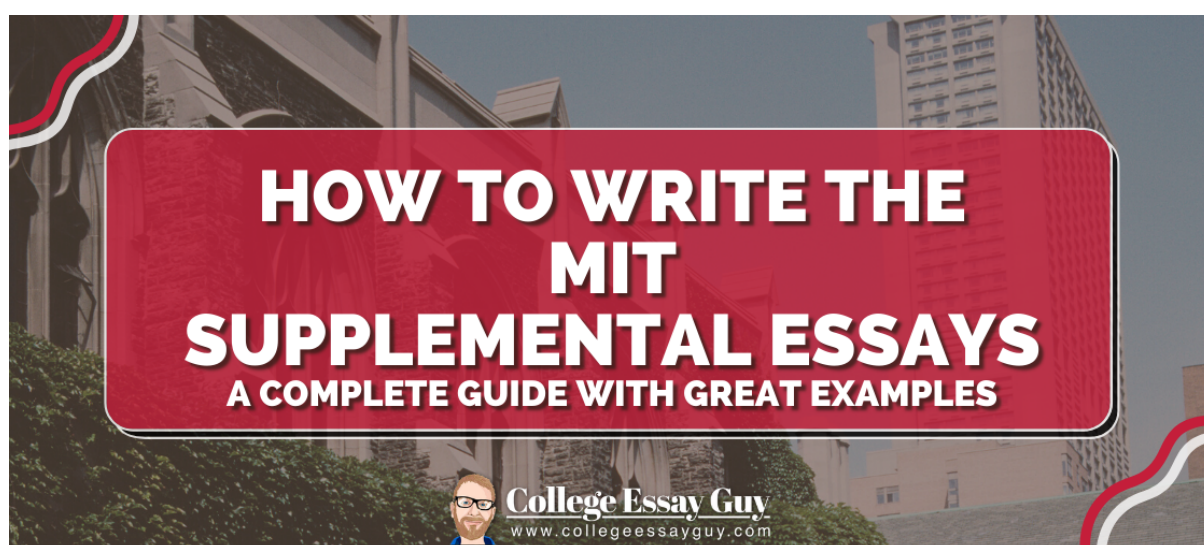


How to Write the MIT Supplemental Essays: Examples + Guide 2022/2023



If you're applying to MIT, odds are high that you're a pretty exceptional student (and human). Your GPA sparkles, your test scores soar, and your activity list practically sings with meaningful accomplishments. This is great for you, and great for the 20,000 other people applying annually. In a sea of highly successful seniors, your responses to MIT's supplemental prompts will help distinguish you from the pack (or pod if we're sticking with our aquatic metaphor). The best news: MIT gives you many chances to make an impression. To this end, we've put together the following set of examples, tips, and ideas for each of MIT's 10 supplemental essays.

WHAT ARE MIT'S SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPTS?

PROMPT #1:

Optional: Please tell us more about your cultural background and identity in the space below. (150 words or fewer)

PROMPT #2

Optional: Please tell us if aspects of your identity have been a barrier to educational access and opportunity. (150 words or fewer)

PROMPT #3

Tell us more about why this field of study at MIT appeals to you. (100 words or fewer)

PROMPT #4

Optional: If you think that additional information about your family will give us a more thorough impression of your background, please include it here. (150 words or fewer)

PROMPT #5

Optional: If there is anything we should know about your school's grading system or course offerings, please use the space below. (250 words or fewer)

PROMPT #6

Optional: If you have or had any extenuating circumstances regarding your coursework (including disruptions due to COVID-19), please tell us about them here. (150 words or fewer)

PROMPT #7

Optional: We understand that sometimes things outside of your control impact your ability to complete tests to the best of your ability. If you have an extenuating circumstance, such as exam cancellations or illness, please let us know here. (150 words or fewer)

PROMPT #8

Please list up to four activities—if you have more than four, choose the ones that are most important to you. (40 words or less per activity description)

PROMPT #9

Optional: If you have or had any extenuating circumstances regarding your activities (including disruptions due to COVID-19), please tell us about them here. (150 words or fewer)

PROMPT #10

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

PROMPT #11

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

PROMPT #12

MIT brings people with diverse backgrounds and experiences together to better the lives of others. Our students work to improve their communities in different ways, from tackling the world's biggest challenges to being a good friend. Describe one way you have collaborated with people who are different from you to contribute to your community. (225 words or fewer)

PROMPT #13

Tell us about a significant challenge you've faced (that you feel comfortable sharing) or something that didn't go according to plan. How did you manage the situation? (225 words or fewer)

PROMPT #14

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

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

HOW TO WRITE EACH SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT FOR MIT

HOW TO WRITE MIT SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #1

Optional: Please tell us more about your cultural background and identity in the space below. (150 words or fewer)

PICKING A TOPIC

Do you have a strong sense of cultural identity? Jot down a list of cultural aspects you might want to emphasize, and then jump right down to the example below.

Do you see the phrase “cultural background” and come up blank? Fear not! There are ways to talk about culture beyond religion, ethnicity, and nationality. First, try my [Values Exercise](#) to learn more about what matters most to you. Here are a few questions to get you thinking:

Does your family have strong values that span generations? Are you from a family of creators? Educators? Doers? Risk takers? That shared value could be your cultural background. Write a list of traits and values you see in your grandparents. Underline any that you also see in your immediate caregivers. Put a star next to any you embody yourself. Those might just be worth writing about. Are there two or three values of yours that you learned from specific people? You might be able to answer this prompt with a montage of “inherited values.” Make a(nother) list of some core values that aren’t a focus of your personal statement. For those values, underline any that make you think of a specific person in your life. Choose three, think of how those values show up in your life today, and get started writing a draft.

Give your grandparents a call! Not only will Nana appreciate it, but your elders might just have a sense of cultural heritage you weren’t aware of. Hearing a family member’s take on this question might make you realize you have more of a cultural background than you initially thought.

Pro Tip: If you feel you can’t share all you’d like to share in just 150 words, you can use the optional Prompt 4 (below) to say more.

Example:

4 eggs. 2 cups milk. 1 cup flour. 1 tablespoon sugar. 1 teaspoon salt.

Swedish Pancakes have connected my family for generations. Learning the recipe with my aunt during Christmas brought us together and unlocked the secrets of the most delicious food on earth. Serving them to my Farmor and playing “Let it Be” on the piano was my way to say goodbye before she passed.

While their taste is divine, it’s what Swedish Pancakes represent that really matters to me. They’ve been a portal to understanding my heritage and connecting to the people in my life who matter most.

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Tips + Analysis

Set the scene with a clear image. This student doesn’t use a traditional description, but he manages to set a clear scene, baking in the kitchen, with a short list of five ingredients. Descriptions can lend a warm and fuzzy feeling to this short essay and give your application depth and humanity.

Connect culture to values. What? We love urging students to ground their writing in values? We know you’ve heard this one before, but this prompt is an open invitation to explicitly share your values, specifically those you’ve inherited from your family or community. This student names his values in the final sentence: heritage and connection to loved ones. But even before that, he shared his values of service (in this case, literally serving food) and music.

Use Tip 1 for paragraph 1 and Tip 2 for paragraph 2—and there’s your outline! Showing your cultural heritage in action using a descriptive anecdote, then unpacking what those cultural elements mean to you, is just about all you need to (and perhaps can) do in a 100-word supplement. This strategy of “show and then tell” will be valuable in many of these MIT supplements.

You may notice you’re describing a community here, if briefly. For more on this type of essay, check out our comprehensive guide on how to write the community essay [here](#).

And here’s a bonus example that we love:

My last name: Pritamani, Mother’s maiden name: Kalvani, Grandmother’s maiden name: Kewalramani. Almost every Sindhi, along with enjoying shiny clothes, can be identified by the -ani. Though the Sindhi language may be dying, pre-partition Sindhi culture is truly alive with daal pakwan and sale mani being dishes I have learned to make.

Though my roots are Sindh, post-partition most of my family moved to Mumbai, which has now become my “home” in India. I can vividly remember the off-and-on monsoon rains and drinking from fresh nariyal (coconuts) when coming out of Jogger’s Park.

I celebrate Diwali, use my Hindi written and spoken skills to read the shudh (pure) Hindi from the prayer books, recount lessons from the Ramayan and Mahabharat, and fast from eggs every Monday as prayer for my parents’ long life.

Growing up watching Sunday football, learning and exploring American history.

I am Sindhi, Indian, Hindu, and American.

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HOW TO WRITE MIT SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #2

Optional: Please tell us if aspects of your identity have been a barrier to educational access and opportunity. (150 words or fewer)

This optional prompt is a new one this year, so we don’t have any examples yet. And you should only answer it if you have a story worth telling that hasn’t been told elsewhere in your application. If you do choose to answer it, remember that the goal is to say something your peers cannot. That means using a specific story from your life to show how some aspect of your identity has truly been a barrier for your education. Just be careful not to position yourself in a way that risks coming across as a victim. If you can’t do that, it’s totally okay to skip this. It truly is optional.

HOW TO WRITE MIT SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #3

Tell us more about why this field of study at MIT appeals to you. (100 words or fewer)

This is a *super* short “Why major?” essay. Because it’s so short, the key will be to *briefly* share the origin story for the major you’re considering. [Here’s a guide](#) to the “Why major” essay.

Example:

Why Electrical Engineering?

My decision to major in Electrical Engineering was inspired by my desire to improve security through technology. When I lived in Mexico, my father’s restaurant security system lacked the ability to protect our property from robbers,

who would break in multiple times a year. Thanks to the influence of my cousin, who now studies Autonomous Systems, I developed an interest in electrical engineering. I am inspired to not only improve my father's security system, but contributing to security innovations for larger companies and perhaps, one day, national security. (89 words)

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Here's a simple outline for this essay:

Why Electrical Engineering?

Thesis: I want to improve security through technology

Robbers broke into dad's restaurant

Cousin taught me about Autonomous Systems

In the future: work with large companies or on national security

Note that your thesis statement should probably be clear and it could come either at the beginning, middle, or end.

HOW TO WRITE MIT SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #4

Optional: If you think that additional information about your family will give us a more thorough impression of your background, please include it here. (150 words or fewer)

Here's another optional prompt. But you may find it easy to write this one if you follow the tips below. Essentially, you get to share a story about how your family has shaped who you are, beyond what you shared in Prompts 1 and (potentially) 11.

Check out how this student handled this essay.

Example (written by Stan):

Whereas 23 & Me describes my parents' genetic composition as Ukrainian, Russian, Jewish, and Greek (in that order), culturally they could be defined as multi-country European. My father speaks 5 languages and currently works in Germany while my mum collected her multiple University degrees from 3 different countries.

Although I've been in the British education system my whole life, my parents have definitely imprinted upon me their pan-European worldview and, thanks to my

weekend Russian school lessons and annual visits to my grandparents' village in Ukraine, my Slavic roots are still intact.

*If one were to dissect and label our family's sociological profile further, it would be rather typical for a first generation highly-skilled immigrant household. Socially liberal (unsurprising given that both parents are LSE graduates), and very science-centric (the only thing we do religiously as a family is to read *The Economist* every week). (144 words)*

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Tips & Analysis

Show, don't just tell. This tip is the foundation of any good application essay. You've probably heard it before, but it's worth repeating, especially because of the word count. Notice how this student shows us how he's been shaped by his parents' "pan-European worldview." Those specific details matter and make the essay more interesting.

Hint at how your family has influenced your academic interests. This essay does a great job of showing how the student developed an interest in economics that's outside of his academic studies. If you haven't shared these types of details in your "Why us?" essay, this prompt is a great opportunity to wave that flag.

Keep the essay focused on you. The prompt might make it seem like this essay should focus on your family. But remember, you're the one applying to MIT. So, make sure you're at the center of your response. Tie the details and experiences back to you so that admission officials can see how this essay might reflect the opportunities you'd like to take advantage of as an incoming student.

HOW TO WRITE MIT SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #5

Optional: If there is anything we should know about your school's grading system or course offerings, please use the space below. (250 words or fewer)

Check with your guidance counselor to see if there's anything you should include here. Things *not* to include: general statements about teachers' difficult grading standards or over-explanations of not-that-bad grades.

Example:

GCSEs are graded on a 9-1 scale where 9 is the highest grade and 1 is the lowest grade. On average, students in England take eight GCSE subjects, with only 2% of

students taking more than ten GCSE subjects and only 0.1% taking twelve or more.

A-Levels are graded on a A*-E scale where A* is the highest grade and E is the lowest passing grade. Predicted grades were issued on 11th October 2021. On average, students in England take between 2 and 3 A-Level subjects, with only 5% taking four subjects and only 0.1% taking five or more.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/analysis-of-results-a-levels-and-gcse-summer-2021/summer-2021-results-analysis-and-quality-assurance-a-level-and-gcse>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/infographic-gcse-results-2021/infographics-for-gcse-2021-accessible> (118 words)

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HOW TO WRITE MIT SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #6

Optional: If you have or had any extenuating circumstances regarding your coursework (including disruptions due to COVID-19), please tell us about them here. (150 words or fewer)

Put here whatever you're putting in the 250-word space included on the Common App COVID-19 section (though it would have to be cut to fit the MIT word count). For a complete guide to that one, including examples, [click here](#).

Example:

My Design and Technology GCSE NEA (non-exam assessment) Coursework, which carried 30% of the total grade, was cancelled due to lockdown in the UK. This meant that the project I had spent more than 50 hours designing, prototyping, and recalibrating (a sprout grower that had built-in sensors which monitored humidity and temperature) was neither finalised nor assessed.

And so although I had completed thorough research and had 3D CAD models ready to be laser cut, I was unfortunately not able to translate my online designs into an actual prototype. Similarly, I was not able to test the C code I had written for the Arduino and breadboard because I was not allowed to enter school.

Ultimately, D&T GCSE was assessed using exam assessment only and although I received a solid grade of 8, I felt disappointed that I could not show my best work.
(145 words)

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Tips & Analysis:

Clearly state the impact the challenge had. When talking about challenges, it's important to avoid the risk of sounding like you're whining, or complaining about being a victim of circumstance. It can be a delicate balance to walk, but this essay does a nice job of that by clearly laying out the student's plans for the project and the impact it made—essentially an enormous amount of lost work and potential.

Give specific details. Notice how this essay gives specific details so we know exactly what the student had already done and what she hoped to do before the setback. These details make the story believable and give understandable weight to the disappointment she expresses at the end of the essay.

Write about something unique to you. Students all over the world experienced disruptions to their academics due to COVID-19. So, make sure your essay talks about something unique to your experience. This example does a good job of talking about one specific way this student experienced a setback. There were probably other setbacks, but the example used in this essay provides insights into what was uniquely challenging for her.

HOW TO WRITE MIT SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #7

Optional: We understand that sometimes things outside of your control impact your ability to complete tests to the best of your ability. If you have an extenuating circumstance, such as exam cancellations or illness, please let us know here. (150 words or fewer)

Pretty straightforward. Any extenuating circumstances like exam cancellations or illnesses impact your test-taking abilities? This is your opportunity to explain those.

HOW TO WRITE MIT SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #8

Please list up to four activities—if you have more than four, choose the ones that are most important to you. (40 words or less per activity description)

Simple.

Pick your top four activities (from your Common App list).
Write 40-word descriptions. Our tips for the Activities List live [here](#), and apply them to this writing as well.

Examples:

Citizen Scientist Marine Protected Area Watch

(Word Count: 40)

Monitor local Marine Protected beaches for illegal activity; coordinate with Park Rangers and fellow Citizen Scientists to deter visitors from abusing the beach habitats and creatures; complete surveys on activity at the beaches: published data 15 times for academic studies

2019 Captain; starter MHS Varsity Baseball

(Word Count: 38)

Starter at 2nd or 3rd base; bat 2nd in lineup; made school history by making 2017 CIF semi-finals, 2018 CIF finals; 2017 Rookie of the Year Award, 2017 All-Frontier League Honorable Mention; to be Captain in 2019 Season

Educator Heal the Bay's Pier Aquarium

(Word Count: 32)

Teach and engage in discussion with guests at touch tanks, shark tanks, and whale exhibit; coordinate whale watching events, encourage ocean respect and environmentalism; received Dolphin Pin for 150 hours of service

Starting Driver MHS Water Polo

(Word Count: 40)

Starter, sprinter; 2018 Conejo Classic Tournament Champions, 2018 Oxnard Tournament Champions; 2nd Team All-Frontier League 2017 Award, 2016 MVP of JV team, Frontier League Champions 2015-2018; club season: start for S&S Bruin Water Polo - driver, compete in local tournaments

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Tips + Analysis

For a comprehensive list of tips and ideas, head over to our full [activities list writing guide](#).

Most importantly:

Emphasize tangible, measurable impact.

Use active verbs.

Use lists and incomplete sentences

Cut extra words by using more specific words (i.e., “told people about” → advertised, “came up with” → brainstormed).

HOW TO WRITE MIT SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #9

Optional: If you have or had any extenuating circumstances regarding your activities (including disruptions due to COVID-19), please tell us about them here. (150 words or fewer)

Where Prompt #7 was asking how illnesses or cancellations affected tests you’d taken, this prompt is asking how those interruptions or challenges impacted your extracurricular activities. So think of this as similar to the Common App “[additional information](#)” section, but only add information here about extenuating circumstances like exam cancellations or illnesses. You’ll have an opportunity for a fuller additional information response in Prompt #14 (if you need it).

Here’s a great example for this one, though at over 200 words, you’d have less space to work with.

Example:

Over the past two years, I have dedicated a large part of my free time to coursework beyond the core curriculum of my school. This was not always easy. Citing resource constraints and administrative rigidities, my school rejected my request to take extra A-Level courses. But I was undeterred. Securing permission to take extra courses outside school, I dove into courses such as A-Level Statistics and Computer Science. I took those exams via an external exam centre, receiving an A in both, and finishing the two-year courses in 1 year and 3 months respectively.*

In a period where the Covid-19 pandemic forced me inside — away from the classroom, my friends, and the sports we used to play — these courses allowed my intellectual curiosity to flourish. From Computing to Statistics, Maths to Business Studies, my 6 A Levels provided a key outlet for me to explore the world beyond my window without ever leaving the house: What are the business

practises that produced the computer on which I program? What are the statistical methods that underpin programming languages like Python and C++? As just one of 200 people to take on 6 A Levels, I feel both enriched by this diverse education and excited to explore the full range of MIT's course offerings as well. (214 words)

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Tips & Analysis

Share the importance of the activity. The reader needs to know why the disruption to your activity was significant. So give details that show your commitment to the activity before the setback. The author of this essay does a great job of this by sharing that he had already gone through great lengths to stay committed to this activity for two years.

Discuss what you did to handle the obstacle. Setbacks and disruptions are a normal part of life, so it's important to show how you push through challenges or find ways to work around them. Use this essay to show admission officials how you navigated these setbacks with perseverance rather than despair. In this example essay, the author shows that he found an alternative way to carry through with his original plan.

Show how the experience shaped your perspective. What did you learn from this experience? You'll give the reader even more insight into how you handle challenges if you close your essay with a lesson you learned, like how this student explains how the setback enriched his intellectual curiosity.

HOW TO WRITE MIT SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #10

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

PICKING A TOPIC

Ideally, your topic will be something that is *actually* fun. (Not something that, for example, is actually academic that you're trying to justify as also being fun.) Take a look at your **brainstorming work** and see if there are any random/odd/fun parts of you that haven't yet made their way into your application. Past students have written about geocaching, doing impersonations, and "Jedi Juggling Club," among others.

Here's an example we love, though since MIT dropped the word count this year, you'd have a bit less space to work with.

Example:

One activity which I simply do for the pleasure of it is playing cricket—not on a proper team or league, but casually along with friends and family.

Though I have enjoyed competitively participating in soccer, ultimate frisbee, and table tennis in the past, the lack of competitive nature in cricket is refreshing, especially because I am not that great of a player. The whole playing experience with other casual cricket players is more enjoyable: Though the goal is to win, we can learn and grow without the stress of losing an “important” match.

The connectivity with others is another reason I enjoy being a casual cricket player. I usually play with my family, and have taught many friends with non-cricketing backgrounds how to play. One time, my friends and I were playing at a local park, and a family of three generations joined us: representative of how casual cricket is welcoming to all.

The accessibility of the sport in my backyard, where I can pick up the bat and hit a tennis ball around during an evening walk, and sometimes having my parents bowl at me/me bowl at them, shows the spontaneous fun that I can have at any time.

As someone who likes to watch cricket, Indian cricket specifically, it is enjoyable to be able to casually play a sport that many in the US have never properly experienced. It also connects to my identity as an Indian who grew up with stories of “gully cricket.” (248 words)

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Tips & Analysis:

Showcase something new about your personality. Use this prompt as a way to showcase a part of your personality that you haven’t been able to express elsewhere in your MIT application. For example, we love how this essay is about an activity that likely didn’t make the student’s activities list (since he only plays cricket for fun), but also how he’s able to find joy in playing cricket, even if he’s not “great” at it (#vulnerability).

Give specific examples to show why you like the activity. These details allow admission officials to learn about your way of viewing the world. So, don’t hold back on that color and specificity. Share details about how you became interested in the activity, what keeps you interested, and how the activity influences your connection to other aspects of your life. In this

example, notice how the author weaves multiple stories together with specific examples that give the essay a nice flow from start to finish.

Connect it to your intellectual curiosity. MIT is looking for intellectually curious students. So, even though this prompt asks about an activity you do purely for pleasure, it helps if you can at least hint at how the experience of it also sparks your mind to think deeply in other ways—like how this student ties his cricket play to the benefit of not always being competitive and finding connection with others.

Here are two more great examples we encourage you to read for inspiration (though, again, the second one is a little over the current word count).

Examples:

I love collecting, whether it be playing cards or arrowheads, my most significant collection. I first started my arrowhead collection after a trip to an ancient adobe village in Sonoma, California. I was fascinated by the idea that ancient peoples had walked where I walked and had a life where I was standing. When I arrived, I realized how the stories behind the bricks of the buildings tell of the past and can predict the future, as trends repeat themselves.

This principle of trends repeating themselves is important to me, and I strive to apply it through volunteering with the Smithsonian, transcribing and editing historical documents to preserve them digitally for future generations. By securing a moment in time, I can help protect future communities from mistakes of the past.

Now I seek out other places and stories that document moments in time, like a Boomtown from the gold-rush era in Jamestown, California. Arrowheads are often difficult to source; my collection of 13 represent my strategy of remembrance and preservation. (170 words)

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Beyond my busy life at school, I compose and perform music as a way to channel my creativity to escape the rigidity of my course curriculum through improvisation.

When I was eight years old—after years of school-mandated recorder classes—I begged my mum to let me graduate to the clarinet. I spent hours each day practising scales and climbing the grade ladder in Classical music.

But I found myself gravitating towards the sounds of jazz—and the opportunities for improvisation that the genre provided. Through secondary school, I continued

practising my favourite jazz short pieces, eventually performing Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue which I played for my mother's birthday.

Entering GCSE Music, I found a perfect opportunity to combine my talents as a musician with my passion for creating new things as a programmer. Specifically, I spent two years developing a piano-clarinet jazz duo that I premiered for the class at the end of the course.

More recently, then, I have moved beyond the clarinet to begin composing music myself—not only jazz, but also electronic music that I can bring to life on my computer. Combining Icelandic vocals and California drum solos, I aim to create music that stretches across genre and geography.

Whether I actually release anything, of course, a different story. But as I prepare to ship off to college, I look forward to the chance to find new collaborators that can both teach me new skills as a composer and play alongside me in the ensemble.
(250 words)

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HOW TO WRITE MIT SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #11

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

This is your classic “community essay,” even if MIT is giving you less space this year. You can write about an extracurricular activity, a volunteer experience, your family—or something else entirely. The possibilities are pretty vast in terms of potential topics. That can feel empowering, or overwhelming. If you need help brainstorming a topic, check out our full [guide on how to write the community essay](#) for an in-depth explanation of how to approach this type of essay, and some quick tips you can follow after reading this great example essay.

Example:

My world is at once expansively big and recognisably small. Coming from a multiethnic European family, I've spent my childhood encountering an array of rich cultures across the continent and beyond. I learned about the Jewish holiday of love “Tu B'Av” to bring me closer to my extended family living in Tel Aviv. Further north, I joined my relatives in Ukraine to celebrate the Orthodox new year two weeks after all of my friends back home.

Even in London, my world feels stretched across neighbourhoods, zones, and ethnic traditions. Whether it is making sense of the Islamic conception of peace on a school trip to our local mosque or losing myself in Caribbean music at the Notting Hill Carnival, I have learned to see the world through my city and the 300 languages spoken in it.

Yet my world is also one of close-knit communities. As a volunteer, I have developed close relationships with a range of students who see me as a mentor in their ambitions to become a video game developer. Among my school friends, I have built a family of bandmates and co-conspirators that come together every week to make new music, work on joint programming projects, and train in Jiu-Jitsu. And in my actual family, I spend my nights playing geography games and attending cooking schools where we learn new cuisines that we can incorporate into our meals at home.

Together, the big and the small combine to make my world one of exploration and intimacy. (250 words)

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Tips + Analysis

Show what makes your place in this “world” unique. Many students may come from the same “world” as you. So your goal here is to show the reader how your place in it is different. Notice, for example, how this author weaves together multiple parts of her identity to show her unique perspective within her family, city, and the world at large.

Give examples of how you give and receive from your community. The community essay is important in helping admission officials see how you may fit in on their campus community. So think of this as an opportunity to show how you not only learn from your community but also contribute to it. In this example, we learn that the author is not only an active member of her communities through volunteer work and group activities, but she’s also curious about learning from the people whose identities are different from her own.

Don’t forget to show how the community “has shaped your dreams and aspirations.” That’s an important part of the prompt, so be intentional in not only showing what you’ve learned from your community and how it’s helped you grow as a person and leader, but also how it’s shaped your vision of your future. This student, for example, ends with that

insight—showing how the interactions and experiences she’s had “combine” to shape her world into one of “exploration and intimacy.”

Here are two more great examples of essays we encourage you to read for inspiration (though—this feels like a trend—they’re both slightly over word count).

As I have had a knack for fixing errors on computers for friends and family, building a computer was a valuable experience that has reaffirmed lessons and my values.

I started with the motherboard, following unvaried instructions, which compares to how I’ve bettered my understanding of the strictness of Hindi grammar. I have learned all the endless grammar rules in Hindi in a monotonous but necessary process, which has taught me patience.

Working on the heat sink has taught me to maintain calmness and patience during the mentally challenging troubleshooting phase of programming.

The graphics card reminds me of my clarity of my thought process in life—my long-standing ambition for a degree in computer science and clarity in my desire to contribute to non-profit organizations, such as Gurukul.

The Wi-Fi adapter, and network connectivity, connects to how I have built a strong connection to my Indian heritage through learning about festivals such as Diwali, experiencing the rich cultural diversity, and learning the history of India’s fight for independence.

RAM, the working memory of a computer, functions efficiently like how I process information and retain the most important, and overall have developed effective learning techniques—such as making sure to understand the derivation of an equation rather than mindlessly memorizing an equation.

I have an understanding of hardware—having built a computer—but have reaffirmed my zest for a future in software in computer science through my various experiences. (235 words)

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I come from a world of knowledge, expertise, and wonder. My dad is a software engineer who has spent his life building code. A devout mathematician, he has inspired my love of math and analytical thinking, helping me think beyond the material at hand to the underlying concepts. My mom, on the other hand, teaches me to follow my dreams. So when I took an enlightening summer course on engineering at Vanderbilt, she immediately began to support me in my aspirations

and helped me identify programs and resources in the engineering realm. In a world where new crises seem to arise without warning, I see engineering as a way to help protect society using intricate processes.

Of the many college-level courses I have taken, my favorite has been a course on Materials Engineering. I particularly appreciated the applications of math and the state-of-the-art lab tour. I got to observe some real-life research projects and equipment, which included touring a military helicopter. I also participated in a final lab project, which tasked me with discovering the reason behind the catastrophic failure of a bolt and determining how much stress or strain it would have taken for the failure to occur, helping me to apply my math knowledge in the real world.

Engineering has numerous possibilities. Driven by the values instilled by my parents, I hope to further the field and find innovative ways to help and protect people as a materials or nuclear engineer. (243 words)

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HOW TO WRITE MIT SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #12

MIT brings people with diverse backgrounds and experiences together to better the lives of others. Our students work to improve their communities in different ways, from tackling the world's biggest challenges to being a good friend. Describe one way you have collaborated with people who are different from you to contribute to your community. (225 words or fewer)

This is a great chance to talk about whichever community service project you've been most involved in, only this year, MIT added some wording that changed the context of the prompt in significant ways—specifying that you identify a time you contributed to your community by both “collaborating” and by doing so with “people who are different from you.”

To help you brainstorm ideas for this prompt, [here's a step-by-step guide](#) we put together for this one based on two strategies we recommend: the uncommon connections technique and the Elon Musk structure.

Give it a read and see if you can:

a) Come up with 1-2 ideas that may work (making sure to look for community contributions that involved **collaborating** with others **who are different from you**).

b) Pick which structure might work better.

Bonus points: Spend 10-15 minutes mapping out a basic outline based on either the uncommon connections technique or the Elon Musk structure.

Since this is a new version of this prompt, we don't have an example that hits all the elements above, but check out this example, and the tips and analyses below for how it could be tweaked to fit.

Example:

From a young age, teaching has been my way to give back to my community, whether it's my immediate family or neighbours on the opposite edge of London.

My first teaching experience took place when I was 10. My five-year-old sister took a principled moral stand against homework by getting under the table and refusing to do her maths additions tables. After almost an hour of negotiations, our mother admitted defeat, so I jumped in to assist her. My sister and I worked patiently through the tables, finding new tricks to help her master the relationship between the numbers. And I found myself genuinely thrilled to have helped her — and my mother — in that difficult moment.

I have been teaching regularly ever since. At Imperial College's programming club, I volunteered to help show young people the creative side of coding through graphical programming. At people's homes, I have adapted to people's needs, from teaching Computer GCSE to helping a group of four girls make a moving Raspberry Pi robot. And during lockdown, I offered free Python coding classes to kids of essential workers. In each, I not only provided support to students to complete their stated assignments. I also found myself learning from the students along the way, helping me to find novel solutions to my own challenges as a programmer. It is this two-way exchange between teacher and student that I find so rewarding in this contribution to my community. (241 words)

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Tips + Analysis

Demonstrate a different set of values. MIT is giving you lots of opportunities to show different sides of yourself. That also means multiple chances to show the diversity of your values. Since this prompt is narrowly asking for a specific way you've impacted your community, you may not have a ton of options for topics. But you can look for ways to expand on the

values you've already shared. How? Check out [this Values Exercise](#) and scan your essays for the values that are already coming through, making a list as you go. Are some missing, even important ones? If so, look for ways to demonstrate those here. For example, this student was able to inject some humor in their description of their little sister taking "a principled, moral stand against homework" by planting herself under the table and refusing to come out—maybe they weren't able to smuggle that value in elsewhere?

Explain how your collaboration partner(s) was(were) different from you. Were you working with peers of the same age but vastly different backgrounds? Did you find opportunities to collaborate with unusual partners, like special-needs students or adults in a different country? Make sure the reader will understand the differences involved, and if they're not obvious, make the space to explain what made your partners different, and what you gained from working with them. For example, if this student were writing to this prompt, they may have expounded on the "two-way exchange between teacher and student," using that as the basis of their collaboration and showing how these students' input and involvement led to "novel solutions to [the student's] own challenges as a programmer.]"

Show the opportunities and obstacles of the collaboration. MIT admission officials want to see your collaboration skills in action. And when you're collaborating with someone with a different point of view or background, things don't always go smoothly. But it's the friction that can create new solutions while also leading to personal growth. Your goal in this essay is to show both sides—so make sure to note your contributions to the collaboration, but also ways you grew from learning from others. If this student were to tweak this essay to fit the prompt, they may have, say, shared details on a challenging yet beneficial collaboration with a fellow programming tutor or an improvisation that arose from ongoing conversations with an argumentative student.

HOW TO WRITE MIT SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #13

Tell us about a significant challenge you've faced (that you feel comfortable sharing) or something that didn't go according to plan. How did you manage the situation? (225 words or fewer)

PICKING A TOPIC

Essentially, MIT wants to see how you solve problems. Brainstorm a list of challenges you've overcome and times things didn't go according to plan.

Consider the following:

The “**Elon Musk structure**” can work really well for this essay, since you don’t have to have solved the problem in order to write about it.

This is a chance to show a side of yourself the admissions counselors haven’t seen yet. Read through the rest of your application and see if any activity or experience is missing. In most cases, *something* went wrong at *some* point, and that can be your topic.

Finally: Most students write about something going wrong in a robotics competition (“Our robot broke!”), so we recommend thinking of other options.

Now, create a basic outline that answers:

What was the problem?

Why was it a big deal?

What did you do about it?

How were you crucial to helping solve it or what gifts or talents were you able to bring to the situation?

How did it turn out? Were there any larger impacts or lessons learned?

Let’s check out an example of this structure coming to life (though, since MIT dropped its word count slightly this year from 250 to 225 words, you’d have a bit less room to work with).

Example:

Off the crack of the bat I tracked the first two hops, but when I looked down, all I saw was a crooked finger.

It was the game before CIF, our year to take the championship that had eluded us the year prior. I had received Honorable Mention All-League and Rookie of the Year awards my sophomore year, and this year was my time to help break school history.

But a misplaced pebble guaranteed I wouldn’t have the opportunity to live my decade long goal of winning CIF. During the first playoff game, I simply watched from the dugout, restricted by my cast. I felt useless.

In the next game, I completely altered my gameplan; I talked to our coach about my helping to manage the team. I traded my glove and bat for a clipboard and pencil, keeping score and tracking pitch counts; I used the data to alter defensive formations based on opponents’ batting tendencies and advise on pitching

strategy, allowing us to conserve our ace for the championship. I applied my problem solving skills and led my team from the dugout.

Our team broke school history for the second year in a row, making it to the CIF championship, but fell two runs short of victory. While I could think “What if I had been playing?” I don’t have to, because I know I played a valuable role and was just as much of a threat at left bench as I was making diving stops at second.

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Tips + Analysis

Let’s take a look at how this student used the structure outlined above.

What was the problem? Although the crooked- finger image is a bit graphic, it makes it easy to see this student’s problem. Using a quick descriptive anecdote like this student did can be an effective way to set the scene and get to the juicier parts of this prompt: your actions. Right before you get there, though, let us know:

Why was it a big deal? Raise the stakes. In the example above, the author mentioned a championship and school history. Providing context for your challenge (what you had done to build up to this moment, the investments other people made in getting to this moment, etc.) will help the reader care.

What did you do about it? Specifics, specifics, specifics. This student shares high-impact actions (tracking pitch counts, using data to alter defensive formations) and does the work for the reader, naming the higher-level skills required (problem solving and leadership).

How were you crucial to helping solve it? This student doesn’t answer the question directly, but it’s clear that his unique circumstance—a player thrust into a different role—gave him the opportunity to leverage his skills (analyzing data on baseball strategy). If your prior experience (maybe taking a summer course on using Excel) helped you adapt on the fly or overcome a challenge (maybe by creating a spreadsheet to analyze how time of day impacted student conflict during class change time), share it!

How did it turn out? Were there any larger impacts or lessons learned? Leave the reader with a satisfying conclusion, even if you haven’t fully resolved the challenge. If you’re still working to overcome that challenge, tell us how. And if you learned something valuable along the way, like this student’s new comfort with having a positive impact regardless of his role, don’t hesitate to share it explicitly.

HOW TO WRITE MIT SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #14

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

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

This is basically the Additional Info section of your Common App. You can find a complete guide for that section [here](#).