

COLLEGE INFORMATION/DOCUMENTS

Tips on completing your college application for admission

Apply Early

Applications rushed through immediately preceding the deadline will reflect lack of care and completeness. Admission staff are more impressed by applications received a month or so early, as opposed to those arriving the day before the deadline. Deadlines are set to eliminate people.

Neatness

Applications that are difficult to read will not receive equal consideration.

Completeness

An incomplete application tells a great deal about the applicant. Indicate “not applicable” or “N/A” rather than leave a question blank.

Prepare Your Application Yourself

Only you can prepare it in the best and most authentic way. A “too perfect” application may raise questions of how much help was received. Ask admission staff about specific programs and requirements.

Recommendations

Recommendations should come from those who know you best. Colleges generally require no more than two plus a school recommendation. Additional recommendations are seldom helpful. They may lead to the “thicker the file, the thinner the case” syndrome.

Teacher Recommendations

Give the teachers the forms early. Don't force teachers to resent you by asking them to write a recommendation at the last moment.

Supplementary Material

Don't submit unless it's relevant to the application.
Don't try to be too cute!

Extra Curricular Activities

These should be presented openly and honestly.
Don't minimize or exaggerate.

Some Final Tips

- Find something that sets you apart.
- Find out all you can about the college to which you are applying.
- Show interest in the college and emphasize your reasons for applying.
- Provide your counselor information about your reasons for applying.
- Establish a personal relationship with an admissions officer.
- Schedule your interviews to save the most important for last.
- Show your essay to a teacher and/or counselor.
- Keep a copy of everything you send.

Writing the college essay

When the college essay is required as a part of the admissions process, it is important to give serious effort to its composition. Probably no other piece of admissions criteria receives as much attention or generates as much discussion. Here is the opportunity to reveal your intelligence, sense of humor, maturity, sincerity, enthusiasm, creativity, and writing ability.

Areas of Evaluation:

1. Skill in using standard written English
2. Depth in insights as reflected in content and substance and ability to reflect true feelings or opinions about a subject
3. Creativity and uniqueness evidencing fresh and original viewpoints.

Essay Directions:

1. Address what the directions request.
2. Discuss something which has significantly contributed to your growth as a person.
3. Assess your uniqueness as an individual; tell something about yourself not learned from other application information.
4. Address your particular opinions or feelings on a specific topic.
5. Reflect on your goals and aspirations telling how you expect your education at that college to meet them.

Tips for Composing the Essay:

1. Do not wait until the last minute to write your essay.
2. Make lists of your qualities as you know them (particularly those the college seeks), aspirations and goals; activities; honors and awards; personal or academic shortcomings you are trying to overcome; persons or courses which have influenced your career goals or aspirations; and any specific strengths of the college and how you wish to avail yourself of them.
3. Write a draft, making sure to address the particular directions for discussion.
4. Put your draft aside for 24 hours and read again.
5. Make corrections in sentence construction, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Read aloud what you have written to help you locate any rough spots you wish to rework.
6. Let someone else, whose opinion you respect, read and evaluate your paper.
7. Rewrite the essay, revising it with your evaluation in mind. Put it aside again and repeat the process until you are satisfied.
8. Type your essay unless a handwritten version is requested. Proofread for any errors. Make it look as perfect as you can.
9. Make a copy for your own files.
10. Mail the applications on time!

Sample Essay Questions:

1. Talk to us about a person, other than a member of your family, who has influenced you.
2. What particular book, play, poem, film, dance performance, musical composition, or piece of visual art has affected you deeply in the past three years? Describe your reaction.
3. Share with us your conception of an ideal education.
4. Imagine that you are the editor of a major news magazine. What would you choose as the cover story for the issue that would be on the newsstands on January, 2008? Why did you make this choice?
5. If you could automatically and irrevocably change one fact or facet in the development of human history, what would that change be? Why did you make this choice?
6. Describe an important life experience and what you learned from it. Describe unusual circumstances, challenges, or hardships you have faced. What information can you provide that will distinguish yourself from other applicants?
7. Which book(s) have affected you the most and why?
8. Discuss the academic experience that has meant the most to you. Describe a scientific problem, research problem, or academic issue in any field of study which you would like to pursue in college or later.
9. You have found the end of the rainbow. What is there?
10. Your thumbprint is unique, the only one like it in the entire world. Describe it.

Personal statements

A personal statement comes from the heart and is an expression of your dreams!

A personal statement is **not** a resumé of activities. It is a strong, clear, positive essay, which includes information on the student's experiences and background, current activities and challenges, plus information regarding goals and aspirations. It is an integral part of the application process. A Personal Statement may be used for college admissions or for scholarships. The content of the Personal Statement should add clarity, richness, and meaning to the information you present in other parts of your application, enabling the Office of Admissions or scholarship agency to form the best impression of you.

Do not wait until the last minute to write a personal statement. This is very obvious!

- Write the first draft of a personal statement. Write more drafts until the essay is perfect. Keep the essay on a computer so that it can be revised for future applications.
- Make corrections in sentence construction, grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- Ask a trusted English teacher to read and evaluate the personal statement, especially since this is an assignment in junior and/or senior English classes.
- Take time and think about each prompt before you start writing. Use details and examples to make your point. Stick to one topic.
- Start writing to answer each prompt, then go back and review the word count, content, and overall message.
- Remember to talk about yourself so that we can get to know your personality, talents, accomplishments and potential to succeed. Use plenty of "I" statements.

Short-answer templates

Write a short paragraph about each of the topics below; save electronically. Then each can be changed as needed for individual applications.

- An introduction to the student and his/her family, including the members of the family, and any struggles or economic situations to be considered.
- A discussion about how a class, activity, or sport has helped you grow and how you will use that in the future. Consider experiences that have made an impact on your life.
- A discussion of the reasons for attending college and studying the career chosen, including any family members, teachers, or others who have been an inspiration along the way.
- Your future educational and career goals, particularly how your contributions will make America or the world better.
- A discussion of the student's academic progress, personal triumphs or challenges – If you decide to talk about a challenge or triumph, do not forget to explain what you learned from the experience.
- An important world issue that is meaningful to you and about which you have constructive thoughts.

- Your personal characteristics that will ensure your success in college.
- Your definition of “leadership.”
- Your reasons for volunteering and serving your school and community and what you have learned about yourself.
- Disabilities – If you are living with a disability, feel free to talk about it in the context of your ability to succeed.
- Culture – If your culture has influenced who you are, talk about it. Let it add to the picture we form of you.
- Your financial need, if for scholarship.
- The reasons a scholarship source should award you money—why you are unique and different from other applicants.

Stay focused. Avoid common mistakes such as:

- Inappropriate use of humor.
- Creative writing (poems, scene setting, or clichés).
- Quotations – We want to know your thoughts and words, not someone else’s.
- Generalities – Stick to facts and specifics you want us to know about yourself.
- Repetition – Do not talk about the same topic in each response. Give us new information we cannot find in other sections of the application.
- Lists of accomplishments or activities.
- Philosophy – Do describe your world in facts and examples. Don’t ask questions without answers.
- Be college specific but not campus specific if the college has different campuses. You’re talking to all the campuses of that specific college in your response.

Letter of recommendation

Most scholarships and colleges require that you submit two to three letters of recommendations from teacher, counselors or current or former employers. To better assist them with writing a good letter for you, please provide as much of the information listed below as possible. Please give the person writing your letter of recommendation 1-2 weeks to complete it, therefore you must provide this information to them in advance. ***It is not acceptable to submit a letter of recommendation from a family member.***

- A letter may highlight strengths, abilities, goals, personality and may indicate financial need and potential for success.
- A student may ask a teacher in whose class hard work, excellence, and energy has been demonstrated.
- Some scholarships want to hear from a teacher in a particular subject area. A student would want a recommendation from a math or science teacher for an engineering scholarship, for example.
- If a character or personal reference is needed, it would be appropriate to also ask a former employer or faith-based leader who can speak to integrity and work habits.

- If addressed “To Whom it May Concern,” and student is given a copy, it could be used for more than one application.
- Make sure the letter fits the application in terms of content and subject.
- Give a completed copy of your “Resume” to each recommendation writer.
- Write a thank-you note!

Other information needed for letters of recommendation

- Name of college, scholarship or agency that this letter is for: (provide as much information about the school, scholarship or agency as possible--is it a technical school, arts school, which program of study are you interested in, why do you want to go there, what type of scholarship is it, what type of agency, etc....)
- Clubs you have been a member of in high school. List the years of involvement and purpose of organization. List any leadership positions have you held in or out of school? Be specific with names, dates, length of time, etc.
- Name 2 or 3 positive characteristics you feel you have.
- What do you see as your strengths?
- List any community service (including the number of hours). Name of organization, where was it located, what did you do and for whom?
- What aspect of your personality do you feel should be emphasized in a letter of recommendation?
- Is there anything you have done, special skills or anything about you that would distinguish you from another applicant?
- What are your post high school plans? (do NOT say “go to college”) How about 10 years from now.
- What do you feel you can offer a college or university? (Why should they want you to be a part of their freshman class?)
- Is your high school academic record an accurate measure of your ability and potential? If not, what do you consider the best measure of your potential for success in college?
- Are you the first in your family to attend college?
- Anything else you would like to add?

Scholarships

Scholarships are funds awarded to students who meet specific criteria set by the donor(s). Scholarships are competitive! Frequently used criteria include: academic performance, ancestry, career goal, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, specialized skills (i.e. music, athletics, drama, dance, etc.). **Scholarships are an excellent way to help pay for college costs and do not require repayment.**

Students should maintain a scholarship portfolio or keep this information in a folder, as this is the information generally requested for scholarship applications:

- copies of college and scholarship applications with due dates (postmark or received) noted
- personal statement
- letters of recommendation
- current transcript
- ACT/SAT test scores
- a projected budget for the next school year
- samples of work from an essay or art contest

Sources for scholarship information

The **College and Career Center** has copies of scholarship information they receive throughout the school year.

Log into **Family Connection** and under the “Colleges” tab scroll down to Scholarships and Money. Here you can do a scholarship search and match.

Other reputable sources of scholarships and related information include, but are not limited to:

- community or faith-based organizations to which the family belongs or with which the family has a relationship.
- organizations that honor a student’s talent in a specific area such as art, dance or volleyball.
- employers of parents/guardians: check with the human resource, benefits, or personnel office.
- the university or college the student will attend: many times information is sent directly to the student or is available only through the college’s website. Colleges are **huge** sources of scholarships!
- any number of websites, but students must be wary of where information will be going on the internet.

Beware of scams!

Students and parents are being scammed if a company or scholarship “source” promotes its offerings with:

- “The scholarship is guaranteed.” No one can guarantee anything; this is a lie.
- “You cannot get this information anywhere else.” Legitimate scholarship information is available through public sources.
- “I need your credit card or bank account number for this scholarship.” This commonly-used scam is a way to get money out of parents’ or students’ accounts in the future without permission.
- “We will do all the work.” The student still has to fill out applications, write essays, and attend to the requirements. It is not possible for anyone else to do the work.
- “The scholarship will cost money.” Always use free resources.

- “You have been selected” or “You are a finalist.” Companies have access to huge databases: they are trying to make students and families feel special and thus market a number of products. There is no scholarship advantage to buying any of these books or products.
- “We save money by not having an address.” Legitimate scholarship sources have contact information and a physical address.
- “Come to....hotel room on Sunday afternoon.” Be wary that these free seminars or interviews may be sales pitches for expensive and unnecessary products.

Resume format

The Resume is important when you start applying for colleges, scholarships, asking teachers for letters of recommendations or applying for jobs. It helps the school or organization that you are applying to or the teacher you are asking for that letter of recommendation from, know as much about you as possible. Use the **Resume in Family Connections**: Under the “About Me” tab in the “Interesting Things About Me” section, click on “Resume”. Your Resume should include the following items:

School achievements:

- Describe your college/career plans, the reasons you wish to go to college, and the reasons you wish to follow a particular career path.
- List any academic awards you have received (note grade level) and the reasons you received those awards.
- Describe leadership positions or special contributions you have made to school clubs, sports, and activities, particularly noting what you have learned about yourself (note grade level/offices held).

Community activities:

- Describe your contributions to community organizations and/or faith-based activities: Describe work or volunteer experiences you have had. What was your unique role with those positions? What did you learn about yourself? How did you grow from these experiences?
- Describe what you have learned from your travel experiences or from having lived elsewhere
- Describe something special or unique about you that you would like to have mentioned in the letter. You might like the writer to mention a specific assignment, reading, or project on which you did well. Explain.

Educational/Career goals:

Discuss your personal and professional goals

Scholastic achievements

List advanced honors or AP classes in academic areas

Scholastic honors:

List awards or achievements for academic pursuits

Schools clubs & organizations

Do not use abbreviations (i.e. PHS, NHS)

Give positions of leadership and amount of time or years of involvement

Athletic achievements:

Give positions of leadership and amount of time or years of involvement

List honors or awards won

Community/Volunteer service:

Give positions of leadership and amount of time or years of involvement

Employment:

Describe type of work and dates of employment

Special events or opportunities:

Travel or summer workshops and conferences

Interests:

List your interests and describe your most admirable qualities

Family information:

Describe your family demographics, activities, and duties/responsibilities at home, and any special challenges you have overcome

References:

While references are typically no longer included on a resume, be sure to have the name, position, address, and phone numbers of the people you will use for references.

Additional Items that are included:

High school: Name, city and state, GPA (if over 3.0)

Your name, address, phone and email address