

College Planning Workbook



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Getting to Know Yourself

The process of choosing a college begins with a careful look at yourself, not with a list of colleges. It is your own assessment of your interests, your abilities and your giftedness that is central to your college search. You may want to begin your search by looking at specific colleges, but the first step is to carefully evaluate yourself as a person and as a student. Here are some areas that could make a difference in your selection of a college.

1. Are you more comfortable taking an active, rather than passive approach to learning? Do you prefer having opportunities for discussions and seminars or can you learn material in large classrooms with little discussion? Are mentoring relationships with professors important to you?
2. Do you value independence or do you require more structure in your academic setting?
3. Do you see college as primarily a vehicle for vocational preparation or do you view college as a time for developing “wholeness of person” and testing a variety of ideas and career paths?
4. Are you prepared to miss important family occasions and only being able to come home for major holiday breaks or do you need to be close enough to get home more regularly?
5. Do you enjoy being outdoors and in rural settings or will you miss the energy of an urban location?
6. Are you comfortable having your faith challenged regularly in the classroom and having fewer like-minded peers and or do you want to where you will grow in your Christian faith in the classroom and have more like-minded peers around you?
7. Is having a good academic/social balance important? Do you prefer a more academic or a more social setting?
8. What are your best subjects? Which subjects do you want to avoid in college?

Where can I find help with the answers to some of these questions?

There are consultants who specialize in assessments. There are at least two of consultants who have helped Cambridge students and parents in the past:

1. PeopleRight – Mike McCormick is President of this company and is a former Cambridge parent and board member who has provided skills and career assessments for students for many years. His website is www.people-right.com.

2. The Giftedness Center – Bill Hendricks is President and specializes in identifying what people love to do and will instinctively do by virtue of their natural, inborn motivational bent of giftedness. Website is www.thegiftednesscenter.com
3. Self Survey for the College Bound – This is a survey that is used in the book, College Match by Steven Antonoff. A copy of this survey is available in the College Placement Office.
4. There are free Myers-Briggs and DISC personality test instruments available online that can be useful in self assessment. The College Placement Director can help you interpret your results from either of these instruments as it relates to choosing a college.

Choosing a College

Size:

A. **Small – fewer than 3,000 students**

Covenant College, Rhodes College, Furman University, University of Dallas, Samford University, Austin College, Davidson College, Washington and Lee University, Rice University, Trinity University, University of Tulsa, Wofford College, Wheaton College

B. **Medium – between 3,000 and 10,000 students**

Wake Forest University, Duke University, Vanderbilt University, Northwestern University, Georgetown University, College of William and Mary, Elon University, Belmont University, Chapman University, SMU, TCU, Boston College, Emory University, Naval Academy, West Point Military Academy, College of Charleston, Harvard University, Princeton University, Yale University

C. **Large – between 10,000 and 20,000 students**

Baylor University, University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, University of Virginia, Boston University, Clemson University, University of Kansas, University of Nebraska, University of Oklahoma, Georgia Tech, Auburn University, University of Mississippi, University of Southern California, University of Pennsylvania, Cornell University

D. **Very Large – over 20,000 students**

University of Texas at Austin, Texas A&M University, University of Michigan, Penn State University, University of Illinois, University of Minnesota, University of Florida, Florida State University, Ohio State University, University of Alabama, Texas Tech University

Academics:

Most colleges and universities have a wide range of majors and course offerings and are able to prepare students for many types of careers. However, when making your college application list, it is important to know the academic strengths of the colleges and universities. Here are some of the academic categories and some examples of good colleges and universities in these categories.

- A. **Liberal Arts and Sciences** – Liberal arts colleges prepare students well for professional careers such as medical school, law school, and teaching. Liberal arts majors are also well positioned to enter the job market in many areas. There are also strong liberal arts programs in larger national and regional universities, especially in their honors programs. Cambridge students have matriculated to many strong liberal arts programs. A few examples of these are, Furman University, Rhodes College, Austin College, St. John's College in Annapolis and Santa Fe, Carleton College, University of Dallas, Wake

Forest University, Baylor Honors College, Samford University's University Fellows, University of Texas Liberal Arts Honors and Plan II, Texas A&M Cornerstone Honors and many more.

- B. **STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics** – Most all of the public state flagship universities have strong academic programs in the sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics. Some very well know and highly selective STEM schools are MIT, Cal Tech, Georgia Tech, Purdue, USC, Rochester Institute Technology, Northwestern University, University of California at Berkeley, Stanford, University of Michigan and University of Illinois, University of Florida, North Carolina State, Virginia Tech and University of Minnesota. Some good STEM programs in Texas are Texas A&M, University of Texas, Rice University, Texas Tech University, the University of Texas – Dallas.
- C. **Business** – Business schools are found in most medium, large and very large universities. Some smaller liberal arts colleges will also have business courses of study. Some of the highly ranked undergraduate business programs are at the University of Pennsylvania, University of Virginia, Notre Dame University, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Cornell University. Some good business programs in Texas are the University of Texas, Texas A&M, SMU, TCU and Baylor University.
- D. **Nursing** – There are over 500 nursing programs to choose from in the United States. Many of the strongest programs are connected with medical schools such as Duke University, Vanderbilt University and Johns Hopkins University. Most of the flagship state universities have good nursing programs. Some very good nursing programs in Texas are at Baylor University, University of Texas in Austin, TCU, Texas Women's University, Houston Baptist University, University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston and University of Mary Hardin Baylor.
- E. **Education** – There are multiple routes to a career in education. Many students will major in an academic subject such as Mathematics, English, History, Biology, etc. and pursue education credentials as graduate study. Many private secondary schools do not require college work in an Education major or minor. Students who wish to pursue an Education degree from a top school of education may want to investigate some of these highly rated education programs: University of Texas – Austin, University of Virginia, Vanderbilt University, University of Georgia, University of Georgia, Columbia University, University of Michigan and the University of Indiana. There are a number of schools in Texas with good schools of education: Baylor University, Texas A&M, Texas Tech University, TCU, Dallas Baptist University, University of North Texas and University of Dallas.
- F. **Fine Arts – Art, Drama, Music** – Many colleges and universities are especially geared towards majors in the Fine Arts. Other national and regional universities have very strong academic programs in one or more of the fine arts. Students who major in some

area of music or drama submit portfolios along with their application. Some schools have strong reputations in one or more of the fine arts such as The Julliard School for music and dance and Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) and Ringling College of Art and Design for the visual arts. Students who are interested in Drama and Theater majors will consider schools such as Elon University, Belmont University, New York University, and Northwestern University.

- G. **Christian Colleges and Universities** – Many Cambridge students have chosen colleges who teach from a distinctly Christian world view. Students can receive a strong education in the liberal arts and sciences as well as majors in the health sciences, fine arts, business and education at distinctly Christian colleges. Here are some very good Christian colleges and universities that Cambridge students have attended: Covenant College, Wheaton College, Grove City College, Westmont College, Hope College and University of Dallas. Other distinctively Christian schools to consider are Gordon College, Biola University and Calvin College. Baylor University, Samford University,

Public or Private Colleges: What to Consider

State residents have an admission advantage at public colleges – Since state residents pay taxes to support their public colleges, those colleges give admission priority to in-state applicants. At highly selective state universities, however, state residents compete with many other highly qualified applicants from in-state and out-of-state.

Both types of colleges can be diverse – Many private colleges attract students from a broad geographic spectrum, including international. Students at public colleges tend to be in-state or from nearby states, but may come from many heritages and backgrounds.

It may take longer to graduate from a public college – At many public colleges, it can be difficult for students to get into the classes required for their major. If this is the case, savings from lower tuition may evaporate. On average, private colleges show higher four-year graduation rates.

Either type can be affordable—or expensive. Private colleges frequently offer scholarships and grants that significantly cut their actual cost, even bringing it close to the cost of a public college. On the other hand, out-of-state students attending public colleges pay much higher tuition. For them, the cost of a public college is on a par with the cost of private colleges. At public colleges, "non-resident" students pay more tuition. But there is hope.

Reciprocity agreements guarantee reduced tuition to students from nearby states.

Out-of-state tuition waivers give some non-residents reduced tuition based on a high GPA, interest in a particular field of study, or parents who are alumni, faculty, or staff.

State residency status usually requires a year of family residency or graduation from an in-state high school. But rules may be less strict for some public college systems.

Either type can be prestigious. Many private colleges are considered highly prestigious. And so are some public universities. If you are set on getting a graduate degree, consider a lower-cost undergraduate degree at a public college and attending a more well-known college for your advanced degree.

Either type can be small or large. It's true that private colleges tend to be smaller, incur less red tape, and offer more personal attention than public colleges. But it is entirely possible to find small public colleges and large private universities. If you want the resources of a large university with a small-scale atmosphere, look for universities with honors colleges.

Understanding Selectivity

A Selective College Is Simply a College That Does Not Admit Everyone – Selectivity is measured by the percentage of students who are admitted. The lower the percentage, the more selective the school is. Essentially, most colleges are selective to some degree. A small group of highly selective schools admits less than a third of applicants.

Most Colleges Admit Most of Their Applicants – Most colleges admit over half of their applicants. The average acceptance rate for all four-year colleges in the U.S. is 63.9 percent, according to a 2013 report from the National Association for College Admissions Counseling. Another interesting statistic is that approximately 70% of the 2,500+ four-year colleges admit 70% or more of their applicants. So, your chances at the vast majority of colleges may actually be quite promising.

The Headlines Are About a Small Number of Highly Selective Colleges – Out of the some 2,500+ four-year colleges featured in the United States, only about 50 of them routinely admit fewer than 30 percent of applicants. If your heart is set on one of these colleges, it is a good idea to include some well-researched backup schools on your college list. You may very well be attending one of them.

Colleges Can Be Selective in Other Ways – Selectivity isn't always based on the admission rate. It sometimes depends on other factors.

- If your grades and test scores fall below the average qualifications of admitted students, that school will be more difficult for you to get into.
- Applying to a public college out of state may lower your chances. Such colleges give preference to state residents and sometimes to applicants from neighboring states.

Reach, Match or Safety

- A. Reach** - *A reach school is one where your academic credentials fall below the school's range for the average freshman. Reach schools are long-shots, but they*

*should still be possible. If you have a 2.0 GPA, Harvard is not a reach school—it's a dream. **Any school with less than a 30% acceptance rate should be considered a reach.***

- B. Match** - A match school is one where your academic credentials fall well within (or even exceed) the school's range for the average freshman. **There are no guarantees**, but it's not unreasonable to be accepted to several of your match schools.
- C. Safety or High Probability of Acceptance** – a school where your academic credentials fall far above the school's range for average freshmen. You can be reasonably certain that you will be accepted to these schools. **This must be a school that you could be excited to attend.**

Other Considerations

College Ministry Opportunities

Greek Presence

Urban, Mid-Size City or Rural

Make a College List

Make of list of at least 20 schools that meet most of your important characteristics that might possibly become application school.

- A.** Make a larger list first (20+ schools) , and then narrow over several months. (Target Schools)
- B. Final list should include 6 – 10 schools.** (Final Target Schools) - There should be some schools that are Matches and Safeties as well as Reach school or two. **You should be prepared for each school on your list to become your #1 choice.**
- C. Research on each of the schools on your longer list (target schools).**
 - a. Find the profile of the most recent freshmen class – most schools have this information on their website. Many school websites have this information under “Common Data Set” search.*
 - b. Talk to alumni of your target schools. Cambridge alumni have attended many of the school on your target list.*

- c. Correspond with the Regional Admissions Rep. All schools will have an admissions representative that is responsible for applications from Cambridge. Ask to be put on the mailing list. Ask for the most recent promotional material.*
- d. Get input from the college placement director about the schools on your list.*
- e. Go to local college fairs. Most of these are in the fall of the school year. The college placement office will have information about these college fairs.*
- f. Go on the Cambridge college trip, even if your target schools are not represented. You will be able to determine a lot about your preferences about size, type, geographic location of college by seeing similar schools on the college trip.*
- g. Visit as many of your target schools as you can. You should visit all of the schools on your final target list.*

Colleges Visits

What to See

- **Students** – Talk to students, listen to their conversations. Observe how they dress for class. Do they seem to enjoy being there? Are they proud of their school? What extracurricular activities are they involved in? Are there enough like minded students?
- **Student Center** – Visit the student center, look at the bulletin boards
- **College Newspaper** – Get a copy of the school newspaper and read it.
- **Academics** – Are the students serious about their academics? How stressful and competitive is the academic environment? What is the normal academic work load?
- **Faculty** – Are faculty available and approachable? Are they mentors to the students? Does the school value academic teaching? Schedule a meeting with a faculty member.
- **Student housing** – Is there guaranteed housing for 4 years? How many students live on campus? Coed Housing? Spend the night with a student or at least visit a dorm room.
- **Dining** – Eat in the main dining hall. How many other dining places other than the student dining hall?
- **Recreational and exercise facilities** – Are there places to exercise. Are jogging trails available? Are students active with intramural sports?
- **Safety and Health** – Check out the Health Center? Visit with a Campus Security professional.
- **Library** – How many books does the library own? Are there comfortable study areas? Is the library open enough to accommodate your student habits?
- **Campus Appearance** – Is the campus clean? Is this somewhere you would want to spend your college life?
- **Off Campus** – What is there to do when you are not on campus? Are there sufficient shopping areas? Are there good restaurants close by? What cultural and social opportunities are close by?

Things to Do

- **Campus Tour** - Take an admissions office campus tour. Be sure they have a record of your attendance.
- **Attend a group information session.**

- **Interview** – Have a separate meeting with an admissions counselor or an interview (if possible)
- **Student Cafeteria** – Eat a meal in the student dining hall.
- **Conversations** – Talk to students, professors, employees about their experiences at this school.
- **Overnight** – Spend a night in a dorm
- **Campus Ministry** – Go to a campus ministry meeting
- **Classes** – Go to a class/ meet some faculty
- **Ballgame or Concert** – Attend an athletic, social or cultural campus event.

And Keep in Mind

- Do not judge a school solely by the student tour guide. No single person represents an entire college.
- The sunshine factor; do not let the weather influence your judgment, unless of course it rains or snows all the time.

Questions to Ask

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the college?
- What should I know about the college that isn't mentioned in the brochures or on the website?
- Is there anything special that we should see while we are here?
- Where do students study?
- What are the student housing options?
- Which dorms are best to live in and how do I get into them?
- How many years can I live off campus?
- Is safety an issue?
- Are classes taught by professors or teaching assistants?
- What is the typical class size? For freshmen? For upperclassmen?
- How good is the food in student dining? What are the other dining options?
- Are faculty assessable? Does the faculty have a good reputation with the students?
- How many hours per day/week do students typically study?
- How easy is it to get into the classes that you want or need to take?
- How difficult is it to participate in name your interest?
- How good are the career counseling services?

- What is the political climate on campus?
- What are the campus ministries on campus?
- Are there particular tensions on campus that I should be aware of?
- What off campus activities are available to students?
- Are there good dining options off campus? Shopping?
- How important is Greek life? What is the relationship between Greeks and non Greeks?
- What is the school spirit like? Do students attend collegiate athletic contests?

Types of Applications

1. **Common Application** - <https://www.commonapp.org>

The Common Application provides a common, standardized first-year application form for use at any member institution. Today, The Common Application serves over 1 million students and school officials annually through our free online First-Year and Transfer applications. Over 500 public and private colleges and universities use the Common Application.

2. **Apply Texas** - <https://www.applytexas.org>

ApplyTexas offers centralized means for both Texas and non-Texas students to apply to apply for admission to any Texas public university, as well as to participating community and private colleges.

3. **School Specific Applications**

Schools not using the Common Application will have their own specific applications, which can generally be found through their website and either submitted online or mailed in – and sometimes, schools will accept either the Common App *or* their own school-specific one. In cases where both are accepted, it usually doesn't make a difference which one you submit, but it's a good idea to call the admissions office and see if there is a preference.

Standardized Tests

When is the best time to take standardized tests?

At a minimum, students should take one SAT and one ACT test during the second school term of their junior year during January and February. Test results will determine which test students should repeat to improve their scores. Some students are better SAT test takers and some are better ACT test takers. Colleges do not prefer one test over the other. Many students will take both the SAT and ACT tests and one additional test for a total of three standardized tests by the end of June of their junior year. There is time for one or two additional tests in the fall of their senior year.

How do students prepare for standardized tests?

- A. Cambridge students will take the PSAT in October of the freshmen, sophomore, and junior years. This is a shorter version of the SAT test and is good practice for the SAT test. Top scores of the junior year PSAT receive National Merit Scholarship recognition.
- B. Many students will seek outside help from outside testing companies. There are many options in Dallas. Some of these are:
- Karen Dillard College Prep - <https://kdcollegeprep.com>
 - Kaplan Test Prep - <http://www.kaptest.com/>
 - SMU Continuing Education - <http://www.smu.edu/CAPE/TestPrep/SAT-ACT>
 - Princeton Review - <http://prep.princetonreview.com>
- C. Some students will use private tutors to help with test preparation. The testing companies above provide private tutoring as well as group courses. There are many other individuals in the Dallas area who offer standardized test tutoring services.
- D. The best preparation for the SAT and/or the ACT test is practice, practice, practice. College Board offers free practice tests for the SAT. There are also several books (*Princeton Review*, *Barrons*, etc.) that can be purchased at Barnes and Noble with both ACT and SAT practice tests.

How important are standardized tests?

Standardized tests are only one of the criteria that colleges and universities use to make admissions decisions. Two criteria are always more important than standardized tests: **rigor of curriculum and Grade Point Average (GPA)**. Standardized tests are more important for larger public, state universities who have very large numbers of applications to review. Private schools will have a more holistic review of students which will include extracurricular activities, recommendations, and essays. There are many colleges that are devaluing standardized tests.

Some of these have become test optional schools. A list of these schools is available online at <http://fairtest.org/university/optional>

Resume Guidelines

- I. Make a list of every activity, honors and awards that you have been involved in since the beginning of your freshmen year.
(Students should begin make this list during their freshmen year)
- II. At the end of each year, each student should submit of list of activities to the College Placement Director (electronically)
- III. Categorize these activities into (1) Honors and Awards (2) Extracurricular Activities (3) Work Experience (4) Travel (5) Interests, Hobbies
- IV. Use one of the formats in the workbook and construct your resume
- V. Submit your resume draft to College Placement Director for editing.
- VI. All resumes must be completed by the end of the junior year.**
- VII. Resumes may be revised throughout the senior year.

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EDUCATION

8/08 – 5/13

The Cambridge School of Dallas

Dallas, Texas

ACTIVITIES

11th-12th

Prefect Council

One of five students elected to serve as student leader by vote of entire student body and faculty.

4 hrs/week

- Prefects provide formal student leadership, evaluate effectiveness of school policies, act as liaisons between students and faculty, and serve as mentors to younger students.
- Prefects provide regular counsel to the Headmaster and represent the school at major public functions.

12th

Student Activities Chair

- Responsible for organizing teams of students to plan school back-to-school events, the All-School Retreat, Formals, and special events.

1 hr/week

36 weeks/year

9th-12th

Girls Varsity and Junior Varsity Crew Team

The crew team practices 5-6 days per week at 5:30 am from August through May. The team competes in local, state and regional regattas.

17 hrs/week

39 weeks/year

- Most Valuable Player in grade 11

9th – 12th

Girls Varsity Tennis Team

- Team placed 4th in TAPPS 2-A State Tournament Grade 11
- Team Captain in Grade 11

12 hrs/week

16 weeks/year

9th – 11th

Drama

- Chorus, *A Winter's Tale* by William Shakespeare in Grade 9
- Roxane, Vignette from *Cyrano de Bergerac* by Edmond Rostand Grade in grade 10
- Pigeen Ryan, *Auntie Mame* by Jerome Lawrence and Robert Lee in Grade 10
- Stage Crew, *The Red Lamp* by Hilliard Booth in Grade 11

9 th – 12 th	National Charity League, Highlander Chapter Organization that promotes service, leadership And culture. Serve at 12 nonprofit agencies including: Reconciliation Outreach, Salvation Army, New Friends New Life, Senior Source, North Texas Food Bank, Meet the Troops, Museum of Nature & Science. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nominating Committee in Grades 10 and 11 • Executive Committee and Recording Secretary in Grade 11 • President in Grade 12 • Volunteer weekly through NCL, school and church at a variety of agencies, including Center of Hope, Voice of Hope, a local DISD Elementary School, PCPC Christmas Box Project, the Salvation Army and others. 	3 hrs/week 50 weeks/year
11 th	Founding Member of Junior Board for Reconciliation Outreach	1 hr/week 3 weeks/year
9 th	Chess Club	1 hr/week 30 weeks/year
10 TH -12 TH	International Travel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concordia Language Village, Lac du Bois, Bemidji, MN Summer 2010 - Spent four weeks in intensive French language study. • International Cultural Exchange, Hong Kong Summer 2011, 2012 - Spent three weeks teaching English to native Cantonese speakers. Implemented curriculum in class of 13 teenage students. 	14 weeks
11 th	Teen Leadership Program Hosted by The Dallas Association of Young Lawyers	6 hr/week 1 week/year

HONORS AND AWARDS

10 th	National French Exam
11 th	TAPPS District Academic Contest <i>- Poetry Interpretation – District Finalist</i> <i>- Prose Interpretation – District Finalist</i>
11 th	Pascal Award <i>- Award for the outstanding student of French</i>

SKILLS, TALENTS & ACHIEVEMENTS

Languages

- Proficient in French

Catherine Cambridge

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Education

The Cambridge School of Dallas, Dallas TX (7-12)

- *Cumulative GPA:*
- *SAT: Critical Reading Math Writing*

Honors and Awards

- Thespis Award
 - *Award for the outstanding student of Drama (10)*
- Declamation
 - *School wide rhetoric competition*
 - *Third Place (9), Finalist (10), Semi-Finalist (11)*
- French National Concours Exam
 - *4th in the Region, 10th in the Nation (10)*
 - *8th in the Region, 90th percentile (11)*
- TAPPS District Academic Contest
 - *Poetry Interpretation – District Finalist (10)*
 - *Prose Interpretation – District Finalist (10)*
- The Witherspoon Institute, Princeton University – one week summer studies - selective
 - *The Moral Life and the Classical Tradition (12)*

High School Activities

- Drama Performances - Cast Member (9, 10, 11, 12)
 - *The Best in the West (9)*
 - *Our Town (10)*
 - *A Mid Summer Night's Dream (10)*
 - *The Devil to Pay (11)*
 - *You Can't Take It With You (11)*
- Music Worship Group for Chapel - vocalist (9, 10, 11, 12)
 - *Leadership Team (11, 12)*
- French Club (11, 12)
 - *Vice President (11)*
- New Student Orientation
 - *Mentor (10, 11, 12)*
- Salon Discussion Group
 - *Student led discussion group on topics of current events, politics, worldview,*

Philosophy, theology, and Classics – periodic weekend nights in student’s homes (11)

- Volleyball (9, 10, 11, 12)
- Basketball (9)
- Tennis (9)

Community Activities

- West Dallas Volunteer (11, 12)
 - *Tudor urban city children in after school program – one day per week*
 - *Periodic weekend programs with church youth group*
- Ministry and Humanitarian Aid Trips
 - *New Orleans – Construction, painting, and cleaning work for a church which had incurred extensive damage during Hurricane Katrina - Spring Break (10)*
 - *New York City, Washington Heights “Operations Exodus” – Teacher and Activities Leader with summer inner city youth Program – one week (10)*
 - *Austin, Texas – Inner city ministry - Spring Break (11)*
- High School Ensemble – Park Cities Presbyterian Church (9, 10, 11, 12)
 - *Conducted special anthems for Sunday worship service at least quarterly and participated with Adult Choir with special music programs such as Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving*
 - *Participated in weekly practice*
 - *Middle School Choir – Played lead role of Elijah in “Elijah for Young Voices “and participated in recording an album, “Come Christians Join to Sing”*
- Sunday School Teacher – Park Cities Presbyterian Church (7-12)
 - *Preschool Sunday School teacher for 6 years*
 - *Vacation Bible School teacher for elementary school children – 5 summers*
- Youth Group – Park Cities Presbyterian Church (9, 10, 11, 12)
 - *Sunday School and Small Group (9, 10, 11, 12)*
 - *Music Worship Leadership Team (11, 12)*

Interests

- Music and Singing
- Reading
- Movies
- Dancing, especially swing dancing
- Travel
 - *Historical overseas trips to Italy, England, and Scotland with family*
 - *School trips to Chicago, Tennessee and Washington DC*

The College Application Essay

College Essays are very revealing. They paint a picture for admission officers – not just of your writing ability and thought process, but also about your personality, creativity and values. You are attempting to present aspects of yourself that reach beyond grades, recommendations and test scores. For many students, this is the challenging part of the application process.

One admissions director described 90% of the essays that he read as “MacEssays” - technically correct in that they are organized and have correct sentence structure and spelling, but they are boring. A MacEssay is not wrong, but it is not going to help a student stand out in the admissions process. Your essay is a story about yourself that is not on your application or resume. You have an opportunity to create a portrait of yourself that will make admissions committees want to admit you.

Top Ten Tips for Writing a College Essay (from National Association for College Admissions Counseling)

Start early. *The more time you have, the less stress you'll have. You'll have plenty of time to give the essay your best effort.*

Be yourself. *Take a moment to think about what interests you, what you love to talk about, what makes you sit up and take notice if it's mentioned in class or on TV. Then write about it. One of the biggest mistakes students make is "writing what they think others want to hear, rather than about an issue, event, or person that really had significance for them," says an admission and financial aid official at a New York college. An essay like that is not just boring to write, it's boring to read.*

Be honest. *You're running late (see #1), you can't think of what to write, and someone e-mails you a heartwarming story. With just a tweak here and there, it could be a great essay, you think. It's what you would have written if you'd just had enough time. Don't be fooled! College admission officers have read hundreds, even thousands of essays. They are masters at discovering any form of plagiarism. Adapting an e-mail story, buying an essay from some Internet site, getting someone else to write your essay, admission people have seen it all. Don't risk your college career by taking the easy way out.*

Take a risk. *On the other hand, some risks can pay off. Don't settle for the essay that everyone else is writing. Imagine an admission officer up late, reading the fiftieth essay of the day, yours. Do you want that person to nod off because he or she has already read ten essays on that topic? "The danger lies not in writing bad essays but in writing common essays, the one that admission officers are going to read dozens of," says an associate director at a Pennsylvania high school. "My advice? Ask your friends what they are writing, and then don't write about that!"*

Keep in focus. This is your chance to tell admission officers exactly why they should admit you. Unfortunately, some students try to list every single reason, their stellar academic record, their athletic prowess, their community service, all in a page or two. When that happens, the essay looks like a grocery list. Even though the Common Application main essay has a suggested minimum of 650 words, with no limit, every admission officer has a big stack to read every day; he or she expects to spend only a couple of minutes on the essay. If you go over 700 words, you are straining their patience, which no one should want to do. Instead, read the essay question carefully and jot down a few ideas. Then choose the one that looks like the most fun to write about. Stick to that main theme throughout the essay. You don't have to list all your achievements, that's what the rest of the application is for. Use the essay in a creative way to help the admission officers get to know you as a person.

Write and rewrite. Don't try to write a masterpiece on your first try. It's not possible, and all that pressure is likely to give you writer's block. For your first draft, write anything that comes to mind about your topic. Don't worry too much about grammar or spelling. Just get it down on paper (or computer screen). Then let it "rest" for a few hours or a few days. When you come back to the draft, look for ways to make it more focused and better written. Some people are "fat" writers: they write long, wordy first drafts that need to be shortened later. Others are "skinny" writers: they write short and simple first drafts and then need to add details or examples to "flesh out" the skeleton. Either way, don't be afraid to make major changes at this stage. Are there details that don't really relate to the topic? Cut them. Do you need another example? Put it in.

Here are two other things to try, suggested by one college counselor.

- Remove the introductory and concluding paragraphs, and then see if your essay seems stronger. These paragraphs are often the most likely to have unnecessary detail.
- Go through the essay and cut out every "very" and every "many." Words like these are vague, and your writing is often stronger without them.

Get a second opinion. Even best-selling novelists ask other people to read their manuscripts before they're sent to the publisher. When you've rewritten the essay to your satisfaction, find someone who can give you advice on how to make it even better. Choose a person you respect and who knows something about writing, a favorite English teacher, a parent, or a friend who writes for the school paper. Ask them to tell you what they like best about your essay, and what you can do to improve it. Criticism of your writing can be tough to hear, but try to listen with an open mind. You don't have to make every change suggested, after all, it's your essay and no one else's, but you should seriously consider each suggestion.

Proofread. Finally, you're ready to send your essay. Not so fast! Read it over one more time, looking for those little errors that can creep in as you write or edit. If you're using a computer, also run a spell check. Sometimes, it can be difficult to catch minor typos—you've read the essay so many times that you see what should be there rather than what is there. To make sure you catch everything, try reading your essay out loud or having someone else read it out loud to you.

Another strategy is to read the essay backward, from the last sentence to the first. That makes it just unfamiliar enough for errors to stand out.

Be accurate. *Applying online may feel like you're sending email, but you're not. An Oregon director of admission warns against using informal email language, incorrect capitalization or abbreviations such as BTW or "thanx," which are not appropriate to a formal document. Make sure your online essay represents the best of you.*

Don't expect too much from an essay. *The application essay is important, but it's not the only thing that is considered. "Can [the essay] make a difference in getting the 'thin versus thick' envelope? Absolutely," says the New York director. "But that is the exception rather than the rule." That's because admission officers look at the whole package, your academics, extracurricular activities, standardized tests, and other factors. A great essay rarely makes up for a weak academic record. On the other hand, a mediocre essay won't necessarily consign your application to the "deny" list. So make your essay as well-written as you can, but don't put so much pressure on yourself that the rest of the application fades in importance.*

More Essay Tips (from the admissions staff at Carleton University)

View it as an opportunity. *The essay is one of the few things that you've got complete control over in the application process, especially by the time you're in your senior year. You've already earned most of your grades; you've already made most of your impressions on teachers; and chances are, you've already found a set of activities you're interested in continuing. So when you write the essay, view it as something more than just a page to fill up with writing. View it as a chance to tell the admissions committee about who you are as a person.*

Be yourself. *If you are funny, write a funny essay; if you are serious, write a serious essay. Don't start reinventing yourself with the essay.*

Make it fun. *If you're recounting an amusing and light-hearted anecdote from your childhood, it doesn't have to read like a Congressional Act — make it fun!*

Tell us something different *from what we'll read on your list of extracurricular activities or transcript.*

Take the time to go beyond the obvious. *Think about what most students might write in response to the question and then try something a little different.*

Don't try to take on too much. *Focus on one "most influential person," one event, or one activity. Tackling too much tends to make your essay too watered down or disjointed.*

Concentrate on topics of true significance to you. *Don't be afraid to reveal yourself in your writing. We want to know who you are and how you think.*

Write thoughtfully and from your heart. *It'll be clear who believes in what they are saying versus those who are simply saying what they think we want to hear.*

Essays should have a thesis *that is clear to you and to the reader. Your thesis should indicate where you're going and what you're trying to communicate from the outset.*

Don't do a history report. *Some background knowledge is okay, but do not re-hash what other authors have already said or written.*

Answer each school's essay individually. Recycled "utility essays" come across as impersonal and sanitized. The one exception is an essay written for and submitted to Common Application member schools.

Proofread, proofread, proofread. Nothing says "last-minute essay" like an "are" instead of "our" or a "their" instead of "they're."

Keep it short and to the point.

Limit the number of people from whom you request feedback on your essay. Too much input creates an essay that sounds as though it has been written by a committee or results in writing that is absent your own voice.

Appearances count. Formatting and presentation cannot replace substance, but they can certainly enhance the value of an already well-written essay.

Teacher Recommendations Guidelines

1. **Request recommendation letters before the end of your Junior Year.**
2. **Generally, colleges require one math/science teacher and one liberal arts (history, English, philosophy, political philosophy) teacher recommendation.**
3. **Provide a resume to the professor when you make your request**
4. **Meet with your recommender if requested.**
5. **Provide the College Placement Director with the names of your recommenders.**
6. **Choose professors who know your work best.**
7. **Thank your recommender.**

College Application Checklist

College	EA/ED/RD	Test Scores Sent	Recommendations Completed	Essays Completed	Transcript Sent	Application Completed	Scholarships Completed
Furman	EA	9/15	8/31	9/30	9/15	10/15	11/15
Rhodes							
Texas A&M							
Baylor							
Samford							
Wake Forest							
Yale							