

How to Get Over Your Application Angst

With their seemingly endless series of blanks and spaces to “tell us about yourself” and boxes to “provide us with your social security number, date of birth and innermost thoughts” – not to mention the essays, there's a reason why many student procrastinate when it comes to filling out college applications. Ugh! Multiply this by the number of colleges that you will be applying to, and you have the ingredients necessary for a nervous breakdown!

Completing your college admissions applications doesn't have to be such a painful experience. In fact, if you break them down into their individual parts, you'll see that completing them is a lot easier than you thought. Here are some strategies to help you tackle your applications and prevent a few headaches along the way:

Take a deep breath – and get a sneak peek. Take some time to request (via mail or by downloading them via the Internet) and carefully review the college applications before setting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard.

Here's what you're likely to find inside the typical college application:

- Application forms. These are the forms that ask for all of your vital statistics-- your coursework, grades, test scores, activities, honors, awards, summer activities and employment.
- Essays. Many applications also require one to three, 500-word essays. The essays provide you the opportunity to expand on an accomplishment or something about you that is not easily reflected in the short answers on the application forms
- Recommendations. Start shining some apples to give to your teachers. There also may be recommendation forms that your teachers and counselors will need to complete, describing your academic ability and character.

Each of these pieces fit together to serve a specific purpose. The application forms give the college's basic information about how you've performed academically and socially. The essays allow you to highlight one of your strengths and demonstrate your writing ability and the recommendations give others' opinions of you.

Focus on leadership and initiative. Colleges want students who are going to be leaders in the future and make a difference in the world. In your applications try to highlight any leadership experience you've had. Wherever possible, give the colleges examples of leadership and initiative in your applications.

Remember preschool? Well, this time show, DON'T tell. Instead of giving an overview of your accomplishments, give concrete examples of what you have actually done. It's important to not just state the facts but to also give some examples of your accomplishments to show the college what you've done.

Make your essay your personal highlights reel. Your essay is the opportunity for you to let colleges know about your most important achievement, goal or personal strength. Your essay should give the admission officers insight into who you are as a person, what's most important to you and what you will bring to their freshman class.

Help them help you. Your teachers and counselors may have to write dozens of recommendations. This means that you should do everything you can to help them. Give them at least three weeks advance notice and be sure to provide them with all of the forms, pre-addressed envelopes and background information about you that they'll need.

Fill the gaps. Maybe your transition from junior high to high school was a rough one. And, as a result, your grades suffered. You don't want to provide a lengthy accounting of every reason why your grades slipped, but explaining that you made a difficult transition into high school and that since then you've matured and gotten better grades will help.

Proofread, Proofread, Proofread! Some applicants have misspelled their own major or even put the wrong college's name in their essays, which has not left strong impressions on the admission officers. The best way to prevent these kinds of careless errors is to complete your applications early enough so that you have adequate time to review and revise and review again.