THE TOP 10 ways to enjoy the college admissions process

10. **Visit, if possible, at least some of the colleges you are considering.** Nothing will help you more to define your ideal learning environment and help you see whether the labels and stereotypes that get attached to some colleges really are valid.

9. **Schedule an interview if the college offers individual interviews and is one you are seriously considering.** But don’t worry if you can’t, or if you don’t want one. Interviews are almost never a required part of the process, and they may or may not even be considered evaluative. But having one could help you learn more about the institution.

8. **Share your reactions about the colleges you visit with your parents and others.** Sure, it’s sometimes frustrating that they want to be so involved with what ultimately will be your decision, but since they are frequently the ones who are going to be helping you pay for this experience, they should be part of the process.

7. **Be thoughtful in your choices.** If you are diligent enough with the steps above, you ought to be able to narrow your college choices down to six to eight strong options that cover a range of competitiveness for you.

6. **Apply early decision only if you feel absolutely sure it is your first choice.** Too many students apply ED for the wrong reasons (i.e., because of whatever strategic advantage they think it may give them), but applying early can be limiting. This is especially true for anyone for whom financial considerations are going to be important in deciding where to attend; you and your family may wish to be able to compare different financial aid/scholarship awards.

5. **Your SAT/ACT scores will probably play less of a role in your admissions decision than you may think.** Most selective colleges do not have cut-off scores below which applicants are not admitted, and most have a fairly wide range of scores represented among admitted students. That’s because test scores only provide colleges with the roughest possible measure of your potential for academic success in college; your high school grades are a much better predictor of that. Higher scores are better than lower scores, of course, but even the highest scores are not a guarantee of admission. At most colleges, it is likely that your scores will look similar to those of other applicants, which means it is unlikely that they will be a deciding factor in your candidacy.

4. **Relax when it comes time to writing your personal essay, and let it come from your heart.** Yes, the essay is important enough to be required by most colleges, but please know that very seldom is the essay reason enough by itself to admit or reject anyone. We just want to get to know you a little better, and your grades and scores only paint part of your picture. But don’t forget to proofread!

3. **Choose the teachers who write your letters of recommendation carefully.** Since those letters are another way for us to get to know you better, they should come from teachers who know you well—maybe even teachers who have had contact with you outside of the classrooms through clubs, teams, etc. And don’t forget that some of the teachers who challenged you the most may be able to write an even more meaningful letter than the ones for whom you got an easy A.

2. **Submit additional letters of recommendation only if they are from people who can add things about you that others couldn’t.** Letters from friends of your parents who happen to be alumni of the college to which you are applying, for example, don’t usually shed much additional light for us.

AND THE #1 WAY TO ENJOY THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS PROCESS:

1. **Breathe deeply and always remember that a year from now you will very likely be attending a great college where you will get a first-rate education and have a wonderful experience.** There are so many terrific options for higher education in the United States that almost everyone ends up having a really positive college experience. And don’t forget that the quality of your experience is far more up to you than it is up to the institution you attend.

   **Good luck!**