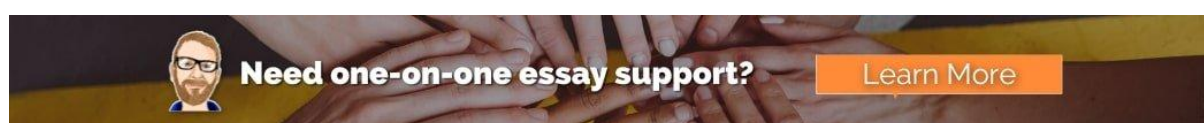
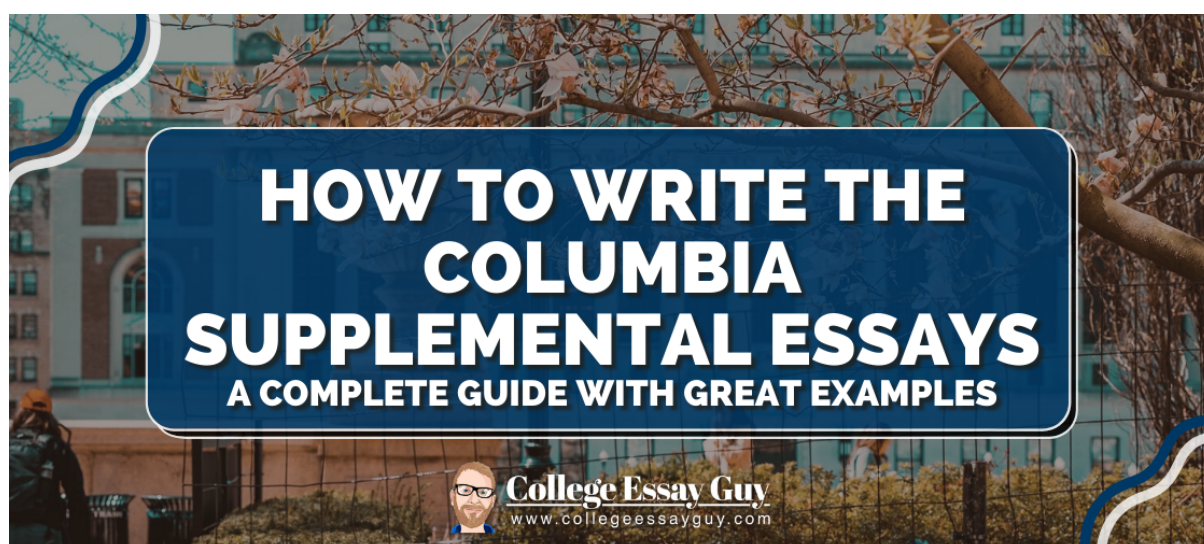


How to Write the Columbia University Supplemental Essays: Examples + Guide 2022/2023



HOW TO WRITE THE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAYS

If you're applying to Columbia University, a quick scan of its required supplemental essays will give you a good sense of what Columbia admission reps are looking for: students who'll thrive in the [Core Curriculum](#).

Fair warning: If you don't consider yourself a regular consumer of culture (i.e., literature, art, film, shows, music, podcasts, and all things that are distillers of the human experience), you might be struggling to come up with things to write about.

What do we mean? Take a look at Columbia's [Core Curriculum](#) and then its required supplemental essays below, and you'll see.

But don't worry: Even if you aren't a self-described lover of arts and culture, we've got a few things to share to help you make the most of these supplemental essays.

WHAT ARE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY'S 2022-2023 SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPTS?

For the two list questions that follow, there is a 75 or 125 word maximum. Please refer to the below guidance when answering these questions:

- Your response should be a list of items separated by commas or semicolons.
- Items do not have to be numbered or in any specific order.
- It is not necessary to italicize or underline titles of books or other publications.
- No author names, subtitles or explanatory remarks are needed.

For the four short answer questions, please respond in 35 or 200 words or fewer (as noted for each prompt).

For additional guidance, visit our [website](#).

PROMPT #1

List the titles of the books, essays, poetry, short stories or plays you read outside of academic courses that you enjoyed most during secondary/high school. (75 words or fewer)

PROMPT #2

We're interested in learning about some of the ways that you explore your interests. List some resources and outlets that you enjoy, including but not limited to websites, publications, journals, podcasts, social media accounts, lectures, museums, movies, music, or other content with which you regularly engage. (125 words or fewer)

PROMPT #3

A hallmark of the Columbia experience is being able to learn and live in a community with a wide range of perspectives. Tell us about an aspect of your own perspective, viewpoint or lived experience that is important to you, and describe how it has shaped the way you would learn from and contribute to Columbia's diverse and collaborative community. (200 words or fewer)

PROMPT #4

Why are you interested in attending Columbia University? We encourage you to consider the aspect(s) that you find unique and compelling about Columbia. (200 words or fewer)

PROMPT #5

Please tell us what from your current and past experiences (either academic or personal) attracts you specifically to the areas of study that you noted in the application. (200 words or fewer)

PROMPT #6

In Columbia's admissions process, we value who you are as a unique individual, distinct from your goals and achievements. In the last words of this writing supplement, we would like you to reflect on a source of happiness. Help us get to know you further by describing the first thing that comes to mind when you consider what simply brings you joy. (35 words or fewer)

That application is no joke. Let's take a look at how to tackle it.

HOW TO WRITE EACH SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT FOR COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

A WORD (OR 2) ABOUT COLUMBIA'S LIST PROMPTS

These next two prompts are pretty straightforward. Like last year, Columbia is making clear in the prompt what it's pointed to on its site for years:

Your response should be a list of items separated by commas or semicolons.

Items do not have to be numbered or in any specific order.

It is not necessary to italicize or underline titles of books or other publications.

No author names, subtitles or explanatory remarks are needed.

To further clarify their guidance around no need for explanatory remarks or author names, school officials knocked the first list answers down from 200 words to 75, leaving a bit more room (125 words) for the list of your favorite resources, media outlets, and entertainment choices.

Here's our tip for answering these: Don't overthink it—it's really not a trick question. Columbia really wants to know what you read, what movies you love, and which newspapers and podcasts you follow. That's it. So heed the bulleted advice, make your lists, and save your brain power for the short-answer prompts.

One more tip: Try to show some variety in your answers, but be honest about it.

See examples for each below.

HOW TO WRITE COLUMBIA SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY #1

List the titles of the books, essays, poetry, short stories or plays you read outside of academic courses that you enjoyed most during secondary/high school. (75 words or fewer)

Example:

The Art of Political Manipulation, William H. Riker

The Better Angels of Our Nature, Steven Pinker

Leonardo's Brain, Leonard Shlain

The Power of One, Bryce Courtenay

Hopscotch, Julio Cortazar

Gang Leader for a Day, Sudhir Venkatesh

Who Gets What--and Why, Alvin E. Roth

Freakonomics, Steven D. Levitt

Jane Eyre, Charlotte Bronte

And Then There Were None, Agatha Christie

Murder on the Orient Express, Agatha Christie

HOW TO WRITE COLUMBIA SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY #2

We're interested in learning about some of the ways that you explore your interests. List some resources and outlets that you enjoy, including but not limited to websites, publications, journals, podcasts, social media accounts, lectures, museums, movies, music, or other content with which you regularly engage. (125 words or fewer)

Example:

Lectures

The Future of American Economy, Nicholas Bloom

Politics from an Ethical Perspective, Rob Reich

Mechanics of Genomic Sequencing, Mike Snyder

Machinery of Freedom, David Friedman

Engineering your Luck, Tiffany Zhong

Fighting for Minority Rights, Congressman Ted Lieu

Multiculturalism, Wajahat Ali

The Satire Paradox, Malcolm Gladwell

U.S. Supreme Court Tour

Thomas Jefferson Memorial Tour

Exhibits

Smithsonian Renwick Gallery: WONDER

The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Design for Eternity--Architectural Models from the Ancient Americas

Cantor Arts Center: She Who Tells a Story--Women Photographers from Iran and the Arab World

TV

Sherlock Holmes

House of Cards

Last Week Tonight

The Daily Show

War and Peace

Designated Survivor

Quantico

Concerts/Shows

War Horse

Mamma Mia

Movies

Now You See Me

Pride and Prejudice

Interstellar

The Age of Adaline

HOW TO WRITE COLUMBIA SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY #3

A hallmark of the Columbia experience is being able to learn and live in a community with a wide range of perspectives. Tell us about an aspect of your own perspective, viewpoint or lived experience that is important to you, and describe how it has shaped the way you would learn from and contribute to Columbia's diverse and collaborative community. (200 words or fewer)

This is basically a "Community Essay," with a bit of "Why us?" thrown in. You can find our comprehensive guide on how to write the Community Essay [here](#). Or, if you're short on time, here's the abbreviated version:

Step 1: Create a "communities" chart by listing all the communities you're a part of. Keep in mind that communities can be defined by ...

1. Place: Groups of people who live/work/play near one another
2. Action: Groups of people who create change in the world by building, doing, or solving something together (Examples: Black Lives Matter, Girls Who Code, March for Our Lives)
3. Interest: Groups of people coming together based on a shared interest, experience, or expertise
4. Circumstance: Groups of people brought together either by chance or external events/situations.

Step 2: Use the BEABIES Exercise to generate your essay content. Once you've chosen a community, map out your content using the **BEABIES Exercise**. That exercise asks:

What did you actually do? (Tip: Use active verbs like “organized” and “managed” to clarify your responsibilities.)
What kinds of problems did you solve (personally, locally, or globally)?
What specific impact did you have?
What did you learn (skills, qualities, values)?
How did you apply the lessons you learned?

Step 3: Pick a structure. The Narrative Structure works well for students who have faced a challenge in or with this community. Otherwise, the Montage Structure works well.

Consider answering these three questions in your essay if you choose the Narrative Structure:

What challenge did you face?
What did you do about it?
What did you learn?
How do those things shape how you will contribute to Columbia? (Ideally with some Why Us detail)

Here's an example using the Narrative Structure.

Example:

In the summer of COVID-19, I formed two virtual clubs to offer my peers a continued sense of community. With most summer activities canceled, I felt it was

important to our mental health to provide alternative social connections in the absence of face-to-face interaction.

For Book Club, teachers and students met in advance, creating thoughtful presentations that illustrated each presenter's passions and perspectives. For Debate Club, conversations got heated with teachers arguing alongside students, each person advocating their position. After summer, I was told by students and teachers alike that the clubs were the highlight of their week. To my delight, the Debate Club was so popular, I am continuing it during this school year.

At Columbia, I will shift my focus to fostering community between my LGBTQ+ peers and other members of the community. From my summer club experience, I have a new appreciation for how social interactions can develop stronger bonds between students, staff, and faculty. I intend to find similar opportunities through Columbia iQ where I can organize social events like a book club or even a group cooking class to help foster new champions for the LGBTQ+ community. (192 words)

— — —

Tips + Analysis

Answer the question. This student effectively uses a simple narrative to answer the question clearly and directly. Here's how she does it:

The first quick paragraph sets up the what and the why (built two virtual clubs to maintain sense of community) of the challenge she faced.

Next, the student efficiently addresses how her experience shaped her engagement with complex, perhaps controversial ideas, and how learning to effectively engage can promote social cohesion.

Finally, she explores how she wants to apply these insights to her experience and engagement with the Columbia community, including a specific school opportunity (Columbia iQ) that she envisions contributing to in specific ways.

Show your values. This student packs tons of values into this essay. Read it again and see how many you count. Don't know what your values are? Do our [Values Exercise](#), and identify the core values you want Columbia to come away with after reading your essay.

Use structure to guide your reader. Each paragraph has a clear structural purpose—1) Problem I faced; 2) What I did, the impact it had, and what I

learned; 3) What I'll bring to Columbia because of 1 + 2. Clear topic sentences and transitions are your friends.

Add a “why Columbia” specific detail or two. The specific examples in the final paragraph can help a reader envision how this student will become part of and contribute to Columbia's community. Whether it's continuing your advocacy work with an on-campus organization, or honing your debate skills in your discussion-based core classes, let Columbia admission reps know you've explored why you fit with Columbia's community and that you're thinking of how you can apply your experiences to life on campus.



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- ✓ Support through brainstorming, outlining, drafting, and refining
- ✓ A focus on self-discovery and uncovering your story

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HOW TO WRITE COLUMBIA SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY #4

Why are you interested in attending Columbia University? We encourage you to consider the aspect(s) that you find unique and compelling about Columbia. (200 words or fewer)

This prompt is your classic “Why us?” essay, only it's a bit on the short side with a max of 200 words. We recommend checking out our complete guide on [how to write the “Why us?” essay](#) and pay close attention to the “Why Cornell” and “Why Penn” examples, which are our favorites. The “Why Tufts” essay is a nice example of how you can write a shorter version of the “Why us?”

Here's the abbreviated version of how to write the “Why us?” essay:

Spend 1 hr+ researching 5-7 reasons why Columbia might be a great fit for you (ideally 3-5 of the reasons will be unique to Columbia AND connect back to you).

Per the last sentence of the prompt, make sure you're focusing on opportunities you can only (or mostly only) find at Columbia (and not, say, New York City). That's so important to school officials, they made a point to add that clarification to the prompt this year.

Make a copy of [this chart](#) to map out your college research (see it below as well).

Create an outline for your essays based on either Approach 1, 2 (recommended), or 3 in my full guide above.

Write a first draft!

Here's a great sample essay for this prompt. Note that this essay is nearly 300 words—yours will need to be a bit shorter.

Example:

Columbia cultivates a focus on diversity of intellect, research, art, and tradition that brings me home.

At North Carolina Governor's School, the My Lai Massacre, determinism vs. free will, and epistemology were just a few of the topics we discussed in seminars. During the 5.5 week program, I asked myself countless questions: How should we define truth and knowledge? What principles would rule the ideal society? How does Plato's Allegory of the Cave apply to my experiences? Similar to that found at Governor's School, the discourse surrounding the Core forges a sense of community and curiosity that will allow me to delve further into these inquiries. In fact, the Contemporary Civilization course closely resembles the GS focus on the investigation of relevant political, moral, and social issues. Further, the flexibility to take unique courses such as Cognitive Mechanics and Economic Behavior and Research Ethics & Philosophy will allow me to gain a clearer understanding of the connections between my chemistry research and impactful societal, religious, and technological decisions and realities.

The research opportunities at Columbia are unparalleled. The SURF program will allow me to further my knowledge of the applications of chemistry by delving into research in a laboratory at Columbia. I hope to build upon my research in catalysis through work in Dr. Robert Farrauto's lab, which places a refreshing focus on environmental sustainability through catalysis engineering.

Outside of the classroom and the lab, whether it be through CU China Dance or Raw Elementz, I hope there is a stage in NYC that will embrace my dancing. Further, the tree-lighting, hot-chocolate drinking, and acapella singing that occur

each year are just a few of the many traditions that strengthen the Columbia community—ones that I want to be a part of.

— — —

Tips + Analysis

Identify unique opportunities at Columbia. The prompt is asking you kindly not to write about its location, or its friendly students, or any other quality you could ascribe to hundreds of other schools. You can tell this student spent a good deal of time doing her research. The great thing about a “Why Us?” essay is that once you’ve compiled your research, it almost writes itself.

Follow the formula. This essay answers the question using a template that’s very basic, and we don’t mean that pejoratively. The writer gives us “example + personal connection” over and over again. Her examples include most of the “Why us?” greatest hits: In the author’s own words, “intellect, research, art, and tradition.” So, find specific coursework and research opportunities and faculty that align with your (hopefully specific) interests, extracurriculars that nourish your creative side, and campus culture-y things you identify with. Then put these in an order that makes sense to you. And don’t forget:

Make it personal. Even though she packs a lot of research into these 291 words, this is not a merely expository essay. We learn a lot about what matters to her and what stokes her curiosity—the intellectual vitality leaps off the page. That string of questions she asks herself do a lot of the legwork early on.

Remember, “Why us?” = Why Columbia + Why Me. Another great thing about this essay is the way the writer matches her own values with Columbia’s. As important as identifying your own values is identifying those of the schools you’re applying to, and connecting the two in ways that show the two of you are compatible.

HOW TO WRITE COLUMBIA SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY #5

Please tell us what from your current and past experiences (either academic or personal) attracts you specifically to the areas of study that you noted in the application. (200 words or fewer)

This essay is what we call a “Why Major” essay.

You'll find a step-by-step guide to writing this essay [at this link](#), but here's the short 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 great example. Note that this example is nearly 300 words, and yours will need to be no more than 200 words.

Example:

Hikes along the Great Wall. Sharing freshly fried green onion pancakes from a food stand with my cousins. Three-person moped rides through busy streets. Dinners with my extended family.

Every trip back to Wuhan, China, is marked by these events and numerous other shared moments with family. Yet, when I am reminded of China, I instead envision people rushing around busy streets wearing face masks to avoid pollutant inhalation, the rarity of blue skies on any given day, and the disturbing level of air contamination that prevents my relatives from leaving their homes. Seeing this phenomena so clearly on a day-to-day basis during my visits has been a call to action.

Working with Dr. Hotz in the Department of Materials Science and Mechanical Engineering at Duke allowed me to combat these problems directly. Throughout the summer of 2016, I explored methods of improving the efficiency of the Dry Reform of Methane (DRM), a reaction that transforms harmful waste gas to a useful syngas, through catalysis. I was able to investigate a novel method of catalyst synthesis that drastically reduced the costs associated with catalyst creation and increased the efficiency of the Dry Reform of Methane. These benefits may propel the reaction towards use in industry. Breakthroughs in catalytic research for the DRM have the opportunity to transform energy sustainability and increase environmental sustainability.

In a “values” auction at Governor’s School, I bid \$800 of my allotted \$1000 dollars on a single value: Making an Impact. My experience in chemical research thus far has shown me that chemistry has an incomparable ability to influence lives in substantial ways, which is why I hope to study chemistry at Columbia. (277 words)

— — —

Tips + Analysis

Show you have skin in the game. The writer is clearly invested in the cause of environmental sustainability. He makes a smart choice by opening with that lovely “mini-movie moment” of cherished memories, then laments how these memories are polluted by China’s dangerous air quality. His cause is personal. And he has literally bought in.

Geek out when possible. How ’bout that third paragraph? This guy knows his stuff and has the experience to back it up. Knowledge of specialized language is a great way to demonstrate fit to major, so use a measured amount of geeky (read: insider) language. But be careful not to overdo it or you risk alienating your reader. This essay is a nice example of how to walk that line.

Look to the future. Not only does this student prove he’s a good fit for his major, he tells us that Columbia is the right launchpad for his mission to use chemistry to “influence lives in substantial ways.” Wouldn’t you want someone like that on your campus? Since “Why Major” essays offer natural connections to potential future careers, if you know what career you want to pursue, consider ending the essay with that look forward. Even if you don’t know what you want to do yet, you can still share some insights into how your major will prepare you for life after college.

HOW TO WRITE COLUMBIA SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY #6

In Columbia’s admissions process, we value who you are as a unique individual, distinct from your goals and achievements. In the last words of this writing supplement, we would like you to reflect on a source of happiness. Help us get to know you further by describing the first thing that comes to mind when you consider what simply brings you joy. (35 words or fewer)

For this prompt, we’d highly recommend not writing something that you think they want to hear by writing about what really brings you joy is calculus homework.

Instead, use this as a quick spot to show them a side of you they won't see elsewhere by sharing something that truly, actually, for really reals brings you joy.

Because this prompt is new this year, we'll offer some examples that worked well with other schools (for a 50-word prompt, meaning you'll need to be a bit shorter here).

Examples:

On Fridays, I'll take the boys I babysit to the ice cream parlor and bring their terminally ill mother back a strawberry cone. Next, I'll make the kids watch the Magic School Bus instead of Toy Story 4 for the twentieth time so they get a peek into my childhood.

— — —

Humming, singing, and belting. Or a combination of the three. Regardless of how I am doing, these activities never fail to make me feel ten times better, whether that be because I am performing, or just because I am screaming in my room.

— — —

Finding a manatee mother with her baby on Banana River, open gym volleyball, sunny but cool California weather, when my coding works the way I want, creating funnily-shaped breads with my sister Amy, aroma of cinnamon tea wafting from my cart as I pass out tea to the nurses station

— — —

Six-word stories; poems by Jorge Luis Borges; the state of peace from doing yoga; immersing myself in history fictions before bed; Friends; holding my mom's hand on our walks; the breathtaking sunset of Mount Hermon; talking and laughing across from a dear friend selfishly wishing the moment could last forever.

— — —

Tips + Analysis

You've got options. As in, with content and structure. Even though each example above is brief, each gives a nice glimpse into something meaningful and joyful for the student. Note that the prompt's phrasing ("describing the first thing that comes to mind when you consider what simply brings you joy") lends itself more to the approach of the first two

examples, so lists of joyful things like in the second two examples might be slightly riskier, but with that caveat, each of the above adds a nice facet to an application.

Get specific. There's a crazy amount of detail in the first example considering it's 50 words, and conveys a few different values through those details. And the final example almost feels like a poem, with each new piece adding a layer. Takeaway: Avoid broad/general statements about what's bringing you joy. Show us.

Use this prompt strategically. One way to do so: Write 2-3 totally different versions, and then, before you submit, take a look at everything Columbia is getting (your personal statement, the other supplements, your activities list, the additional info section, etc.), and use the version that helps school officials see a piece of you that's maybe missing otherwise.