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T14 Law School Why X Optional Statements

A persuasive Why X statement explains a real decision: why this applicant wants to learn, work, and live at this particular law school. The reader should understand the applicant's priorities and see how the school would serve them. Specific program names help only when the writer explains why those opportunities matter.

The numbered sources at the end are clickable. School instructions establish requirements. Published essays provide material for critical reading. The writing recommendations are editorial judgments, not a claim that any essay structure guarantees admission.

What a strong statement must accomplish

The central task is to explain a relationship between the applicant and the school. A reader who has finished the essay should be able to describe both the applicant's reasons for choosing the school and the evidence behind those reasons. A sentence about an excellent clinic tells the reader little until the applicant explains what they want to learn there and why they care about that work.

There are several ways to make that relationship convincing. Someone with substantial work experience might explain a problem they could recognize but could not yet address. An applicant with a developed intellectual interest might describe a question they want to pursue. Another applicant might have significant family responsibilities or a long-standing connection to the region. The essay becomes personal through the reasons that actually influence the decision.

The statement should add information. It may build on the direction established in the personal statement, but it should develop that direction into a reason for choosing this school. Recounting the same experience at the same length wastes the new space. A brief reference to an existing interest is usually enough to begin the next part of the explanation.

Do not demand a perfectly settled career plan from an applicant who is still exploring. An honest question, supported by relevant experience, can be persuasive. The writer needs to show that their interest deserves attention and that they have considered how the school might help them investigate it. They do not need to pretend to have chosen their entire career.

How to evaluate fit

Use these questions while reading or revising:

- What does the applicant want from their legal education, and why?
- Which parts of the school would help them pursue that interest?
- What does the essay reveal that a list of programs would not?
- Can the reader see the applicant taking part in the community?
- Does the enthusiasm match the evidence and the applicant's actual circumstances?

The relationship can be distinctive even when an individual feature is available elsewhere. Several schools may have an immigration clinic. The applicant's interest might still be particular because of

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the clinic's work, the surrounding community, a complementary academic opportunity, and an existing personal connection. The goal is a credible explanation of choice. Claims that one school alone could possibly educate the applicant are seldom necessary.

The current T14 prompts

The table summarizes the routes relevant to this study. A source described as a reproduction is a third-party transcription of application instructions. The application on LSAC remains the final reference for those entries. The table is not a replacement for scholarship-specific or character-and-fitness instructions.

School	Where Why X or other supplemental material belongs	Length and source
Yale	Its optional essay offers four choices concerning community, accomplishment, setback, and changed thinking. Yale expressly directs applicants away from specific reasons for attending Yale. The intellectual 250-word essay is a separate required component.	Optional essay approximately one double-spaced page, 12-point font. Official source [01].
Stanford	The current application includes required writing about communicating across differences and an additional required 250-word response. These are not generic Why Stanford essays. Older guides describing the familiar optional books or songs prompts should not determine the current application.	Required disagreement essay approximately 1-2 pages; one required 250-word response. Official indexed page and current reproduction [02, 03].
Harvard	Both the Statement of Purpose and Statement of Perspective are required. An optional addendum can provide other relevant information. There is no separately listed general Why Harvard essay in the public components.	Each required statement 1-2 pages, with at least one full page. Official source [04].
Chicago	Public instructions permit supplementary addenda for information not covered elsewhere. This is an optional route, rather than a requirement that every applicant provide another essay. Consult the application instructions when choosing a specific topic.	Usually one page or less for an addendum. Official sources [05, 06].
Columbia	Optional prompt 6 directly asks why Columbia and how its offerings, location, or community fit the applicant's goals. It competes with five other supplemental choices, so select the topic that adds the most useful information.	At most one optional statement, up to 500 words, double-spaced. Official fall 2027 preview [07].

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School	Where Why X or other supplemental material belongs	Length and source
NYU	The public instructions invite additional information about background and contribution. They do not list a dedicated general Why NYU prompt. The presence of an additional-information attachment does not make that a mandatory Why X essay.	Follow the current attachment instructions; no general limit specified in the public section. Official source [08].
Penn	The core-strengths option asks how the applicant's goals and values match Penn. Answer the personal half of that question as well as the institutional half. Other optional topics address contribution, challenges, motivation, and qualities.	One double-spaced page per optional essay in the current application reproduction. Official FAQ and reproduction [09, 10].
Virginia	Current public instructions expressly identify an optional prompt about interest in UVA, along with household contributions and other addenda. Older advice that UVA does not ask for a Why UVA statement is no longer a safe description.	Follow the prompt and formatting in the current application. Official source [11].
Michigan	Essay One asks about academic, cultural, or professional fit. Applicants may choose it or another supplemental topic according to the information they want to add.	Submit one or two supplemental essays at most, each 1-2 pages, double-spaced, font at least 11 points. Official source [12].
Duke	Optional Essay 1 asks about law school and Duke. Applicants who have already explained why law in their personal statement may focus on Duke. Required short answers and Optional Essay 2 perform different functions.	Why Duke 1-2 double-spaced pages. Official source [13].
Northwestern	Optional Essay 1 asks about interest in Northwestern. The other options concern contribution, academic or testing challenges, and career aspirations. Avoid duplicating those topics across attachments.	Each optional essay 1-2 pages, double-spaced, at least 11-point font. Current reproduction; official policy confirms optional essays as a review component [14, 15].

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School	Where Why X or other supplemental material belongs	Length and source
Berkeley	Current short-answer question 1 asks about location and the broader environment while setting academics and curriculum aside. A conventional clinic-and-professor essay would miss that instruction. The remaining choices explore other personal qualities and experiences.	Up to two responses, each at most one double-spaced page, 11-point font, one-inch margins. Official source [16].
Cornell	The official FAQ expressly lists an optional Why Cornell statement. Keep the focus on what has influenced the decision to apply.	One page in the current application reproduction. Official FAQ and reproduction [17, 18].
Georgetown	The optional statement concerns additional personal perspectives and experiences. The separate short responses invite personality and reflection. Neither should automatically become a general Why Georgetown essay.	Short response maximum 250 words; follow application instructions for the additional statement. Official source [19].

Published samples worth studying

An admitted applicant's essay is evidence of what that applicant submitted, not proof that the essay caused the admission. A sample described as strong by an editor has editorial support, but that is different from a documented admissions outcome. These distinctions matter when choosing a model.

1. **Penn classroom visit sample**

   The 2009 Top Law Schools collection [20] reports that this author was admitted and enrolled. A classroom visit, health-policy interests, and family circumstances explain the choice. An observed exchange supplies natural humor and an effective closing callback. Study how academic and practical reasons reinforce each other. Its length and historical references need adjustment for a current application.

2. **Michigan Law in the Casbah**

   Law in the Casbah [20] connects regional ties and international interests to academic choices. Its outcome is unspecified. Study the direct explanation of fit, while questioning superlatives and generic claims about contribution.

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3. **Michigan Taxi**

   Taxi [20] makes the applicant recognizable through a transportation concern, then adds child advocacy as an academic reason. Its outcome is unspecified. Study the ordinary details. Tighten its prose and independently check its historical program references.

4. **Penn public interest and LGBT rights sample**

   7Sage's Good Why X Essay [21] is the strongest compact model in this set. The writer gives the educational choice a consistent purpose by connecting a public-interest direction to Philadelphia, relevant work, academic study, and support for pursuing that career. Each institutional detail serves the applicant's priorities. The result reads like a considered decision rather than a catalogue.

   The editor endorses the essay, but the page does not specify an admissions outcome. Its legal and institutional context is historical. Study its coherence and economical explanation. Some praise could be reduced, and its reference to the personal statement is functional rather than especially elegant. The transferable lesson is to make the reader understand why the resources matter to this person.

5. **Northwestern health economics sample**

   7Sage's Decent Why X Essay [22] is a useful comparison. It connects graduate quantitative training to research and coursework and mentions an alumni conversation. Its prose is less controlled, and the connections among its reasons could be developed further. The publisher itself calls it decent and in need of polishing. No admissions outcome is provided.

   Read it to distinguish substance from polish. Relevant prior experience gives a program reference weight, even when the sentence needs work. Smooth wording cannot supply that missing experience. Its historical references, including the accelerated JD, are not current program advice.

6. **Duke sample with a reported admission**

   7Sage reports a Duke admission for the author of The Duke Mindset [23]. It includes concrete work and recreational interests, but I would not choose it as the primary voice model for this project. The extended puzzle and yarn metaphors compete with the reasons for choosing Duke, and some language feels inflated. This is a stylistic judgment, not a finding about AI authorship. Its useful lesson is that concrete personal interests can make an applicant visible. Admission does not make every sentence an example to imitate.

Choosing content before drafting

Start with the applicant's actual reasons. Research works better once there is something personal to connect it to. Ask the applicant to describe their decision aloud, without asking them to sound

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impressive. Preserve their vocabulary in the notes. Often the plainspoken answer contains a stronger idea than the polished paragraph they have been struggling to write.

The following questions are useful for brainstorming. They are prompts for finding material, not a requirement to answer all of them in the essay.

- What work, responsibility, or intellectual question do you want to continue pursuing?
- Where have you reached a limit in your current knowledge or role?
- What kind of learning experience helps you think well?
- Which school opportunity made you stop and investigate further?
- What did a student or graduate explain that changed your understanding?
- What personal circumstance makes the location meaningful?
- What could classmates realistically learn from working with you?
- Which reason would still matter if you stopped thinking about rankings?

An applicant can have ordinary reasons and still write an excellent essay. Wanting to remain near family does not need to become a story about lifelong service. Wanting access to a particular practice area does not need to become a claim about transforming the profession. Give the reason its actual scale and explain why it matters.

Choose reasons with enough depth

Build the essay around a small number of reasons that can be explained. Two or three developed reasons often work well in a short statement, but that is an editorial starting point rather than a quota. A single unusually substantial connection may deserve more space. Several related opportunities may support one reason rather than becoming separate paragraphs.

Give the most important reason the most space. Equal paragraph lengths can create false balance. The applicant's research may show that one feature is central and another is a useful personal consideration. The organization should reflect that difference.

Do not try to represent every interest on the resume. A good essay selects enough material to explain the decision. Additional interests can remain elsewhere in the application without being forced into the school-specific statement.

Researching the school well

Research should resolve questions the applicant already has. When reading about a clinic, ask what students actually do. When reading about a professor, ask which question in their work is relevant. When evaluating a cross-disciplinary opportunity, ask how a JD student can take part. These questions produce usable reasons, while a broad search for impressive names usually produces a list.

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A research worksheet

Applicant priority	Detail to verify	What the essay must explain
Learning a particular kind of client work	The clinic's current matters and student responsibilities	Which responsibility the applicant wants to learn and why their experience has made it important
Pursuing an intellectual question	Relevant current scholarship and teaching	What question interests the applicant and how the work may help them think about it
Studying across disciplines	Eligibility, course access, or program structure	Why the combination helps the applicant's inquiry, rather than merely adding credentials
Finding a suitable learning environment	A concrete observation or a student's account	Which behavior the applicant values and how they would participate
Remaining connected to a region	Family, community, work, or career ties	What those ties mean for the decision to spend three years there

Verifying access and availability

Check the school's current description rather than relying on an old sample. Confirm that the clinic exists under the name you use. Confirm that a professor is currently affiliated with the school and distinguish regular teaching from visiting or emeritus status. Check whether a university-wide opportunity is available to JD students. For a joint degree, understand the separate application and any additional time involved before describing it as a plan.

Do not promise participation in a selective opportunity as if admission guarantees it. The applicant can express a hope to apply, a desire to train, or an interest in the work. That is enough. Likewise, a student's description of their experience is evidence of that person's experience, not proof that every student will receive the same opportunity.

Read descriptions at the right level of detail. A clinic's title is less useful than its account of student responsibilities. A professor's general field is less useful than a question from their scholarship. A student group's existence is less useful than an activity the applicant understands and wants to join.

Using conversations honestly

The value of an interaction comes from what the applicant learned. Naming someone without explaining the substance is weak evidence of fit. A useful account says what the person described, why the applicant noticed it, and how it affected their interest.

Distinguish what you saw from what someone told you. A webinar can be described as a webinar. An alumnus's account can be described as an alumnus's account. The essay does not become more

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personal by blurring those categories. Accuracy gives the reader a reason to trust the applicant's explanation.

Questions for students should ask about experience. Ask what surprised them in a clinic, what collaborative work looks like, or which opportunity became important after enrollment. Generic requests to confirm that a school is friendly rarely produce details worth including.

Developing paragraphs that explain the decision

A strong paragraph usually includes an applicant priority, evidence for that priority, and a relevant opportunity. It also explains what the applicant hopes to do or learn. These elements do not have to appear in a fixed order. A paragraph may begin with a school observation and then explain why it mattered. Another may begin with work experience and move toward a learning opportunity.

The missing element in many drafts is the explanation between the name and the benefit. The writer says they want a clinic, then says it would prepare them for practice. The reader still does not know which experience they want or why this clinic addresses it. Resolve that missing step before improving the adjectives.

The following brief practice lines are invented teaching illustrations. They are not published applicant samples or text to submit.

Making a program reference meaningful

Thin: I am drawn to the school's renowned housing clinic and its commitment to access to justice.

More informative: At the tenants' help desk, I could explain a form but could not advise someone whose landlord disputed the facts. I want supervised experience interviewing clients and developing a case from their account.

The second version establishes a reason for clinical training. It still needs a verified connection to the particular school. The writer should add that connection after researching the clinic's work. Specific experience and accurate school information have to support each other.

Making a cultural observation meaningful

Thin: The collaborative community perfectly aligns with my values.

More informative: A student described how her clinic partner challenged a draft she had spent several days writing. She spoke about that disagreement as one of the most useful parts of the semester.

The stronger line supplies something the applicant can evaluate. The next sentence should explain why that kind of exchange matters to them. Avoid adding a generic sentence about belonging when a concrete account of how they learn would do more.

Making a faculty reference meaningful

Thin: Professor X's groundbreaking scholarship inspires me.

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More informative: The applicant identifies a question from the professor's work, explains how it relates to an experience or inquiry of their own, and describes what they still want to understand.

This does not require an elaborate summary of an article. The essay is still about the applicant's choice. A concise account of the relevant idea is enough when the connection is clear.

Keeping transitions natural

Move between reasons by explaining their relationship. An intellectual interest may lead to a desire for supervised practice. A preference for close feedback may explain why a student interaction mattered. A family connection may make the surrounding city a practical place to pursue those goals.

Avoid assigning every paragraph an ornamental transition. Phrases announcing another dimension of a journey seldom explain why the next idea belongs. The paragraph can simply begin with the next relevant fact when the relationship is already clear.

Openings and endings

The opening should make the reason for writing visible quickly. A direct statement of interest can work. A short observation from a visit can work. A practical personal circumstance can work. A genuine intellectual question can work. Choose the opening that fits the applicant's material rather than requiring every writer to produce a dramatic scene.

If using a scene, retain only the details that explain the interest. Descriptions of sunlight, campus architecture, and a racing heartbeat rarely establish why legal education is suitable. The reader should arrive at the applicant's reason within the first few sentences.

An effective opening also sets an honest scale. The applicant can be excited without claiming that one brief conversation changed their entire life. A modest description of something that confirmed or deepened their interest is often more believable.

The ending should follow from the reasons already developed. It may bring together the kind of work the applicant wants to pursue and the community they want to join. It may return briefly to an opening observation. It should not introduce a new cluster of resources or a large promise of future impact.

Do not manufacture a first-choice declaration. State that the school is the applicant's first choice only if that is true. A promise to enroll regardless of other offers carries a different meaning from enthusiasm. The essay can end convincingly without either claim.

Keep any statement of future contribution at a realistic level. Continuing a kind of volunteer work, sharing experience with a relevant student group, or taking part in thoughtful classroom discussion is easier to understand than a promise to redefine the school community.

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Preserving a human voice

Writing that feels personal gives the reader access to how the applicant notices, chooses, and explains things. It can be polished. Polishing becomes a problem when the editing removes those individual ways of thinking and replaces them with familiar admissions language.

The practical standard is that the applicant can explain every sentence naturally and recognize themselves in the final draft. They should know where each claim came from. They should be able to say why a detail matters without reciting the paragraph. If their spoken explanation is clearer than the written version, use that discrepancy to find what the prose is hiding.

Patterns that deserve attention

Pattern	Why it weakens the essay	What to look for instead
Repeated abstract praise	The reader learns that the school is excellent but little about the decision	A particular activity or experience the applicant wants
A metaphor running through every paragraph	The metaphor can force unrelated reasons into an artificial unity	A real relationship among the applicant's priorities
Perfect certainty about a career	The conclusion may exceed the experience supporting it	A credible direction and questions the applicant wants to explore
Repeated promises of impact	Future contribution becomes larger than the available evidence	A concrete way the applicant could participate
Every paragraph ending in a moral	Reflection begins to sound mechanical	Explanation only where the reader needs it
A list of faculty and clinics	Proper nouns create the appearance of specificity	A developed reason for including each reference
Stock emotional language	The expression could belong to many applicants	A detail the writer actually remembers and finds meaningful

Authorship and assistance

Feeling personal and being the applicant's own work are separate requirements. Michigan generally requires applicant-originated ideas and expression and prohibits generative AI drafting, with a specific exception for its designated AI prompt. Duke requires the applicant to write the drafts and final product without generative AI assistance while allowing proofreading and general feedback.

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Columbia's fall 2027 preview certification also bars writing or modification by consultants or AI tools. Read the actual school language before deciding what kind of help to provide. [07, 12, 13]

This study guide concerns research, close reading, brainstorming questions, and editorial criteria. At schools with restrictions, preserve the boundary described in their instructions. Removing AI-associated wording from an externally drafted essay does not satisfy an authorship requirement.

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Sources and reading links

All sources were consulted on October 1, 2026.

[01] Yale Law School Application Components *Official instructions.*

[02] Stanford Law School JD Application Process *Official page indexed by search.*

[03] 7Sage Stanford Application Requirements 2026 to 2027 *Current application reproduction.*

[04] Harvard Law School JD Application Components *Official instructions.*

[05] Chicago Law Application Requirements *Official instructions.*

[06] Chicago Law Personal Statement and Addenda FAQs *Official guidance.*

[07] Columbia Law Fall 2027 JD Preview Application *Official preview PDF.*

[08] NYU Law Admissions Information and Instructions *Official instructions.*

[09] Penn Carey Law JD Admissions FAQs *Official page indexed by search.*

[10] 7Sage Penn Application Requirements 2026 to 2027 *Current application reproduction.*

[11] Virginia Law JD Application Information *Official instructions.*

[12] Michigan Law Apply to the JD Program *Official instructions.*

[13] Duke Law Juris Doctor Application Information *Official instructions.*

[14] 7Sage Northwestern Application Requirements 2026 to 2027 *Current application reproduction.*

[15] Northwestern Law Admissions Policy Statement *Official policy.*

[16] Berkeley Law Ready to Apply *Official instructions.*

[17] Cornell Law JD Admissions FAQ *Official instructions.*

[18] 7Sage Cornell Application Requirements 2026 to 2027 *Current application reproduction.*

[19] Georgetown Law Application Requirements *Official instructions.*

[20] Top Law Schools 2009 Why Our School Essay Collection *Penn and two Michigan samples.*

[21] 7Sage Good Why X Essay *Penn sample and editor commentary.*

[22] 7Sage Decent Why X Essay *Northwestern sample and commentary.*

[23] 7Sage The Duke Mindset *Sample with publisher-reported admission.*

[24] 7Sage How to Research a Why X Essay *Research guidance.*

[25] Spivey Why X Essay Deep Dive *Former admissions deans and transcript.*

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[26] Spivey Interview with Penn Admissions Dean Renee Post *First-person explanation of the core-strengths prompt.*

[27] 7Sage How to Write a Why X Essay *Structures and writing guidance.*

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