



Tips for Applying to College

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Although the headlines about college admissions make it sound like getting into a good college is close to impossible, the vast majority of the 2,200 public and private four-year college and universities in the U.S. actually admit more than half of their applicants. As you and your students/children start thinking about the college application or process, the goal should be for them to apply to schools that provide a good fit—academically, financially, socially, and geographically—not the schools with the biggest names or the lowest acceptance rates.

Be Engaged, and Be Your Best, But Above All, Be You!

The best way for students to prepare for college is to immerse themselves in the high school experience—finding activities, classes, and friends they enjoy. It doesn't make sense to pursue activities that might "look good" to colleges; students will thrive and stand out when they are fully engaged, so you should encourage them to find activities that are truly meaningful to them. Academic performance and rigor during the high school years are the most important factors in determining college admission. Therefore, it is important to choose appropriate classes that pose a reasonable level of challenge. Does your child need to take every AP class offered at his/her school? No, it's better to choose AP or advanced classes in subjects that truly interest them. And they should work with their high school counselors to make sure they're meeting the UC/CSU "a-g" requirements. And finally, here is something you don't hear too much during the college application process: they should try to achieve balance in their lives, leaving time for family, friends, and relaxation.

College Research

There are many books and websites where students can read about the wealth of college options. Some of my favorite books are:

- *The Fiske Guide to Colleges* (hard copy or e-version)
- *College Admission* (Mamlet and Vandeveld)
- *The Complete Book of Colleges* (Princeton Review).

Questions/Consultation

The good news is there are college admissions consultants and others in the community to help guide you through this process of applying for college.

If you have questions or would like to schedule a free half-hour consultation with the author of this article, please email Deborah Moritz at penpathcollege@gmail.com and be sure to visit her Facebook page, [facebook.com/debbie.moritz.24](https://www.facebook.com/debbie.moritz.24), where she posts tips and articles of interest to the college-bound.

Some excellent websites include:

- bigfuture.collegeboard.org (for general info)
- nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator (a resource from the Federal government)
- thecollegesolution.com (for financial aid advice)
- Naviance.com



For students who know what major they would like to pursue, there is substantial information on the departmental websites for each potential college or university. For those with learning disabilities, it is important to work with their learning specialists to find schools with the appropriate levels of learning support.

Standardized Tests

Keep in mind that standardized test scores comprise only one of many factors that colleges consider. There are many test prep agencies in our community as well as excellent online test prep. Khan Academy has partnered with the College Board, which administers the SAT and SAT subject tests, to provide free SAT test preparation (khanacademy.org/test-prep). In addition, Kaplan has recently announced a partnership with ACT for live, online test preparation starting in the fall, projected to cost less than \$200, and free for students who qualify for an ACT fee waiver. For students who do not test well, over 800 schools are now test-optional. A relatively small number of schools require SAT subject tests. Make sure your students know the requirements for their schools of interest.

Summer Activities

It is a good idea for teens to do something meaningful during their summers, especially the summer after junior year. Meaningful is very broadly defined; they can get a summer job (e.g. babysitting, working in a store or restaurant, being a camp counselor, doing research in a lab), pursue a new interest, help take care of a younger sibling, do volunteer work, read a series of books, take an existing skill or talent to a higher level, or learn a new instrument. The possibilities are limitless, but do not include sitting on the couch playing video games, hanging out at the mall, or even pursuing SAT/ACT test prep (which is necessary, but does not comprise a meaningful summer activity). Remind your students to leave space for down time and relaxation. They need the summer to re-charge. For juniors, this is a good time to write a draft of their essays for the common application and UCs. The more work they get done over the summer, the less stressful fall will be.

The Last Word

With some preparation, the college application period can be a time of exploration and self-reflection. It does not have to be solely one gigantic stressor!