



Five Underutilized College Application Tips

By Kevin McMullin, Collegewise Founder and President

Start early. Proofread. Some college application advice is sound, but hardly news. Here are five underutilized college application tips for seniors in the middle of, or waiting to start, their applications.

1. Beat—then use—inertia.

The law of inertia says that matter will stay in an existing state—standing still or moving in the same direction—until an external force changes it. That's true for projects, too. Starting a big project is usually the hardest part. It's too scary, too overwhelming, and just easier to put off one more day. But once you exert enough outside force to change your still state, it's easier to just keep moving. Bottom line: just start. Do whatever you have to do. Your application or essay doesn't have to be perfect right away—it just needs to stop being blank. Recognize that continuing will almost certainly be easier than starting. Here are a few past posts, [here](#) and [here](#), with some advice from experts that will help.

2. Rejigger your deadlines.

Deadlines can be good or bad. On the upside, impending deadlines have a way of getting work out of you. They beat down procrastination, lack of inspiration, and general fatigue. But they also raise your stress, and depending on how close you cut it, damage the quality of your application. So here's how to get the good without the bad—change the deadlines. Make them impending today and treat them as if they were the real thing. You'd be amazed how much you can do.

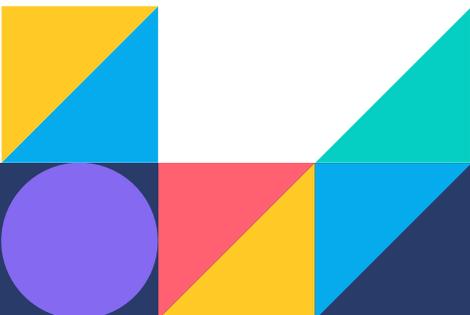
3. Trim the fat.

Imagine I said to you,

I got three projects done last weekend. I fixed an electrical problem in my house, I volunteered at a local food bank for five hours, and I made a salad.

Wouldn't that description have had more oomph if I'd just left the salad tidbit out?

Even the best meat can be ruined by too much fat. And even a really successful college applicant can seem less impressive when they bloat their application with everything they've ever done in high school. That club that you left after one semester of freshman year? You obviously didn't care about it that much (which is fine). So why do you think an admissions officer would? Your



college application should present your most compelling, meaningful, or proudest work. That doesn't mean that everything you share has to be an unmitigated success. But if it doesn't add anything to the application other than fat, trim it off and let the tastier parts come through.

4. Tell the truth.

Yes, it's bad to lie on a college application. You're signing your name to a document that you're asserting is true. If a college finds out, you'll be out, even if you've been admitted and are happily living in a dorm on campus. But honesty is also an underutilized likeability tool on college applications. Were you the slowest runner on the cross country team? Don't omit that part in an essay about cross country. Did you do something stupid and get suspended as a sophomore? Use the word "stupid" when you explain it in the prompt that asks you to do so. Did your entry into the robotics competition literally go up in flames? Mistakes are human. So is the occasional failure. Yes, there's a limit to how honest you should be (I would not admit to crimes, a hatred for school, or anything else that would raise caution in a reader's mind). But it's a lot easier to like—and admit—a real human than an over-polished applicant.

5. Sleep on it.

Applications and essays sometimes don't look as good the next morning as they did the night before when you finished them. Use that to your advantage. Start early (see tip #1) and allow yourself a few extra days to come back with a fresh set of eyes. When it looks as good as you thought it did the night before, then you're done.

Want more expert application tips from Kevin? Check out his blog at wiselikeus.com.

