

Avoid Mistakes on Your College Application

College applications represent you to admissions officers, so give yourself the best chances of acceptance by taking your time and completing all parts of the application fully.

The best approach to turning in a great application is to allow plenty of time to work on it. Complete a first draft of the application before working on the final document. Starting early will save you from making the most common errors and the worst mistake of all: missing the application deadline.

Here are several common application errors and how to avoid them:

Dishonesty

Never lie on an application. This includes overstating grades, exaggerating about participation in activities, or plagiarizing an essay. Just be yourself. Your essay should express something personal, but appropriate. An admissions committee receives thousands of applications, and trying to write what you think admissions officers want to hear is the surest way to sound forgettable.

Ignoring an academic red flag

If you have an issue that might need explaining, such as a poor grade in a class, time missed from school, etc., it's best to briefly and honestly address it on the application. Don't ignore it, or the admissions committee will draw its own conclusion. Tell your own story. It's not uncommon to have a problem area, and owning up to it shows honesty and maturity.

Getting the details wrong

You don't want to sing the praises of one college on another college's application. Since you may use some of the same essays and responses for more than one school, go over each draft carefully, making sure to insert the correct names and details. Then put the applications away for at least a day, and go back over them with a fresh eye.

Sloppy or lazy preparation

All applications are not the same. Follow the instructions for each college's application exactly. Ask your school counselor or teacher to clarify any questions you have, or look on the college's website for additional information.

Have someone you trust proofread your work. Never rely on spell-check. Every application needs to be complete, accurate, legible, and mailed on time. Save a photocopy of each application or a printout of every electronic application. And follow up on test scores, recommendations, etc. to be sure they are sent to the proper contacts and offices at the college.

