

College Research and Why This College

A worksheet for connecting verified opportunities to your interests and preparing an essay with substance.

Begin with a question you care about, then investigate how a college would help you pursue it. A list of programs is useful only when you can explain why those opportunities matter to you. Use one set of pages for each college.

College and undergraduate school _____

Application cycle _____ Date checked _____

Start with the actual prompt

Exact prompt and word limit shown in my application

Does it ask about the university, a particular school or major, academic interests, community, or contribution? Keep your research within that scope.

Give the research a direction

One experience that has shaped what I want to understand or do next

A question or skill I want to pursue in college

The classroom or community conditions that help me participate

An undecided student can name questions to explore. You do not need to invent a settled career plan.

Investigate one opportunity

Copy this page for each promising course, program, organization, or academic structure. Use current official college sources and explain the connection in your own words.

Exact name and what the opportunity actually offers

Official source URL and date checked

Who can participate and what preparation or selection is required

Check the undergraduate school, campus, prerequisites, application process, timing, and whether the opportunity is current. Interest in a professor's work does not establish access to a lab.

My experience or question that makes this relevant

What I hope to learn or contribute and the first realistic step

Unanswered question and how I will resolve it

Evidence status: ☐ Verified for this cycle ☐ Needs clarification ☐ Do not use yet

Turn research into an essay plan

Choose the connections that answer the prompt best. Two well-explained reasons can do more than a long list of names. Not every opportunity needs to be unique to this one university; your reasons for choosing the combination should be clear.

Connection 1

My experience or question and the college opportunity that responds to it

Why the connection matters and what I would realistically do next

Connection 2

My experience or question and the college opportunity that responds to it

Why the connection matters and what I would realistically do next

Check the draft

- ☐ I answer the exact prompt and use the correct college, school, and program names.
- ☐ The reader can see why each detail matters to me.
- ☐ Every opportunity is supported by a current official source.
- ☐ I have not promised access, a research position, or leadership I have not earned.
- ☐ I describe what I would bring through specific habits or experience.
- ☐ The language sounds like me when I read it aloud, and I meet the word limit.

If removing the college's name makes the response fit almost anywhere, develop the connection further. If the paragraph reads like a catalog description, put more of your own thinking into it.

Worked example

Imagine a student who has mapped shade between a bus stop and a community center. Example College and its opportunities below are invented to demonstrate the method.

Start with the student

Experience: The student made a map in the morning, then walked the route at three in the afternoon and found that several stretches were no longer shaded.

Question: How can a map represent changing conditions and the experiences of people who use a route at different times?

Connect an opportunity to a next step

Opportunity 1 Introduction to Geographic Data

What the sample course offers: methods for collecting and displaying geographic observations. The student wants to learn how to organize repeated measurements and show their limitations clearly.

What must be verified at a real college: current catalog listing, availability in the student's intended program, prerequisites, and the actual course content. Record the official URL and date rather than relying on a search snippet.

Opportunity 2 Community Mapping Studio

What the sample studio offers: project work with local partners after students complete prerequisite coursework. The student wants to practice developing a research question with the people using the map, rather than assuming their needs.

What must be verified at a real college: undergraduate eligibility, prerequisites, selection process, how often the studio runs, and whether the partnership described is current. If access is unclear, keep the question in the notes instead of turning it into a promise.

Move from names to a reason

Early version: "Example College's excellent mapping courses and community partnerships will help me pursue my passion for environmental change."

More developed version: "Walking my shade map at three in the afternoon showed me how much my morning measurements had missed. I want to learn how to represent those changes, then apply to the community mapping studio to practice designing questions with the people a map is supposed to serve."

The second version gives the reader an observation, a learning goal, and a reason for the opportunity. It still needs the exact verified details and prompt for a real college. The student writes the final response in their own voice.

Related reading

What Top Colleges Are Actually Looking For

<https://summittutors.org/what-top-colleges-are-actually-looking-for/>

College counseling at Summit Tutors

<https://summittutors.org/college-counseling/>