

College Admissions Do's and Don'ts

by Randall S. Hansen, Ph.D.

While every college or university has its own requirements for admission and its own unique set of criteria for selecting candidates for admission, following these general guidelines should help all college applicants be better prepared to tackle the admission application process.

- Do understand the College Admissions Domino Effect.
- Don't wait until the last minute to begin the application process; the earlier you start, the better off you'll be. And do read the application instructions carefully to be certain you are following directions and including everything each college requests.
- Do familiarize yourself with the college admissions timeline.
- Do continue to take challenging and advanced courses your senior year in high school. And do continue to earn good grades in those courses.
- Do attend college fairs, use college source books, and take advantage of college-related Web sources to learn about as many colleges and universities as you can.
- Do develop a set of criteria (entrance requirements, reputation/ranking, location, costs, majors, etc.) for developing your list of colleges. Read more.
- Do work with your family and guidance counselor in narrowing down your list of colleges to a reasonable number.
- Do research each college or university to determine entrance requirements, fees, and due dates of applications.
- Do consider making campus visits to the colleges that most interest you. Read more.
- Do include a mix of colleges in your final choice that include at least one or two "stretch" schools, some number of good fit schools, and perhaps one "safety" school. But don't sell yourself short when considering your list of schools.
- Don't panic if you don't score as well as you hoped on the standardized tests (SAT, ACT). But do plan on taking them again and attempting to perform at a higher level.
- Do commit the most time to writing, editing, and rewriting your college essays. And do have at least one other person proofread your final drafts. Read more.
- Don't just ask the popular teachers to write letters of recommendation for you. Instead, do ask teachers who really know you, your interests, and your potential.

- Do consider early decision or early action programs if you have one college that seems a perfect fit for you. But don't apply for one of these programs if you are undecided about your choice of colleges. Read more.

- Do keep track of all the deadlines for each college or university -- and do be sure to get your applications in before those deadlines.

- Don't allow yourself to fall into the dreaded senior slump. Many colleges will ask to see at least some of your senior grades before making an admissions decision -- and some may wait on the decision until they see all your senior grades.

- Do stay involved in volunteering and community service activities. While they look good on a college application, they are also providing you with valuable skills and experience you'll need when it's time to apply for internships and jobs while in college.

- Do carefully review each application packet before you seal and mail it to be sure you have all the correct materials for each college.

Questions about some of the terminology used in this article? Get more information (definitions and links) on key college, career, and job-search terms by going to our Job-Seeker's Glossary of Job-Hunting Terms.

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