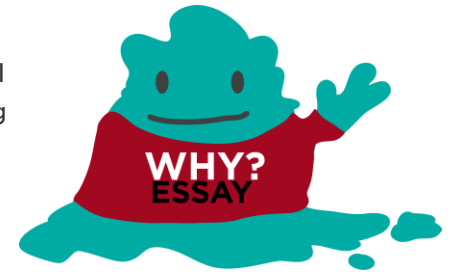# GUIDE TO THE SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAYS

If you thought the Common App's personal statement was the only essay you would have to write, we are about to disappoint you. Every year, individual colleges and universities assign application supplements with an array of school-specific essay prompts. Some schools even opt to release their own applications independent of the Common App! Luckily, these supplemental essays often fall into one of five common categories, which we have identified for you in this handy guide!

THE WHY ESSAY

This is, without question, the most common supplemental question out there. Schools ask, "why?" to gauge how much you really care. Have you been paying attention? How well do you really know the school? How true are your reasons for applying? As vast and probing as these questions may seem, the key to a good answer lies in good old-fashioned research.

No matter how the question is phrased or what the word limit is, there are two essential components to a successful why essay: in-depth knowledge of a school and a convincing demonstration of personal interest.

THE ACTIVITY ESSAY

The activity essay is an excellent opportunity to expand beyond the 150-character limit of the Common App's activity descriptions. Colleges want to know the motivations behind your participation and your level of commitment to the enterprises you deem most important. How has this activity had an impact on your life? How has participation in this activity affected the lives of others? This is also an excellent place to highlight your leadership skills, teamwork and drive. But remember, show don't tell. Describing how your role as captain improved communication among your cheerleading teammates is much more effective than telling admissions you are a great leader.
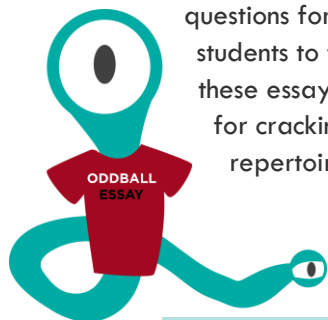
THE COMMUNITY ESSAY

The community essay is another standard supplemental rascal that mines for information about your social habits and favorite causes. Prompts that ask about a "community you belong to"

often leave themselves open to interpretation. As with every essay you ship off to admissions – think about something you want admissions to know that hasn't been represented. What can you expand upon to show your versatility, passion and ability to connect with the world around you?
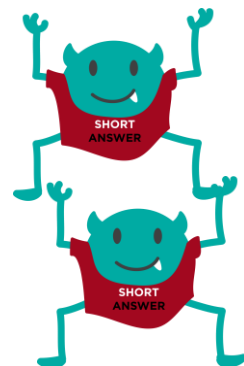
THE ODDBALLS

There are certain schools, like the University of Chicago, who have always taken a special pride in developing craft questions for their applicants to answer. In recent years, more schools are jumping on the bandwagon, luring students to their applications with questions like "What does #YOLO mean to you" (Tufts, 2013). The trick to these essays is so simple, you're gonna kick yourself when we say it. START EARLY. Brainstorming time is key for cracking the code to these puzzles. Consider the question that is being asked and then dig back into your repertoire of subjects you haven't yet discussed.

SHORT ANSWER

There's one other popular format for supplement questions: short answers. These little critters provide a different kind of creative challenge for aspiring college-goers. Even though space is limited – think 50 words, or even 250 characters – this is still an opportunity to show off your personality, and even your sense of humor if you have a penchant for pith.

The challenge of answering these questions lies half in generating honest, unique and clever ideas, and the other in being concise. Humorous answers can also have heavy impact here. Our advice to you: Overbrainstorm and overwrite. Think of as many ideas as you possibly can for each short answer and get them all on the page. When narrowing down your choices, think about representing a range of your personality traits and interests.

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