

## What Are Colleges Looking For?

### Increase Your Chances of Admission

#### Highlight On Your Application:

**Grades and test scores** Obvious? Yes. But these marks are one of the first things colleges consider. Make sure you do what you can to get these as high as possible.

**Extracurricular activities** Have you taken a leadership role in your activities? What have you accomplished? Think: quality over quantity.

**Rigorous course schedule** Schools want to see challenging courses that will help you grow academically. Talk to your counselor about opportunities for advanced courses, such as Advanced Placement (AP) level.

#### Strengthen Your Application Essay

**Show, do not tell** Do not just list your attributes. Be specific! For example, saying that you are helpful is not as interesting as writing about your experiences volunteering.

**Creativity counts** Avoid standard essay topics. Try an original idea, something an admissions office has not read a million times before. The essay is your opportunity to show your prospective college what makes you *you*.

**Check for spelling errors** Make sure to proofread your writing, then ask a parent or teacher to look it over for spelling or grammar errors.

#### Prepare for Your Interview\*

**Know the logistics** Find directions to where the interview will be held ahead of time so you do not arrive late. Call the college admissions office and ask what the appropriate dress code is for interviews.

**Be natural** Admissions officers want to know you as a person, so highlight your accomplishments in a meaningful way. Sounding like you are reading off of a cue card will not leave them with a strong memory of you. Remember that the interview should be a conversation. Be confident and optimistic about your future college career.

**Ask questions** Come prepared with questions or impressions you have about the college to demonstrate your interest in the school. Place less emphasis on your plans after graduation and more on what you want to learn and accomplish as a college student. Make sure to follow up your interview with a thank-you note.

*\*Not all colleges require an interview for admission. For those that do, a successful interview can help you (and your application) stand out from the applicant pool.*

**FastTip:** College admissions costs can include test fees for the ACT and/or SAT, non-refundable application fees (between \$10 for community colleges to \$75+ for some private colleges), and processing fees for additional copies of your high school transcripts.

### Application Dos and Don'ts

#### DOS

+ **DO follow the rules** If an application asks you to choose one essay, do not answer them all. Read the application directions completely before answering any questions.

+ **DO include everything** Verify all forms have been signed and that you have included all essays and recommendations. Double check that you have not left out anything important. Make copies for your records.

+ **DO pay attention to deadlines** Submit your application with plenty of time to spare. You may want to send your application via certified mail or request an email receipt if you applied online, for added assurance that it arrived on time.

#### DON'TS

- **DON'T procrastinate** Letting things wait until the last minute might mean leaving something out or making mistakes on the application. You want to take as much time as possible on your application.

- **DON'T leave anything out** Be careful to not treat an online application like an instant message (IM) or e-mail. An admissions office does not want to see smiley faces or IM slang. Treat an online application with the same seriousness as you would a paper one.

**Need money for college?  
Search 1.3 million awards  
worth over \$3 billion!  
[www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)**

**FastTip:** Remember that college selection is all about matching. There are no "good" or "bad" schools, only schools that are "good for you" or "bad for you." So be yourself!