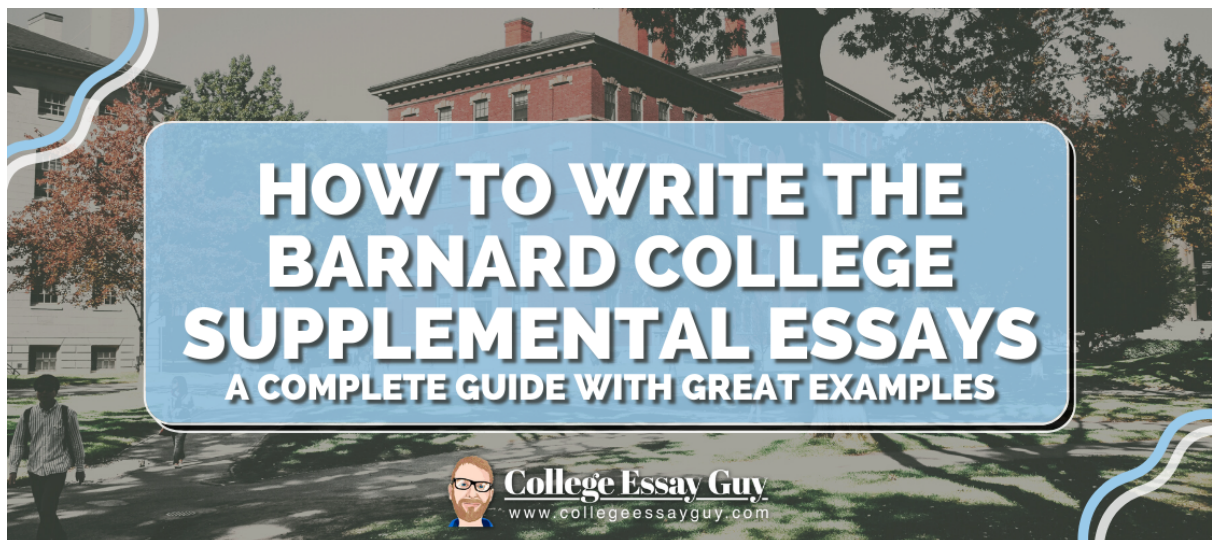


How to Write the Barnard College Supplemental Essays: Guide + Examples 2022/2023



Founded in 1889 when nearby Columbia University refused to admit women, this small liberal arts women's college is deeply rooted in the principles of equality, advocacy, and intellectual curiosity. They are principles that appealed to alums like Zora Neale Hurston, Erica Jong, and pioneering New York State Chief Judge Judith Kaye. As an aspiring Barnard student, you'll likely connect with these values as well.

You'll get a deeper understanding of how Barnard envisions its role and how it wants to grow and evolve by reading its [strategic plan](#). You'll also find an extensive, by-the-numbers look at its offerings, from enrollment and tuition statistics to student life and financial aid information, on its [Common Data Set](#).

WHAT ARE THE BARNARD SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPTS?

BARNARD SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #1

What factors encouraged your decision to apply to Barnard College and why do you think the College would be a good match for you? (300 words)

BARNARD SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #2

At Barnard, academic inquiry starts with bold questions. What are some of the bold questions you have pondered that get you excited, and why do they interest you? Tell us how you would explore these questions at Barnard. (300 words)

BARNARD SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #3

(Optional) Pick one woman — a historical figure, fictitious character, or modern individual — to converse with for an hour and explain your choice. Why does this person intrigue you? What would you talk about? What questions would you ask them? (300 words)

HOW TO WRITE EACH SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT FOR BARNARD

HOW TO WRITE BARNARD SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #1

What factors encouraged your decision to apply to Barnard College and why do you think the College would be a good match for you? (300 words)

This is your classic “Why us?” essay. We recommend checking out this [complete guide on how to write the “Why us?” essay](#) and paying close attention to the “Why Cornell” and “Why Penn” examples, which are our favorites.

Here’s the short version of how to write the “Why us?” essay:

Spend 1 hr+ researching 7+ reasons why Barnard might be a great fit for you (ideally 2-3 of the reasons will be unique to Barnard *and* connect back to you).

Make a copy of [this chart](#) to map out your college research.

Create an outline for your essays based on either Approach 1, 2 (recommended), or 3 in the full guide above.
Write a first draft!

As you write, try to avoid these common mistakes:

Seven Common Mistakes Students Make on “Why Us?” Essays

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

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

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

Mistake #4: Parroting the brochures or website language.

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

Mistake #6: Thinking of this as only a “Why them” essay.

Mistake #7: Writing a “Why Columbia?” essay instead of a “Why Barnard?” essay, because of the two schools’ close connection.

Here’s a great sample essay for this prompt (note that since Barnard updated its limit to 300 words, you now have an extra 50 to play with):

Example:

I grew up near the birthplace of the riotgrrrl movement, inspired by zines and women who refuse to minimize themselves. When I read about Barnard’s zine library, I was ecstatic. Barnard’s pedagogy embodies zines’ same spirit of fighting injustice, giving women the skills and close-knit community to fulfill their potential.

With Barnard’s flexible curriculum and dedicated professors, I can pursue all my interests without sacrificing in-depth analysis for interdisciplinary freedom. I’d explore mathematical cognition during early development with Koleen McCrink while discussing circular economy models with Sandra Goldmark. Within the sociology department, I’d examine my family’s roots by taking Politics and Society in Central Eastern Europe and investigate the theories fueling activism in Social Movements. With opportunities like externships and BCRW’s Interrupting Criminalization initiative, I’d navigate the world holistically.

Barnard empowers women to learn boundlessly. In the collaborative spaces of the Milstein Center, I'd develop my screen-print projects and my fluency in web development. Upholding Barnard's commitment to environmentalism, I'd love to join the SGA Sustainable Initiatives Consulting Board. From workshops on salary negotiation to seminars on women in leadership, Barnard offers me the necessary tools to thrive in my multidimensional life.

In the middle of explaining first-year curriculum, my Barnard tour guide stopped to point out the newly installed "I Am Queen Mary," going off-script to highlight how crucial continued decolonization is. In that vignette, I found the riotgrrrl attitude alive at Barnard--a community of unafraid women, passionately speaking their minds and eager to change the world.

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Tips + Analysis

Show how you and Barnard share key values. Keep this [Values Exercise](#) handy as you write, and identify a few you believe Barnard shares. The essay above is packed with shared connections: In her excitement over Barnard's zine library, for example, the writer shows creativity, self-expression, community pride, and a thirst for knowledge. Likewise, in defining her own understanding of Barnard's pedagogy, she reflects key values—meaningful work, justice, community, helping others—while her description of Barnard's flexible curriculum shows her appreciation for freedom, personal growth, and self-expression. This passage is particularly effective in helping the reader visualize how those shared values would benefit this student's experiences on campus: "Barnard empowers women to learn boundlessly. In the collaborative spaces of the Milstein Center, I'd develop my screen-print projects and my fluency in web development. Upholding Barnard's commitment to environmentalism, I'd love to join the SGA Sustainable Initiatives Consulting Board."

Show a range of interests. The broad scope of this prompt ("why do you think the College would be a good match for you") is intentional. It's not just asking about your chosen major or your academic interests; it's probing for details about the breadth of your interests. So after talking about, say, courses and professors and programs that interest you, talk about campus life—clubs, activities, sports, and other extracurriculars. This is a great way to show you're more than just a serious student (although, hey, that's important too), that you're interested in other things too. For this student, it wasn't just the curriculum that drew her to Barnard; it was also the school's

“commitment to environmentalism,” its workshops, seminars, and externships, and especially its “community of unafraid women, passionately speaking their minds and eager to change the world.”

Be specific. Notice too how this student doesn’t stop at generalities like “flexible curriculum and dedicated professors” or how “Barnard empowers women to learn boundlessly.” She backs them up with specifics unique to Barnard—from professors (Koleen McCrink and Sandra Goldmark) to courses (Politics and Society in Central Eastern Europe) and other academic opportunities (BCRW’s Interrupting Criminalization initiative) to avenues for personal growth (“collaborative spaces of the Milstein Center”) and community involvement (SGA Sustainable Initiatives Consulting Board). These details are critical to showing Barnard not only that you’ve done your homework in researching what the school is all about, but that you’ve given serious thought to *why* it’s a good fit for you—and you for it.

Imagine yourself on campus. By describing the aspects of Barnard that appeal to her *and* how she’d use the opportunities to learn, grow and contribute, this student helps the admission team envision her on its leafy campus in a dynamic way. Like this: “I’d explore mathematical cognition during early development with Koleen McCrink while discussing circular economy models with Sandra Goldmark. Within the sociology department, I’d examine my family’s roots by taking Politics and Society in Central Eastern Europe and investigate the theories fueling activism in Social Movements. With opportunities like externships and BCRW’s Interrupting Criminalization initiative, I’d navigate the world holistically.” And this: “In the collaborative spaces of the Milstein Center, I’d develop my screen-print projects and my fluency in web development.” Do that, as much as you can.

And because we’re feeling generous, here’s a bonus example, teeming with color and pizzazz.

Bonus example:

In the words of my campus tour guide:

“You know whether a student is from Barnard just by the air of confidence she has around her.”

I could see it in her . . . and blossoming in me—a Barnard woman.

Barnard is that tightly-knit family within the larger Columbia community. They live symbiotically as independent institutions with unique perspectives. I too was brought up in a large family, each of us joined by our collective history, but

independent in our ideologies. Barnard holds strong to its ideology of enabling women to pursue their passions. Barnard would shape me, not to become a great woman neuroscientist, but a great neuroscientist. In a field heavily dominated by men, Barnard provides the blank page for a STEMInist like me to write her own stories in the company of bright female students and faculty working together to uplift one another.

Under the tutelage of professors such as Kara Pham and Elizabeth Baur, whose papers on fear conditioning I analyzed while writing my own investigative reports, I'll be able to experience the thrill of intensive research, such as exploring the cellular makeup of the brain at SRI. With my experience in publishing a student-led psychology and neuroscience magazine and researching divergent behavioral traits, I look forward to contributing to the Barnard Psychology Journal and participating in discussions in the Barnard Psychology Society.

Barnard is my qualia.

I aspire to live the lives of my YouTube idols(Izzy Snapshots and Isa Farfun) one day taking part in Barnard's quirky traditions in the heart of New York. From Midnight Breakfast to Big Sub, Barnard embraces the weird and emphasizes the spirit of community.

Barnard is more than a school. It's a sisterhood, a sisterhood of boldly independent women—Barnard women. (290 words)

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HOW TO WRITE BARNARD SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #2

At Barnard, academic inquiry starts with bold questions. What are some of the bold questions you have pondered that get you excited, and why do they interest you? Tell us how you would explore these questions at Barnard.

(300 words)

The word “bold” may seem intimidating. You may be asking, *What if I don't have any bold questions?* Sure you do. Bold questions are merely those that stimulate your intellectual curiosity, that go deeper than the surface and seek to get at the heart of important issues—issues and concerns that interest you. Here are some ideas on how you can brainstorm for this prompt:

Step 1: Start by asking: What do I want Barnard to know about me that isn't coming through enough in the rest of my application? And more specifically: What

did I touch on only briefly (or not at all) in the Why Barnard essay for Prompt 1? Write down some ideas.

Step 2: Still stuck? The prompt centers on “academic inquiry,” so one simple way to approach the prompt would be to think back to your academic interests, something you could explore on a deeper level. It could be something in your major—but it doesn’t have to be. It could also be an area of interest you’ve explored outside of school—like getting out the vote in your precinct, or starting a recycling program in your high school cafeteria. You have a couple options here:

Option 1: Go wide: Pick 2-3 issues that you can discuss more broadly. Or ...

Option 2: Go deep: Pick one issue and delve deeply into how you’d answer thoughtful questions around it.

Step 3: What deeper questions come to mind around these topics? In the get-out-the-vote example above, maybe you have questions around voting rights laws or gerrymandering. If you started that recycling program, you may be interested in sustainable building practices or environmental activism.

Step 4: Connect those questions back to Barnard resources. Since the prompt asks you how you’d explore your questions at Barnard, it’s looking for some specific opportunities—courses, programs, professors, clubs/activities—that you think will help you answer your probing questions. Even if you did cover an area of academic interest, say your love of computer science, you can find a more narrow topic that allows you to dig more deeply, say in the area of AI.

Step 5: Showcase your values. That Values Exercise linked above will help you identify the ones that matter most to you. (Hint: Curiosity is a good one for this prompt.)

Here’s a great example.

Example:

I am interested in questions surrounding gender justice and sexual violence, specifically their intersection with economics and politics.

At Barnard, I hope to ask difficult questions surrounding women, labor, and safety. Specifically, I hope to research sexual violence, enrolling in Professor Tolonen’s class ECON 3063, “Women in Development Economics.” By joining this class, I will ask: In what ways are the impacts of sexual violence gender-specific? Do such experiences have an impact on the way women’s economic roles are viewed in

society? I would also like to lean into the legal implications of sexual violence cases. By taking the colloquium on “Law and Violence,” I could learn about instances where the law warrants different forms of violence. What makes violence permissible in these cases? What are the methods that inform these legal determinations? I believe I can start to answer these important questions as a student at Barnard College.

At Barnard, I also hope to learn about poverty and labor. In high school I started “BISC Comes Forward,” a social media campaign that revealed inequalities faced by janitorial staff. This campaign underlined the poverty experienced by working women. I questioned why the government fails to intervene in helping widowers with children who are living under the poverty line. As I major in Economics and Politics at Barnard, I will explore these intersections between class and gender. Through BC3019: “Labor Economics,” I hope to study various labor theories to understand the government's lack of intervention in cases of earnings gaps.

From a young age, my mother taught me to be an independent thinker. When I was young my questions were small. As I grew up my questions only got bigger. At Barnard, I can ask these big questions, hopefully finding significant answers along the way.

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Tips + Analysis

Do your homework. This applicant clearly demonstrates that she understands the values and primary goals of Barnard. Go back to the **Values Exercise** so you too can show that your values align with Barnard's. The mission statement on any college website offers a gold mine to help you pick out the key values and then highlight how they line up with yours. For example, one of Barnard's primary goals is to create “female leaders of tomorrow who will develop their voice so that they can inform, inspire, and persuade.” This student shows how she's done this in her own community with her work aiding the janitorial staff in her school.

Ask probing questions. In this essay, the writer includes four questions she wants to answer at Barnard. She may not have the answers for them yet (and that's ok—expected even!), but she includes a blueprint on how she envisions exploring them. She mentions specific classes she wants to take and then explains how they'll help her answer her questions. This allows us to envision her on Barnard's campus, already aligning her course schedule with her goals.

Answer the “why.” Remember, the prompt asks why these questions interest you, so save some room in your word budget for that critical piece. This student doesn’t really answer the “why” behind her interest in sexual violence, though she digs deep into those questions and how she’d answer them at Barnard. But she was able to answer that “why” in the second paragraph by connecting her questions around poverty and labor back to experiences and learnings that sparked her curiosity. Then, at the end of her essay, she shares how her mom encouraged her from a young age to ask both big and small questions. . It’s a nice tie-in, especially given Barnard’s emphasis on empowering women leaders and role models.

HOW TO WRITE BARNARD SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #3

(Optional) Pick one woman — a historical figure, fictitious character, or modern individual — to converse with for an hour and explain your choice. Why does this person intrigue you? What would you talk about? What questions would you ask them? (300 words)

As a proud women’s college, Barnard naturally appeals to young women who are inspired and motivated by the female role models who came before them. That’s why they put their own gender-specific spin on the popular get-to-know-you question: If you could have dinner with anyone, dead or alive, who would it be?

Like that old conversation starter, this prompt is digging for insights into who you are and what makes you tick: Who do you look up to and why? What would you do with a short window of opportunity to learn directly from one of your heroines? And to make sure you respond with as much depth and clarity as possible, the prompt probes for three specifics: 1) *why* this person, 2) *which* topic you’d discuss, and 3) *what* questions you’d ask. Make sure to cover those essential elements in your essay.

Notice how admission officials are not restricting your answer to real life. Fictional heroines are also possible here. So are the heroines from the history of your own life (your mom, your grandmother, your soccer coach, your AP Calculus teacher). The intent is to allow you the creative freedom to express yourself. So *whom* you choose isn’t as important as *why* you chose her and what you decide to talk to her about.

A couple points worth noting:

Avoid the obvious. Are Joan of Arc, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Hermione Granger, and Michelle Obama admirable women worth writing about? Sure. But they’re women other applicants are likely to use too, making it more

difficult for your essay to stand out. Using a more uncommon choice has a number of added benefits. It may show you are widely read (if you choose a more obscure literary figure than Harry Potter's bestie, for example) or demonstrate a deep appreciation you have for a specific area of history (like the lengths former slave Cathay Williams had to go to serve in the U.S. Army after the Civil War). This prompt also gives you a chance to show your strong command of women's contributions to a particular field you're interested in or to show how you recognize and respect the contributions a special woman in your own life has made.

Remember, this essay is about you—not your heroine. It may be tempting to write an essay about why your heroine is worth looking up to. And you may have to do a tiny bit of that to address the prompt. But reserve the vast majority of your word budget (at least 175 of your 250-word limit, say) on *you*—e.g., how she inspires and motivates you, what you would gain from an hour in her company, how you would follow her example. Have fun with it. Or use it to show your serious side. Whatever feels like *you*.

Write about someone you genuinely admire. Don't choose someone just because you think Barnard officials will be impressed. If she doesn't resonate with you in an important way, that may come out in your essay and you risk coming off as disingenuous. Choosing someone you truly find admirable and interesting will also make it easier to write an essay explaining why you find her admirable and interesting.

Let's take a look at a great essay for this prompt.

Example:

As a closeted ninth grader, I remember fighting tears while watching Amandla Stenberg's coming out video. Her words—"It's deeply bruising to fight against your identity"—resonated in my bones. In the Romanian Orthodox community, adults proclaimed they'd kick their kids out for making the "disgusting choice" of homosexuality. I grew up hypervigilant of outing myself and overwhelmed with shame. But here was Amandla, brave enough to come out to the entire world.

As a black queer woman, Amandla also struggles with reconciling the facets of her identity that dominant narratives try to partition. I want to ask her about the bittersweet feeling of loving the groups you belong to, but having your coexistence muted. We'd brainstorm strategies for combating erasure, especially through our activist weapon of choice: art. From film to music to a graphic novel about a black girl warrior saving the world, Amandla uses intimate accounts to share powerful messages about lived experiences, in the same way that I aspire to. Last year, she

reignited a national conversation about police brutality and BLM when she starred in The Hate U Give. I want to talk to Amandla about reforming our juvenile justice system, the elements of an effective protest today, and what good representation, that dismantles harmful stereotypes rather than perpetuating them, looks like. Most of all, I want to talk to Amandla Stenberg about how to generate change from the inside out; progress led by disenfranchised communities, and supported by the institutions and groups that have marginalized them.

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Tips + Analysis

Show how you and your heroine share common values or qualities.

Remember: Part of the purpose of this prompt is to flex the values you want to show Barnard. Typically, as in this student's essay, some of the reasons you look up to your heroine is because she displays traits and qualities you see in yourself, or that you at least value and aspire to. For this student, Amandla Stenberg embodies fighting against injustice, embracing her authentic self, using her voice to effect change and drive progress, and having the courage to "come out to the entire world"—all things this student wants to do, and sees herself doing, even if she hasn't taken those first steps yet. This shows aspiration and inspiration, and it makes us feel like we're getting a peek into how this student will grow and the contributions she'll make at Barnard.

Tell us how you'd use that golden hour effectively. This student doesn't just list some broad topics she'll discuss with Amandla. She gets specific, painting a picture of a productive, even life-changing collaboration, as in this last snippet: "I want to talk to Amandla about reforming our juvenile justice system, the elements of an effective protest today, and what good representation, that dismantles harmful stereotypes rather than perpetuating them, looks like. Most of all, I want to talk to Amandla Stenberg about how to generate change from the inside out; progress led by disenfranchised communities, and supported by the institutions and groups that have marginalized them." You may not envision actually collaborating or brainstorming with your heroine, and that's ok. But do show how you'd take the time to learn and grow from the moment in her company.

Get personal. Remember, Barnard wants to know *you*. So don't be afraid to show vulnerability, to let your guard down a bit and show emotion. Here's how this student got vulnerable: "Her words—'It's deeply bruising to fight against your identity'—resonated in my bones. In the Romanian Orthodox community, adults proclaimed they'd kick their kids out for making the

‘disgusting choice’ of homosexuality. I grew up hypervigilant of outing myself and overwhelmed with shame. But here was Amandla, brave enough to come out to the entire world.” This is vulnerable because you get the sense that this student, having not yet come out, has not shared these thoughts and feelings widely. It’s also vulnerable to give voice to feelings of shame—and by doing so, she shows her own courage. By being vulnerable with us, the student helps us connect with her, making the essay more personal—and, by extension, more memorable.

Cover the new *why*, *which*, and *what* elements of the updated prompt.

This year’s prompt added three last questions to the mix: *Why does this person intrigue you? What (which topic) would you talk about? What questions would you ask them?* This student does a beautiful job of covering all three questions, even without the extra prompting: Why? She identifies with her struggles as a black queer woman, and admires her ability to use “intimate accounts to share powerful messages about lived experiences.” What topic? She wants to discuss strategies for “combating erasure” and for reforming the juvenile justice system, among other topics. What questions? Though she could have posed specific queries (and given the updated specifics of the prompt, we’d encourage you to do so too), she was clear in what she’d ask about: “bittersweet feeling of loving the groups you belong to, but having your coexistence muted,” and “how to generate change from the inside out; progress led by disenfranchised communities, and supported by the institutions and groups that have marginalized them.”

In keeping with our generosity streak, here’s a bonus example for this one.

Bonus example:

Jeopardy night.

My first introduction to Nellie Bly . . . a fierce figure who paved the way for generations of women following her.

But who was Nellie Bly?

Other than a “meddlesome” woman who broke the bounds of journalism through her ten-day exposé on the inadequacy of mental asylums in the US, Nellie Bly was just a woman trying to forge her own identity. She simply wanted to be her own person.

For four years now, I have worked with the incarcerated women of Tumkur Jail. I have navigated prejudice and often well-meaning concerns that female prisoners

can't be helped or that they might exert a detrimental influence on me. Though I haven't let such questions derail me from my path, the journey itself has been difficult. If Nellie Bly were here today, I would ask her why?

Why did she choose to investigate mental asylums, which remain shrouded in social stigma to this day? More significantly, I long to know how she was so unconstrained, despite the societal expectation to be demure and docile. Perhaps, speaking with Bly would provide context to my own experiences—to help me understand what it means to make tough choices and tap into my own repository of courage and grit for a cause greater than myself.

Bly championed the cause of women at a time when it was atypical to do so. I want to absorb her strength, independence and unquenchable fire. She worked only for herself, hardly unnerved by the societal burden of 'sacrifice' prescribed to all women. Throughout her journey of exposing the inadequacy of mental asylums, she stood by her own ethical core and explored where no man dared to go, literally. (279 words)