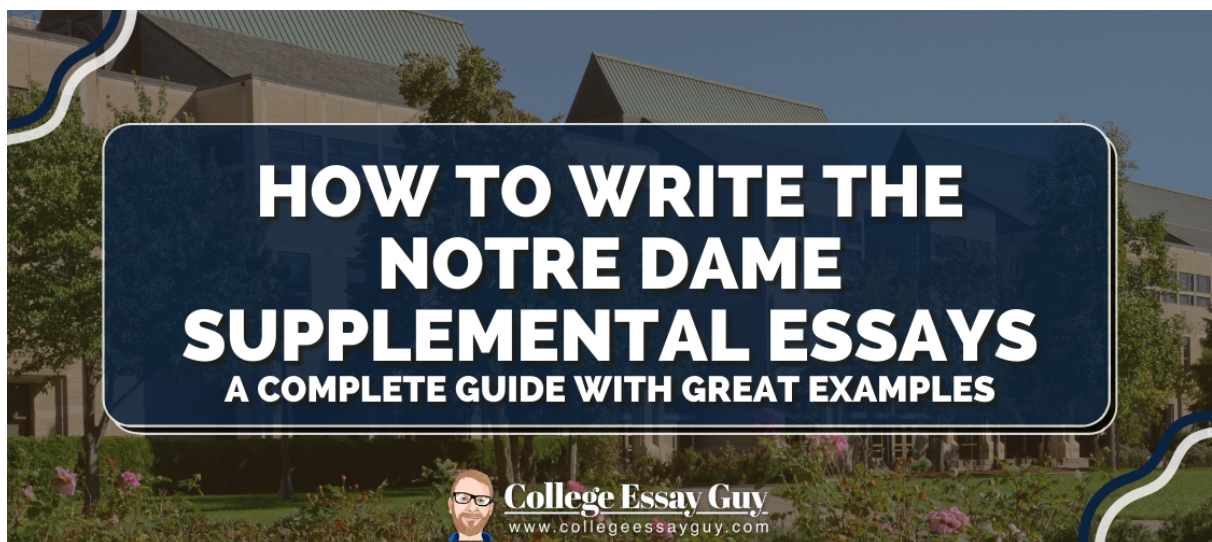


# How to Write the University of Notre Dame Supplemental Essays: Examples + Guide 2022/2023



Notre Dame asks for three supplemental essays—each limited to 200 words.

But before you dive right into the prompts, get an extensive, by-the-numbers look at Notre Dame's offerings in its [Common Data Set](#), and for deeper insights into how the university wants to grow and evolve, read its [strategic plan](#).

## WHAT ARE THE NOTRE DAME SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPTS?

*The University of Notre Dame Writing Section consists of one (1) essay response to a required question and one (1) essay response to a question you select from the options provided. In total, you'll write two (2) essay responses. The word count is a maximum of 200 words per essay.*

## NOTRE DAME UNIVERSITY SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #1

*Notre Dame is a Catholic university, founded by members of the Congregation of Holy Cross, with a mission to educate the hearts and minds of students. What excites you about attending Notre Dame?*

## NOTRE DAME UNIVERSITY SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #2

***Additional Prompts - (You choose 1)***

- *People in the Notre Dame community come from many different places, backgrounds, and walks of life. How is where you're from a part of who you are?*
- *Tell us about a time when you advocated for something you believe in.*
- *If you were given unlimited resources to help solve one problem in your community, what would it be and how would you accomplish it?*
- *What is the greatest compliment you have ever been given? Why was it meaningful to you?*

# HOW TO WRITE EACH SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT FOR UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

## HOW TO WRITE NOTRE DAME SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #1

Notre Dame is a Catholic university, founded by members of the Congregation of Holy Cross, with a mission to educate the hearts and minds of students. What excites you about attending Notre Dame? (200 words)

This is a short “Why us?” essay. Because it’s short, the key will be finding 5-7 reasons that set Notre Dame apart from all the other schools you’re applying to.

To help get a strong understanding of how to write to this prompt, [check out our “Why us?” essay guide](#)—and pay particular attention to the Cornell example, which is one of our favorites. While that example is longer, you’ll also find advice in that guide on tackling shorter “Why us?” essays, and the Tufts essay is a great example.

Don’t have the time to read the full guide? Here’s the TL;DR version:

Spend 1 hr+ researching 5-7 reasons why Notre Dame might be a great fit for you (ideally one or two of those reasons will be unique to Notre Dame)

and connect back to you). Why this many reasons? You'll likely only end up including only some of these, but it's better to have more than you need. Plus, you'll learn more about the school if you find this many. 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 for Notre Dame), or 3 in the full guide above. Write a first draft!

As you write, try to avoid these common mistakes:

### **Five 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.

Here's a great sample essay for this prompt. You may not be applying to the Mendoza College of Business like this student was, so don't worry about that bit of detail. Instead, focus on the specifics and other details he uses, as we'll discuss in the Tips + Analysis section below.

#### **Example:**

*At the Mendoza College of Business, I am eager to develop my whole self, by incorporating liberal arts and theology into finance.*

*Understanding finance and how it relates to societal functions fascinates me. Through following the NYSE after school, I've learned the ability to analyze markets is one of the most important skills in our ever-changing, diverse economic landscape. Professor Bergstrand's article "Should TPP Be Formed? On the Potential Economic, Governance, and Conflict-Reducing Impacts of the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement" captivated me. I agree there are limitations*

*in computer business models, and in order to allow for greater diversity human analysts cannot be replaced.*

*A business major is one thing, but Notre Dame's unique Poverty Studies minor will expand my understanding of the life billions of people live everyday, allowing me to make financial decisions with a higher purpose in mind. I would be thrilled to couple this learning with working alongside the Center for the Study of Religion and Society, while also advancing my knowledge of the Catholic faith. I aim to study the magnitude of the statistical mark I make as an economist, while concurrently viewing the outcome as a humanitarian.*

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### **Tips + Analysis:**

**Be specific.** We're talking about courses, professors, research studies, clubs: Use their formal names, and make sure to spell them right. Note how this student doesn't just name a professor he'd want to learn from; he also researched his publications and spoke to why one in particular resonated with him ("I agree there are limitations in computer business models, and in order to allow for greater diversity human analysts cannot be replaced."). That depth of detail is a great way to show you've done your research and aren't just listing what you saw in the course catalog.

**Demonstrate a range of interests.** The broad scope of this prompt 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. This student doesn't do a whole lot of that, and it's not a do-or-die must, but we definitely recommend it. So, after talking about, say, courses and professors and programs that interest you, talk about campus life—clubs, activities, sports or other extracurriculars. But note that the prompt asks you to share about more than how Notre Dame will transform your "mind"—school officials also want to know about your heart. Given this ...

**Speak to your desire to give back.** As a proudly Catholic institution (with over 80% Catholic enrollment), Notre Dame values a culture of service. In fact, the first goal in its strategic plan revolves around **character**: "We strive to build a community that inspires the pursuit of truth and teaches respect, love, and service so that our learning serves the Church and the world, particularly for those who are most in need." Your budget limit is tight, so keep it brief. This student makes some nice "heart" connections in the final paragraph.

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## HOW TO WRITE NOTRE DAME SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY PROMPT #2

**Additional Prompts:** Choose 1 (200 words max)

1. People in the Notre Dame community come from many different places, backgrounds, and walks of life. How is where you're from a part of who you are?
2. Tell us about a time when you advocated for something you believe in.
3. If you were given unlimited resources to help solve one problem in your community, what would it be and how would you accomplish it?
4. What is the greatest compliment you have ever been given? Why was it meaningful to you?

### **1. People in the Notre Dame community come from many different places, backgrounds, and walks of life. How is where you're from a part of who you are? (200 words)**

This prompt asks you to reflect on where you come from and how that has shaped who you are. It's a **diversity essay**, as Notre Dame seeks to know how your experiences would add to the diversity of the college community. 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, etc.

This is a new prompt for Notre Dame this year, so we don't have something exactly on point, but this essay, written for another school, would work great.

#### **Example:**

*My great-grandpa's eyes twinkle as my 5-year-old self struggles to stir the giant pot of cioppino. Like this traditional seafood dish, I too am an Italian-American originating from California.*

*My very loud family crowds my house each holiday, relegating me to an air mattress, a sacrifice I'm more than willing to make. The rooms fill with stories and laughter as we down pizzelles and compete in a cutthroat cookie-decorating contest.*

*Likewise, my California beginnings, though brief, had a sizable impact on my life. I was a year old when we left, but California's adventurous culture is part of my identity, reinforced by annual trips to visit relatives. From hiking San Jacinto Peak, to days at Disneyland, where my grandparents and mom worked, each excursion left me giddily exhausted.*

*The true centerpiece of our get-togethers isn't the cioppino, but the stories and experiences that connect us as family.*

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## **Tips + Analysis**

**Identify the identities and communities that have shaped you.** This author presents themselves as an Italian-American from California. What's your particular personal constellation? Make a list. Keep in mind that communities can be defined by ...

Place: Groups of people who live/work/play near one another

Action: Groups of people who create change in the world by building, doing, or solving something together (Examples: Black Lives Matter, Girls Who Code, March for Our Lives)

Interest: Groups of people coming together based on shared interest, experience, or expertise

Circumstance: Groups of people brought together either by chance or external events/situation.

**Give a taste of each one.** Here, great-grandpa's eyes twinkle as a five-year-old stirs a pot of cioppino. Brainstorm a detail or example for each identity or community using one of your five senses. What does each one look/smell/taste/sound/feel like? The details bring us into the experiences: sleeping on an air mattress when family comes, eating pizzelles, hiking San Jacinto Peak. Bonus points for proper nouns! Bring the reader into your world—the more specific the better.

**Show why it matters.** This student describes their cultural roots and traditions, but ultimately, they're talking about the importance of family. Think about your values. How has the way you've grown up impacted how you perceive and engage with the world around you?

## **2. Tell us about a time when you advocated for something you believe in. (200 words)**

This prompt is wide open. That may make it feel more intimidating, but one way to narrow it down is to look at your Activities List and ask: Is there anything here that shows me championing a cause? Or advocating for change? Maybe it's the recycling program you started in your school cafeteria. Or the BLM protest you participated in last summer. Look for something that, instead of a one-time effort, shows an enduring interest/belief/mission. The key will be talking about it in a way that shows it's important enough to "fight for."



It's time to dig into an example to see what that might look like. This is also a new prompt for Notre Dame (they've been busy in the admission office this spring!), but this essay, written for a slightly shorter prompt, would work well here.

### Example:

*In eighth grade, I created an art piece addressing a stereotype I had faced and posted it online, encouraging my friends to do the same and hashtag it #StereotypeProject. The drawing snowballed into a viral movement, gathering the attention of over 1,000 youth artists worldwide, each contributing their own stories and drawings. The Stereotype Project has since grown, extending into local schools and calling on the next generation to stand strong against the biases they face due to race, gender, sexual orientation, mental illness, and more. In a time of increasing youth activism and reminders of the potential we have as young revolutionaries, the Stereotype Project is an outlet for creative expression, unity, and a means of imparting a positive impact on the world. Our website continues to be live and accept submissions: [stereotypeproject.org](http://stereotypeproject.org).*

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### Tips + Analysis

**Don't feel like you have to save the world.** Writing about how you're changing "the world for the better" may feel daunting. *What if my actions aren't having a global impact?* Breathe. We have good news for you: Notre Dame doesn't expect you to have started a non-profit at the age of 17 (but if you have, cool). The Notre Dame culture of service to others means they're looking for students committed to making an impact—if not on the world at large, at least on the world around them. That "world" could mean your town, your school, your Debate Club, your friend group, or, as in this case, your online audience. The world you're impacting isn't as important as the action you're taking to help make it better. With that in mind ...

**Consider this an extracurricular activity essay of sorts.** We have [a full guide to that type of essay here](#). Comb through [your extracurricular activity list](#), specifically looking for an example of how you're taking action to effect positive change. The extracurricular essay guide has two great brainstorming exercises that can help you find a great topic: the **BEABIES** and the Elon Musk exercises. Pro tip: Focus on the problem-solving aspect in both exercises.

**Keep the topic current.** The prompt specifically asks you about "an action you are taking"—with intentional emphasis on the now. So choose

something that a) you're still actively working on, or b) you worked on/launched earlier but built it in a way that continues to effect positive change. The essay above offers a great example of the latter. Besides directly answering the prompt, writing about a current/lasting endeavor shows an ongoing commitment to action.

**You don't have to be tackling Society's Biggest Challenges.** Although we mention issues like racism and the environment in our introduction to this prompt, you don't necessarily have to write about huge social justice issues for your answer to be legitimate. Even though this essay is on a somewhat relevant topic, the key to its success is in how the student spotlights an issue that has personal meaning to her (a stereotype she herself faced) and details 1) how she took action (posted her art piece online using a hashtag and urged others to do the same, and 2) its impact ("creating an outlet for creative expression, unity, and a means of imparting a positive impact on the world"). In short, the winning formula here is: Issue of Personal Importance + Action You Took + Impact It's Having = Great Essay.

### **3. If you were given unlimited resources to help solve one problem in your community, what would it be and how would you accomplish it? (200 words)**

This is an essay focused on community service and civic engagement. That means you specifically want to talk about values that show how giving back has deep meaning for you (think purpose and enrichment, but also resourcefulness, leadership, empathy, even laughter and adventure). This [Values List](#) will help you identify those that resonate.

Do you have meaningful examples and anecdotes that bring those values to life—like the club you started to teach chess to fifth-graders, or the recycling project you led in your neighborhood, or taking care of your younger siblings or cousins? Your topic of choice should be something you genuinely care about and want to change for the better. You'll find it much easier to write with enthusiasm if you talk about something you actually find important and interesting.

Like Prompt #2, you can approach this using the tools for [extracurricular essays](#). Read through your [Common App Activities List](#). If you can identify not just one but a few things you can talk about to show you've already contributed to the "common good," they could become an excellent topic for this Notre Dame essay. Then invoke what we call the Elon Musk method ([head here](#) for an explanation + examples), like in this sample essay (which was written for a different school but would work well for this new prompt).



## Example:

*Every school year, I walk around campus, arms and backpack chock full of heavy textbooks. In the classroom, I read the textbook, review a lesson, and complete a worksheet. Rinse and repeat. And not just me: nearly every other student has had this experience. Enter personalized learning.*

*Personalized learning could mean allowing students to master concepts at their own pace, or it could refer to computer programs designed to match one's personality. For example, some learn kinesthetically, while others learn visually. The possibilities to unlock true learning potential through personalized learning are endless.*

*As an engineer, I want to develop teaching methods that help both the young and the old acquire new skills and enhance learned ones. Through computer science, I can devise an intelligent tutoring system. And after designing a personality quiz, I can create an algorithm to match the student's preferred learning style and determine which multimedia is best to teach them.*

*Although I personally do not have a learning disability, a close friend suffers from autism. Surprisingly, if you met him, you probably could not tell. From a young age, he was placed in a regular classroom, not a special ed one. As an extrovert, this personalized learning system enabled him to be a social butterfly while also learning at his own pace.*

*Therefore, I believe that by advancing personalized learning experiences and minimizing inflexibility in education programs, we can reduce perceived learning disabilities. The future of intelligence will be much more well-rounded and diversified.*

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## Tips + Analysis

**Identify the problem.** This student is beleaguered by the boring burden of traditional learning. What is an issue that really concerns you, and why? Help us understand why you care about it. Who is affected and how? What is the consequence if this issue is left unaddressed?

**Lay out your plan to solve it.** Be specific. The question asks how you'd accomplish your task. Describe the actions you'd take, the tools or programs you'd develop. Let your reader see how your brain works; how do you solve complex problems? Call on your strengths and previous actions. This

student approaches the issue through their tools and experience with engineering and computer science. Are you already working on this issue? What have you done so far that you'd expand on?

**Name the impact.** What will the world look like when you've had a chance to do something about this problem? Who or what will be affected and how? Imagine yourself already having achieved it, and let your reader celebrate with you. For this student, this what impact looked like: "As an extrovert, this personalized learning system enabled him to be a social butterfly while also learning at his own pace."

**Think BIG.** The prompt offers you *unlimited resources* to address the issue! You seek to join an institution that could give you access to deep financial support and networking opportunities. Notre Dame is signaling that it's seeking candidates who are prepared to make a major impact with the resources the school can provide. Show you've got vision: How would you leverage these vast resources for the common good?

#### **4. What is the greatest compliment you have ever been given? Why was it meaningful to you? (200 words)**

Also a new prompt this year, this one is your Time to Shine. You could try to remember the best compliment someone's *ever* given you (and by all means, if it comes to mind, go for it) ... OR, you could think of that quality or skill of yours that you love the most and highlight that. What's your superpower? What do people love about you? What do you most appreciate about yourself? Then roll back to a time you received a compliment about it and go from there. This is a great opportunity to reveal something about you that hasn't come through elsewhere in your application.

**Bring the compliment to life with examples.** Where does this quality or skill show up in your life? What are some times it's had an impact in your life, on other people or in your community? Give brief, descriptive details of these moments to show how this quality or skill is meaningful to you AND how it'll contribute to the college community you'll join.

**Always bring it back to values.** Something that people celebrate in you says a lot about what's most important to you. What does this skill and your examples reveal about your core values? Connect each example to a value. You can use the [Values List](#) for inspiration.

**End with insight.** What have you learned about yourself or the world thanks to your superpower? Wink as you walk away (show your capacity for self-reflection).