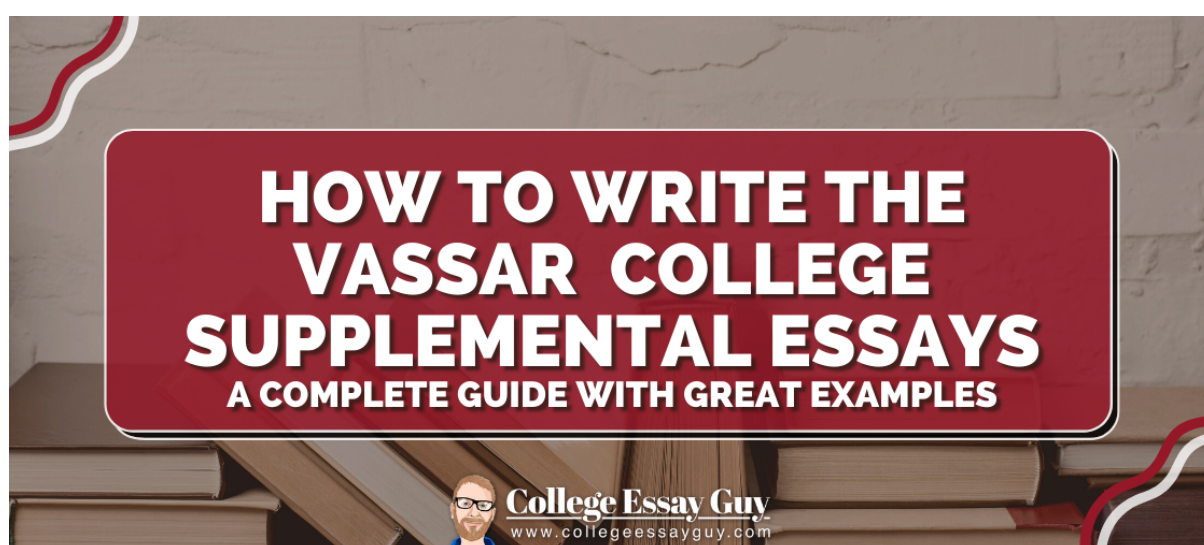


# How to Write the Vassar College Supplemental Essay: Examples + Guide 2022/2023



Vassar College is a coeducational liberal arts college located two hours north of NYC. Founded as a progressive women's college in 1861, Vassar turned down an invitation to merge with Yale in the 1960s, keeping its autonomy as it began admitting its first male students. Known for taking a bold approach to academic inquiry, Vassar offered hands-on courses and interdisciplinary majors way before all the cool schools were doing it. Independent thought is one of Vassar's core values, so be sure to keep this in mind as you approach the prompt.

You'll gain a deeper understanding of Vassar's values and priorities by reading its [mission statement](#). 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 VASSAR COLLEGE SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPTS?

## VASSAR COLLEGE SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #1

***Please select and respond to one of the following prompts in 300 words or less.***

- 1. At Vassar, we aim to foster an inclusive community through our philosophy of engaged pluralism. Engaged pluralism is rooted in “the conviction that collaborating across differences is necessary for social transformation and critical for the well-being of any community and its members.” In short, we believe it's our differences that make us stronger. Tell us a little bit about what makes you unique and what you hope to add to our community.*
- 2. Vassar is a diverse community that inspires positive change through open inquiry, deep dives into society's most difficult challenges, and collaborative problem solving. We care deeply about one another, the communities that have forged us, and the community we build together on campus. Tell us more about the community (or communities) you come from and how it has shaped who you are.*

### **AND VASSAR OFFERS TWO OPTIONAL UPLOADS:**

- 1. If you wish to provide details of circumstances not reflected in the application, please upload a file here. Similarly, if you wish to upload your resume, include it here.*
- 2. Your Space is your opportunity to allow the Committee on Admission to learn something about you that you have not addressed in another section of the application. For example, in the past, applicants have shared poetry, short stories, cartoons, digital images of art projects, photography, and collages, and/or links to videos, and short films. It is your space, so if you choose to complete it, send something that is a reflection of you! Your Space is entirely optional.*

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

By offering these two similar prompts for you to choose from, Vassar is highlighting that community is a significant value of the institution. In either case, you have the opportunity to reflect on what you as a unique individual bring to the Vassar community and how you would impact it in a positive way.

What's the difference between the two prompts? Hone in on the key words to get an idea: In the first, you find inclusivity, collaboration, social transformation,

well-being and strength in difference. In other words, Vassar believes that a healthy and productive learning environment depends on a diverse assemblage of participants. Thus, it's largely a **diversity essay**, in which you get to describe how your singular self will bring a special sparkle to the Vassar constellation. The second prompt names diverse community as enabling positive change, addressing society's challenges, problem solving and caring for one another. Thus, it's more of a **community essay**, in which you share how the community(ies) you come from have shaped you and how you will engage at Vassar to affect for the better the community there and beyond. You'll find more detail about how to approach either prompt in the links above, but here's the quick version:

### **HOW TO WRITE VASSAR SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT OPTION #1**

At Vassar, we aim to foster an inclusive community through our philosophy of engaged pluralism. Engaged pluralism is rooted in "the conviction that collaborating across differences is necessary for social transformation and critical for the well-being of any community and its members." In short, we believe it's our differences that make us stronger. Tell us a little bit about what makes you unique and what you hope to add to our community.

(Limit 300 words)

For this diversity essay, take some time to list out several different ways in which you identify. For example, "I'm a ... reader, jazz lover, queer, Colombian, singer, feminist, etc." Name as many identities you claim as you can. While diversity can refer to ethnicity, class, religion or sexuality, think broadly about the elements of your unique context that have influenced your character, which may also include geography, perspectives, ways of living and more. Consider unusual experiences that have shaped you. For example, have your values conflicted with your family's in complex ways? Have you been raised in a way that's atypical? Demonstrate how these "differences" will contribute to the Vassar community. [Here's a guide](#) that may help you tease out content and ideas.

Because this is a new prompt, we don't have an example written specifically for it yet, but here's a sample essay written for a different school that would work nicely with a few tweaks/additions.

#### **Example:**

*As a light-skinned, soft-spoken, empathetic, and analytical Black woman, a lot of times I have felt that I am not a part of my own community. Many of my family members ask me why I relate so much to the East Asian community and culture.*

*This, of course, has led me to question whether or not community is only skin-deep.*

*I became engrossed in the East Asian community at a young age. My dad, an international pilot, often brought movies home from China. One day he brought home *Spirited Away* by Hayao Miyazaki. He described it as something similar to *Alice in Wonderland*. I could truly see myself in the Miyazaki's heroines: from how they transcended their roles in life to how they met obstacles with resilience and bravery, these heroines helped me feel less alone.*

*I evolved from watching Miyazaki movies to joining anime clubs, to reading East Asian philosophy, and eventually studying the works of Japanese author Haruki Murakami. This culminated in a trip to Japan last summer as a People to People: Student Ambassador. Immersed in the culture, I visited a Japanese high school, hiked Mt. Fuji, soaked in an onsen, and experienced a deep connection with my homestay family, the Mishimas.*

*Through being a part of the East Asian community, I have explored answers to metaphysical questions, prayed at a Shinto shrine, and realized that community is a state of mind, much more than skin deep.*

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## **Tips + Analysis**

**Find your facets.** What are the different sides of you that make you ... you? This student starts with adjectives that define her ethnicity, temperament, and personal qualities, then moves into a deeper reflection about her unexpected connection with East Asian culture and community. In this way, she shows her understanding of herself as someone who walks in a world other than the one she was born into, a unique and compelling aspect of herself. In describing her experiences, she also reveals some of the values that are important to her, such as curiosity, bravery, resilience, overcoming obstacles, and transcending one's role in life.

**Use rich detail.** Here, we get a sense of how the student engaged with East Asian culture through the film *Spirited Away* and the works of author Haruki Murakami. She went to Japan, hiked Mt. Fuji, soaked in a natural hot spring, and stayed with a family whom she calls by name. Brainstorm a detail or example for each aspect of your identity using one of your five senses. What does each one look/smell/taste/sound/feel like? Bring the reader into your world—the more specific the better.

**Say how you'll contribute.** The prompt specifically asks what you hope to add to Vassar's community. In what ways will you contribute to the diversity on campus? Do you have a particular viewpoint or approach to life based on your combined experiences? Are there groups or organizations you'll join? Is there an org you'd want to start? Show your reader that you've thought about how you want to engage with the school community. This student was answering a different prompt, so she didn't specify how she'd use her unique qualities to make an impact on her college campus, but we can easily see her naming some East Asian clubs and activities at Vassar that she'd want to join—or better yet, finding other clubs and resources she'd enrich with her East Asian-influenced contributions.

Here's another example we love, offered as a bonus.

### **Example 2:**

*The process of transitioning from male to female challenged me unlike any other obstacle. Tested on both a mental and a physical basis, I learned the importance of recognizing and understanding my hidden emotions. For many years, I tried to shut out the feeling that my assigned gender did not align with my emotional self. I would often feel uncomfortable looking in a mirror and would regularly daydream about living as a woman. Rather than attempting to understand this incongruence, I ignored my emotions on the basis that they were "irrational." I believed it impossible that these emotions could indicate anything about me that I didn't already know, so I rejected them.*

*During this past year, I recognized that the only way I could resolve this struggle was to start accepting my emotions and experience them entirely. By recognizing and analyzing my emotions, I finally realized that I was a transgender woman. I could no longer deny that fact or allow anyone else to tell me otherwise. Since that realization, I have grown emotionally and taken control of my life. I have started taking feminizing hormones for my physical transition, and have begun my social transition through name and pronoun changes. Had I not challenged myself to address my gender dysphoria, I would not be the emotionally whole and confident transgender woman I am today.*

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## **HOW TO WRITE VASSAR SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT OPTION #2**

Vassar is a diverse community that inspires positive change through open inquiry, deep dives into society's most difficult challenges, and collaborative problem solving. We care

deeply about one another, the communities that have forged us, and the community we build together on campus. Tell us more about the community (or communities) you come from and how it has shaped who you are. (Limit 300 words)

For this community prompt, first identify the communities you're a part of, which can be defined by place, identities, interests, circumstances and more. Where do you come from, where have you participated, and how have those experiences shaped who you are? Then notice that the prompt implicitly asks about your readiness to make positive change, collaborate to solve society's problems and care for the community. Reflect on how you have already done that in one or more of your communities, and envision how you'll apply the skills and lessons you learned at Vassar or beyond. Use [this guide](#), with exercises and examples, to help you brainstorm some topics.

Here's a sample essay written for a different school that would fit the focus of option 2, and could be tweaked to do so even further.

### **Example:**

*Every season, my high school volleyball coaches pick an inspiring quote to label on the back of our practice shirts. My favorite? "Be a voice, not an echo."*

*After wearing braces for several years to correct a persistent jaw pain, I was elated when they were removed. However, after just a few months, my orthodontist noticed my teeth shifting to their previous position and recommended tongue therapy.*

*Though reluctant at first, I gained a newfound confidence through tongue therapy. In the classroom, no longer the last to speak. On the volleyball court, effectively communicating plays and rotations. Tongue therapy allowed me to freely speak my mind.*

*As my confidence soared, so did my desire to help others. Through Lion's Heart, I once provided baby supplies to needy families in Santa Ana and noticed a long line forming for the provisions. Realizing many immigrant families were struggling with filling out the forms, I offered to translate for them. Through Chinese and Spanish translation, I not only reduced wait times, but became the voice for those who could not speak, literally.*

*As a selected participant for Girls Who Code, I found even more voices. Introduced to coding for the first time, I now know more languages, including HTML and JavaScript. I now plan to help others discover their voice. Using technology-based*

*solutions, I will develop innovations for society's problems. Perhaps, a device that can both translate multiple languages and teach correct pronunciations.*

*After all, I am a voice, not an echo.*

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## Tips + Analysis

**Describe your communities and how they've shaped you.** This author walks in the worlds of volleyball, classrooms, tongue therapy, community service, Chinese and Spanish speakers, and Girls Who Code. Through her interactions in each of these communities, she gained confidence, developed leadership, and learned to speak her mind. What worlds do you inhabit? Who are the people and places with whom you connect and relate? How and with whom have you spent your time? Use the exercise in the guide linked above to brainstorm a list of the communities you're a part of. Then consider how each of these has influenced you, your daily life, your perspective, your plans and dreams. What values and qualities have you developed as a result of these interactions?

**Map out your participation.** What role do you play in the communities you're involved in? Whose lives do you touch and with what result? This student enhanced communication among her teammates and used her translation skills so people could access needed food. Describe the specific actions you've taken and the impact you've had. Consider the positive change you've made and the problems you've solved (personal, local, or global) by your contributions to your community(ies).

**Share your vision.** This student's growth led her to use her newfound skills to serve the community and find within herself a desire to help further. After learning to code with other motivated young women, she now shares her vision for how she wants to use technology to help amplify others' voices. How do you intend to build on what you've started? What will that look like at Vassar and in the world?

**Go further.** This can be a great place to bring in some "Why us?" elements—showing that you've done your research and you know why you and Vassar are a great fit. What organizations, activities, or opportunities on campus are you excited about that tie in with your community involvement?

This next essay takes a similar approach while describing a different type of community. It too suggests the unique ways in which this student will contribute to the communities he joins going forward.

## Example:

*I'm a farmhand at Gaining Ground. Every summer I dig up potatoes with my bare hands, meticulously sort, pack, and load them onto trucks for homeless shelters, Head Start programs and soup kitchens. Much of my life is digital, but mud doesn't mix well with smartphones. On the farm, I leave my phone under rows of drying garlic and find a certain peace in trading it for a pair of work gloves.*

*I'm also the 'guy who loads the truck'. The only way everything fits is if the crates are stacked just right: there's an art to that. My first day, I unloaded the entire truck and reloaded it in a more sensible configuration--heavy crates on the bottom, lettuce baskets on top--in the rain. Each time, I get the delicate produce to the shelters in better shape. When each volunteer strives to do their part just a bit better, the impact on the community, and on the lives of those we help, can be extraordinary.*

*When asked why I go back after finishing my community service hours, I usually say "I just like to help people," but that's only part of it. I do it for the look on the farmer's face when I come when they're shorthanded, for the juicy discussions as my hands sift through the earth for carrots, for the soup kitchen's gratitude when they pick up their vegetables. I keep coming back to work with a community that helps people in ways no individual could alone.*

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## HOW TO APPROACH VASSAR'S OPTIONAL UPLOADS

1. If you wish to provide details of circumstances not reflected in the application, please upload a file here. Similarly, if you wish to upload your resume, include it here.

- 2.

Your Space is your opportunity to allow the Committee on Admission to learn something about you that you have not addressed in another section of the application. For example, in the past, applicants have shared poetry, short stories, cartoons, digital images of art projects, photography, and collages, and/or links to videos, and short films. It is your space, so if you choose to complete it, send something that is a reflection of you! Your Space is entirely optional.

With these additional uploads, Vassar is giving you the chance to answer the question, "What else would you like us to know?" They're optional, so don't feel like you *have to* add something. However, they can help distinguish you from other



candidates and make your application stand out. Or they can be your opportunity to explain a circumstance or challenge that might affect your candidacy.

In deciding whether and what to submit, consider offerings that show another side of yourself that doesn't appear elsewhere in your application. Step back and take a look at the information you've already included. Is there something missing? Something you need or want Vassar to know? Something necessary to give the reader a fuller understanding of you? Be mindful not to repeat information that you've already included somewhere else.

**Additional upload #1 might include information about:**

Health or economic issues, traumatic events or other circumstances that impacted your educational performance or participation in extracurricular activities

Physical or learning differences

Unusual grading systems or classes that might not be clear from your transcript or might show something particularly interesting about you

A stellar academic or extracurricular activity that you weren't able to describe fully

A project or obligation that occupied a great deal of your time and is not reflected elsewhere in your application

A special honor or award that requires further illumination

A "red flag" on your application, e.g., a bad grade you received in science, why you dropped two sports last year, or the fact that you want to major in math but didn't take a class in the subject last year

Our guide to the Common App [Additional Information Section](#) has examples and more advice about these types of submissions.

Additional upload #2 is fairly self-explanatory. Vassar prides itself on the diversity and creativity of its student body. Have you produced something wonderful? Share it! Like some other essay prompts, this option is a great one for sharing an essay you wrote (and are particularly proud of) for another school, especially if it shows a side of you Vassar hasn't seen yet. Learn more about saving time with "super" essays [here](#).