

## Supplemental college essay for Duke (online source)

The strong essay below was written in response to the application to Duke University's Trinity College. The guidelines for the optional supplemental essay ask, "**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.

The sample below shows a solid response to the question. After reading the single paragraph essay, be sure to read the discussion of the essay.

*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.*

### Read the critique of this short essay.

Before we look at the actual essay, 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. 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 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.