

College Application Do's and Don'ts

Sometimes what you don't do is just as important as what you do!

Before you apply to college, DO:

- ✓ *Continue to get high grades and score well on standardized tests:* "Senioritis" is tempting, but grades and test scores are some of the first things a college will use to screen the applicant pool.
- ✓ *Obtain (or maintain) an *active* role in your activities:* If you find that you don't really do much in an extracurricular activity even though you're technically a member, you may want to drop it to concentrate your efforts.
- ✓ *Continue to take more rigorous academic courses:* Take challenging courses that will help you grow academically.

DON'T:

- ⊗ *Don't overload your personal schedule to impress an admissions office.* You may end up doing more harm than good if your grades and overall quality of life suffer because you're burned out or involved in too many activities.

On Your Application Essay, DO:

- ✓ *Show without telling:* Don't just list your attributes; be specific. For example, saying that you're helpful is not as dynamic as relating your experiences with helping younger students learn how to read.
- ✓ *Demonstrate your creativity:* Avoid cliches or standard essay topics. Try to come up with something an admissions office hasn't seen a million times before.
- ✓ *Let your personality shine:* The application essay is your opportunity to show your prospective college what makes you unique. Ask yourself whether what you've written is memorable, engaging and in your own voice.

DON'T:

- ⊗ *Don't rely on spellcheck:* While it's a good idea to use the spellcheck tool, don't count on it to catch every mistake. Read through your essay to catch usage mistakes and have a parent or teacher look it over for grammatical errors.
- ⊗ *Don't write about a delicate or controversial subject if you can't get the tone right.* Religion, a bout with depression or an issue with your boyfriend or girlfriend are all fine subjects for an essay; but handle them wrong, and your essay will end up in the trash.
- ⊗ *Don't treat an online application like an instant message (IM) or e-mail.* An admissions office has no need to see smiley faces or IM slang. Treat an online application with the same seriousness as you would a paper application.

On the General Application, DO:

- ✓ *Follow the rules:* If an application asks you to choose one essay, don't answer them all. Read the application directions completely before answering any questions.
- ✓ *Include everything:* Verify all forms have been signed and that you've included all essays and recommendations. Doublecheck that you haven't left out anything important. Make copies for your records.
- ✓ *Pay attention to deadlines:* Note when the application deadline is and submit it with plenty of time to spare. You may want to send your application via certified mail (or request an e-mail receipt if you applied online) for added assurance that it arrived on time.

DON'T:

- ⊗ *Don't let anything go until the last minute:* Procrastination might mean leaving something out or making mistakes on the application.

In Your Interview (if you have one), DO:

- ✓ *Arrive early and dress the part:* Know where the interview will be held ahead of time. Dress on the conservative side. Questions about the dress code? Call the college and ask.
- ✓ *Reveal your identity:* Admissions offices want to know you as a person. When discussing accomplishments, highlight why they were meaningful or what you got out of them.

DON'T:

- ⊗ *Don't sound like you're reading off of a cue card:* Rehearse, but remember that the interview should be a conversation. Be natural, sure of yourself and optimistic.
- ⊗ *Don't show up with no knowledge of the school:* Come prepared with questions or impressions you have about the college to demonstrate your interest level. Place less emphasis on your plans after graduation and more on what you want to learn and accomplish while a college student.

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Admissions Guide

Pick Your College: Questions to Consider

Financial Aid Questions

What type of financial aid packages does the school offer?
How are outside scholarships handled?

What tuition increases are planned in the next few years, if any? What has been the average tuition increase in years past?

What kind of work is available? Wages and hours?

Are there refunds available if you need to leave school for any reason?

Campus Life Questions

How diverse is the campus? How does the school promote diversity?

What is the crime rate on campus and in the surrounding neighborhood?

What student organizations are on campus?

What services does the student health clinic provide? What about 24-hour emergency care?

Academics/Career Questions

How does the school help graduates find jobs?

What percentage of graduates from the school find jobs in their field of study?

What is the retention rate (how many students come back after their freshman year)?

What is the classroom environment like? How much student-teacher interaction is there? Are you able to visit the campus and sit in on a class?

How many computers/computer labs are there? Are they up-to-date and accessible to all students?

Early Decision (ED) vs. Early Action (EA)

ED and EA allow students to apply early to schools they know they want to attend. *What's the difference?*

Early Decision is binding. If accepted, you must attend that school and withdraw any applications sent to other schools. You won't be able to compare financial aid offers.

Early Action is not binding. Even if you are accepted, you may compare admissions and financial aid offers and wait to commit to the college until later in the year.

Some schools now offer **Single-Choice Early Action. This option is similar to Early Action, except that you may not apply early to other colleges (though you may apply regular decision).*

Many ED or EA deadlines occur in the fall. Ask your college whether ED or EA is an option and if you can apply early to other schools. Talk to your counselor and ask your prospective school for more information.

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Admissions Glossary: Key Terms

Award Letter: A letter telling you what financial aid (if any) your college is offering to you (includes types and amounts of aid offered, specific program information, etc.). You may choose to accept some or all of what is offered.

Credit (or Credit Hour): A unit of measurement institutions give for fulfilling course requirements. Most colleges require that you complete a certain number in order to graduate.

Cost of Attendance: Includes any cost associated with attending college: tuition and associated fees, room and board, books and supplies, etc.

Enrollment Status: Indication of whether you attend full or part time. In general, you must attend at least half time (or in some cases full time) to qualify for financial aid.

Expected Family Contribution: Amount students and their family are expected to contribute toward cost of attendance.

FAFSA: Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Students must fill out the FAFSA each year to find out how much federal aid they are eligible to receive. Web: www.fafsa.ed.gov.

Open Admissions: Students are admitted regardless of academic qualifications.

Out-of-State Student: Generally applies to students attending a public university outside of their home state. Out-of-state students must pay a higher tuition rate unless they establish legal residency for that state.

Rolling Admissions: There is no set admissions deadline date; qualified students are accepted until classes are filled.

Undergraduate Student: A student who has not completed a baccalaureate or first professional degree.