



*Your Roadmap to
College Admissions Success*

Why This College? Common Supplemental Essay Question

Good Sample Essay and Bad Sample Essay

The supplemental essay for college admissions can be a stumbling point for a lot of applicants. Many students put significant time into their longer personal statement but then rush off the shorter supplemental section of the application.

The application to Duke University's Trinity College offers applicants the opportunity to write a supplemental essay that answers the following question: **If you are applying to Trinity College of Arts and Sciences, please discuss why you consider Duke a good match for you. Is there something in particular at Duke that attracts you? Please limit your response to one or two paragraphs.**

The question asked here is typical of many supplemental essays. Essentially, the admissions folks want to know why their school is of particular interest to you. Such questions often generate a lot of remarkably bland essays. The example below is one example of what **not** to do. A typical result is something like this weak supplemental essay.

I believe the Trinity College of Arts and Sciences at Duke is an excellent match for me. I believe college should not be merely a gateway to the work force; it should educate the student in a variety of subjects and prepare him or her for the range of challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in life. I have always been a curious person and enjoy reading all kinds of literature and nonfiction. In high school I excelled in history, English, AP psychology, and other liberal arts subjects. I have not yet decided on a major, but when I do, it will almost certainly be in the liberal arts, such as history or political science. I know that Trinity College is very strong in these areas. But regardless of my major, I want to receive a broad education that spans a variety of areas in the liberal arts, so that I will graduate as not only a viable job prospect, but also as a well-rounded and learned adult who can make diverse and valuable contributions to my community. I believe Duke's Trinity College will help me grow and become that kind of person.

A bad essay such as this example never discusses features that are unique to Duke. A good essay gets specific and shows particular knowledge of the school.

The strong essay below was written in response to the same essay prompt. Essentially, the admissions folks want to know why their school is of particular interest to you.

When I visited the Duke campus last fall, I immediately felt at home. The Gothic architecture and tree-shaded walks created an atmosphere of peaceful but serious reflection. The place is at once Southern—which, as an Alabamian, is important to me—and universal as it reflects the traditions of Europe and the classical world. The Trinity College liberal arts curriculum also reflects this unique pairing of the modern South and the global past. For example, I am considering a major in history, and am very interested in the combination of geographic and thematic areas of study offered by Duke's history program. The combinations of areas offer seeming endless areas of specialization. One interesting possibility is a focus in the geographic area of the U.S. and Canada, combined with a thematic study of Women and Gender or African Diaspora. By juxtaposing and intertwining these two foci, my understanding of the American South—and much more—would be greatly enriched. This innovative and flexible approach to both traditional and non-traditional subject matter is greatly appealing to me. I know by reputation and from a friend currently enrolled in Trinity College that the liberal arts curriculum is very challenging, but also rewarding. I believe I am more than prepared for these challenges, and that I will thrive in this climate. Duke University's campus already feels like home; I believe that its academic opportunities will also provide a stimulating environment in which I feel I belong.

Think about the prompt. The admissions officers want to know if there is something "in particular at Duke" that makes the applicant want to go there. The strong sample essay succeeds on this front. Although the essay is just a paragraph long, the author presents three specific features of Duke that make her want to attend:

- The attractive campus with its Gothic and Southern appeal
- The flexible nature of the history curriculum
- The fact that she has a friend at Duke

This last point doesn't matter much in the admissions process and the writer was correct to mention it only indirectly.

The first point has moderate importance. Many colleges have impressive Gothic architecture, so the feature isn't unique to Duke. However, the writer connects the campus to her own Southernness. She also demonstrates that she has visited the campus, something that is not true of many applicants who haphazardly apply to a long list of prestigious schools.

The second point about the history curriculum is key to this essay's success. This applicant knows what lies beneath the university's surface. She has clearly researched the curriculum. She is not applying to Duke simply because of its beauty or its reputation, but because she likes how the university approaches learning.

Admissions officers will certainly take note of the fact that this applicant has done some research and has thoughtful reasons for wanting to attend Duke.

Why This College – Bad Example

Circle the errors

As a diligent ,and self conscious individual I feel that my academic potential is at unique heights, and being accepted to the _____will only increase that prospective. Through my four years of high school, I have worked with my hardest effort, and striven for achievement, success, and difference.

Ever since I was young my dream has been to become a doctor, and I believe that _____will help me become a well rounded, educated, and social/attentive pediatrician. I have been taking medical classes through my years of high school, including: Biomedical Technology, Medical Science one, and Medical Science two honors. Through these classes I have been exposed to much more information making me want to become a doctor. I wish to take as many medical classes such as biology, genetics, and other subjects pertaining to the field I want to go into in the future.

Being a student, I have always striven for greater than what I expected. In my 9th grade class I was recommended not to be in honors English. Despite the doubt that my teacher possessed I continued through my high school career partaking in many honors and AP classes; and did succeed in them. In life I have dedicated myself to being the best I can be. The atmosphere at _____ I believe is the perfect environment for the growth of my academic success and my sociality. With my elevated standards, in and out of school I feel that as a student I can excel, and be all that is expected of me, and maybe more.

My goals outside of school not only consist becoming a better athlete and a better person to society. I set goals for myself, which enable me to grow as a genuine person. As a child I started dancing, ranging from traditional from hip-hop. I learned to be thankful for the value of setting good goals for myself. My dance choreographer made an everlasting impression on me by filling my head with positive morals, perseverance, and confidence. I am proud to say that I have been dancing for 12 years, and still am continuing. I am glad I had dance to help me inspire me positive values that can stand the test of time. On a daily basis I make use of these moral to better myself as much as I can.

Every wrong doing, every obstacle, every little mistake I have ever made has only made me a stronger person, because it taught me what is right or wrong. I attribute my devotion to being the best I can be, to Dnace, and the morals instilled in me from dance. I want to be a productive person in society, a person who makes a difference, and furthering my education at _____is the next step to making that process successful.