

PREPARING TO STUDY ABROAD

EVERYTHING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS
SHOULD KNOW ABOUT COLLEGE ADMISSIONS





The Princeton Review
2007-2008 SAT U.S. & World History Subject Tests

The Princeton Review
2007-2008 SAT Chemistry Subject Test

THE OFFICIAL ACT PREP GUIDE 2016-2017 WILEY

The Princeton Review
2007-2008 SAT Physics Subject Test

The Princeton Review
ACT PREMIUM EDITION 8 2018

KAPLAN SAT Subject Test: MATHEMATICS LEVEL 2 2008-2009

SAT Vocabulary-Building Novel Trilogy: FEAR NONE BUT THE INNOCENT

The Official SAT Subject Test Study Guide: U.S. History

SAT II Biology FOR DUMMIES

KAPLAN SAT Subject Test: BIOLOGY



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INTRODUCTION

Many students throughout the world choose to pursue their studies abroad. To help prospective students plan their move to the best universities in the world, Spark Prep has produced a series of articles published under the title "Preparing to study abroad". The material aims to answer oft-repeated questions about studying abroad, especially in the USA.

We hope you enjoy it and Good luck with your applications!

ABOUT SPARK PREP

Spark Prep is one of the premier international admissions, tutoring and test prep firms. Our unique approach to education and the college application process helps prepare students for a life of academic and professional mastery. Our expert team is comprised of specialists from every major academic field.

We help students craft well-rounded and authentic applications that reflect their unique strengths and values, while helping them to develop holistic intellectual and critical thinking skills that can be used in any field and in any geography. Our students get accepted to the most reputable schools, not only in the US, but also the UK, Europe, Canada, and Singapore.

Our service offerings in 2022 include: Application essay coaching, Application and School list development support (for the US, the UK, Europe, or any other countries upon request), Test prep (SAT/ACT, IELTS/TOEFL), and 1-1 Academic tutoring.

Register to set up a free 1-1 consultation on college applications with our admission expert at: 098 788 1080!



STUDY IN THE USA

U.S is one of the top destinations for education, studying abroad in the U.S. has only been increasingly popular in the last 20 years. Due to the language and distance barrier, international students may find the college application very confusing and difficult. To help ease the stress that international applicants may encounter, this post will focus on what students should do for their undergraduate application.

Ask yourself first

You may see many of your friends set out to college overseas and you want to be one of them. Don't rush. You need to sit down and think hard whether you are mentally ready. Being away from home to live in a totally new environment will be a shock that you can't expect until you are actually on that path.

Don't study abroad just for the sake of it. You need to make sure you are ready for this experience and have a clear academic or career goal before getting started on any applications.

Have a serious talk with your family

Sit down and have a serious discussion with your family (make sure to list any pros and cons of this experience). This is utterly important in terms of financial support. Because you will be totally new to the environment, you must have a certain amount in your bank account to allow you enough time to adjust and figure things out for yourself, which you should continue to read the next tip.

Check your finance

Because you are international students, you can't get a loan from a U.S. bank and scholarship opportunities are very limited. College admission offices will request for your financial statement in the application to make sure that you can afford the tuition and living expenses. This is a requirement of the government and immigration to ensure that you will not stay in the U.S. illegally.

In short, if you want to study abroad, plan your finance ahead to cover at least a year or two abroad. As you can't get a job outside of school, you don't have the flexibility of income to pay for expenses.

Research, research, research

Because you live so far away, you don't have a lot of chances to do campus tours. Thus, research is your cheapest way. You can reach out to international students to ask for their experiences. They can give you the most honest and real information. Only after thoroughly researching should you start creating a college list.

While it may be normal in your home country to apply to only one school, you should know that college admission overseas is very different. You should follow the tips of making a college list just like domestic students to maximize your chance of acceptance (college list blog link)

Take the TOEFL/IELTS test

This test is required for all students if English is not their first language. Different colleges may have different score requirements. To maximize your chance, you should master your four language skills and get the highest possible scores. Remember to check the schools code when you register for the TOEFL/IELTS so that they can send school scores for you. Also, if you don't do well on the TOEFL/IELTS the first time, don't stress out. No one is perfect from the beginning and you can always take it again and choose the best scores to send to colleges.

SAT and ACT

Nowadays, SAT and ACT tests are offered in many countries. Some colleges may not require international students to take these standardized tests beside TOEFL/IELTS; however, it doesn't hurt to try. If you do well, it'll definitely boost your acceptance chances.

Letters of Recommendation

Some countries are not familiar with letters of recommendation so you should do research or ask international students about them. It's best that your English teachers are reference providers since they are more comfortable with the language. In addition, because your reference providers may not be familiar with steps to send their recommendations, it's best that you ask them to have hard copies of letters in sealed envelopes so you can mail them to colleges. That way, the confidentiality of the reference letter is still conserved.

Ask someone to proofread your personal statement

Again, because of the language barrier, you should ask someone who is fluent in English to proofread your essay. It is not good to send college admissions a writing piece that is full of spelling or grammatical mistakes.

Get familiar with the Common App

The Common App is the most popular platform where you can apply to multiple schools within its system. Getting familiar with the Common App will be a great help to keep track of your college list and reduce your workload.

TIPS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS APPLYING TO GRADUATE PROGRAMS

High school and college are the two most common goals of international students, but in recent years, graduate degrees are becoming more popular. For those who finish undergraduate study in the U.S., they must be familiar with the admissions process. However, for international students who haven't gone through college apps before, applying to graduate programs in the U.S. can be as overwhelming. This post will provide international students tips for graduate degrees application

Make sure to have a goal

Before you want to obtain any degrees abroad, the first and foremost step is to have a goal. Again, don't study abroad just for the sake of it. For graduate admissions, you are required to pick a focus and you have to stick with it until the end. In short, no switching of major, unless you can't comfortably afford the tuition and be willing to go through admission all over again. Therefore, you need to ask yourself what you want to study, what you want to make out of your graduate degree and achieve in the future. Similar to any international students, be mindful about culture shock, financial aids, or language barriers.

Check your bank account

Studying abroad is expensive because there are not many scholarships and financial aid options for international students, and note that graduate degrees are more expensive compared to others. Regardless of the degrees, colleges always ask international applicants for bank statements as required by the U.S. immigration department to ensure that you can afford school and won't remain in the U.S. illegally.

It's important that your funds can cover tuition and living expenses for at least a year. Going abroad isn't only the tuition, there are books, health insurance, housings, and other expenses. Generally, colleges do not often offer on-campus housing for graduate students, and off-campus housing can accompany many fees and risks.

Hunting for Schools

Once you complete the above, it's time to look for schools. Not all colleges offer graduate degrees, and not all graduate degrees offer diverse focus. Therefore, as mentioned above, it's very important that you know what you want to study. Since you are not very familiar with the U.S. college system, U.S. News or The Princeton Review are great resources to search for graduate schools by focus. If you plan on attending law school, you can check LSAC website; for medical schools, you can check AAMC website; for MBA, you can check GMAT website.

After researching, you should make a list of schools that match your preferences and qualifications. Apply to more than one school because U.S. admissions is very different and you should always have a back-up plan.

Standardized Tests

TOEFL is a must for all international students. Different graduate programs may require different scores but in general, the minimum TOEFL iBT for grad applicants should be 100 (and compatible score for TOEFL pBT or cBT). Do always check the admission site of each school for score requirements. If you have never taken TOEFL before, you should take it now. Keep in mind that you are allowed to take TOEFL multiple times and send colleges your best scores.

Most programs require grad standardized test scores, the common tests are MCAT (medical program), LSAT (law program), GMAT (MBA), and GRE (majority of graduate programs).



Letters of Recommendation

Some graduate programs may ask for your work experience so it's ideal to ask your current employer to write a reference letter. You can also ask your college professors or former employers for recommendations. In addition, your recommendation providers may not be familiar with the U.S. admissions system, sealed hard copy letters can be sent by mail.

Don't wait until the last minute. You should ask your potential reference providers in advance and notify them of admissions deadlines. Sometimes international mail may take longer, so you don't want your letters to miss the deadline of admission.

Personal Statement and Resume

As graduate applicants, colleges expect that you can bring your past experiences into the classroom. Thus, it's ideal that you write your personal statement linking back to your work, what you learned from it, and how it affects the person you are now.

Don't forget to attach your resume to your application. Even though you may have had multiple jobs before applying for a graduate degree, it's best to include the aspects of work that relate to the program you choose. If possible, only include professional work and internships, or volunteer experiences. If the school recommends or requests, you can send them your portfolio.

Finally, always proofread your materials. Since it's a graduate application, colleges have higher standards. You don't want to send them writing pieces with grammatical or spelling mistakes.

U.S. COLLEGES -FAQS

College application is sometimes confusing and complicated for international applicants as students are unfamiliar with the U.S. college admission system and the difficulty of language barriers. This post provides some most frequently asked questions for international applicants.



I want to study abroad, where should I start?

Your first step is to ask yourself the question, “Am I ready?”.

Am I ready for the new culture and environment?

Am I ready to live away from home?

Am I ready to face the challenge and overcome it?

If you answer “yes” for the above questions, then ask yourself what your goals are and how studying abroad can help you achieve it. Once you have an answer, the next step is to discuss it with your family. Studying abroad is a big decision and having support from family is utterly important, especially the financial support. If you and your family can afford the tuition and living expenses for at least one year, only then it's time for school search.

How many schools should I apply to?

A list of 7-10 schools is a good number. You should know what you want to study in advance. There are many factors that go into making a school list namely environment, geography, size, or school activities.

How do I apply to colleges?

You can apply to colleges through the Common App or directly through the school's website (make sure you have a credit card to pay for the application fee online).

What documents do I need to send to colleges?

Some common requirements for an application include: school transcript, personal statement, financial statement, letter of recommendations, TOEFL score (some colleges may accept IELTS), and SAT/ACT score (some colleges may not require SAT/ACT score from international applicants so you should check each school's requirement).

Is TOEFL or IELTS required for application?

If English is not your first language, colleges will require an English proficiency exam. The most common exam is TOEFL. Some colleges may accept IELTS but you should check with the admissions office.

What is the minimum TOEFL score I need to get?

Different colleges require different scores, so you should always check with each one for a minimum score requirement.

Do I have to send my SAT/ACT score?

For international students, TOEFL is primary. Some colleges may request SAT/ACT scores. However, it doesn't hurt to give it a try, you may get a good SAT/ACT score and boost your acceptance chances.

Do colleges accept the IB diploma, A-levels, AP credits, etc.?

Yes. If you have good performance on these tests, you can get certain college credits (which will save you some cash).

How can I send my documents?

The best way is emailing or faxing because sometimes letters get lost in the mail. For standardized tests, you can request ETS and College Board to send the scores as you register for them. Letters of recommendation and school transcript should be kept confidential and sent by your providers or school administrators.

How can I ensure my documents arrived or check the status of my application?

If you use the Common App, you can easily check on the list of requirements for each school. If you apply through the school's online application, you can log onto your account with a username and password that you create on the school's site to check for application status.

When will I get acceptance notification?

After the deadline, it will be a month or two for the consideration process. Different colleges have different notification dates, but generally for Regular Decision, the results should be out no later than mid-April unless you are on a wait list. If you apply for Early Decision or Early Action, colleges will notify you in January.

I got accepted, can I apply for a visa now?

Not yet. Once you get admitted and make your choice of school, you should send a confirmation to the school's admission office with a deposit. Then you have to apply for SEVIS and send the admission office a copy of your SEVIS receipt with SEVIS number on it. After that, college will issue you an I-20 to apply for a visa.

The U.S. immigration department requires that full-time international students apply for F-1 visa. No tourist visa is allowed.

Can I apply as a part-time student?

No. In order to be an eligible international student in the U.S. with an I-20, you have to be a full-time student. Only full-time students with I-20 can apply for an F-1 visa.



Can I get a paid job while I'm studying in the U.S.?

Yes, but only an on-campus job. You are not allowed to have an off-campus paid job if you are an F-1 international student. As for internship, you can have an unpaid position off-campus.

Can I live off-campus?

Maybe, each school has a different policy about housing. Most of the time, you can live off-campus after freshman year or you are older than 21. In case you do live off-campus, make sure to update your address with the office for international students at your school. Most colleges require and encourage students to live on-campus during freshman year for social and academic benefits.

*The information in this post is only relevant to international students who haven't studied in the U.S. before. If you graduate from a U.S. high school, the requirements may be slightly different so you should contact your college counselor or college admissions offices for more information.

DON'T OVERWHELM YOURSELF WITH COLLEGE LIST

You can start making a list of colleges during junior year, summer before senior year, or at the beginning of senior year. Some common questions you may have are: How many colleges should I apply to? Is my college list too long or too short? How do I know if a school is a safe, match or reach (“dream”) school?

Everyone has a different standard when it comes to the number of colleges to apply. College lists can be around 4-20 or more schools. Normally, the ideal number is 6-12. One school is too few and more than 12 might be too many. There are pros and cons to having too few or too many colleges on your list.



Too few schools on college list: less than 4

PROS

- You can start making a list of colleges during junior year, summer before senior year, or at the beginning of senior year. Some common questions you may have are: How many colleges should I apply to? Is my college list too long or too short? How do I know if a school is a safe, match or reach (“dream”) school?
- Everyone has a different standard when it comes to the number of colleges to apply. College lists can be around 4-20 or more schools. Normally, the ideal number is 6-12. One school is too few and more than 12 might be too many. There are pros and cons to having too few or too many colleges on your list.

CONS

- It will be very stressful. College admissions is almost a game of chance where you can never be certain what your chance of acceptance is. While you are enjoying your last semester of high school, you shouldn't be miserable about admissions results. Therefore, having too few schools on your list, especially lacking of “average” schools, will make your chances of admission less certain.

Too many schools on college list: more than 20

PROS

- You have a peace of mind waiting for an acceptance letter. You're able to sit back, relax and wait for the spring time decisions to roll in. You don't have to stress out too much if you have a wide range of school choices.

CONS

- Applying to too many schools can also be incredibly stressful. Unlike having too few, too many schools mean a tremendous amount of work during the application season. While keeping up with finals and maintaining a good GPA, you will also have to spend LOTS OF time focusing on multiple essays. It will be very difficult to give each of them your best. As a result, you will likely lose steam, become distracted, and write lower quality essays. Moreover, when the admission deadline approaches and final exams, you may lose focus and be unable to give your best effort for each.
- It costs a lot of money. Application fees and the cost of submitting standardized test scores will add up to a few thousand dollars if you have too many schools on your list.
- As results are rolling in, too many acceptance letters could also cause undue stress. You may feel torn to choose the one for you. No one wants to spend the next four years of life in a miserable place.

Overall, having too many or too few schools on your college list is not ideal. As we mentioned above, the ideal number of schools on a college list should be between 6 and 12. This range will allow you to focus on each of them while keeping the application costs at a reasonable price.

CATEGORIZING YOUR COLLEGE LIST

The process of making a college list requires a lot of time and effort depending on personal preferences. Preferences include size, location, type of school, majors and related academic opportunities such as internships and studying abroad. Although these factors are important, students should be mindful about their chances of getting accepted to certain schools. Therefore, a well-balanced college list must consist of a reasonable number of schools, considering personal preferences as well as acceptance chances.

In general, college lists should be divided into three categories based on chance of acceptance: Reach (sometimes also referred to as “dream”), match and safety schools.

Reach/Dream schools

Reach schools are the most selective schools on your list and the most difficult schools at which to be admitted. These are schools at which your academic qualifications (GPA, rigor of curriculum and standardized test scores) are lower than previously admitted freshmen. You should also categorize a school as a reach school also if their admission rate is lower than 10-15%. If your academic credentials are a bit lower than their averages, but you have other unique and compelling aspects in your application, you may still have a chance. It is unlikely, but it doesn't mean impossible.

You can set these schools as your first choice, but the common number of reach schools on the list should only range from one to three. It is sometimes a good idea to apply for Early Decision to your reach/dream schools. If you get in, you take it and don't have to wait until March.

Match schools

Match schools are schools at which your credentials are within 50% of their admitted freshmen. Your academic performance matches well with what the school looks for and you are likely to get accepted. However, do note that although acceptance rate is good, acceptance rate is only the possibility so you have to show your best on the application. Since you have a higher chance at these schools, your list should mostly match schools.

Safety schools

Safety schools are schools at which your academic performance confidently reaches or exceeds their average previously admitted freshmen class. Your chance of acceptance at these schools is the most certain on the list. A range of one to three safety schools on a college list is reasonable. Think of them as your plan B.

In some cases, safety schools are great final options in terms of finances or any preferences that reach and match schools can't satisfy. If you're one of the more qualified students, it is more likely they will offer you a merit scholarship to persuade you to enroll at their institution (which would, in turn, push their academic averages and ranking up).

The college admissions process always contains elements of surprise; therefore, having a balanced list of colleges will maximize your acceptance rate and help reduce your anxiety.

COMMON APP TO KEEP TRACK OF YOUR COLLEGE LIST

Having a complete balanced college list is necessary but keeping track of all schools' requirements is even more important. The Common App is the most popular U.S. undergraduate college admissions application that allows you to apply to multiple colleges. On one hand, Common App is a very useful system that takes a considerable amount of work and stress off your shoulders. On the other hand, there are still certain pros and cons about this system.

PROS

- Common App is a recommended application if you apply to two or more schools because it's very well-organized and easy to keep track of.

You can make a college list on the Common App and see all the application requirements of each college.

- It helps keep track of your application process by indicating the material you have and have not completed or submitted. Most importantly, it also indicates the application deadline of each college.
- You only have to fill out background information once and it will automatically be sent to all colleges on your list. Once you start the application, you can always save your work and come back to make any revisions. The filled personal information can be rolled over if you decide to take a gap year.
- You only have to write your personal statement essay once. However, you do need to write different supplement essays to meet different college requirements.

The Common App is free, but you do need to pay each college's application fee.

CONS

- Not all colleges are members of the Common App, for example many state colleges, so you may need to use that school's application system or other systems as well.
- Personal statement word count is limited. The Common App sets a word limit on the personal statement essay. This may leave you feeling like you can't fully describe everything you want the college admissions officers to know about you.
- Because the Common App is easy to use, there are more applicants and the admission pool gets more competitive over years.

You should make use of the Common App when applying to two or more colleges. The Common App will save the duplicated information leaving you with more time to focus on supplemental essays. For international students who are not very familiar with the U.S. college admissions system, the Common App is a recommended application tool since it helps you keep track of your college list. It also gives you a sense of what colleges typically ask for on their applications.

PART-TIME MBA: WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

MBA programs are one of the most popular graduate degrees. It not only boosts your skill sets in business work but also a useful degree in any career path. However, it doesn't mean that everyone needs one and you should always ask yourself why an MBA. Don't spend time, money, and effort for an MBA just for the sake of getting a degree. Generally, many people who want to get an MBA already have a job, so there's options of full-time or part-time studying with separated pros and cons. This post focuses on pros and cons of part-time MBA.

PROS

- Time flexibility - You can keep working while studying for an MBA because class time is normally outside of working time, most commonly in the evening.
- Less financial concern - While you have a professional career outside of school, you can pay for the tuition and reduce the financial stress.
- Less credit requirements - Because you have to commit to both school and work at the same time, there are fewer credits required each semester.
- Hands-on practice - You can apply what you learn in class to your daily work and vice versa. You can make the most out of classroom learning as well as working efficiency.

CONS

- Not every school offers a part-time MBA degree so there will be some difficulty in choosing schools. There are some limitations in traveling between work and school. However, be at ease. Due to Covid-19, many schools have been developing online learning platforms which makes learning remotely a way to go.
- More time commitment - Less hours for class per week means more year commitment for a part-time MBA to fulfill credit requirements.
- Less course selection - The time limit of class leads to the limit of course selection so you may not have diverse class options that interest you to choose from compared to full-time.
- Sometimes, part-time MBA course credits can't be transferred to other programs.
- Study abroad option is limited - Given work commitment, you might not be able to spend a semester abroad.

Working and studying at the same time is exhausting, especially after a full day at work, it is sometimes tiring and hard to focus during evening class.

While there are certain advantages for part-time MBA, the disadvantages may affect both your work and school performance. Therefore, you should take into consideration the time and effort commitment for both work and school before making your decision.

FULL-TIME MBA: WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

A full-time MBA program just like its name requires your full commitment in school. Similar to a part-time program, a full-time MBA program also has pros and cons that you must review carefully before making decisions.

PROS

- More school options - There are more schools that offer a full-time program than part-time MBA so you have more choices.
- More course selection - There are more courses offered throughout the week because there is more flexibility for class time.
- More internships and study abroad programs - You have more availability to add an internship into your schedule or you can spend a semester abroad and experience different business environments in various cultures.
- Opposite of part-time programs, you will be less distracted from work requirements and be able to fully focus on school.
- Networking - While you can spend more time with your classmates, you have more chances to build your network. If you or your friend already had work before, this is the best opportunity to expand your personal network and gain future career benefits from it.

CONS

- Financial capability - This is the biggest concern for full-time MBA. Because you don't have work, there's a limit of income to pay for school. Thus, if you do consider taking a full-time MBA, you should plan your finances ahead in consideration of tuition and living expenses.
- School intensity - Since you are expected to fully commit to school, the workload is definitely more intense compared to part-time MBA.

Again, both part-time and full-time MBA have their pros and cons. Depending on your personal circumstances, you should choose the one that works with your circumstance and give you the best advantage in both school and work. Make everything a memorable experience.

EXECUTIVE MBA



For the graduate level of business administration, you are probably more familiar with MBA. Due to cost and time commitment, MBA sometimes may not be the best option. However, it doesn't mean there is no way to obtain a graduate degree to advance your career, it is time for you to consider Executive MBA.

What is an Executive MBA?

Executive MBA (or EMBA) is a graduate business degree and its structure is relatively similar to traditional MBA with the offer of different focus. EMBA is very flexible in terms of time commitment, classes can be held in the evening, during weekends, or one full day of class per week. Because of this flexibility, an EMBA degree generally requires 1-2 years to complete.

Who can take EMBA?

EMBA is designed for working professionals who look for advanced degrees to learn more or to pursue higher career opportunities. EMBA candidates are commonly in the mid-stage of their career with the minimum of 5-year work experience. If you are in the beginning of your career, the traditional MBA might be a better fit for you.

What does EMBA offer?

As mentioned above, because of its similar structure to MBA, EMBA offers different programs. Just like MBA, you should consider an EMBA program carefully. It is best to choose the one that is closely related to your current or prospective career interest. Besides programs, EMBA is where you can learn about skills that are important for a manager. In addition, in case your work commitment does not allow you time to physically attend classes, some schools offer an online EMBA program. Different schools offer different focuses and programs, so make sure you research carefully and choose the best suited one.

How much does EMBA cost?

It varies by schools, programs, and time commitment. In general, EMBA is a bit more expensive than traditional MBA; however, you can always apply for scholarships and financial aid, or ask your employer to support you. In case you take EMBA in order to pursue a promotion within your current company (or industry), the employer may be receptive and willing to support you.

What can I benefit from EMBA?

Besides boosting your education for your future career, taking EMBA allows you to network and share knowledge and experiences. Because EMBA candidates are already further into their career, you have a chance to learn from others. You can also gain business contacts with managers with different specializations, at different career levels, and from different industries.

LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION: WHAT, WHY AND HOW

What is a letter of recommendation?

A letter of recommendation is an evaluation of an applicant's character, skills, and abilities from a source who knows the applicant well. The letter of recommendation can come from a past or current teacher, coach, employer, or anyone who has a special understanding of the applicant and sufficient experience to compose a detailed and well-documented letter of support.

Why is a letter of recommendation necessary?

Letters of recommendation provide admissions committees with a fuller picture of a student from sources who are familiar with the student. These letters allow admissions teams to view the applicant from a different perspective that [ideally] reveals things about the student that cannot be ascertained from grades and test scores. This fuller picture helps them to make an informed assessment and decision about who the student is and how they would contribute to school.

What should be included in a letter of recommendation?

A letter of recommendation should contain information that is consistent with applicant's self-description in the personal statement and throughout the rest of the application. However, consistency does not mean repetition. College admission officers do not want to read three different letters about the same activities and accolades over and over again. If possible, these letters should expand upon something already mentioned or provide new information about a unique or exciting aspect of the student that would otherwise be overlooked. For this reason, it is helpful for students to get letters from two teachers who know them in different capacities. For example, one teacher may have had the student in all her math classes, while the other recommendation comes from a teacher who has worked closely with the student on the debate team.

Regardless of who writes the letter, the letters should show examples, details, and anecdotes to support the picture being painted of the student. In short, an effective letter of recommendation should address these questions:

- Who is the letter writer and what is her relationship to the applicant?
- What are the applicant's strengths and achievements?
- How has the applicant overcome challenges and/or how has the applicant challenged his/herself?
- What sets the applicant apart from her peers?/What makes the applicant unique?
- How has the applicant made an impact/impression on you/the greater school community?
- What would the applicant bring to a college campus?



How many letters of recommendations should I submit?

Colleges will specify the number of letters of recommendation they require. Most selective colleges will require two to three letters of recommendations, including one from the school counselor and one to two teacher recommendations. Sometimes colleges will permit an additional letter of recommendation, but will often have specific guidelines about when an extra recommendation is appropriate and what it should contain. It is important to stick very closely to their guidelines and not disregard their limit on extra recommendations. If colleges do not specify a limit on the amount of recommendations, applicants should be mindful of having too many recommendations, which can become repetitive and have the potential to adversely affect a student's application.

Letters of Recommendation are very important in the college application process because they reflect or describe an applicant from different viewpoints and add to the overall profile of the student. An effective letter of recommendation should allow the admissions committee to make a better-informed assessment of the candidate.

WHO SHOULD BE YOUR RECOMMENDATION PROVIDERS?

The letter of recommendation is very important in the admissions process as it reflects a professional opinion about your personal and academic qualities. You want your recommendation providers to help best highlight you as an overall student and person. After the admissions committee reads your letter of recommendation, they should feel like you're someone they would enjoy sitting down with for lunch (in addition to being confident in your academic abilities). Therefore, in order to obtain the best letters, choosing the right people to write the letters is very important.

TIP 1 Don't just choose a teacher from a class in which you've done well

Rather than thinking of teachers that give you good grades, you should think of those who know you well. You may not get an A in these classes, but it doesn't mean the teachers can't write you a good letter of recommendation. If they see your improvement in the class, the teachers may write about how you try your best and how your character impresses them. This is even better than an easy-A teacher.

TIP 2 Choose teachers you had in junior or senior years

You should start thinking about who you could choose to write this letter as early as tenth grade. As you start to get a better idea of who these letter writers could be, you can start to develop a connection with them and show them who you are in and outside of classrooms. Keep in mind that your options may change from junior to senior year as you meet and develop relationships with new teachers. However, it doesn't hurt to maintain a good relationship with your teachers.

TIP 3 Choose teachers who teach subjects that are related to your potential major

If you choose to major in Biochemistry, it's best to choose your Chemistry or Biology teacher to write your letter of recommendation. It will show how you perform in that area and how it makes you an ideal candidate for that specific major in college.

If, for example, your potential major is performing arts or fine arts, you still need to choose teachers from core subjects; however, you can possibly ask teachers from art classes for the additional recommendations.

Getting a good letter of recommendation requires time and effort to form good relationships with your teachers. Sometimes it may take a little courage to ask teachers, but remember they are the ones who can help you get into college and tell admissions officers more about you and your performance. Do take notes to ask teachers well in advance of any deadlines.

LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION: DOS AND DON'TS

A letter of recommendation plays a very important role in the admissions process. Whether you are an undergraduate or graduate applicant, there are certain rules that apply to any kind of application. Check out the following tips so that you can make the most out of your letter of recommendation.

DOS

Do choose someone who knows you well and whom you know well. Employers are ideal if you are currently working because they can write about your work ethics.

Do choose someone whose subjects or jobs are related to your major.

Do ask for recommendation letters in person and in advance. Email should be a final resort when you have been able to speak in-person due to geographic distance.

Do inform the letter writers the purpose of your request, whether it's for undergraduate, graduate or any special program application.

Do bring your resume or "brag sheet" (an up-to-date list of all your activities, accomplishments, etc.) to the meeting with recommendation providers to give them an idea of your background, achievement and future goals.

Do politely bring up any key pieces of information you hope they will discuss in the letter during the meeting.

Do send a recap or any extra information that might be helpful along with a thank you note.

Do follow up periodically with the providers until the recommendation letters are submitted and send another thank you note after reference submission.

Do keep them updated on your admissions results.

DON'TS

Don't wait until the last minute to ask. It's best to start requesting letters of recommendation right when you start the application. The earlier the better.

Don't lie or ask your reference providers to lie.

Don't choose someone for their title. Even if they're Ph.D, M.D., or J.D, if they don't know you well, they can't help you.

Don't choose someone with poor writing skills even though they know you well because references with serious grammatical mistakes or word choices may cost your chance.

Don't come to the meeting with them unprepared. Be prepared to discuss your experiences, achievements, interests in the programs to which you're applying and your goals.

Don't hesitate to give reference providers with extra information even if you already had a meeting with them.

Don't forget to send them a thank you note and update them on your admissions results.

Requesting a letter of recommendation is only a part of your ongoing relationship with professors, [past] employers and mentors. It is very important that you follow the above suggested etiquette not only for references and recommendations, but also for long-term professional relationships with your professors, employers and mentors.



WHY PARENTS ARE IMPORTANT IN APPLICATION PROCESS

To the students:

College admission can get very stressful. The pressure can drive you to the edge of being broken down. That's why getting your parents involved is essential. Not only being parents, they are the closest mentors to guide you past the anxiety of future preparation.

First rule: Parents are the first and last ones in this world to help you unconditionally

You can argue that your parents don't really understand you. That might be true but not all the time. Parents can offer guidance or opinions in creating college lists, financial aid applications, and other college-related issues. It's simply because they may have already been there and done that.

Second rule: The information resource is right next to you

Some students already have a defined dream and set goals for their choice of major. Some students are yet to know the direction they want to head and that calls for parents' help. Parents shouldn't choose your major, but they can give you reality facts. You may change majors many times in college, but learning this information from parents can give you a better idea in making decisions.

Third rule: Don't exclude them, they are paying for you

Although it does not apply to all cases, parents are generally the ones providing financial support. Therefore, you should discuss with them which colleges would be best for your financial situation, especially if you need to apply for financial aid or loans.



To the parents:

Many of you have gone through the college admission process, you faced and overcame the difficulty in both academic path and life. It makes you the ideal source of help for your children's admission process.

First rule: Don't be forceful. Your child's happiness is all that matters.

Don't let yourself think that you pay for the tuition and you have the right to get involved. That's not all true. What you like is not what your children like. If they don't like it, they won't be able to succeed.

Second rule: Don't make decisions for them.

You will soon send your children off to college. You won't be physically next to them all the time to get them out of trouble. Children have to experience hardship to grow. College admissions is the mere first step of real-life entrance. It is, without a doubt, stressful, chaotic, and overwhelming. However, let your children make their own decisions. You are only the helpers; thus, you should be there for them but don't make choices on their behalf.

Third rule: Provide help with areas children still lack in experience

Your children are only high school seniors and they can't know everything. You should consistently encourage and remind them to do more research about different aspects of schools and see which might be best for them. Education is important but their well-being is all that matters.

COLLEGE APP AND PARENTS INVOLVEMENT: WHAT TO DO

College applications are the most important part of senior year and with it comes a lot of pressure. College search is one of the first steps of this stressful process and having parents' support can make a big difference. Therefore, as parents, you should know how to help your children get through their first step of entering the real world.

Rule 1: Let your children take the initiatives

Both you and your children should clearly understand each other's roles. Your children are the one going to college and it is your duty to be there for them. As parents, you tend to think what would be best for them but it's not necessarily what they want. To put it simply, what you like may not be what they like. Being supportive and available is crucial, but you shouldn't be assertive. If your children follow your wishes and go to the school they don't like, there's a higher chance that they won't enjoy college and want to transfer. It means going through the admission process again.

With college search, parents should let the children take the initiative in choosing schools they're interested in. If your children hesitate and voluntarily ask for your involvement, do explain to them that it is ultimately their choice that matters.

Rule 2: Have family discussions regularly

Maintain good communication with children throughout the admission process. The reasons are:

It helps you keep track of your children's progress.

You can offer help, information and advice timely, especially when your children compile college lists.

Your children may experience anxiety, stress or undesired mental problems. Frequent communication allows you to catch those signs early to help them.

You can understand your children better and vice versa to strengthen family's bond.

Rule 3: Be positive

Remaining positive is a good way to reduce stress during this intense time. Sometimes, it's a good idea to encourage children to take part in activities outside of classrooms, such as sports or community service to relieve the pressure from grades, standardized tests and essays. These activities can also boost their application qualifications.

Sometimes, your children may feel discouraged due to a low grade. You should console and assure them that one low grade doesn't ruin their chance completely. They should look up and try harder next time.

Rule 4: Keep close contact with their college counselor

It is important that parents consistently check in with college counselors. It helps parents learn more about children's performance at school and timely seek advice from professionals when needed. College counselors can assist parents in their support of children's application process.

COLLEGE APP AND PARENTS INVOLVEMENT: WHAT TO DO (CONT)

The previous blogs provided the first four rules of what parents can do to support the application process. This entry will continue to offer more tips to parents of high school seniors.

Rule 5: Prepare for standardized tests with your children

The most important rule for standardized tests is "Don't be last minute." As the deadline for college applications approaches, having to take these tests is very stressful and creates a higher chance for low scores. Therefore, you should plan ahead with your children and make sure there's enough time to complete all application requirements. You should also make sure there is appropriate "rest time" between tests so children can improve any areas of weaknesses.

You can also make studying for standardized tests more fun and less stressful by playing vocabulary games for instance. It can help relieve stress and strengthen the bonding of family members.

Rule 6: Make plans to visit colleges together

Campus tours are a great way to experience the college environment in advance. A campus tour can help narrow down your children's college list.

To make the most out of college tours, you should plan out a family trip for weekends or long weekends and draft questions to ask the schools' admission ambassadors prior to the trip.

You should always accompany your children on a campus tour to see how your children feel about the schools and to have your concerns answered by school representatives. However, do remember that your children are the one making decisions, you should only be supportive and informative.

Rule 7: Maintain a good relationship with teachers, especially potential reference providers

While your children are busy with exams, college essays, and standardized tests, they may distance themselves from social relationships. You need to encourage them to maintain a good relationship with teachers, especially the prospective recommendation providers. To do so, encourage your children to be active, contributive and verbal in class.

It is just as important for you, as parents, to keep in touch with your children's teachers. The teachers will help you understand your children's strengths and weaknesses. More importantly, the connection with potential reference providers will give more information about your children's background and help them write letters of recommendation better.

Rule 8: Review your children's application before submission

Due to many elements of application, children will be overwhelmed and may make unintentional mistakes that can seriously hurt their acceptance chance. You should offer to help them take the final look before submission to catch any unintentional errors.


Most parents hope their children can enjoy their college time the most. Your involvement is necessary to help them get through this intensive time of application with breeze. However, you have to remember that your children are the sole decision-makers for their future and life. You, as parents, are the audience, the supporter and the cheerleaders by their sidelines.






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