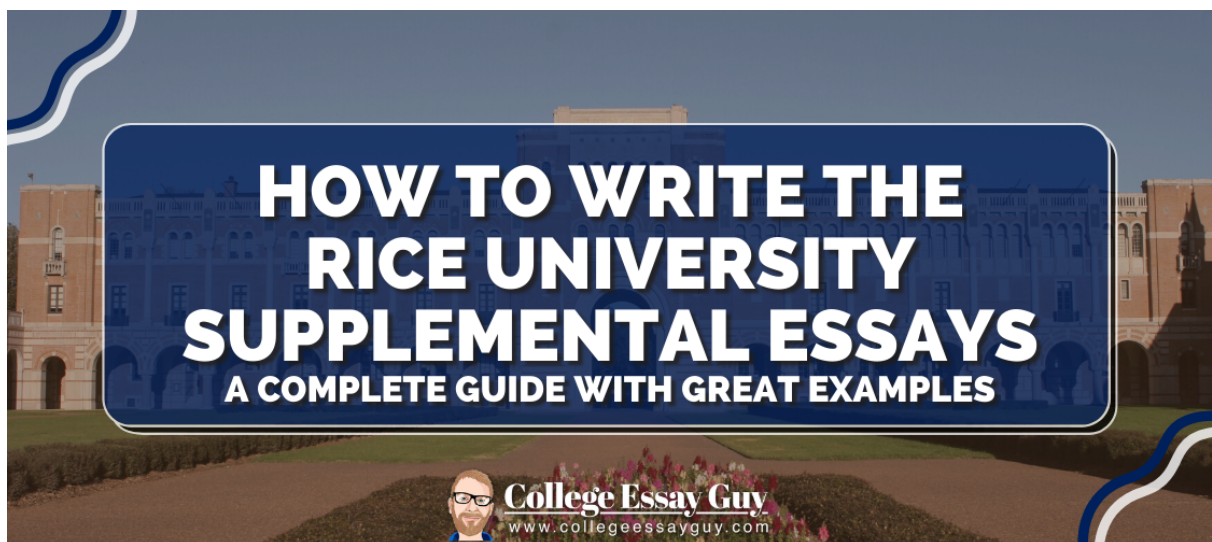


# How to Write the Rice University Supplemental Essays: Examples + Guide 2022/2023



If you've already written supplemental essays for your college applications, chances are you've written some version of most of Rice's prompts below. And there's a reason these essays—specifically the “Why us?,” “Why Major,” and “How You'll Contribute” prompts—are so common: They do a great job of getting to the heart of who you are, what you value, and what you're looking for in a college experience. But just to show it's different, Rice throws a curveball for the last one (in addition to a couple extras for architecture majors). We break them all down below, complete with examples, tips, and analyses.

Before you begin writing, you may want to get deeper insights into the kind of student Rice is looking for, and how it views itself. You'll find an extensive, by-the-numbers look at its offerings, from enrollment and tuition statistics to student life and financial aid information, on its [Common Data Set](#). For a better sense of how Rice envisions its role in academia and how it wants to grow and

evolve, read its strategic plan, [Vision for a Second Century, Second Decade \(V2C2\)](#).

# WHAT ARE THE RICE SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPTS?

## RICE UNIVERSITY SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #1

*Please explain why you wish to study in the academic areas you selected above. (150 word limit)*

## RICE UNIVERSITY SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #2

*Based upon your exploration of Rice University, what elements of the Rice experience appeal to you? (150 word limit)*

## RICE UNIVERSITY SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #3

*Rice is lauded for creating a collaborative atmosphere that enhances the quality of life for all members of our campus community. The Residential College System and undergraduate life are heavily influenced by the unique life experiences and cultural tradition each student brings. What life perspectives would you contribute to the Rice community? (500 word limit)*

## RICE UNIVERSITY SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #4

**Architecture Essay Prompt:** *Why are you determined to study architecture? Could you please elaborate on your past experiences and how they have motivated you to apply to Rice University and the School of Architecture in particular? (250 words max)*

## RICE UNIVERSITY SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #5

**Architecture Essay Prompt:** *Please expand on relevant experiences and motivations outside of your academic trajectory that have inspired you to study architecture, focusing on aspects that are not accommodated by other prompts in the application. (250 words max)*

## RICE UNIVERSITY'S "THE BOX"

*The Rice Box: In keeping with Rice's long-standing tradition, please share an image of something that appeals to you.*

# HOW TO WRITE EACH SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT FOR RICE UNIVERSITY

## HOW TO WRITE RICE SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #1

Please explain why you wish to study in the academic areas you selected above. (150 word limit)

This essay is what we call a “Why Major” essay, and at 150 words, it’s relatively short.

You’ll find a step-by-step guide to writing this essay [at this link](#). We recommend reading the whole guide, but here’s the SparkNotes 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!

Here’s a good example of a strong Why Major essay. It was written for Yale but offers a solid framework to emulate (note, though, that you’ll get a whole 50 more words for your Rice Why Major).

### Rice University Essay Example 1:

*Storytelling has shaped me. At four, I read *The Lion King* until I’d memorized it. I’d snuggle in bed as my dad read *Wilderness Champion* or *Tom Sawyer*. Later, I found audio and visual storytelling, mesmerized by *This American Life* and *Whiplash*. Now, I create my own stories through newspaper satire, podcasting, and locally-broadcasted radio.*

*My major at Yale would be the next chapter in my life of storytelling. I’d explore past narratives and how they can be digitally innovated. Whether exploring media’s disfiguration of truth, developing screenplays, or analyzing mise-en-scene, I hope to pioneer new networks of connection. (99 words)*

## Tips + Analysis

**(Quickly) hook the reader.** The first line performs a few functions here. First, it pulls us in and makes us curious about what exactly she means by claiming that storytelling has shaped her. Second, it gives us a sense of a core aspect of her identity and values.

**Show the development of your interest through moments that connect to core values.** She packs a nice amount of detail into 99 words. The details she includes point toward her values and identity, as do her interests in newspaper satire, podcasting, and local radio. The details in the second paragraph show some nice depth and development.

**Describe how Rice can help with the next steps.** She links her brief origin story to how college might help her on her path, and how it will help her develop both her understanding and her values.

**Architecture students, write about your other areas of academic interest.** Technically speaking, you essentially have three academic-focused prompts for Rice, for a total of 650 words (lucky you!), so it's important not to repeat yourself too much and to share multiple aspects of your academic interests. When filling out your Common App for Rice, you'll be asked to note your "second and third areas of interest, including non-majors and areas outside the school to which you are applying." So, since you'll be thoroughly covering your interest in architecture from a couple of different angles in Prompts 4 and 5, consider using this essay to speak to your interest in those other subjects, maybe touching on architecture only briefly but not in a way that will feel redundant to the information you'll share in the architecture-specific prompts. That will help to communicate to Rice the wide breadth of your academic curiosity.

Here's another example from a Rice applicant with some pretty impressive extracurriculars:

### Rice University Essay Example 2:

*Over the past summer, I conducted research as a full-time intern at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. The primary purpose of my research was to engineer a more efficient halogenase enzyme. This enzyme was designed to decrease costs and increase the yield of halogenated products used to create a novel biomaterial for F-35 aircraft. Applying all the knowledge I'd gained*

*throughout high school to figure out this problem was an incredible introduction to the world of multidisciplinary science.*

*I built on my years spent studying organic chemistry, biochemistry, and microbiology, both in school and Science Olympiad, with a focus on utilizing engineering principles in order to create a product. Throughout the summer, I enjoyed being able to apply my knowledge collaboratively, pulling from a vast range of scientific fields. It's this experience that has greatly influenced my decision to continue applying myself interdisciplinarily and continue my undergraduate studies in biomedical engineering.*

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## HOW TO WRITE RICE SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #2

Based upon your exploration of Rice University, what elements of the Rice experience appeal to you? (150 word limit)

At 150 words, this is a shorter version of the typical “Why us?” essay.

Because this essay is so short, the key will be finding 2-3 reasons that set Rice apart from all the other schools you’re applying to.

[Here's the “Why us?” essay guide](#)—in this case, the Cornell example is probably the best one to check out, since it focuses on reasons that set Cornell apart. In that guide we talk a bit about how to tackle the shorter version of this essay, and the Tufts example is a great one.

As you write, try to avoid these common mistakes:

### Six Common Mistakes Students Make on “Why Us?” Essays

**Mistake #1:** Writing about the school's size, location, reputation, weather, or ranking

**Mistake #2:** Simply using emotional language to demonstrate fit

**Mistake #3:** Screwing up the mascot, stadium, team colors or names of any important people or places on campus

**Mistake #4:** Parroting the brochures or website language

**Mistake #5:** Describing traditions the school is well-known for

**Mistake #6:** Thinking of this as only a "Why them" essay

Here's a great sample essay for this prompt:

### Rice University Essay Example 3:

*Last year I attended California Girls State. Like myself, many delegates were pursuing careers in STEM, and we helped each other understand the importance of having a supportive community of intelligent, empowered young women. So when I found Women LEAD at Rice, I was excited to apply. Women LEAD will further expose me to views on leadership from a woman's perspective while networking with other bright, talented women so I too can become a leader and inspire others.*

*I love that Rice is one of the only schools I'm applying to that directly focuses on student well-being and community through things like President and Dean's Study Breaks, helping students find balance before finals.*

*Additionally, I want to work with the Rice Student Volunteer Program, helping build community in Houston, and with Baylor College of Medicine Patient Discharge Initiative to help underserved patient populations, as I've loved volunteering at Saddleback Memorial.*

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### Tips + Analysis

**The "us" in "Why us" means you + Rice.** In other words, connect your "why me" to your "why Rice." This student does that right from the start, sharing a leadership experience that inspired her (STEM-focused delegates at California Girls State) and connecting it to a relevant opportunity that's attracted her to Rice (Women LEAD). Try to do that as often as you can throughout the essay, as doing so shows, in dating parlance, why you and Rice are perfect for each other.

**Be specific.** We're talking about courses, professors, programs, opportunities, clubs, etc., that are unique to Rice—like this student's mention of Women LEAD, President and Dean's Study Breaks, and the Student Volunteer Program. And make sure to spell them correctly!

**Make it clear that Rice is unique, and say how.** Admission officials don't just want to know how you'd take advantage of their school's offerings; they

also want to know “why Rice” over other schools you may have applied to. So in addition to academic and extracurricular specifics, try to find one or two examples of an opportunity that you can’t find anywhere else, or in this student’s case (in the school’s support for student well-being), at only a few other schools.

**Show a range of interests.** The broad scope of this prompt (“what elements of the Rice experience appeal to you”) 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. Of course, with just 150 words, you don’t have a ton of space for the whole laundry list, so you’ll need to be judicious in choosing your range of reasons “why.” This student does a nice job of that in the short space allotted, pivoting from leadership opportunities (Women LEAD) to campus community (study breaks) to volunteer programs (Rice Student Volunteer Program and Saddleback Memorial) to an academic example (Baylor Patient Discharge Initiative).

Here are two more strong examples for Rice’s “Why us?” prompt:

#### **Rice University Essay Example 4:**

*At heart, I am a collaborator. From working with my Science Olympiad team for hundreds of hours each year to playing in numerous extracurricular orchestral ensembles, I’ve learned that the best work I do is with and for those around me. I want to study in the Rice Department of Bioengineering because of the large emphasis placed on collaboration. With its focus on multidisciplinary work and experiential learning, I know that I will be able to excel in Rice’s team-based environment, taking advantage of its small classes in order to forge tight bonds with my peers around me.*

*Rice has more than 250 student organizations, and with access to the Texas Medical Center, a facility abounding with opportunities, and cutting edge research and technology on campus I know that at Rice, I will be able to fully pursue my interests both academically and collaboratively.*

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#### **Rice University Essay Example 5:**

*Just like the Owl camouflages to integrate into its environment, I’ll strive to become one with the Rice community by taking advantage of its numerous opportunities.*

*While Basmati Beats will give me the platform to indulge my Indian roots in a collaborative form of dancing, I can continue imparting knowledge to others with Nano Owls. The opportunity to teach nanoscience to students in Houston will empower the vision I had with the D-STEM Society in my Dehli community.*

*I'm looking forward to 3 days of absolute entertainment at OwlCon. With its 750 annual participants, I hope to share my passion for gaming with like-minded individuals.*

*While The Rice Memorial Center will be my temporary home for 36 hours as I work on complex algorithms at the annual HackRice, The Hoot will always keep me company during exhausting all-nighters.*

*I hope to spread my wings and explore the night at Rice University.*

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## **HOW TO WRITE RICE SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #3**

Rice is lauded for creating a collaborative atmosphere that enhances the quality of life for all members of our campus community. The Residential College System and undergraduate life are heavily influenced by the unique life experiences and cultural tradition each student brings. What life perspectives would you contribute to the Rice community? (500 word limit)

It's worth noting right out of the gate that Rice's decision to give you a full 500 words for this essay, much more than the "Why us?" and "Why Major" prompts, is pretty telling. The school is proud of and committed to its culture of inclusion and collaboration, and this prompt offers you an opportunity to show how your own background would help you contribute in a meaningful and unique way.

Check out this strong sample essay for this prompt, and we'll analyze why it works on the other side.

### **Rice University Essay Example 6:**

*What are you?*

*Mixed-race people and people of color get this question all the time. While a part of me wants to respond with "a bit tired, thanks for asking", I usually just end up telling them I am half Indian, half European. I know that my ambiguous features, darker skin, and unusual name makes people uncertain about what my*



*background is, and that in turn makes people uncomfortable -- they don't know what box to put me in.*

*I am both Jewish and half-Indian, an unusual blend of cultures. Although I'm not particularly religious, I often see things from a Jewish point of view: Tikkun Olam and Tzedakah, peace and neighborly love, community and solidarity. I always strive to make my community a better place than it was initially, and to make sure that I stand with those that may be facing economic or social issues. My time as a counselor-in-training for a Jewish summer camp also helped me learn about other people's interpretations of Jewish values from a wide range of ages, including from my fellow counselors. In addition, the Indian side of my family exposes me to a wide range of Indian culture, from the artwork in my grandparents house, to the stories from when my grandfather moved to America for school. Through this half of me, I have been able to experience, to a small extent, what it's like to be seen as "different". Even though I've never even been outside the United States, I'm still considered at least slightly foreign to most people. This helps me better empathize with people of color who may be facing much tougher questions than I ever was. The junction between these two identities gives me a unique intersectional identity that I can use to better empathize, communicate, and interact with other people.*

*Intersectional identity is something that everyone has at some level, even if it isn't apparent in their appearance. As someone who has a diverse set of experiences, I have a genuine curiosity for what intersectional identities other people have hidden away, and appreciate cultural exchanges with those around me. Even just sharing latkes or gulab jamun would allow me to share my side of the story, and can help open them up to new cultures. With the Residential College system, this not just becomes easier, but almost inevitable. Each residential college has its own traditions and culture (such as McMurtry's association with bananas or Duncan's Monday Night Lights), which add a unique aspect to their respective residents' identities, creating an intersectional identity that enriches everyone's experience. I can use my own background and understanding of identities to help broaden the perspectives of the others in my residential college, on top of letting other people teach me their traditions and perspectives. Everyone benefits from exposure to new ideas and perspectives, and I think that not only can I provide some of these ideas and perspectives, but I can also benefit from others.*

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## **Tips + Analysis**

**Communicate what matters to you.** How do you do that? Consider connecting each contribution to a particular value (e.g., creativity, collaboration, social justice). [Here's a list of values](#) you can use to generate some ideas or to connect with your 7-10 contributions. Reading back over this essay. Which values can you spot? We see a ton—family, community, love, empathy, curiosity, communication, and meaningful relationships, just to name a few.

**Cover experiences or topics you haven't shared yet.** Think of your college application as a buffet table or sorts—from the carved roast beef (your obsession with computer coding, say) to the potato soufflé (that internship with Bloomberg or the LEED architectural firm) to the caramelized Brussel sprouts (your role as captain of the soccer team or second-chair violin) and assorted cheese (your finesse at chess or all the mountains you've hiked) and the chocolate mousse (that quirky knife-throwing hobby, maybe)—each dish/essay showing a different side (or multiple sides) of you and what makes you family-recipe unique. Think of what dish this essay contributes to the smorgasbord. Even though this prompt seems fairly specific in focusing on your cultural influences and experiences, use it as an opportunity to try to include parts of yourself that you haven't yet talked about elsewhere in your Rice application. Maybe you haven't written about your volunteering experience with your temple, or your love of knitting, handed down from your great-grandmother's Nordic ancestors. Here's a chance.

**Use color and detail to “show” not just “tell.”** This is good advice for other pieces you may be writing, since details can help breathe life into a piece of writing. For example, notice how this student didn't just talk about sharing “my side of the story” over meals, but over “latkes or gulab jamun.” This is another good example of using color to tell the story: “In addition, the Indian side of my family exposes me to a wide range of Indian culture, from the artwork in my grandparents house, to the stories from when my grandfather moved to America for school.”

**Make sure to bring it back to Rice and how you'll contribute to the campus community.** This is a key part of the prompt, the part that allows the Rice admission team to envision you on campus in a meaningful way. For this student, that means sharing how connecting with others over a shared “intersectional identity” becomes easier, thanks to signature traditions like the McMurtry hall's obsession with bananas or Duncan's Monday Night Lights.

Here's another example for this prompt:

## Rice University Essay Example 7:

*"I'd like a veggie bowl please. And would you mind changing your gloves?"*

*That got me several weird looks. Some from customers around me, others from Chipotle employees across the counter. But I was used to it. Over the years of asking for a change of gloves or to cut with a clean knife, the weird looks have become normal. My strict vegetarian diet follows the principles of Jainism that run in my family, a direct result of my Indian-American identity.*

*From a young age, I've been questioned for wearing a sacred rakhi thread on my wrist, or bringing in homemade Indian vegetarian food for lunch. The Indian side of me is omnipresent. In explaining these differences, I've sometimes felt as though being different has made me less than those who were "normal." This obviously isn't true, but it's taken me a while to realize that. Meeting friends who embrace and value my ethnicity has helped me understand that what makes me different actually makes me a more complete person. Like in language classes, where I've been able to use my struggles to communicate effectively in a second language while visiting family in India to bolster my ability to communicate in Spanish during class.*

*As a result of my experiences as an Indian-American, I've been committed to advancing inclusion in society. In addition to taking small, personal actions, I've participated in numerous activities that seek to understand and help alleviate social injustices, like Junior Leadership Dayton (JLD). Through JLD, I witnessed firsthand the devastating effects of the opioid epidemic in a city with one of the highest rates of overdoses in the nation, and the struggles associated with rehabilitation. Talking to people in homeless shelters whose daily struggles exceeded what I had experienced in a lifetime, and helping underprivileged kids who grew up deprived of access to an education in the arts, I began to understand the magnitude of the issues that plague our society.*

*I seek to include those around me regardless of their background, welcoming new freshmen in Science Olympiad, for example, or talking to the violist who might have otherwise sat by himself during rehearsal breaks. My experiences with those who have accepted me for who I am have led to my desire to promote an acceptance of others, something I'll bring to Rice's campus.*

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# HOW TO WRITE RICE SUPPLEMENTAL

## ESSAY PROMPTS #4 & #5: RICE

### ARCHITECTURE

It's fair to say that Rice is *super* interested in your reasons for applying to its architecture program, and why you think you're the right fit—and it's giving you ample space to explain. The key is to share a diverse set of reasons and experiences, while avoiding too much repetition.

“Yeah, right,” you say? “How do I write about different things, when both prompts seem to be asking me about the same thing—my interest in studying architecture?”

We get it. It does seem a little redundant, but it doesn't have to be. It may help to approach each prompt this way:

#### **#4 Architecture Essay Prompt:**

Why are you determined to study architecture? Could you please elaborate on your past experiences and how they have motivated you to apply to Rice University and the School of Architecture in particular? (250 words max)

Think of this as your classic “Why Major” prompt, in the way that Prompt 1 wasn't for you. In that prompt, you got to focus on those other academic areas that appeal to you at Rice. This time, it's all about the architectural program. See Prompt 1 tips for more guidance.

A key part of this prompt is to “elaborate on your past experiences” and connect them to why you chose to apply to Rice in general and the architecture program specifically. How do you do that? Consider using a montage structure, which means making a list of 3-5 architecture-related experiences you've had and the influence each had in motivating you to pick Rice. For example—just spitballing here—maybe that community college course, *The Politics of Architecture and How They Shaped Europe*, made you see the friezes of the Parthenon and the Fachwerkhäusers of Germany in a whole new light, and now you're eager to take Rice's *The Metropolis* course to learn how the architect of today influences urban design as a public figure. Find a handful of examples like that, weaving your experiences and Rice's offerings together, and you've got yourself an essay.

If you have multiple academic reasons for “why architecture,” from classes to teachers who inspired you to school-based projects, use them in this essay, since the next one asks about non-academic influences. If you don’t have those examples, no sweat. We have some recommendations for other outside-the-classroom examples that may prompt some ideas—read those in the tips for Prompt 5 below.

#### **#5 Architecture Essay Prompt:**

Please expand on relevant experiences and motivations outside of your academic trajectory that have inspired you to study architecture, focusing on aspects that are not accommodated by other prompts in the application.

(250 words max)

Think of this one as your “Okay, what else you got?” essay—a Rice School of Architecture additional information section, if you will. Anything else that comes to mind that inspired you to want to be an architect that you haven’t already covered? This is the place to talk about it.

In this one, though, you don’t have to connect your experiences back to Rice. You’ve got that covered in Prompt 4.

Note that this one specifically asks about details and examples “outside of your academic trajectory.” So leave the classroom, coursework and school-related projects to Prompt 4. So what goes here in response to Prompt 5? Maybe those visits to Monticello in Virginia or The Getty in LA made a mark, or your favorite part of a trip is to explore area churches, just to admire the spires and domes and intricate detail of the icons and columns. Anything to show why architecture is your thing.

Still stumped? Feel like you’ve covered all the architecture you can think of? Pull back the lens a bit and think about what architecture means to you in the larger sense—not just buildings and urban landscapes, but collaborative spaces or the chance to build a sense of community you’ve long enjoyed in your own town. Or maybe one of your parents is handy around the house, and the extra room you helped them carpet or the fence you helped them build inspired in you an appreciation for the creativity and precision that go into even the small details of a structure.

#### **RICE UNIVERSITY'S "THE BOX"**

The Rice Box: In keeping with Rice’s long-standing tradition, please share an image of something that appeals to you.

Now comes the fun part of the Rice application. No more essays to outline. No more words to fuss over. No more grammar checks. Just one two-dimensional, uploadable image that, in Rice's words, "shares something about yourself, your interests or what is meaningful to you."

Don't have any idea what to do here? Here's what not to do: Don't fret over it. [Rice's admission page](#) points out that this image is not used in the evaluation process. It's just another chance to get to know what matters to you, a chance to "put your stamp on the application about who you are aside from what you have achieved." The only real advice Rice offers is to make sure the image can stand alone without explanation.

The possibilities really could run the gamut: a photo of you and your pet, your childhood home, a scene from a favorite trip, a creation you built or drew, your bookcase—even a photo from your phone that speaks to you, and about you. Or it could be something totally different. Realize that this doesn't have to be an image you took yourself. It could be a Monet, the Rover's view of Mars—even a meme.

A few last tips:

- Don't overthink it.
- Do have fun with it.
- Keep it clean.