



College Connections

HOW NOT TO STRESS OUT OVER COLLEGE APPLICATIONS

Stressing out over applying to college is normal, and some anxiety is unavoidable. But, there are steps every student can take to minimize the possibility of a major meltdown and massive panic attack during the application process.

- Go over the application carefully. Take time to read it through and understand exactly what is required before filling it out. Make sure you follow directions.
- For letters of recommendation, choose teachers, counselors, or other mentors who have been involved with you most recently, and give them plenty of time – at least two months – to write their letters.
- Send out the application well in advance of the deadline. Allow time for the post office to deliver the application and for admissions staff to process it. If

applying on-line, e-mail early in case any problems arise. If the college asks for something to be resent, there will still be time to do so.

- Pick one way of applying, and stick to it. Apply either on-line or on paper, but don't e-mail an application and then follow up with faxes or snail mail of your forms; this will only make for more work and possible errors in the admissions office.
- Keep copies of everything. Photocopy or duplicate everything in each application, and keep copies of all notes, e-mails, PINs, passwords, cancelled checks, and any other related communications.
- Get confirmation that the application was received. A simple way to do this is to send a

stamped, self-addressed response card with the application. Note that the U.S. Postal Service also offers a "confirmation of delivery" service for a very small amount.

- Use the same name on all parts of your application. Use exactly the same first name, last name, and middle name or initial throughout. This seems obvious, but even a minor variation can cause confusion and increase the chances of a mix-up in the admissions office.

Sources: *The College Board, "Is Part of Your College Application Really Missing?"*,

<http://www.collegeboard.com/student/apply/the-application/110025.html>; "College Application Requirements: There's More Than Just a Form," <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/apply/the->

THE COLLEGE APPLICATION: COMMON MISTAKES AND TIPS

Misspellings and grammatical errors. Don't count on spell check; proofread your application with attention to every detail.

Missing deadlines. Keep track of the different deadlines for submitting forms to college admissions offices, financial aid departments, and deadlines for state and federal financial aid, and for other scholarships and grants. Keep track of all deadlines on a calendar or personal planner, crossing off each deadline as it is met.

Reading instructions carelessly and filling out forms too fast. A common error is mistaking the word "county" for "country" and filling in "United States" instead of "Queens." Read carefully and answer each question being asked. Make sure the forms are properly signed and dated. If applying on-line, be sure to click on the correct items in drop-down boxes.

Applying to colleges without informing the school guidance counselor. Your counselor needs to send your official transcript and can help follow up on recommendations from teachers, offer advice, and help coordinate the application process. Don't leave your school counselor out of the loop!

Listing purely recreational pursuits as extracurricular activities. "Texting," "chillin'," and

"playing 'World of Warcraft'" do not count as extracurricular activities. Organized athletics, the arts and sciences, after-school clubs, formal organizations, and volunteer work for community groups do. If uncertain about which activities to list, ask your school counselor.

Waiting too long to ask for letters of recommendation. Be sure to make your requests well ahead of time, at least two months before the deadline.

Parents/Guardians are too involved. Parents/Guardians should be involved in the application process, but students must be their own advocates, filling out the application forms, keeping up with any communications from admission and financial aid staff, and remaining in charge of the process.

Other frequent mistakes:

Applying on-line and not completing the process properly. Monitor completion carefully. Save and print confirmation of delivery and receipt for your applications.

Using an e-mail address your friends think is funny. Use your own name in a professional

e-mail address for the college and save clever and comical e-mail addresses for friends.

Using the wrong college's name in an application essay. Proofread your essays carefully and make sure each essay goes to the college mentioned in that essay.

Applying for early decision when uncertain about choice. Be sure the college you apply to for early admission is your top choice.

Writing illegibly. Use your best and neatest handwriting.

Sources: *Frank Burnett, "Common College Application Mistakes,"*

<http://school.familyeducation.com/college-applications/college-prep/29728.html>; *Allen Grove, Jeremy Spencer, "The Six Most Common Blunders of College Applicants,"*

<http://colleageapps.about.com/od/theartofgettingaccepted/a/app-mistakes.htm>; "Top 10 College Application Mistakes,"

<http://www.actstudent.org/college/mistakes.html>; *Rakeish Bedesi, "36 Most Common Mistakes Students Make on College Application,"*

<http://www.applyingtoschool.com/forms/common-mistakes-students-make-on-college-application.aspx>

THE COMMON APPLICATION

Most colleges and universities require potential students to complete different application forms. Some allow you to submit the Common Application. The Common Application is a standardized undergraduate college application form that students can complete and submit to any of the participating institutions.

The advantages to the Common Application:

- **It saves time.** Instead of typing the same information multiple times, you only have to do it once, while still applying to multiple schools.
- **Only one personal essay to write.** You can choose among four essays or write your own. This allows you to channel all your efforts into crafting a single, flawless essay.
- **It's easy to complete.** You can cut, paste, move things around and by filling it out on-line, you can save it at any point and go back to it.

The current Common Application membership includes close to 400 private and public institutions of higher education around the country. The following private, independent colleges and universities in New York State accept the Common Application:

- Adelphi University
- Alfred University
- Bard College
- Barnard College
- Canisius College
- Cazenovia College
- Clarkson University
- Colgate University
- College of Mount Saint Vincent
- The College of New Rochelle
- Concordia College
- Cornell University
- Daemen College
- Dowling College
- Elmira College
- Fordham University
- Hamilton College
- Hartwick College
- Hobart and William Smith Colleges
- Hofstra University
- Iona College
- Ithaca College
- Jewish Theological Seminary/List College
- The King's College
- Le Moyne College
- Long Island University/ C.W. Post Campus
- Manhattan College
- Manhattanville College
- Marist College
- Marymount Manhattan College
- Mount St. Mary's College
- Nazareth College
- The New School/Eugene Lang College
- New York Institute of Technology
- New York University
- Niagara University
- Pace University
- Polytechnic Institute of NYU
- Rensselaer Polytechnic University
- Rochester Institute of Technology
- Russell Sage College
- Sage College of Albany
- Sarah Lawrence College
- Siena College
- Skidmore College
- St. Bonaventure University
- St. John Fisher College
- St. Joseph's College
- St. Lawrence University
- St. Thomas Aquinas College
- Syracuse University
- Union College
- University of Rochester
- Utica College
- Vassar College
- Wagner College
- Wells College

The Common Application is sponsored by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). For more information, visit <http://www.commonapp.org>.

KEEPING YOUR SCHOOL COUNSELOR IN THE LOOP

Students are strongly advised to involve their school counselors in the college application process. Colleges often require a recommendation from the student's counselor, who is also responsible for sending out transcripts and obtaining any waivers of standardized test fees. The counselor can inform the student about test deadlines; admissions requirements; available resources for exploring colleges at the school and elsewhere; upcoming college fairs and visits by college representatives; and can point the student to colleges that he/she might not know about or have considered. Counselors can also alert the student and their family to local scholarship opportunities and sources of information about financial aid.

But the caseloads of most counselors, especially in public schools, are increasing, in part because even more students are applying to college. The National Association for College Admissions

Counseling (NACAC) reports that nearly half of the public schools it surveyed for its *State of College Admission 2009* report had an average increase in their caseloads of 53 students per counselor. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends a student-to-counselor ratio of no more than 250 to 1, yet in some states the ratio can be as high as 986 to 1 (California) or 799 to 1 (Minnesota).

Students should be aware that counselors must work with a number of students. Here are some tips to help organize yourself and assist your school counselor with the college admissions process.

- Take charge of your admissions process. Take advantage of all resources available to you, be aware of deadlines, and stay in contact with your counselor; don't wait for him/her to seek you out and offer advice.
- Organize your materials. Use a chart to keep track of different colleges' requirements and keep a calendar of deadlines. Ask for recommendations early, at least a

couple of months before they are due, and work on application essays ahead of time.

- Stay ahead of everything. Don't settle just for being on time or meeting a deadline – be early. Give your counselor plenty of time to gather and mail transcripts, application forms, and recommendations.
- Do whatever you can for yourself, but keep your counselor informed of everything involving your college admissions process.

Sources: "Your Child's High School Counselor," <http://www.collegeboard.com/parents/plan/hs-steps/21287.html>; "Working with Your Counselor During the College Application Process," <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/apply/the-application/50530.html>; Jacques Steinberg, "Study Finds Growing Work for School Counselors," <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/20/education/20college.html>; "Public school counseling caseloads continue to rise," <http://www.examiner.com/x-20753-DC-College-Admissions-Examiner-y2009m10d21-Public-school-counseling-caseloads-continue-to-rise>

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