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12 Tips for Getting into the College of Your Choice

College admission officers carefully assess your high school grades, courses, test scores, essays, activities, recommendations, and interviews, if required. You will increase your chances of getting into the colleges of your choice by following these twelve tips:

1. Get the best possible grades you can during ALL four years of high school. Grades are extremely important.
2. Take academically rigorous classes ALL four years. You should carry as many challenging courses as you can handle—college prep, Advanced Placement (AP), honors, and International Baccalaureate (IB).
3. Practice taking the SAT or ACT. Become familiar with the types of material covered and the test directions. Take the PSAT during your sophomore year. Determine what knowledge and skills you lack and master them for the actual tests. Take advantage of free online SAT or ACT materials, study guides, practice tests, tutors, and prep courses before or during your junior year.
4. Try taking both the SAT and ACT. Colleges will accept either test. You may do better on one test than the other. This will boost your chances for admission. Take the SAT or ACT more than once if you are not satisfied with your scores.
5. Take SAT Subject Tests and AP Tests. Competitive colleges may require you to take some of these exams and they take note of exam results. Only AP scores of five (5) are accepted by top colleges.

6. Spend sufficient time developing your college essays. Think and reflect before you write. Write, edit, rewrite. This is your opportunity to sell yourself. Convey who you are in your writing: energetic, exciting, passionate, and intellectually curious. How can you make the real “you” stand out from the rest of the crowd? Get feedback on the essays from your teachers and/or other school personnel.
7. Become involved in your school and/or community during ALL four years and summer vacations. You need to keep track of your involvement in extracurricular and co-curricular activities, sports, and/or volunteer activities in your community. Move up to leadership positions. Demonstrate growth. Develop a deep interest or talent in one or more areas.
8. Ask your school counselor and teachers who know you well for recommendations. At least a month in advance of college deadlines for recommendations, jog their memories by providing them with a “personal data” or “brag sheet” highlighting your academic accomplishments, athletics, activities, and community service and leadership positions. Also, highlight anything special you did during the summer (for example, foreign travel to improve language skills, volunteer work, projects).
9. Prepare for on-campus interviews, if required by colleges. Re-read your essays and any information you have acquired on specific colleges. Be friendly and articulate. Dress professionally, not casually. After the interviews, send thank you notes or e-mails expressing your continued interest in their institution.
10. Decrease your stress by starting your search for colleges early—no later than the start of your junior year. This gives you adequate time for researching colleges, completing applications, writing essays, and taking necessary exams.
11. Get organized and stay focused. Make a file folder for each college that interests you and put relevant information inside of it (for example, a copy of your application and essay, any materials downloaded from the Internet). Keep focused on your ultimate goal: Getting into the college of your choice. Use these checklists to plan the tasks you should take to get into the college of your choice:
 - Grade 9 College Planning Checklist
(../Uploads/Categories/165/Files/304/grade9collegeplanningchecklist.pdf) [PDF]
 - Grade 10 College Planning Checklist
(../Uploads/Categories/165/Files/304/grade10collegeplanningchecklist.pdf) [PDF]
 - Grade 11 College Planning Checklist
(../Uploads/Categories/165/Files/304/Grade%2011%20college%20planning%20checklist.pdf) [PDF]
 - Grade 12 College Planning Checklist
(../Uploads/Categories/165/Files/304/grade12collegeplanningchecklist.pdf) [PDF]
12. Get on-going assistance from your school counselor and teachers. Don’t be afraid to ask them questions no matter how simple your questions may seem.