



YOUR COLLEGE  
ESSAY EXPERTS

## 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.
7. Social media accounts for student organizations on campus.
8. Twitter account.
9. YouTube student videos.
10. Sometimes there are opportunities to talk to students online.
11. College Navigator.
12. Get the name of student involved in the club you want to join — email or text.
13. I have the advantage of being in a public school which has an alumni org that is very active. I send the kids to find alumni who have gone to that school and ask them about the experience.



14. If it is a school that monitors “interest” it is particularly useful to call the admissions office.
15. School newspaper and other publications.
16. LinkedIn for alumni outcomes.
17. If there is an admissions officer who is a recent grad of the school, they might be able to talk about the experience.
18. I will model how to research a school in a meeting.
19. When I have a student who doesn’t seem to get it, I’ll do a bit of research and then show them how and where I found some info relevant to their interests and push them to keep going along that way.
20. Sometimes I ask the parents to help their kids go through the departments, newspapers, etc. and talk about these things. they sometimes discover that the school they have been pushing is not a good fit.
21. I have them write at least two Why Us essays before they submit the first one, so they get the hang of it. They might modify the first one once they’ve written a second essay.

**Don’t**

1. Use college confidential
2. Copy the words of the web page
3. Rely on Reddit