



## Why This College?

The Why Essay is perhaps the biggest missed opportunity for students as far as supplements go. So many students write cookie cutter or cliched essays about why they want to attend a college which simply do not stand out when an admissions officer is reading their application.

So how do I write a successful Why Essay?

The first thing to keep in mind is that colleges don't want to know why you want to attend, but rather why they should want you to attend. This means that you'll want to talk about your academic potential and interests, as well as your potential contributions to the community. Most importantly, all of this should be discussed with the individual college in mind.

Start with Research

Before you start writing the Why Essay, it's important to do your research and get to know more about the colleges to which you're applying. Successful Why Essays will rely on two elements:

- Expressing your own ambitions, values, and personality
- Demonstrating your knowledge about a specific college

These two elements should ideally be aligned so you are tailoring your ambitions, values, and personality to a specific college! This is why research is so important as you begin to write the Why Essay.

How do I connect these two elements together?

For each college to which you are applying, write down at least five specific reasons why you want to attend the college (e.g. Swarthmore's Music Department offers an independent study during junior year). Then for each of the reasons you wrote down, list three moments from your life that connect to the reason.

Next, pick a moment that reveals something related to the college's mission or an activity you may be involved with in college. Stick to specific details, make connections with what you've already done, and describe what difference will it make to have you as a part of that college community. Most Why Essays are 250 words or less, so there's no room for filler or fluff!

Further Tips

- Remember when we said many of these essays are too general or cliched? Try to avoid writing about campus, sports, or social life. "I fell in love the first time I walked onto the campus" is not going to stand out in a good way.
- If you write about the college's location, make a substantive, academic connection to the location (such as a nearby museum or ecosystem that you might study).
- Don't be too cute. Knowing a motto or mascot (e.g. "Go, Wildcats!") or knowing about a favorite food spot on campus ("I can't wait to eat pizza at X!") won't convince a reader that you're a good candidate.
- If you had firsthand experience with a college through a campus visit or a friend who goes there it is worthwhile to mention (but if it is a short essay, you might want to leave that out as there are other opportunities on the application to mention it).
- In short Why Essay, it's best to focus on intellectual and aspirational fit. Longer essays offer room to dwell on extracurriculars.

**Sample Why Essays:**

*NYU is global, urban, inspired, smart, connected, and bold. What can NYU offer you, and what can you offer NYU? - New York University*

*The Admissions Committee would like to learn why you are a good fit for your undergraduate school choice (College of Arts and Sciences, School of Nursing, The Wharton School, or Penn Engineering). Please tell us about specific academic, service, and/or research opportunities at the University of Pennsylvania that resonate with your background, interests, and goals. - University of Pennsylvania*

*Why Notre Dame? - Notre Dame University*