

Five Keys to Preparing a Strong Application

- 1. Start early**, even if you are not applying early. A well-written app is essential, and good writing takes time. Even gathering all the information needed can take time.
- 2. YOU are applying.** Don't make the application sound like someone else, or let anyone edit you away from your own voice. But do ask someone to look over your writing for correct English usage and typos.
- 3. Include all relevant facts** about you in the application, once. If you are significantly talented in anything, present evidence; if you have overcome challenges or have special circumstances, explain them. Admissions people can't consider information they don't have.
- 4. Choose recommenders carefully**, Colleges that require letters want to know what it is like to teach you, even (maybe especially) when you really had to struggle in the course. Ask teachers who know you well and who can tell them.
- 5. Work with your school counselor.** Many colleges ask for a counselor's report, so make sure that your counselor knows about your achievements outside of the classroom and your circumstances. Prepare a summary to help the counselor write that report. (We provide a good sample summary form in Admission Matters.)

How to Build a Good List

- 1. Think carefully about what you want in a school.** A key to success is a careful, thorough self-assessment of the things that are important to you - academically, socially, and financially. (We have a great questionnaire to help you do this in Admission Matters).
- 2. Seek out suggestions.** Ask your counselor, parents, and others for ideas. Use a couple of good online college search engines like ones at BigFuture, College Navigator, and SuperMatch to help you find schools that fit your criteria.
- 3. Do some research.** Once you have a list of suggested schools, do your homework. Read about them on BigFuture, check out their websites, and visit them (virtually or in person). Note what each offers and what each lacks; these preferences help you further define what you want in a college.
- 4. Be flexible.** Look carefully at lesser-known colleges and, if you can, schools in different parts of the country. There are no perfect colleges, but there are many where you would be perfectly happy.
- 5. Have a balanced list.** It has been said that it is hard for kids to get into college because they all want to get into colleges that are hard to get into. Make sure your final list includes at least a couple of schools where you are sure to be admitted, as well as others where your chances are more uncertain.

* From An Online Editorial Review of (Name of Book) at Amazon.com.