



YOUR COLLEGE  
ESSAY EXPERTS

# Acing The Dreaded "Why" Essay

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## College Essay Experience

**Four Weeks:** Write an Essay with a Wow Coach

Join us for a fun and engaging college essay intensive! Learn our ten-step method from the inside out as you write a Common App personal statement, guided by your own private Wow coach. Participants tell us over and over that this is one of the most eye-opening, valuable experiences we offer. When you're done, you'll have new insight into the essay writing process, plus more than 50 pages of email templates, writing exercises, resources and instructions to use with your students.

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**Year-Round:** Share Ideas, Solve Problems and Dig Into Best Practices

If you like our free Pro Chats, you'll love the College Essay Community. The first week of each month, we announce a timely topic and share reflection questions and resources. At the end of the month, we gather on Zoom for a lively meeting, facilitated by Wow's founders, to talk, reflect and challenge ourselves. All materials are available for a full year, and all meetings are recorded.

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Join an exclusive group of counselors who use Wow's proprietary online system with their students. Membership includes master classes in brainstorming and essay reviews, personalized mentorship, private office hours and early access to new and innovative college essay resources.

*Prerequisite: College Essay Experience training.*

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# What Are Why Us Essays?

- More about the student
- “Dating” essays
- An opportunity



# Why Us Essays Ask a Variety of Questions

- Why us in general?
- Why this school?
- Why this major?
- Why this program?
- Why this career focus?

# Your College Essay In Ten Simple Steps



## The Wow Method

### Your College Essay In Ten Simple Steps

#### CONTENT

- 1 Understand the Prompt**  
Before choosing a topic, you should understand what the prompt is asking and how the essay fits into the application. That means reflecting on what readers already know about you and thinking about what they can't find out from the rest of your application.
- 2 Brainstorm Ideas**  
In Step 2, we encourage students to consider several different topics. For each one, we discuss the story idea, the prompt, and what readers will learn about you. You might be surprised by what you choose to write about.
- 3 Focus on Theme**  
Every essay needs a theme to help the writer stay focused. The theme has two parts: 1) "What happened?" (What story are you sharing?) and 2) "Why does it matter?" (What will readers learn about you that they can't find out from the rest of your application?)
- 4 Free Write for Details**  
Once the theme is clear, it's time to get some words on the page. It doesn't matter what those words are or how many you write. This free write is a chance to capture details, focusing on the "What happened?" aspect of your theme.
- 5 Write Draft 1**  
Step 5 is a content draft. We suggest writing more than the word limit so you don't overthink this first draft or try to make it perfect. You'll have plenty of time to focus on structure and polish later.
- 6 Review Prompt and Theme**  
In Step 6, we read the first draft with the prompt and theme in mind, then give students writing exercises to help focus the essay and add details where needed. This review is for content only. We don't comment yet on structure or polish.

#### CONTENT + STRUCTURE

- 7 Write Draft 2**  
In Step 7, students take a step back and review the work they've completed so far, including theme, free writes, draft 1 and Step 6 writing exercises. Then it's time to write draft 2, this time paying attention to both content and structure.
- 8 Review Content and Structure**  
In Step 8, we review the essay for content and structure. We add notes in the margin, pointing out what works and where the essay could be improved, based on the student's willingness and ability to take the essay further.

#### CONTENT + STRUCTURE + POLISH

- 9 Write Draft 3**  
The polish draft gives the student an opportunity to step back once again and read the essay with fresh eyes. The goal is to tie up any loose ends and make sure the essay is clean, but not to rewrite it beyond recognition.
- 10 Final Review and Proofread**  
The final review is for clarity and consistency only. We focus on grammar, spelling and punctuation. Perfection is not the goal. You are a high school student and should sound like one.

# Step 1: Understand the Prompt

What is the prompt asking?

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What do I know about me?

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What do I know about them?

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How do we fit together?

# Step 1: Understand the Prompt

## Why Us Examples

### Tufts University

Which aspects of Tufts' curriculum or undergraduate experience prompt your application? In short, "Why Tufts?"

### Carnegie Mellon University

Many students pursue college for a specific degree, career opportunity or personal goal. Whichever it may be, learning will be critical to achieve your ultimate goal. As you think ahead to the process of learning during your college years, how will you define a successful college experience?

# Step 1: Understand the Prompt

## Why Us + Community Example

### Duke University (old)

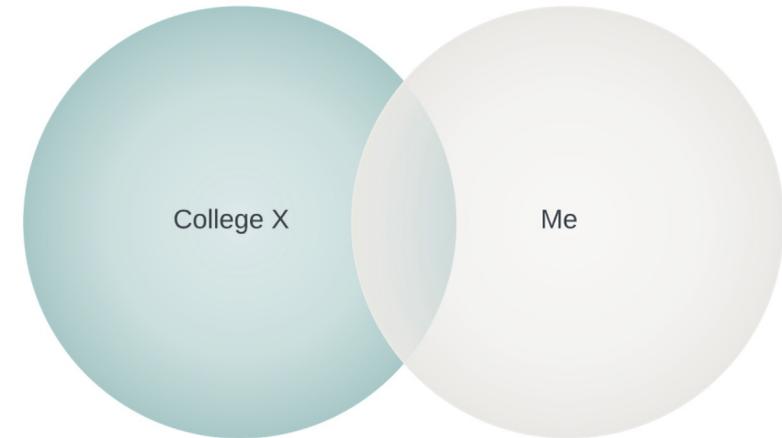
Please share with us why you consider Duke a good match for you. Is there something in particular about Duke's **academic or other offerings** that attract you?

### Duke University (new)

What is your sense of Duke **as a university and a community**, and why do you consider it a good match for you? If there's something in particular about our offerings that attracts you, feel free to share that as well.

## Step 2: Brainstorm Ideas

- What attracts me to this college, major or program?
- What do I want readers to know about me?



- How does what I know about the program mesh with what I want readers to know about me?
- How can I illustrate this intersection in stories or anecdotes?

# What to Include (Content)

Think Strategically

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Answer this question

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Consider all essays together

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Share positive characteristic(s)

# Research Suggestions



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## How to Help Students Prepare for Why Us Essays

This list was generated by participants in the March 2022 College Essay Experience discussion. Thank you to Barbara Rifkind, Sharon Vann, Robin Duncan, Alison Merzel, Laura Whitesel, Amy Mednick, Karen Leonard, Marjorie Bertman, Kristin Leffler, and Liz Gessner for your generous contributions.

1. If the student is going to visit, I give some ideas of how to collect significant info on the visit: go to student union to talk to current students. Ask what they were surprised to discover about the school; what they are disappointed in, what they are happy about.
2. I give them a list of things to look for. It's like a treasure hunt.
3. If the student has a target major, I suggest emailing with a professor who teaches a particular course they are interested in, asking what kind of research they are doing and whether they let undergrads work on their research.
4. I ask them to think of the "A-ha" moment when they know it was a good match for them.
5. Sometimes I tell the kids to find the mission statement of the school and think about how they fulfill that mission.
6. Definitely go beyond the website.



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Apply these ideas to  
any prompt

## Types of Supplements

-  Community Essays
-  Diversity Essays
-  Activity Essays
-  Creative Essays



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