way we sometimes joke about "Why us" essays is that you're trying to show the school why their online dating profile and your online dating profile are perfect for each other—you're going to make a great couple. To that end, details like "*Dr. Petersen and her groundbreaking research in termite-inspired construction robots*" paired with "*since I have spent the last two years studying firefly swarm behaviors for my science fair project*" are a great way to show both that this student really did their homework about the school, and that they're ready to dive in and be an engaged member of its academic community.

Essay 2: Choose either Question A and Question B. (250 word limit)

Question A: Describe an engineering problem that impacts your local community. This could be your school, neighborhood, town, region, or a group you identify with. Describe one to three things you might do as an engineer to solve the problem.

Question B: Diversity in all forms is intrinsic to excellence in engineering. Engineering the best solutions to complex problems is often achieved by drawing from the diverse ingenuity of people from different backgrounds,

lived experiences, and identities. How do you see yourself contributing to the diversity and/or the inclusion of the Cornell Engineering community? What is the unique voice you would bring to the Cornell Engineering community?

Question A is fairly straightforward—what’s a problem some level of your society faces that you believe could be addressed through engineering.

We’d recommend spending some time trying to think of problems that other students are less likely to mention. And you only have 250 words, so probably focus on a problem that you can adequately address. Meaning that, while something like *climate change* is a noble goal to help solve, it’s probably tougher for this essay. But a super specific aspect of it? That could work. Similarly, *poor infrastructure* is going to lend itself to broad, possibly bland writing. But *I want to use civil engineering techniques to turn dangerous intersections in my town into safer, more environmentally friendly roundabouts?* Cool.

The example below is taken from an essay written for a USC Engineering prompt, but would fit nicely here.

Example:

Every school year, I walk around campus, arms and backpack chock full of heavy textbooks. In the classroom, I read the textbook, review a lesson, and complete a worksheet. Rinse and repeat. And not just me: nearly every other student has had this experience. Enter personalized learning.

Personalized learning could mean allowing students to master concepts at their own pace, or it could refer to computer programs designed to match one’s personality. For example, some learn kinesthetically, while others learn visually. The possibilities to unlock true learning potential through personalized learning are endless.

As an engineer, I want to develop teaching methods that help both the young and the old acquire new skills and enhance learned ones. Through computer science, I can devise an intelligent tutoring system. And after designing a personality quiz, I can create an algorithm to match the student’s preferred learning style and determine which multimedia is best to teach them.

Although I personally do not have a learning disability, a close friend suffers from autism. Surprisingly, if you met him, you probably could not tell. From a young age, he was placed in a regular classroom, not a special ed one. As an extrovert, this

personalized learning system enabled him to be a social butterfly while also learning at his own pace.

Therefore, I believe that by advancing personalized learning experiences and minimizing inflexibility in education programs, we can reduce perceived learning disabilities. The future of intelligence will be much more well-rounded and diversified.

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Tips + Analysis

Structure and clarity are your friends. You don't have a ton of space here, so if you want to include some kind of hook, you can, but feel free to pretty quickly and clearly show us how you're answering the prompt. The example essay clearly sets up the problem and why the student feels it's important to address. They then offer us a glimpse of what the world could look like if we solved this problem, and detail a few different ways in which engineering (and CS) could be used to lead us to this world. And the personal example at the end shows us that this is already something we can achieve—we just need people (like the author) to go and do it.

Show your values. In particular, take a look at your personal statement and the other supplements Cornell is getting. Scan through them and see what values you're showing. Are any missing? (Or if you don't have a clear sense of how to define your values, head [here for the Values Exercise](#).) Use this prompt to highlight some values that we maybe aren't seeing fully, or at all, elsewhere in your application. Above, for example, we can see values like *social progress, learning, growth* ...

Regarding Question B, many schools have a supplemental essay prompt that asks students to reflect on their experiences and demonstrate, essentially, how those experiences would allow them to add to the diversity of a college community. This one is similar, but it asks you to think particularly about the role of diversity in the engineering community and profession.

One common question or confusion is what exactly schools mean by “diversity.” While this can refer to things like ethnicity, class, or sexuality, and those can be strong topics to write about, don't feel like diversity is limited to these. Instead, think expansively—what is a perspective that you'd bring to campus, particularly one that others might not? If you're interested in a more specific look into what exactly “diversity” means, check out [this post](#).

One great way to start thinking about what you would bring to Cornell's engineering community is to brainstorm communities you're a part of. And remember, community can mean a lot of different things. It can be places you've interacted with, actions you've taken, interests you've pursued, circumstances you've been in, or identities you inhabit. After you've brainstormed a list of these, connect them back to engineering. How might your identity as a queer Asian-American influence the way you conceptualize projects? How might your obsession with badminton affect how you work in group settings? These are the kinds of questions you should be asking yourself. Then, once you're starting to see some clear connections between the community you're a part of and the perspectives you bring to engineering, you can start writing. Don't be afraid to write it long and cut it shorter after you've gotten everything important on paper. Just let the ideas flow and use your brainstorming to guide you.