

3 Deadly College Application Mistakes You're Probably Making

Across the U.S., high school seniors are polishing their personal statements, slogging through supplemental questions, and gathering last-minute recommendations. In December, colleges and universities will release thousands of early decision and early action notices, delivering some students to their holy grail institutions and others into an agonizing, months-long purgatory.

If you're still working on your college applications, you still have time to make sure your admissions package says everything about you and your background that counselors will want to know.

Here are the boxes to check before you hit send.

Are you paying attention to important details?

What's number one on U.S. News and World Report's list for what to do when applying for college? Read the directions. When it comes to applying to college, missing important details is a common reason why applicants quickly move to the "denied" pile.

- **Proofread, proofread, proofread.** Don't rely on spellcheck or a cursory glance across a computer screen. Print out your personal statement and supplemental essays to review grammar, double-checking you haven't put "Harvard" where you meant "Yale."
- **The activities list.** If you're using the Common Application, don't ignore the section where you enter your activities – even if you plan to upload a resume later.
- **Directions, dates, and deadlines.** They're different at every college, so consider making a spreadsheet to help you keep them straight. Set calendar alerts before critical cutoffs and make sure your recommendations are in on time.
- Some schools require an SAT or ACT plus SAT subject tests. Others may be totally test-optional. If you plan to apply for a scholarship and need a standardized test, find out what the last accepted test date is if you want a chance to improve your score before you apply.

Have you demonstrated interest in the school where you're applying?

As if filling out forms and writing essays and taking tests isn't enough, you'll also want to demonstrate interest. Visiting the campus in person is a time-honored way to prove you may actually attend if admitted, but during covid times, that's become a lot more difficult.

The good news is that there are several ways you can demonstrate interest.

- **Supplemental essays.** Complete the supplemental essays and personalize them for each school. This gives your admissions counselor a better opportunity to understand who you are, where you came from, and if you're a good academic and cultural fit.
- **Department tours.** If you know what you want to study, a department tour is a fantastic way to learn more about available internships, post-grad work opportunities, and the alumni network. A Zoom call with an academic advisor works great if you can't visit in person.
- **School Counseling department information sessions.** Your high school's school counseling department loves to help students learn more about college. Many schools host information sessions and you should plan to attend. It's a great way to meet the person face-to-face who may likely be reviewing your application.

Do you know how much it will cost?

Don't get your heart set on a school, see the price and decide you'll figure out how to pay for it later. On the flip side, don't look at the tuition and assume you won't be able to afford the cost. Colleges offer estimated family contribution calculators that can give you a ballpark idea of what you'll need to pay. Best of all, scholarships can defray that cost further.

- **Submit your FAFSA early.** Submitting your FAFSA is the first step you need to take when qualifying for financial aid. Submit it as early as you can, even if you haven't been accepted anywhere yet because money does run out. You'll need your income tax return (if applicable) and your parent's return, too.
- **Private scholarships.** Apply for as many private scholarships as you can. Some don't even require an essay, although many do.
- **In-state and regional discounts.** Many schools offer reduced tuition to residents of neighboring states. The New England Consortium, for example, allows residents of New England states to pay in-state prices at out-of-state schools if the major they want isn't in their home state.

Success in college is all about building on the good habits you learned in high school. With acceptance letters in hand and financials in mind, you can get serious about choosing a school and submitting your enrollment deposit. You've come this far. Now it's time to get started on the rest of your life!