

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 would probably never 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 the colleges want to hear end up writing the same tired, clichéd stories. Instead, write something honest that helps them get to know you. Whether you write about cooking spaghetti and meatballs with grandma, or how you’ve lost every election you’ve ever entered, if it’s important to you, it’s likely to be important to colleges.

2

Initiative is just as important as participation.

Colleges want students who have the initiative to make things happen. What does that look like? The surfer who calls the local community college to find out if they’d like someone to teach a surfing class has initiative. 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. They don’t want everyone to look and act the same. 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 a huge 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 may love Stanford but knows that 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, a test score or an admissions decision from any particular college. Acting like it is just makes you look meek and weak. So be confident. And remember that you, not your college alone, are the one who will ultimately make you successful.

5

Nice kids finish first.

We’ve heard of more than a few instances where a truly smart, accomplished kid was rejected from a college because he seemed arrogant, self-centered, or just not all that nice to people. 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. Don’t join in when everyone else starts to make fun of the easy target (those who do that are secretly racked with insecurity, by the way). Treat people with respect and try to be a good person. We promise you that your teachers, counselors and potential colleges will notice; and you’ll be in line for karma points later in life.