

Five Collegewise Admissions Tips

1 Writing your college essay about something you *think* will sound good to colleges is almost always a bad idea.

You probably wouldn't stand up at a team banquet and say, "Playing soccer has taught me important life lessons about hard work and leadership." So please-oh-please do not write those words in your college essay. Students who write what they think colleges want to hear end up writing the same tired, clichéd stories. Instead, write something honest that helps admissions readers get to know you. Whether you write about making meatballs with grandma or how you've lost every election you've ever entered, if it's important to you, it's likely important to colleges.

2 Initiative is just as important as participation.

Colleges want students who have the initiative to make things happen. The student who walks into the public library and asks if she can get involved in the literacy program, the athlete who calls the sports camp and asks if there's a summer job available, and the mathematician who emails a college professor and ends up doing summer research—they all have initiative. So look for opportunities. Find ways to make an impact. And never let your parents organize these involvements for you.

3 The best way to stand out from the crowd is to just be yourself.

College is a place where individuality is celebrated. So don't spend your high school years trying to conform to something you think colleges want you to be. If you love numbers, be a math geek. Be the hugest, proudest, geekiest math geek you can possibly be. The same goes for athletes, artists, musicians, and kids who have unusual hobbies like stamp collecting or studying bugs. Just be yourself and be proud of who you are. It's good life advice, and we promise it will help you get into college, too.

4 Getting into college is a lot like dating—confidence is appealing.

Desperation is never attractive. The kid who constantly laments that his life will be over if Stanford doesn't accept him isn't really showing as much confidence (or perspective) as the student who loves Stanford but knows she's going to learn and have fun at any college lucky enough to get her. Your worth as a human being is not determined by a GPA, test score, or an admissions decision from any particular college. So be confident. And remember that you, not your college alone, are the one who will determine your success.

5 Nice kids finish first.

We've heard of more than a few instances where a smart, accomplished kid was rejected from a college because he seemed arrogant, self-centered, or just not very likable. When a college accepts you, they're not just welcoming you to their classrooms—you're becoming a part of their campus community. They want kids that teachers and other students like and enjoy being around. So be the kid your teachers like having in class, treat people with respect, and try to be a good person. We promise that your teachers, counselors, and potential colleges will notice.