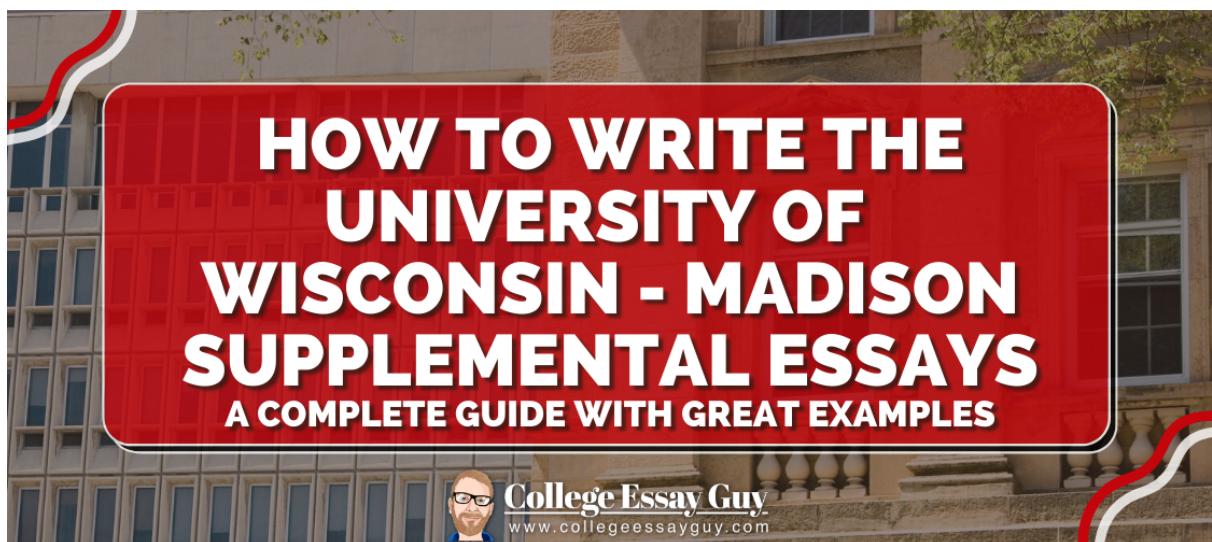


How to Write the University of Wisconsin Madison Supplemental Essays: Examples + Guide 2022/2023



If you're looking for something special from your college experience, the University of Wisconsin-Madison probably has it. With over 70 programs ranking in the top 10 of their respective fields and a well-rounded, rigorous academic climate, there's a place in the school's 30,000+ student body for just about everyone. If you're excited to wade into the wealth of resources the school has to offer but don't know where to start on the UW supplemental essays, we're here to help by providing some examples and tips to kick off the writing and brainstorming process.

Want to get an even better sense of what the University of Wisconsin-Madison is looking for? You'll 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](#). For deep insights into how this public university envisions student success (and how it wants to grow and evolve), read through its most

recent **self-study report**—a simple yet elegant way to quickly get a strong idea of what the University of Wisconsin-Madison values.

WHAT ARE THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN MADISON SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPTS?

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN MADISON SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT

#1

(Only for students applying through the UW System Application)

This part is all about you. Tell us about something you've done — academically or personally — and what you've learned from it (approx. 1 page). Was it a success or a challenge? Did it represent a turning point in your life? How did this particular moment in your life influence you, and how will it continue to influence you as you pursue your college education?

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN MADISON SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT

#2

Tell us why you decided to apply to the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In addition, please include why you are interested in studying the major(s) you have selected. If you selected undecided, please describe your areas of possible academic interest. (650 words max)

HOW TO WRITE EACH SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT FOR U WISCONSIN MADISON

HOW TO WRITE THE U WISCONSIN MADISON SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #1

This prompt is only for students applying through the UW System Application.

This part is all about you. Tell us about something you've done — academically or personally — and what you've learned from it (approx. 1 page). Was it a success or a challenge? Did it represent a turning point in your life? How did this particular moment in

your life influence you, and how will it continue to influence you as you pursue your college education?

This question is basically the UW System's equivalent of the Common App personal statement. By that, we mean that it's looking for you to answer three very important questions:

Who are you?

Will you contribute something of value to our campus?

Can you write?

Because this prompt can essentially be anything you want it to be, it's important that you come in with a game plan before sitting down and writing. Great brainstorming is the first step toward a great essay. Here are five exercises for you to try out as you begin to look for a topic:

[Essence Objects Exercise](#) (12 min)

[Values Exercise](#) (4 min)

[21 Details Exercise](#) (20 min)

[Everything I Want Colleges to Know About Me Exercise](#) (20 min)

[The Feelings and Needs Exercise](#) (15-20 min)

If you're short on time and can't do all five, we recommend completing the first two. Carving out some time and tackling those exercises will help give you a blueprint for an essay that better amplifies the story you want to tell. Based on your topic, you might choose to write a [narrative essay](#) or a [montage essay](#). A narrative essay is often centered around a challenge or series of challenges and follows a more linear storyline, whereas a montage essay is a series of moments or experiences connected by a common thematic thread. We have more details about what those approaches look like and what they require in our extensive guide on [How to Write a College Essay](#).

No matter what you end up writing about, a standout essay will often do three things: focus on an *uncommon* topic, make *uncommon* connections, and use *uncommon* language. Lots of people, for example, write about sports and how it's taught them the value of sportsmanship and hard work. But not a lot of people talk about how playing basketball has shown them the importance of beauty or activism, for example. Even if your topic is common, creating unexpected connections to your values can help you stand out.

Below is a great example of what a strong essay looks like for this prompt.

U Wisconsin Madison Essay Example 1:

Day 1: “Labbayka Allāhumma Labbayk. Labbayk Lā Sharīka Laka Labbayk,” we chant, sweat dripping onto the wispy sand in brutal Arabian heat, as millions of us prepare to march from the rocky desert hills of Mount Arafat to the cool, flat valleys of Muzdalifa. As we make our way into the Haram, my heart shakes. Tears rolling down my cheeks, we circumvent the Ka’ba one last time before embarking on Hajj, the compulsory pilgrimage of Islam. It became the spiritual, visceral, and linguistic journey of a lifetime.

Day 3:

“Ureed an Aśhtaree Hijab.”

“Al-harir aw al-Qathan?”

“Khilaahuma.”

“Kham t’hamanu-huma?”

“Mi’at Riyal.”

“La. Khizth sab’een.”

“Sa’uethikhá Sab’een.”

“Shukran laḵ.”

“Show me hijabs.”

“Silk or cotton?”

“Both.”

“How much do these cost?”

“100 Riyal.”

“No. Take 70.”

“Fine. Thanks Hajjah.”

In Makkah, I quickly learn shopkeepers rip off foreigners, so exchanges like this, where I only have to say a few Arabic words, make me appear local. It also connects me with real locals: the Saudi Arabian pharmacist who sells me cough

syrup, the Egyptian grandmother seeking directions to the restroom, the Moroccan family who educates me on the Algerian conflict. As the sounds of Arabic swirl around me like the fluttering sands (Jamal, Naqah, Ibl, Ba'eer...), I'm reconnecting with an old friend: we'd first met when I decided to add a third language to English and Bengali.

Day 6: The tents of Mina. Temperature blazing. Humidity high. I sleep next to an old woman who just embarked on her twentieth Hajj. When I discover she's Pakistani, I speak to her in Urdu. Her ninety-year old energy--grounded, spiritual, and non-materialistic--inspires me. So far, every day has been a new discovery of my courage, spirit, and faith, and I see myself going on this journey many more times in my life. My new friend is curious where I, a Bengali, learned Urdu. I explain that as a Muslim living in America's divided political climate, I wanted to understand my religion better by reading an ancient account of the life of Prophet Muhammad, but Seerat-un-Nabi is only in Urdu, so I learned to read it. I was delighted to discover the resonances: Qi-yaa-mah in Arabic becomes Qi-ya-mat in Urdu, Dh-a-lim becomes Zaa-lim... Urdu, which I had previously only understood academically, was the key to developing a personal connection with a generation different from mine.

Day 8: "Fix your hair. You look silly," my mom says in Bengali. When my parents want to speak privately, they speak our native tongue. Phrases like, "Can you grab some guava juice?" draw us closer together. My parents taught me to look out for myself from a young age, so Hajj is one of the only times we experienced something formative together. Our "secret" language made me see Bengali, which I've spoken all my life, as beautiful. It also made me aware of how important shared traditions are.

*As I think back to those sweltering, eclectic days, the stories and spiritual connections linger. No matter what languages we spoke, we are all Muslims in a Muslim country, the first time I'd ever experienced that. I came out of my American bubble and discovered I was someone to be looked up to. Having studied Islam my whole life, I knew the ins and outs of Hajj. This, along with my love for language, made me, the youngest, the sage of our group. Whether at the Al-Baik store in our camp or the Jamarat where Satan is stoned, people asked me about standards for wearing hijab or to read the Quran out loud. I left the journey feeling fearless. Throughout my life, I'll continue to seek opportunities where I'm respected, proud to be Muslim, and strong enough to stand up for others. The next time I go to Hajj, I want to speak two more languages: *donc je peux parler à plus de gens* and *quiero escuchar más historias*.*

Tips + Analysis:

Use images to convey a sense of time, place, and self. Notice how this author's use of images and details gives this essay a dream-like quality, hopping between spaces, people, languages, and thoughts. This approach allows the author to talk about many different aspects of their culture. The way the details are conveyed also speaks to the author's aesthetic sensibilities, providing another window into who they are as a person. When you're writing, consider using imagistic language to show the reader what you care about.

Leverage dialogue. Dialogue isn't always the best strategy, as it can take up a good chunk of your word count without explicitly saying anything about who you are. In this piece, however, the author does a great job of using their conversations with people they meet along their journey to convey their **values** and interests. Not only does the dialogue emphasize their fascination with language and cultural exchange, but it breaks up what would have been dense paragraphs into nicely manageable chunks that are easier to read.

Use visceral and evocative language. Details about the specific resonance of Urdu words and the conversations this author shared with the people they met on their Hajj brings this essay to life. Nearly every line is full of **vivid imagery and textured language**. Those details make this piece fun to read, while drawing us into the author's world. When you're writing, think about how you can engage all five senses to show, not simply tell, how you engage with the world around you.

HOW TO WRITE THE U WISCONSIN MADISON SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #2

Tell us why you decided to apply to the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In addition, please include why you are interested in studying the major(s) you have selected. If you selected undecided, please describe your areas of possible academic interest. (650 words max)

This is what we call a "Why us?" prompt. The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate—through specific details and examples—why you're a great match for the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and why it's the perfect school for you. We recommend checking out [this complete guide on how to write the "Why us?"](#)

essay, paying close attention to the “Why Cornell” and “Why Penn” examples, which are two of our favorites.

A number of schools ask some variation on this question on their applications, so you may be writing more than one of these “Why us?” essays during your college application journey. Here are six common mistakes to look out for, and avoid, when answering:

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

Mistake #2: Simply using emotional language to demonstrate fit (i.e., “It just felt right”).

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: Think of this only as a “Why them” essay.

The common theme here is: Do your research. Most of these mistakes are the result of students not taking the time to conduct a thorough dive into a college’s website and available resources. Really take your time with this prompt and find specific clubs, events, professors, classes, etc., that pique your interest. Most importantly, connect those specific opportunities to your specific values (remember the Values Exercise). Remember, this essay is a two-way street. Talk about not just what UW can offer you, but also what you can offer the university.

If you don’t have the time to read the full guide linked above, here’s the SparkNotes version of how to write the “Why us?” essay:

Spend 1 hr+ researching 10+ reasons why UW-Madison might be a great fit for you (ideally 3-5 of the reasons will be unique to the University of Wisconsin *and* connect back to you).

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

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

Write a first draft!

Here’s a great sample essay for this prompt:

U Wisconsin Madison Essay Example 2:

When I was young, I drew planes almost everyday. Planes with three, four, or even eight turbines. Planes with multiple wings and two fuselages. My planes were impossible according to the laws of physics, but I tried to create them anyways.

In middle school, I became fascinated with building planes. After watching hundreds of hours of FliteTest on YouTube and building their kits, I was ready to create my own. My first idea started with a single wing. I drew up a 3' 4" long wing on a sheet of foam board and, after drawing three more prototypes, I assembled it. Then, I wired the two servos and a single 2280kv Radial 2218 brushless motor. On its maiden flight, I threw it into the air and it went straight into the ground. Too much weight in the front, Kanishka. Back to the garage.

In high school, I became captivated with cars, more specifically hydrogen and electric cars. I created a Hydrogen Car team to compete in a hydrogen fuel cell endurance race. I learned how to make a fuel cell more efficient. Ambitious, I worked tirelessly to get to the world finals. I devised a way to use the motor's thermal energy and convert it into electrical energy, making our car more efficient.

I am a creator. The laws of physics often hinder my creativity, but I keep trying to push the limits of what is possible.

In college, I hope to combine my research in hydrogen fuel cells and airplanes to design a new type of plane that isn't electric or combustion based. At UW, I want to major in mechanical engineering to accomplish just that.

For me, learning through building is essential. I enjoy applying angular momentum equations from AP Physics C into my coding projects to make a virtual car move. At UW, I am particularly interested in the project-based format of some classes. I'm eager to take Energy Systems Laboratory as it is a unique class to UW that explores different energy conversion systems in a lab-based format. By learning about the different systems, I can explore how they can be combined to achieve maximum efficiency.

Outside the classroom, I want to conduct research on energy systems in the transportation sector. UW's Energy Institute is perfect for that. I'm intrigued by Professor Xin Wang's research on 'Energy Sponges.' I think that his idea could be used in a lot of transportation sectors and could change the way we use energy. I want to assist him in his research. Further, I want to conduct research on thermoelectric plates and the possibility of making them flexible to accommodate a greater variety of uses.

Throughout high school, racing has been my favorite extracurricular. The drive to create a car that is 12% more efficient while also being 10% faster keeps me thinking of different ways to cut weight or innovate upon the fuel cell. In college, I want to continue racing. As lead engineer of the UW Formula Electric SAE Team, I want to utilize thermoelectric plates and new battery technology to make a faster, more efficient car.

While my future is still unknown, UW will provide me the skills needed to create new technology. Further, I'll contribute in racing and engineering through meaningful activities and research.

— — —

Tips + Analysis:

Build a personal narrative. The author could have just said, “I like physics and am interested in airplanes.” But we’re glad he didn’t. Because, instead of just telling us about his interests, he builds a vivid picture of himself as an applicant: curious, innovative, pragmatic. Specific details about the length of the airplane wings and his thought process as he watched YouTube videos help us envision what kind of person he is beyond his academic credentials and extracurricular activities. Using stories in your essay can help make you multidimensional, adding details that can allow readers to see you in a more personal and intimate way. Also, notice that, because the author starts with an anecdote from his childhood, he’s able to use the passage of time to show how he’s developed his interests and to expand on the work he’s done since. The first sentence in each paragraph takes us closer to the present, allowing us to see how he’s grown over time. Think of how you too can create a narrative that helps you structure your essay and highlight your unique thought processes.

Connect to university-specific resources. You can tell this student has done his research. After he gives us some background info about his interest in engineering, he tells us he wants to major in mechanical engineering at UW and take some project-based classes (like Energy Systems Laboratory). He takes it to the next level by explaining why the lab-based format of the class is particularly appealing to him, showing that he’s looked into the syllabus and done more than a quick, 5-minute search on the UW website. He names a UW professor (Professor Xin Wang) he’d like to do research with on “energy sponges” and expands on why that work would suit his academic goals. The takeaway here: Do more than the bare minimum in terms of looking into what the school has to offer. And, when

you identify university-specific opportunities that you're excited about, briefly explain why they speak to you, to offer a further peek into what motivates and inspires you.

Vary sentence and paragraph length. If you want to keep your reader engaged throughout your essay, it's important to think about how you can use structure to pace your writing. Notice how most of this student's paragraphs are no more than 3-4 sentences max. He doesn't drone on about one topic for long or try to cram everything into a huge, dense block of text that's impossible to read. He uses paragraph breaks to delineate between different focuses or resources, intuitively guiding readers through his story. Short sentences and sentence fragments can also be your friend. If used well, they can create impact and help draw the reader's attention to a specific idea or value. In other words, be intentional with how you write and structure your piece.

With that, you should be ready to start researching and writing your UW supplementals.