

The process of applying to college can be daunting. Before getting into the specifics of how to submit college applications, we want to stress several things.

THE PROCESS IS INDIVIDUALIZED.

You and your family might approach it with different goals or constraints than those of your friends. Do you need to obtain a certain level of financial aid to afford college? Do you need to be close to home for family reasons? What are your particular circumstances that affect your options for next year? It's important to talk about this honestly with your family before you begin the application process.

SENIOR YEAR CAN BE AN EMOTIONAL TIME.

Many students are stressed during this time. You may be worried about how to complete your applications while keeping up with schoolwork; worried about whether you'll get into your favorite school – or any school, for that matter; and, looking ahead, worried about what it will be like to leave home for college. It is normal to feel emotional and overwhelmed at times. If you are feeling especially anxious or upset, talk with your counselor or another trusted adult.

BREAK THE PROCESS DOWN INTO SMALLER, MORE MANAGEABLE TASKS.

You will not finish your applications in time if you wait until a few days before the deadline. After reading the Senior Snapshot about the steps involved in applying, you can make a list of what you need to do, and plan how to accomplish it by the application deadlines. Plan to tackle one or two things on the list each week.

THIS IS YOUR LIFE.

You are the best one to judge which colleges are right for you. Once you have factored in financial and personal considerations, it is important to spend time thinking about the type of school you might like. Do you want to stay close to home, or explore a different location? Do you like the energy of a city, or the relaxed atmosphere of a small town? Do you want to go to a bigger school environment, or a smaller one? Are you interested in a special program that might not be offered by all colleges? Try not to be swayed by outside influences, and pay attention to your reactions to different schools. If you have not visited all of the colleges you are considering, get a better feel for them by spending time on their websites and looking at other online resources.

TAKE THE PRESSURE OFF.

There are many, many colleges and universities that offer an excellent education. Try to begin this process with that idea in mind, and apply to colleges or universities that seem to be the best fit for your interests and personality. Once you're a college student, at least part of your experience will depend on luck. Will you get assigned a great roommate? Will you have a professor during freshman year who opens your eyes to a new field of study? Will you discover a new interest or hobby? There is no way to predict these things; all you can do is apply to colleges that are a good match for you, and then when you arrive in the fall, try to make the most of the opportunity.

GET STARTED.

Make your list of colleges. Factoring in the considerations above, you will be best able to organize this process if you finalize the list of colleges to which you want to apply. Try to include several colleges where you expect to be admitted, a couple where you are likely to be admitted but are not sure, and a couple that are a bit of a stretch. Try to include only colleges where you can envision yourself being happy, and that you will be excited to attend.