

## Educate Yourself: College Admissions

### Admissions: Key Terms Defined

**Award Letter:** A letter telling you what financial aid (if any) your college is offering to you (includes types and amounts of aid offered, specific program information, etc.). You may choose to accept some or all of what is offered.

**Credit (or Credit Hour):** A unit of measurement institutions give for fulfilling course requirements. Most colleges require that you complete a certain number in order to graduate.

**Cost of Attendance:** Includes any cost associated with attending college: tuition and associated fees, room and board, books and supplies, etc.

**Early Action:** If you apply early action and are accepted, you may compare admissions and financial aid offers and wait to commit to the college until later in the year.

**Early Decision:** If you apply early decision, you must attend the college or university if you are accepted and must withdraw any applications sent to other schools. You won't be able to compare financial aid offers.

**Enrollment Status:** Indication of whether you attend full or part time. In general, you must attend at least half time (or in some cases full time) to qualify for financial aid.

**Expected Family Contribution:** Amount students and their family are expected to contribute toward cost of attendance.

**FAFSA:** Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Students must fill out the FAFSA to find out how much federal aid they are eligible to receive. Visit [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov) for more info.

**Open Admissions:** Students are admitted regardless of academic qualifications.

**Out-of-State Student:** Generally applies to students attending a public university outside of their home state. Out-of-state students must pay a higher tuition rate unless they establish legal residency for that state.

**Rolling Admissions:** There is no set admissions deadline date; qualified students are accepted until classes are filled.

**Undergraduate Student:** A student who has not completed a baccalaureate or first professional degree.

### **FastTip:**

If you come across an unfamiliar term or you simply have a question about the application process, ask your guidance counselor for assistance or call the college directly.

### Pick Your College: More Questions to Consider

#### **Financial Aid Questions**

What type of financial aid packages does the school offer? Are there a variety of options?

What tuition increases are planned in the next few years, if any? What has been the average tuition increase in years past?

What kind of work opportunities are available?

Are there refunds available if you need to leave school for any reason?

#### **Academics/Career Questions**

How does the school help graduates find jobs?

What percentage of graduates from the school find jobs in their field of study?

What is the retention rate (how many students come back after their freshman year)?

What is the classroom environment like? Is there much interaction between teacher and students? Are you able to visit the campus and sit in on a class?

How many computers/computer labs are there? Are they up-to-date and accessible to all students?

#### **Room/Board/Lifestyle Questions**

How diverse is the campus? How does the school promote diversity?

What is the crime rate on campus and in the surrounding neighborhood?

What student organizations are on campus?

What are the hours of the student health clinic? What about 24-hour emergency care?

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## What Are Colleges Looking For?

A college admissions office wants to see more than just high test scores and grades. How can you separate yourself from the crowd?

### ***On Your Application?***

*Grades and standardized test scores:* It's obvious, but these marks are one of the first things colleges look at.

*Extracurricular activities:* Quantity doesn't mean quality. Have you taken a leadership role in your chosen activities? What have you accomplished?

*Rigorous course schedule:* Schools want to see challenging courses that will help you grow academically. Don't take classes just to pad your GPA.

*Follow the rules:* If an application asks you to choose one essay, don't answer them all. Read the application directions completely before answering any questions.

*Include everything:* Verify all forms have been signed and that you've included all essays and recommendations. Doublecheck that you haven't left out anything important.

*On-time arrival:* Note when the application deadline is and send it in with plenty of time to spare. You may want to send your application via certified mail for added assurance that it arrived on time.

### ***On Your Application Essay?***

*Show, don't tell:* Don't just list your attributes; get specific. For example, saying that you're helpful is not as dynamic as relating your experiences with helping younger students learn how to read.

*Creativity counts:* Avoid cliches or standard essay topics. Try to come up with something an admissions office hasn't seen a million times before.

*No spelling errors:* First, spellcheck your essay. Then, read it again for usage mistakes. Have a parent or teacher look it over for spelling and grammar errors.

*Personality:* The application essay is your opportunity to show your prospective college what makes you *you*. Ask yourself whether what you've written is memorable, engaging and in your own voice.

### ***In Your Interview?***

*Arrive early and dress the part:* Know where the interview will be held ahead of time so you won't arrive late. Dress on the conservative and understated side. If you have questions about the dress code, call the college and ask.

*Identity:* Admissions offices want to know you as a person. If you're discussing your accomplishments, highlight why they were meaningful for you, or what you got out of them.

*Spontaneity, positivity, confidence:* Sounding like you're reading off of a cue card won't leave them with a fond memory. It's a good idea to rehearse, but remember that the interview should be a conversation. Be natural, sure of yourself and optimistic about your future college career.

*Interest in the college:* Come prepared with questions or impressions you have about the college to demonstrate your interest level. Place less emphasis on your plans after graduation and more on what you want to learn and accomplish while a college student. Follow up with a thank-you note.

***FastTip:*** Remember that college selection is all about matching. Different schools have their own ideas regarding the students they want. There isn't a need to pretend to be something you're not.