

Avoiding Application Mistakes: Advice from the Admissions Office

1. **Spell check** does not equal **PROOFREADING**.
2. Make sure you **SIGN and DATE** the last page of the application if you are filling out a hard copy.
3. You must, *must*, **MUST** spell everything correctly-- most importantly, the **UNIVERSITY NAME** and the **NAME OF THE MAJOR YOU ARE INTERESTED IN!**
4. Don't make your parents fill out parts of the applications for you. Ask them questions if you don't know something, but **DO NOT** have them fill in the answers for you.
5. Illegibility is a major problem. Consider not only using a word processor for your essays, but also for the application if possible.
6. Do not send in an application that is stained, sticky, torn, or folded too many times!
7. Pay attention: is that line item asking you for your **COUNTY** or your **COUNTRY?**
8. If you have a job, make sure you mention that on the application! Jobs impact how much time you have available for extracurricular activities, and including that info will show why they might have been less involved.
9. If you are filling out an application for XYZ College, do **NOT** send the application to University of ABC by mistake! Double check every application going into every envelope!
10. Pay close attention to drop-down menus while filling out online applications. You're probably not from Afghanistan, but it is listed directly below the United States on many applications... and students sometimes slip!
11. Write naturally and with your own voice in your essays. Make sure they are literate and sensible, but a good 17 year old writer need not sound like a 45 year old college professor.
12. However, try to make your best professional impression on the admissions office. Do not list things such as "hanging out with friends," "shopping," or "talking on the phone" as extracurricular activities. Do not blame your parents or teachers if you are explaining poor grades. The admissions office is interested in what you did to improve, not why you received a poor grade. Do not forget to proofread your essay or, better yet, have a parent or teacher proofread it for you. Misspellings and grammatical errors present a very bad impression to admissions officers.
13. Submit the necessary forms to your high school counselor and/or registrar to make



sure your transcripts are sent to your colleges of choice on time. Your SAT/ACT scores must automatically be sent to the colleges from ETS.

14. Review your transcripts BEFORE the counselor sends it to your colleges of choice! Make sure your course names, grades, GPA, name spelling, SSN, home address, and phone number are all correct.
15. Read all instructions regarding the required essay(s); suggested length, topic prompts, and examples will all help you to write the best essay possible.
16. Just because your college or university accepts the Common Application does not necessarily mean the Common Application is all you need. Many schools require supplemental information or forms.
17. Relate whatever you are writing about to yourself and your life. Do NOT write a generic essay-- you are presenting yourself to the admissions board! Write details that are unique to you, that only you would write.
18. Be aware of the impression your e-mail address makes. Create a professional email address for use with college and job applications. There are cases where students are rejected from a school simply because their e-mail address suggests behavior that is unprofessional.

Some Thoughts on Electronic Applications

Do... take the online tour. Before you start your application, walk through each step of the application on "a virtual tour".

Do... check to see if your college of choice allows use of the Common Application, which is used by many private, and some public, institutions.

Do... create an e-mail address that is professional and creates a good image.

Do... create a user name and password that you'll remember easily. Record these words and keep them in a safe place. If you lose your password, some colleges allow you to create a new one, but if you forget your user name, you may have to start a new application.

Do... disable pop-up blockers in order to view parts of the application that displays in pop-up windows.

Do... use the correct browser. Most online applications functions only with new versions of web browsers.



- Do...** Print out the full application directions so you can "check-off" tasks as you complete them. Be sure to check if a supplement is required; if the form says Part 1 and there is no part two visible, you will usually receive part 2 after you complete part 1 and/or pay the fee.
- Do...** follow directions and complete all steps. On each page be sure to scroll to the bottom of the page and the bottom of each pop-up to avoid missing any information.
- Do...** print out copies of your personal statement to cross-check your work with your counselor/advisor or an instructor BEFORE you submit your application!
- Do...** carefully review the summary page. Look for any instance where it says, "no information added," and if you didn't intend to leave that area blank, click "modify" to return to the step where you can fill it in.
- Do...** submit your application at least a week before the deadline. You never know when a computer may crash, or a part of your application may still be missing!
- Don't...** compose your personal statement online. Take time to compose it in a word-processing application, such as Microsoft Word, save it as a text file, and then copy and paste it into the appropriate boxes online.
- Don't...** forget to save your work. You usually have no more than 40 minutes per Web page before you'll be timed out. Whenever you save an entry or move to a new page, your work is usually automatically stored, but if you plan to leave your application for any length of time - to go grab a snack or answer the phone, for example - use the save/logout feature to store your application.
- Don't...** be afraid to ask for help. If you have technical difficulties, don't be afraid to ask the "Help Desk," "Technical Support," or use the "Contact" links.
- Do...** click "Submit Application" when you've finished. Your application won't be sent to the University until you do.
- Do...** pay the admission fee by credit card if possible. This allows an immediate record of payment, rather than having to wait for a check to reach the school.
- Do...** print out your receipt and keep it! You will have a record of your application ID number and a complete summary of your application.
- Do...** look for e-mail confirmation that your application was received. Call the Office of Admission if you do not receive confirmation within 48 hours.



10 Common Mistakes Students Make on the Common Application Online:

- 1) Failing to Read the Instructions. "It's the single most important thing that keeps them from doing this flawlessly. Anytime you don't read the instructions something's probably going to come back to haunt you," said Judy Whitman of the Common Application, who recommends that students print the directions out and read them before they start typing.
- 2) Waiting Until the Last Minute. "Literally, they're doing this the day before it's due at 11 at night," Whitman said. "If there's an early decision deadline on Dec. 1, they're on the computer Nov. 30. They may run into a snag that has nothing to do with us - their Internet access might be down. While it's instantaneously submitted, they shouldn't wait for the last minute to do it."
- 3) Not Entering a Valid E-mail Address. "Later on they wonder why they haven't heard from the college or got a confirmation message."
- 4) Not Using the Checklist to Check Each Individual College's Requirements and Deadlines. "There again," Whitman said, "we have a profile for each college, which gives all the deadlines, fees, and supplementary information. It's all there, yet they'll submit late and wonder why they can't select a college from the list. There is another tab in there which will tell them which colleges accept credit cards, which colleges only accept hard copy, and other specific requirements."
- 5) Saving The Colleges To Which They Wish To Apply. In the MY COLLEGES section, students are not accurately selecting and saving the colleges they want to apply to. They often select the right school, but forget to save.
- 6) Students Forget to Save Their Data Before They Log Out.
- 7) Not Thoroughly Reviewing Application for Errors and Truncated Text. "We have print preview, instructions all over the place, and even though you can type forever in the HTML input screen, this doesn't mean it's all going to fit into the PDF output," said Whitman,, who encourages students to look at the print preview before sending. "What they see on the print preview is exactly what will be transmitted to colleges."
- 8) Not Verifying They Have Completed the Submission Process Before Logging Out. "There are a series of screens they go through which ensure that the data is saved in our system on our server. They close down before doing that and the application is not complete and not submitted into our system," Whitman said.
- 9) Not Following Up With Fees and Supplemental Documents.



- 10) Not Sending Hard Copies to Member Colleges That Don't Accept the Electronic Version of The Common Application.

Now that you know the common pitfalls, visit the Common Application's website at <http://www.commonapp.org> and see how many of your top college picks are there.

This document was assembled from information provided by Sam Rosensohn, The Common Application Online, NACAC (National Association for College Admission Counseling), and Anne Heinzeroth for Upward Bound.

