

US UNIVERSITY APPLICATIONS: TIPS FROM EDUCATIONUSA

A. How to select universities

- Use the College Navigator Database: <https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator>
- Best fit factors – selectivity less than 10% is nearly impossible; less than 30% is highly selective
- Your school list should include: 1-2 reaches, 3-5 targets, 3-4 safeties
- Don't just apply to schools you've heard of – everyone is applying there.
- >60% acceptance rate can mean a school is committed to providing access to education
- Universities have honor colleges for students achieving above their average

B. Admission “Requirements”

Holistic Admissions: An opportunity to show off your strengths and explain your context

1. Requirements: Proof of English Proficiency, completion of high school equivalency
2. Variable Requirements: SAT/ACT, Personal Statement/Essay, Letters of Recommendation
3. Optional: CCAs, community service, grassroots advocacy work, research, internship/work experience, medals, certificates, scholarships, portfolio for arts, family responsibilities.

ACTs or SATs?

- ACT is more speed-based
- SAT is more logic-based

ED/EA/REA/RD

Early Round applications: Deadline is early Nov-Dec; will release acceptances/ results before the regular decision deadline

Early Decision (ED): Binding, raises admissions chances significantly in the stats, some schools have EDII.

Early Action (EA): Non-binding, can apply to as many as you want.

Restrictive Early Action (REA): Non-binding, but you can only apply to one

Regular round applications: Deadline is early Jan- Feb

Regular Decision (RD): Normal round of applications

Rolling Admissions: Admit students as and when they get your application

C. Tips on writing personal statements:

Tip 1: Understand your Audience:

Admissions Officers (AO) are around 25-40 years old, idealistic, studied humanities, want to change the world. They're reading your essay in 2-3 minutes, with 100 applications a day, for five months straight.

Admissions Officers will skim over:

- Cliché topics: vacation/ service trip that made you realise your privilege; sports triumph or injury, meta-commentary about writing an essay.
- Stiff writing: First, second, third; rehashing of accomplishments, generic flowery ChatGPT-like writing, abstract general philosophical statements

Admissions Officers will connect their emotional responses to you – don't depress them.

How are you going to capture the Admissions Officers' attention?

- Use a hook – something unexpected
- Have a strong central message
- Use concrete details from your real experiences
- Be likeable – get them to advocate for you

Tip 2: Read the prompt for the personal statement closely – it will tell you what they're looking for.

- In the CommonApp, you can use the list of question options provided to brainstorm points. The question you pick is not important.

Well-known examples of successful personal statements that can be found online:

- Successful Harvard Essay by Abigail Mack: <https://www.boston.com/news/local-news/2021/05/13/i-hate-the-letter-s-this-college-essay-on-the-loss-of-a-parent-helped-a-bridgewater-teen-into-harvard-and-went-viral/>
- Costco Essay: <https://www.businessinsider.com/high-school-senior-who-got-into-5-ivy-league-schools-shares-her-admissions-essay-2016-4>

D. Supplementary essays?

Some universities require supplementary essays, especially on your academic interests. These may be read by the academics in the university, like the professors.

For queries on US universities applications, you may contact:

singapore@educationusa.org

educationusa.state.gov

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