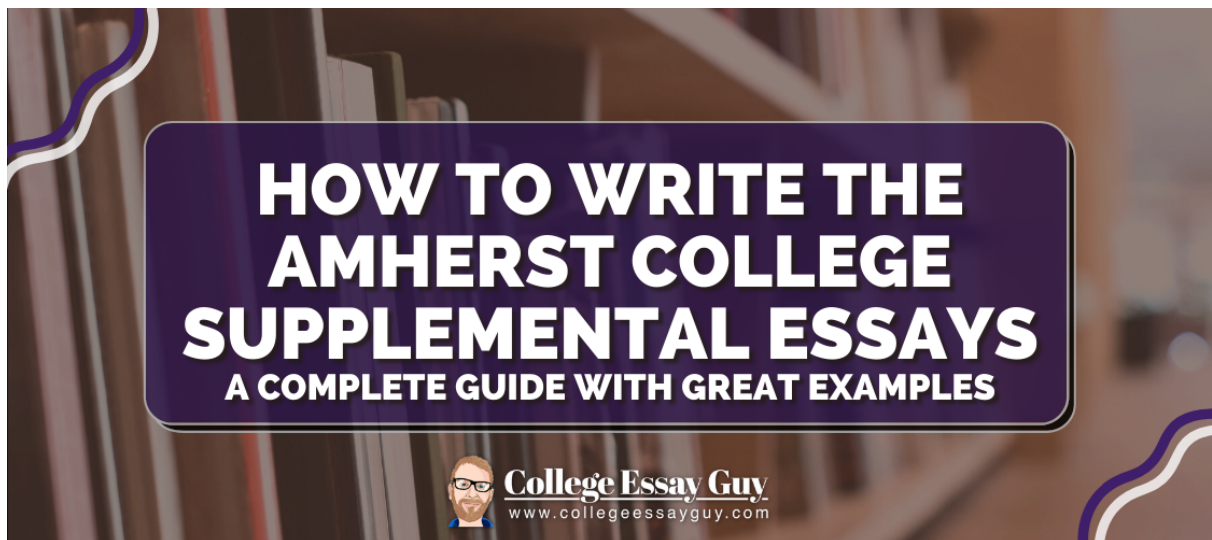


# How to Write the Amherst College Supplemental Essays: Examples + Guide 2022/2023



From its open curriculum to its commitment to fostering a diverse student body representative of the multicultural fabric of America, Amherst is all about giving its students options. And it shows in its supplemental prompts—each offering you a chance to demonstrate not just who you are and what you value, but how you think. In the spirit of freedom of choice, school officials are even giving you the opportunity to skip the first (and longer) of the three essays and instead submit a graded paper from your junior or senior year. While that may be tempting (one less essay to write—yes!), we’d recommend you choose Option A, responding to Amherst’s own prompt. Why? Because 1) it shows initiative, and 2) Option A

invites you to write a response that's personal to you—an excellent chance to give Amherst a deeper glimpse of your values/insights/experiences. Why pass that up? And—bonus!—you may be able to save yourself some time and still show initiative by writing a “super” essay. More on that, and Amherst's other two prompts, below.

But first, if you want a better sense of what Amherst is looking for, you can get 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 deep insights into how this private liberal arts college wants to grow and evolve, read its [strategic plan](#).

## WHAT ARE THE AMHERST COLLEGE SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPTS?

### OPTION A

Respond to one of the following quotations in an essay of not more than 300 words. It is not necessary to research, read, or refer to the texts from which these quotations are taken; we are looking for original, personal responses to these short excerpts. Remember that your essay should be personal in nature and not simply an argumentative essay.

**Quote #1** *“Rigorous reasoning is crucial in mathematics, and insight plays an important secondary role these days. In the natural sciences, I would say that the order of these two virtues is reversed. Rigor is, of course, very important. But the most important value is insight—insight into the workings of the world. It may be because there is another guarantor of correctness in the sciences, namely, the empirical evidence from observation and experiments.” Kannan Jagannathan, Professor of Physics, Amherst College*

**Quote #2** *“Translation is the art of bridging cultures. It's about interpreting the essence of a text, transporting its rhythms and becoming intimate with its*

*meaning... Translation, however, doesn't only occur across languages: mentally putting any idea into words is an act of translation; so is composing a symphony, doing business in the global market, understanding the roots of terrorism. No citizen, especially today, can exist in isolation-- that is, I untranslated." Ilán Stavans, Professor of Latin American and Latino Culture, Amherst College, Robert Croll '16 and Cedric Duquene '15, from "Interpreting Terras Irradiant," Amherst Magazine, Spring 2015.*

**Quote #3** *"Creating an environment that allows students to build lasting friendships, including those that cut across seemingly entrenched societal and political boundaries...requires candor about the inevitable tensions, as well as about the wonderful opportunities, that diversity and inclusiveness create."*  
*Carolyn "Biddy" Martin, 19th President of Amherst College, from Letter to Amherst College Alumni and Families, December 28, 2015.*

**Quote #4** *"Difficulty need not foreshadow despair or defeat. Rather, achievement can be all the more satisfying because of obstacles surmounted."*  
*Attributed to William Hastie, Amherst College Class of 1925, the first African-American to serve as a judge for the United States Court of Appeals*

## **OPTION B**

Submit a graded paper from your junior or senior year that best represents your writing skills and analytical abilities. We are particularly interested in your ability to construct a tightly reasoned, persuasive argument that calls upon literary, sociological or historical evidence. You should not submit a laboratory report, journal entry, creative writing sample or in-class essay. Also, if you have submitted an analytical essay in response to the "essay topic of your choice" prompt in the Common Application writing section, you should not select Option B. Instead, you should respond to one of the four quotation prompts in Option A. **(FAQ [here](#))**

## **OPTION C**

If you were an applicant to Amherst's Access to Amherst (A2A) program, you may use your A2A application essay in satisfaction of our Writing Supplement requirement. If you would like to do so, please select Option C on either the Common Applications or the Coalition Application. However, if you would prefer not to use your A2A essay for this purpose and you wish to submit a different writing supplement, select either Option A or Option B. *(Please note that Option C is available only to students who were applicants to Amherst's A2A program.)*

## **ADDITIONAL PERSONAL INFORMATION**

At Amherst we know that identity is more than checkboxes. If you would like to share more about your identity, background, family, culture or community, please tell us more here. (Maximum: 175 words)

## **ACTIVITIES (REQUIRED)**

Please briefly elaborate on an extracurricular activity or work experience of particular significance to you. (Maximum: 175 words)

## **RESEARCH ESSAY (OPTIONAL)**

If you have engaged in significant research in the natural sciences, mathematics, computer science, social sciences or humanities that was undertaken independently of your high school curriculum, please provide a brief description of the research project. (75 words)

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# **HOW TO WRITE EACH SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT FOR AMHERST COLLEGE**

## HOW TO WRITE AMHERST SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY OPTION A

Respond to one of the following quotations in an essay of not more than 300 words. It is not necessary to research, read, or refer to the texts from which these quotations are taken; we are looking for original, personal responses to these short excerpts. Remember that your essay should be personal in nature and not simply an argumentative essay.

Before we get to the quotes, a few things to think about when approaching this option and choosing which quote to write about:

**Ask how this essay adds to your Amherst application as a whole.** That likely will require you to brainstorm and choose your topics before you start writing, not just for Option A, but for the Additional Personal Information and Activities prompts too. Why approach it this way? With each application you submit, you want to show as many sides of yourself as possible; each prompt is yet another chance to show your schools of choice why you're a great fit for their campus. What experiences/skills/values/insights do you want Amherst to know about that you haven't already shared in your Common App personal statement? If there's a cool extracurricular activity you want to talk about, for example, maybe save that for the Activities prompt, and talk about a *different* set of experiences or activities here—one that doesn't overlap too much with what you want to write about in the Additional Personal Information essay.

**Make it personal.** Take Amherst officials seriously when they go out of their way to urge you to write an essay that's "personal in nature." They're telling you they don't want an academic dissertation on the meaning of empirical analysis or achievement; they want to know more about *you*—how that big brain of yours sorts through big ideas, how those ideas connect with experiences you've had, skills you've developed, and the ways in which you've grown, as a student and a human. The goal here is to get a deeper sense of you and the contributions you'd make to the Amherst community in terms of fresh ideas and perspectives. To that end ...

**Choose the quote that most resonates with you and generates the most material for an essay about your experiences/values/skills.** Pick out keywords you can build an essay around—whether it's math or science (Quote #1), culture or language (Quote #2), diversity or friendships (Quote #3), or achievement (Quote #4). If what you end up writing is tangential to the quote, that's OK. By expressly saying you don't have to research the entire text the quote is excerpted from, Amherst officials are leaving it open to *your* interpretation and its application to your life, whatever that may be.

So, there's no "right" way to answer this prompt. There are a gazillion right ways.

**Consider writing a "super" essay.** Look at the essays you're writing for other schools. Is there a topic you're already writing about that could fit one of these quotes? If so, save yourself some time and write a "super" essay. And by that, we don't just mean a Really Great essay. We mean an essay that can work for a number of prompts, with some modest, necessary tweaking to answer the specifics of each prompt. For example, Stanford's "meaningful" prompt or numerous schools' "community" prompts might overlap nicely, depending on which quote you respond to. Sign me up, you say? Check out [this full guide to the "super" essay](#).

Now, to those quotes, and a brief discussion of each ...

### Quote #1

*"Rigorous reasoning is crucial in mathematics, and insight plays an important secondary role these days. In the natural sciences, I would say that the order of these two virtues is reversed. Rigor is, of course, very important. But the most important value is insight—insight into the workings of the world. It may be because there is another guarantor of correctness in the sciences, namely, the empirical evidence from observation and experiments."*

*- Kannan Jagannathan, Professor of Physics, Amherst College*

Because Jagannathan specifically mentions mathematics and the natural sciences, you may think this quote is meant for engineering, bio, computer science, or other math/science lovers. But you'd only be partly right, because it doesn't have to be. Maybe you want to write about how insight has played a role in your life—from the relationships you've formed to the skills you've learned at your internship at a PR firm. Or maybe you have something important to share about the value of observation and what it's taught you about yourself and the world around you. The options are abundant.

### Quote #2

*"Translation is the art of bridging cultures. It's about interpreting the essence of a text, transporting its rhythms and becoming intimate with its meaning... Translation, however, doesn't only occur across languages: mentally putting any idea into words is an act of translation; so is composing a symphony, doing business in the global market, understanding the roots of terrorism. No citizen, especially today, can exist in isolation-- that is, untranslated."*

*- Ilán Stavans, Professor of Latin American and Latino Culture, Amherst College, Robert Croll '16 and Cedric Duquene '15, from "Interpreting Terras Irradiant," Amherst Magazine, Spring 2015.*

Like Quote #1, this one may seem to target a certain type of student—linguistics majors, English Lit lovers, and other word nerds. But again, we want to urge you to think expansively. Give yourself the freedom to find a kernel that relates to your life—whether that's your love of language, or your own experiences with the interconnectedness of today's world.

Pro tip: If you're wondering if what you're writing is really speaking to the prompt, sprinkle in a few keywords from the quote—"composing a symphony," "exist in isolation"—to show how you're incorporating its concepts. Just don't overdo the references, as that may seem overly gimmicky.

### **Quote #3**

*"Creating an environment that allows students to build lasting friendships, including those that cut across seemingly entrenched societal and political boundaries...requires candor about the inevitable tensions, as well as about the wonderful opportunities, that diversity and inclusiveness create."*

*- Carolyn "Biddy" Martin, 19th President of Amherst College, from Letter to Amherst College Alumni and Families, December 28, 2015.*

This one could be a great opportunity to write a diversity essay, especially if you're already writing one for another school. [Here's a full guide to writing that type of essay.](#)

#### **Quote #4**

*"Difficulty need not foreshadow despair or defeat. Rather, achievement can be all the more satisfying because of obstacles surmounted." - Attributed to William Hastie, Amherst College Class of 1925, the first African-American to serve as a judge for the United States Court of Appeals*

This quote is pretty short, but there are still a number of potential topics for this one—using “difficulty” or “achievement” as a springboard, for example. Or, say, you've had some challenge you've overcome that didn't fit anywhere else in your application—maybe you're even writing about it for your UC application (hellllloooo, “super” essay!). If so, check out [our guide to the UC application](#), and pay particular attention to the discussion on PIQ 5: Significant Challenge.

Here's an essay that was actually written for another school: UT Austin. But notice that, if the author just shifts the few phrases and details specific to Austin (we've bolded them), the essay can fit this Amherst prompt perfectly, since like all good essays, the focus is the student and their values, qualities, etc. We've left the original so you can see how it would double up. This is what we mean by writing a “super” essay.

#### **Example 1:**

**Quote 2:** *“Translation is the art of bridging cultures. It's about interpreting the essence of a text, transporting its rhythms and becoming intimate with its meaning... Translation, however, doesn't only occur across languages: mentally putting any idea into words is an act of translation; so is composing a symphony,*



*doing business in the global market, understanding the roots of terrorism. No citizen, especially today, can exist in isolation-- that is, untranslated."*

*When someone hears Alabama, or specifically my hometown of Birmingham, they think of the epicenter of the Civil Rights movement, college football hysteria, and controversial laws. I'll be the first to admit: my home state is far from perfect. Born and raised in Alabama as an Indian-American, I have experienced the positives and negatives. Yet, the lessons I have learned growing up have shaped me into who I am and taught me values I wish to evolve at **UT Austin**.*

*Every morning I walk to my blue-eyed godfather's garage to get my car; he lets me because he has an extra spot. When I drive through the neighborhood, it's normal to smile and wave to strangers. When a crisis arises, like my grandmother falling while she and I were home alone, neighbors immediately came to help, some I had never met before--the famous Southern hospitality revealed.*

*Volunteering at TechBirmingham, I've developed a responsibility to give back to my community. As a Longhorn, I look forward to continuing my impact in **Austin** through the **CS outreach programs**. In addition to being an avid member of **Code Orange**, I wish to be an instrumental leader in developing and implementing new programs and initiatives to further educate the budding STEM youth.*

*Growing up in Alabama, I have learned the value of community. Whether it is helping our neighbors in a time of need or educating and mentoring kids in the community that need guidance, I know that a strong community creates strong leaders. I wish to bring my perspective and value of community to the Longhorn family—ensuring that all my peers are supported and successful.*

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**Tips + Analysis**

**Think expansively about the quote.** As we mentioned earlier, if you choose Quote #2, you could write about language (or a number of other topics), or as in this example, you could write about “the art of bridging cultures” through personal relationships. By taking us on a tour of the deep connections this student has made with others, we get a keen sense of how these interactions and relationships have shaped their outlook on life, their drive to give back, and their appreciation for “the value of community.” If you have a similar story about how a community has had an important influence on your growth and development and want to write about it here, just make sure you pick a different topic to explore in your Additional Personal Information essay.

**Maybe add some “Why us?” elements.** Amherst doesn’t have a “Why us?” prompt like many schools do. So consider using Option A as an opportunity to sprinkle in those Amherst-specific details—reasons why you’re drawn to the school and what you’d do with the opportunities there. Notice that in the following sentence, the Austin details can be changed to details specific to Amherst (or just about any other school ...): “As a Longhorn, I look forward to continuing my impact in Austin through the CS outreach programs. In addition to being an avid member of Code Orange, I wish to be an instrumental leader in developing and implementing new programs and initiatives to further educate the budding STEM youth.” Why do this? It helps Amherst admission readers envision you on campus, not just learning but contributing. Here’s [a full guide to the “Why us?” essay](#) for more tips.

**Use details to bring your story to life.** Details are the chalk and blackboard to the “show me, don’t just tell me” school of thought. By providing color, anecdotes, and examples, you help your reader take in the sights, sounds, and smells of the story you’re trying to tell. That not only makes your essay more engaging, it makes it more memorable. Like this: “Every morning I walk to my blue-eyed godfather’s garage to get my car; he lets me because he has an extra spot. When I drive through the neighborhood, it’s normal to smile and wave to strangers. When a crisis arises, like my grandmother falling while she and I were home alone, neighbors immediately came to help, some I had never met before--the famous Southern hospitality revealed.” Those “show me” details do a beautiful job of illustrating, and paying off on, this “tell me” thesis statement: “Yet, the lessons I have learned growing up have shaped me into who I am and taught me values I wish to evolve at UT Austin.”

Here’s a great one for Quote #3:

## Example 2:

**Quote 3:** *“Creating an environment that allows students to build lasting friendships, including those that cut across seemingly entrenched societal and political boundaries...requires candor about the inevitable tensions, as well as about the wonderful opportunities, that diversity and inclusiveness create.” (300 words)*

*When I joined the Huntsville Youth Commission, a group of students chosen to represent youth interests within local government, I met Jack. Jack told me his cousin’s body had been stuffed into the trunk of a car after he was killed by a gang. After that, my notion of normal would never be the same.*

*A melting pot of ideologies, skins, socio-economic classes, faiths, and educations, the HYC is a unique collaborative enterprise. Although I was initially intimidated after hearing stories like Jack’s, I soon realized that the members of the HYC never let difference become an obstacle to understanding. Even now, our experiences are like an elaborate network of roads: weaving, bumping, and diverging in unexpected ways. The Commission allowed us to bring our individual experiences into a shared space of empathy.*

*Jack talked about his cousin’s broken body. HYC supervisor Valerie Scott explained that girls get ten-day school suspensions for simply stepping on another student’s sneakers. Alyssa educated us about “food deserts,” where people can’t count on their next meal. And I talked about being born in Tokyo, moving to London, and living in Alabama, finding a way to call each place home. How my family’s blending of Jewish tradition and Chinese culture—bagels and lox on weekends and dumplings every Lunar New Year—bridges distinct worlds.*

*My experience in this dynamic space of affirmation and engagement engagement has made me a more thoughtful person and listener. Listening empathetically*

*helped us envision multifaceted solutions to issues facing 21st-century youth. I want to continue this effort and be the woman, student, and friend who both expands perspectives and takes action after hearing people's stories. Reconciling disparate lifestyles and backgrounds in the Commission has prepared me to become a compassionate leader, eager to both expand perspectives and take collaborative action. (299 words)*

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## Tips + Analysis

**Make those personal connections to your story.** This is the key part of what Amherst is looking for, so make those personal connections work for you. Think: anecdotes of experiences you've had, life lessons you've learned along the way, and skills you've developed, and how. Even though this student starts out talking about Jack's experiences, she quickly tells us how stories like his impacted her "notion of normal," further sharing how she's learned that "our experiences are like an elaborate network of roads: weaving, bumping, and diverging in unexpected ways." And this: "My experience in this dynamic space of affirmation and engagement has made me a more thoughtful person and listener."

**Consider coming out with a power intro, if you have one.** This example may be a bit off the charts in that way, but don't think you have to have a gripping, or graphic, anecdote about a brutal murder for your intro to be effective. There are many ways to open your essay with a hook that grabs the reader's attention. [This guide](#) has 9 ideas that can help get you started.

**Show your values.** Values are a critical piece of any college essay. Why? They're central to showing your college(s) of choice the morals, tenets, and beliefs that mean most to you. A great way to determine your core values is to do the [Values Exercise](#). Which values have you not had a chance to express elsewhere in your Amherst application, or which would you want to come through in a stronger way? This essay is brimming with values, like inclusion, trust, collaboration, community, and compassion.

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## HOW TO WRITE THE AMHERST ADDITIONAL PERSONAL INFORMATION ESSAY

At Amherst we know that identity is more than checkboxes. If you would like to share more about your identity, background, family, culture or community, please tell us more here. (Maximum: 175 words)

You probably caught that “if” at the front of the second sentence, and thought: I don’t *have* to write this one. And you’d be right—technically (Amherst does love its options). But (you guessed it) we’d recommend writing it anyway, because ... (see reasons 1 and 2 listed in the intro on why to choose Option A).

The beauty of this prompt is that it’s wide open in terms of potential topics. Identity, background, family, culture or community—you’re bound to have an interesting story to tell (or likelier, several). And odds are high that it’ll be unique to you, which is a great way to stand out. Because you’re working with such a small word count, though, it may be better to focus on one (identity, community, etc.), so you can give it the attention it deserves, rather than writing more briefly about several.

Below are some ideas for brainstorming a topic. As you think through your options, ask yourself: *Which best allows me to speak to my identity and isn’t something I’ve already shared in my application?*

**Identity:** List out all the ways you identify. Is there something on the list that’s particularly important to you, or maybe one you’ve struggled with? If so, what have you found challenging about it? It could be something like being an ambivert, or coming out as LGBTQ+, or having a “natural mom vibe.” Pro tip: Try to a) choose something that’s uncommon (the closer it is to something only you can write about, the stronger), or b) if it’s more common, offer details that are unique to you.

**Background:** This could be your family background, your cultural background, your own personal background (hobbies, interests, friendships, educational experiences)—in other words, “background” can be defined however you want it to be. Just think about how it would relate to your identity.

**Family:** Is there something unique about your family that you haven't yet shared with Amherst? It may be something that's central to your identity—maybe it's a story about immigrating to America, or being the latest in a long line of coders in the family. Or it could be an interesting family story that you connect with on a deep level—how your grandfather's Menonite upbringing taught you the power of giving back, or how your great-grandmother escaped from a Nazi concentration camp. Just make sure that you're still the main character of the story: how does it illuminate an important influence on how you came to be ... you?

**Culture:** This can be defined rather broadly, so think through which aspects resonate with you and your experiences (race & ethnicity, socioeconomic class, learning a new language, etc.). It could be how rolling spanakopita with your Yiayia taught you the value of attention to detail, or how you were the only one in your generation to learn Polish, because you couldn't stand the thought of that family connection dying out.

**Community:** This tends to be our favorite option, because many schools ask about communities you've been a part of, how you've contributed to them, and what you've gained from them. So chances are you may be writing this essay for another school, giving you another opportunity for a "super" essay. [Here's a step-by-step guide](#) that offers a short exercise to help you think through all the communities you're a part of that might make a good topic for this particular essay.

Here's a great example for this one:

### **Example 3:**

*Liberating: the instant I fully submerge underwater as bubbles rush towards the glassy surface. From synchro, to swimming, and finally to water polo, aquatic sports have defined each stage of my life. My focus shifts from my daily concerns to moving in the water whether I'm competing with seven other girls, slicing*

*through choppy waves during laps, or passing the ball. I'm free to embody what I truly value.*

*In synchro, I go from upright to upside down, but I always finish with my head held high, since perspective and confidence are key. While racing, I respect the boundaries of my lane and balance my arms and legs to swim efficiently. From water polo, I learn to stay afloat and scan for those blocking the goal, remaining resolute as I overcome obstacles. My qualities in the pool define who I am today, and are reflected in my academic and daily experiences on land.*

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## **Tips + Analysis**

**Try to choose a single but elastic topic.** Again, you have a tight word count, so it's probably best to pick one identity to write about, but one that allows you some breadth to talk about other areas of your life. This student chose aquatic sports, which allowed her to write not only about multiple sports (synchronized swimming, competitive swimming, and water polo) but also how the lessons she's learned translates out of the water too (teaching her confidence, perspective, respect for boundaries, overcoming obstacles, etc.).

**Show your values.** Yep, we've mentioned this one before. But it bears repeating because it's so important. Reading through this example, you get a strong sense of a number of values: determination, respect, personal development, health and fitness, responsibility, success (you get the point).

**Bonus: Metaphors are fun.** This is absolutely not necessary, but any time you can have fun with words, you can achieve a key aspect of good writing: craft. And that can help your reader better engage with your essay, which in turn can help your essay stand out. For this author, it was moving from the physical—going from upright to upside down in synchronized swimming—to the metaphorical: holding her head high with confidence and perspective. She keeps that technique going with respecting boundaries and overcoming obstacles—both physical and metaphorical.

## **HOW TO WRITE THE AMHERST EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES ESSAY**

Please briefly elaborate on an extracurricular activity or work experience of particular significance to you. (Maximum: 175 words)

The extracurricular activity essay prompt is a common one, especially for selective schools like Amherst—because it’s a great way to get a glimpse into your values/interests/experiences/skills through the lens of an activity that’s meaningful to you. For the full guide on how to write this essay, [go here](#).

A few things to think about as you brainstorm your topic:

Note that the prompt asks about “an” activity. That’s intentional, so choose one activity to focus on—ideally, one that allows you to show multiple sides of yourself or your values/interests/experiences/skills.

Search through your [Activities List](#) and [Additional Information](#) section for ideas—but don’t limit yourself to those. Why? Because maybe there’s something fun/unusual that you do that won’t make those lists—like, say, your axe-throwing hobby or your kickboxing routine or those scrolls you write, just for fun. The key is to choose something that will a) help you stand out and b) give Amherst more insights into who you are and what you value. Have a bunch of options and stumped as to which to choose? Do the [BEABIES exercise](#) on the ones you’re considering. Which topic yields the best content? Write about that one. Just make sure you ...

Don’t repeat something you’ve already focused on in your personal statement. At the risk of redundancy, remember: The point here is to use this essay to show Amherst *another* side (or sides) of you.

Here’s an example of a strong essay for this prompt:

#### **Example 4:**

*I look up at the wall. This feels impossible.*

*“Just go for it!” my friend Jack says to me. “It seems harder than it is.”*

*During my first year climbing, I spent much time contemplating all possible routes and strategies. But gradually I’ve realized: because my perspective is limited as I stand on the ground, there’s only so much I can tell from looking ahead.*



*Sometimes it is better to just go for it. Over the last couple of years this lesson has served me well: Had I known the difficult rhyme patterns I'd have to follow, I may not have written my play. Had I known the amount of reading ahead of me, I may not have started my research on Neo-Confucianism.*

*"Come on, [Student]!" Jack again.*

*I look up at the wall. Still feels impossible.*

*But I put a hand on it. Then a foot. Then pull up.*

— — —

## **Tips + Analysis**

**Start off with something kind of unexpected.** In a 175-word essay, we don't necessarily expect someone to admit that something could go wrong. However, this author is honest about feeling doubt as she looks up at the wall she's trying to climb. This draws readers in as they question how she'll overcome this obstacle and find a way to get to the top. It creates suspense and also shows that the author is willing to be vulnerable.

**Make connections.** Although this essay is primarily about one activity (climbing), the author cleverly weaves in connections to other activities. She notes that the lessons she learned from climbing have given her the guts to write her own play and the motivation to start research on Neo-Confucianism. Those activities aren't the focal point of the essay, but they help us learn more about the applicant. Although you actually do have to choose only one activity to answer this prompt, this is a great example of how you can use connections to smuggle in more parts of yourself.

**Show growth.** At the start of this essay, the author is at an impasse. Climb the wall or don't climb the wall? Impossible or manageable? By the end, the author has demonstrated that she's the kind of person willing to take on the seemingly impossible. What we like is that she doesn't focus on whether or not she actually got to the top of the wall. She's more interested in the mindset it takes to get started. The growth she demonstrates is subtle, but the fact that she can reflect on it well shows maturity and self-awareness.

**Choose an uncommon topic (if you can).** Sure, this student could've written about being president of the debate club. Or how she'd played piano

for eight years. But many students write about those things. You know what fewer students write about? Climbing.

Pro tip: While you may worry that a less “impressive” (in terms of accomplishments) extracurricular activity won’t show off your strengths as well, consider using your Activities List and Additional Information section to emphasize what you’ve done, and use this essay to show a more uncommon side of yourself.

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## HOW TO WRITE THE RESEARCH ESSAY (OPTIONAL)

If you have engaged in significant research in the natural sciences, mathematics, computer science, social sciences or humanities that was undertaken independently of your high school curriculum, please provide a brief description of the research project. (75 words)

This prompt is truly optional, so we’d recommend not trying to stretch something that doesn’t really fit just for the sake of submitting something—that could even hurt more than help.

But if you’ve engaged in research in some way, whether through an organization or independently, this can be a nice spot to demonstrate some further skills and values by highlighting what you researched and what skills you gained.

Here’s are some examples adapted from UC Activities List entries and PIQs. The second and third would need some word count cuts, but you can learn a ton from their specificity.

### Example #1

#### *Independent Study*

*Last year, I researched and presented a thesis for an Interim Semester project on Singapore’s aging population. I utilized census data to analyze socioeconomic status in relation to population demographics, and designed an interactive website*

*cross-referencing the average age of inhabitants with poverty rates. As part of my project, I also created an actionable plan to improve living conditions for elderly.*

## **Example #2**

*When I joined UCLA's Laboratory for the Chemistry of Construction Materials, their primary project was to design a concrete that can sequester CO<sub>2</sub>. My individual research project, which aimed to solve a part of the problem, focused on the dissolution kinetics of calcite to better understand calcite stability in cementitious solutions.*

*I designed and conducted experiments to test calcite dissolution in solutions containing organic ligands including EDTA, citrate, and acetate. My tests were largely unique because they were the first to be conducted in alkaline pH regions due to the nature of cementitious systems. I imaged the surface of my samples with a Vertical Scanning Interferometer (VSI) and analyzed the data with the micro-nano software Gwyddion. My results have applications for breaking down calcite in cement to sequester CO<sub>2</sub>.*

## **Example #3**

*I studied the crevice corrosion of Ti-6Al-4V, a titanium-aluminum-vanadium alloy, which has applications ranging from oil pipelines to medical implants.*

*In order to characterize the corrosion of Ti-6Al-4V due to the breakdown of its passive film, I applied immersion and electrochemical tests. My experiments were conducted in an artificial saliva solution with fluoride and chloride to understand how dental implants respond to hygiene rinses and toothpastes in a simulated human mouth environment. My results help characterize the initiation of crevice corrosion due to harmful anions, which has not been previously studied.*