



Top Ten Ways to Enjoy the College Admissions Process

- 10. Visit, if possible, at least some of the colleges that you are considering.**
Nothing will help you more to define the ideal learning environment for you, and to help you see for yourself whether the labels and stereotypes that get attached to some colleges really are valid.
- 9. Feel free to schedule an interview if you are going to be visiting,** if the college offers individual interviews, *and* if it is a college that you are seriously considering. But don't worry if you can't have or don't want one. Interviews are virtually never a required part of the process, and they may or may not even be what is considered "evaluative." But having one could help you learn more about the institution, and it could help the college learn more about you. Once you've had an interview or two, you'll find them amazingly enjoyable.
- 8. Share your reactions about the colleges you visit with your parents and others.**
Sure, it's sometimes a pain that they want to be so involved with what ultimately will be your decision, but since they are frequently the ones who are going to be helping you pay for this experience, it's important that they are on the same page with you.
- 7. Be thoughtful in your choices so that you don't feel as if you need to apply to 15–20 colleges** just because some of your friends are. If you are diligent enough with the steps above, you ought to be able to narrow it down to 6–8 attractive options fairly easily, and if those cover a range of competitiveness for you, you will be fine next spring. It will also be nice to save money on those application fees...
- 6. Apply Early Decision only if you felt like "lightning struck" during your college search and it is your clear first choice.** Too many students apply ED for the *wrong* reasons (i.e., because of whatever strategic advantage they think it may give them in being admitted), but applying early can take you out of the "driver's seat" with a very important decision. This is especially true for anyone for whom financial considerations are going to be important in their decision about where to attend; you and your family may wish to be able to compare different financial aid/scholarship awards.

5. ***Be aware that your SAT/ACT scores will probably play less of a role in your admissions decision than you may think.*** Most selective colleges do not have “cut off” scores below which applicants are not admitted, and most have a fairly wide range of scores represented among their admitted students. That’s because test scores only provide colleges with the roughest possible measure of your potential for success academically in college; your high school grades are a much better predictor of that. Higher scores are better than lower scores, of course, but even the highest scores are by no means a guarantee of admission to the most selective colleges. At most colleges to which you apply, it is likely that your scores will look quite similar to those of other applicants, which means it is unlikely that they will be a deciding factor in your candidacy.
4. ***Relax when it comes time to writing your personal essay and let it come from your heart.*** Yes, the essay is important enough to be required by most colleges, but please know that very seldom is the essay reason enough by itself to admit or reject anyone. We just want to get to know you a little better, and your grades and scores only paint part of your picture. Your essay *can* do that, but don’t forget to proofread and use your spell check...
3. ***Choose the teachers who write letters of recommendation for you carefully.*** Since those letters are another way for us to get to know you better, they should come from teachers who know you well, maybe even teachers who have had contact with you outside of their classrooms such as through clubs, teams, etc. And don’t forget that some of the teachers who challenged you the most may be able to write an even more meaningful letter for us than the ones for whom you got easy “A’s.”
2. ***Submit additional letters of recommendation only if they are from people who know you really well and can add things about you that others couldn’t.*** Letters from friends of your parents who happen to be alumni of the college to which you are applying, for example, don’t usually shed much additional light for us.

And the #1 Way to Enjoy the College Admissions Process is:

1. ***Breathe deeply and always remember that a year from now you will very likely be attending some truly excellent college where you will get a first-rate education and have a wonderful experience.*** The great thing about higher education in the United States is that there are so many terrific options that almost everyone ends up having a really positive college experience. And don’t forget that the *quality* of your educational experience is far more up to you than it is up to the institution that you attend.

Good luck.