

PLEASANT GROVE HIGH SCHOOL

HOME OF THE MIGHTY VIKINGS



SENIOR HANDBOOK

GUIDELINES FOR THE COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS



CLASS OF 2012

IMPORTANT EVENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PLEASANT GROVE HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

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|-------------------------------|--|
| SEPTEMBER/ OCTOBER | |
| September 10 | ACT |
| September 16 | Deadline for October ACT Registration |
| October 12 | Regional Financial Aid Night at Lehi High School |
| October 10-14 | College Information Week |
| October 12 | College Day 8:00-10:30 |
| October 22 | ACT (last one before the December 1 st deadline) |
| October 29 | Rocky Mountain College Fair—Juan Diego H.S. 1:00-3:30 PM |
| October 30 | Deadline for SAT registration (Dec. 5 th test date) |

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| NOVEMBER | |
| | |
| November 4 | Deadline for December ACT Registration |
| November 19 | Request transcripts for priority admission and scholarship deadlines (December 1 st is a deadline for BYU, U of U, USU and the Regents') |
| November 23-25 | Thanksgiving Holiday |
| | |

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| DECEMBER/ JANUARY | |
| December 1 | Priority Deadline for many Colleges/Universities |
| December 5 | SAT |
| December 7 | Career Fair |
| December 10 | ACT |
| December 15 | Complete all applications for admissions and additional scholarships |
| December 19 | Christmas Break starts |
| December 30 | Deadline for SAT registration |
| January 28 | SAT |
| | |

Register for ACT at www.actstudent.org

Register for SAT at www.collegeboard.com

UtahFutures Cheat Sheet for High School Students

| Tool | How to use it |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| ACT Online Course & Practice Tests | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Click on “MY Portfolio” 2. Click on “Academic and Vocational Practice Test” 3. Click on “Learning Express Library” for ACT test pre. Including e-books, lessons, and practice tests. <p>(There are many other test preps and topics available through the same tool.)</p> |
| Resume Writer | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Click on “My Portfolio” 2. Click on “My Education and Work History” 3. Go through each section in the list on the left side of the page, filling in everything you can (use the “Add New” button at the top right to create new entries) 4. When you’re done, click “Create Resume” and select your options (there are two pages), then choose the format you want to create your resume in and create! |
| Find Occupations | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Click “Occupation & Jobs” tab 2. Click “Occupations Index” 3. Click the “Search” tab 4. Type in any search keyword and click “Go” 5. If it doesn’t find the result you want, check the “Full Text Search” tab and click “Go” |
| Find a College Major | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Click on “Education and Training” tab 2. Click on “Programs of Study” 3. Either browse the list or use the “Search” tab the same way you would for an Occupation |
| School/College Search | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Click “Education and Training” tab 2. Click “Undergraduate School Search” 3. Answer each question and click “Continue” 4. At the end, click “Get My Results” 5. Choose a college from the list to learn about application deadlines and more |
| Find a College that Offers your Major | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. From a page for a specific major (use the “Find a College Major” to get here), click on either “Utah Schools” or “U.S. Colleges & Universities”. 2. Click on one of the three types of colleges- “Colleges and Universities”, “Private for profit Colleges and Universities”, or “Private nonprofit Colleges and Universities” 3. Click on any of the schools listed to explore more information |

UtahFutures Cheat Sheet for High School Students Continued....

| Tool | How to Use it |
|----------------------------|---|
| Scholarship Search | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Click on “Education and Training” tab 2. Click on “Scholarship Search” 3. Answer each question and click “Continue” until you get to the end of the search, then click “Get Results” 4. To save them, just click the “Save” button in the top right corner of the web page, enter any comments, and click the “Save”. This will log them into “My UtahFutures Favorites” so you can easily retrieve them. |
| Real-Time Job Applications | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Click on “Occupations and Jobs” tab 2. Click on ‘Utah Job Search’ <p style="text-align: center;">.....OR</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Click on “Occupations and Jobs” tab 2. Use “Occupations Index” to locate a career you are considering 3. Click on “Job Central” and choose a job title from the list 4. Refine the search using your zip code in the upper right corner of the page |

Questions about UtahFutures or financial aid?
 Get the answers you want on www.facebook.com/uheaa.
 Just post your question and we will get you an answer!

UtahFutures.org
 UHEAA Outreach
 60 South 400 West
 Salt Lake City, UT 84101

SENIOR YEAR TO-DO LIST

September/October

- SEOPs – these will be conducted individually by appointment during September and October. During SEOPs seniors and their parents will have the opportunity to review credits needed for graduation, discuss options after High School, including college entrance requirements.
- Register for Utah Futures Account at www.utahfutures.org . (Get your State Student # from your counselor) Begin researching careers, colleges, and scholarship opportunities.
- Take the **Student Strengths Inventory** in UtahFutures, it is found on the profile page.
- Sign up for college exams. For ACT go to www.actstudent.org and for the SAT, go to www.collegeboard.com .UtahFutures.org also has 3 full length practice tests which include a writing part.
- Research 6-7 colleges/universities. You should be looking for the following things: entrance requirements, costs, housing options, deadlines for admissions and scholarships, and areas of expertise.
- Download any required forms, including recommendation forms.
- When asking an individual for a letter of recommendation, it is common courtesy to allow 2-3 weeks for them to complete it. Provide a written request for the recommendation (this includes information about the award, position, or scholarship for which you are applying) along with a copy of your transcript and your resume, which should highlight your accomplishments, awards, and honors.
- Transcripts can be ordered through Ella Raventos in the counseling office.
- Sign-up and attend ACT-prep classes. Check for dates and details in the counseling center. Class registration and fees can be done at the financial office.
- Continue preparing for the ACT on your own by going to www.actstudent.org (every Saturday at 8:00 AM beginning three weeks to the prior test date) and www.utahfutures.org (for free full length practice tests).
- Create a list of schools that interest you. Prepare a file for each school of interest and include information about deadlines and admission requirements.
- Take the ACT and/or the SAT and have official scores sent to the colleges or Universities you are considering.
- Review admission and scholarship deadlines. Many universities have scholarship deadlines in November and December.
- Double check opportunities for priority admission deadlines. Many of these are set for November and December.
- Visit colleges/universities that you are interested in attending.
- Take advantage of or contribute to ISA (Innovative Student Assistance). Website: ISA-PGHS.blogspot.com Email: ISA-PGHS@gmail.com

November

- Collect and send in required paperwork for priority admission deadline or scholarships.

December

- Make sure your official test scores are sent to the colleges/universities to which you are applying.
- Order transcripts from our registrar in the counseling center for early January application deadlines.

January

- Complete and submit your college/university financial aid application and the Free Application for Student Financial Aid (FAFSA) between January 1st and February 15th. Check for other financial aid options through the Financial aid website for the college(s)/university(s) of your choice. These forms should be filled out even before you have been officially accepted to a college/university. Go to **www.fafsa.gov**.
- Order transcripts from the registrar in the counseling center.
- Check with your parents to see if they have completed their income tax forms for their current year's filing date in April. Completed income tax forms must be provided to complete and finalize FAFSA submission. Your financial aid award will not be processed until accurate financial information is supplied to FAFSA.
- Contact the admissions office of the college(s)/university(s) to which you have applied to make sure that your information has been received, and that they have everything they need from you.

February

- If you completed the FAFSA, you should receive your Student Aid Report (SAR) within four weeks of applying on-line. Once you received the SAR review and make necessary corrections, then return to the FAFSA processor as soon as possible in order to have your form processed quickly. Timeliness can and will affect the amount of money that you are awarded.
- Contact the financial aid of your chosen college(s)/university(s) to confirm that your information has been received and is completed for processing.

March/April

- Most schools will send acceptance letters by April 15th.
- Compare your school options by examining acceptance letters, financial aid, scholarship offers and potential costs.

- When you choose to accept a college's/university's invitation, you will be required to pay a nonrefundable deposit for freshman tuition (this should insure your place for fall enrollment).
- Sign up and pay for all AP tests you intend to take in May. You can get the deadline for AP test registration from the counseling center or your AP teacher. All test fees are paid to the financial secretary at the financial office. Make sure you register for the correct test!
- If you have signed up for any AP testing, attend the AP test prep classes (there are AP prep. tests at utahfutures.org under additional prep. tests). Your AP teacher should have information of dates, times and locations for these classes.

May

- Take AP exams the first two weeks in May. Make a decision by May 1st as to which college/university you will be attending and notify the school by mailing your commitment deposit check. Many schools require that your notification letter be postmarked by this date.
- If you were placed on a waiting list for a particular college/university, and have decided to wait for an opening, contact that college/university and let them know that you are still interested.
- Once you have chosen your school of acceptance and have received scholarships, **notify your school counselor.**

June

- Turn in your request to your registrar, to have your final transcript sent to your chosen college/ university.
- Contact your college/university to determine when fees for tuition and housing are due, and how much they will be. This may also be a good time to set up a payment plan for either tuition or housing, if needed.
- Review registration dates begin for freshman and find out what is required before fall registration. Confirm what requirements need to be completed before registration: shot records, preliminary fees, advisory appointments, and freshman orientation dates.

Choosing a College/University

Which College/University is right for you?

How do you select the right college/university for you? Spend a few hours investigating college or university websites. Go to their “Prospective” or “Future Students” tabs to see how well their profiles fit what you are looking for in an institution of higher education. Answer the following questions for at least three institutions. Look at both in and out-of-state campuses; be sure to select at least one shoe-in and one reach school (your ultimate preference). Ask the questions below to narrow your options:

ACADEMICS AND CAREER PLANNING

- Does this college/university offer the major that interests me? How strong is the schools program?
- What are the admission requirements?
- When are applications for admissions due? (Put these dates in your planner too)
- List the application requirements (e.g. high school transcripts, ACT/SAT scores, essays, letters of recommendation, letter of application, etc...)
- When are applications for financial aid due?
- What scholarships do they offer?
- Will my AP and previous college/university credits transfer?
- What is the average number of students in each class?
- What does the school do to help graduates find jobs? Does the school provide job placement?

FINANCES

- How much is tuition?
- Are payment plans available? Ask the college if it offers “tuition pay” through Sallie Mae.
- What kind of financial aid does the school offer?
- Are there work-study programs?
- What kind of refund can I get if I have to drop out?
- What other hidden fees are there: parking permits, security deposits, activity cards, etc...

HOUSING AND CAMPUS RESOURCES

- Where do freshmen/sophomores/juniors/seniors live?
- How much is housing? Is it easy to get on campus housing?
- What kind of meal plan is offered in the dorms?
- How accessible are laundry facilities?
- How many computers/computer labs are there? Are they up to date?
- What is the quality of library and research facilities?
- What kind of health facilities and services does the college/university offer?

CAMPUS VISITS

ACADEMIC FOCUS

- Go to a class or two. Most professors welcome visitors. Pick one small seminar and one large lecture. This will help you find out what big (and small) classes are really like.
- Talk with a professor. If you can, schedule a meeting with a faculty member in an area you're interested in. Ask the professor about the classes he or she teaches and how he or she got started.
- Look around. How are the facilities? Are there enough computers? Are there laboratories and study space for undergraduates? Don't be afraid to ask the nitty-gritty questions.
- Pick a normal day to visit. Avoid graduation, three-day weekends of open houses. Contact the school and confirm its tour, visit and interview policies.
- Stay in a dorm overnight. Talk with current students and find out what life on campus is really like.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

- **The Club Scene:** Go to student activities office and take a look at the list of student-run clubs and organizations on campus. Are there enough groups to keep you busy for four years? What about starting your own group? Find out when groups meet and attend a meeting if you have a chance.
- **Sports:** What varsity, intramural, and club sports does the college offer? Are intramural sports popular, or do you have to be on a varsity team to participate. Meet with a coach if you have specific questions.
- **Social Life:** Look at the bulletin boards around campus to see what types of events are posted. Are there concerts, plays, dances, guest speakers, and parties happening on campus? Find out how popular the fraternities and sororities are. If you are there during the week, ask a current student what he or she does on the weekends.
- **The Campus:** Check out the physical surroundings. What do the campus buildings look like? Are the grounds nice? Are there places to study, or relax and throw a Frisbee? Are there a lot of people around enjoying themselves? Can you see yourself there for four years? Is it a safe environment? Are there emergency call booths, outdoor lighting, etc...?
- **The Community:** Is it easy to get off campus for lunch or a movie? What about shopping? Is public transportation available and accessible? Does the university provide free shuttle buses to popular nearby spots? How accessible are the science, history, and art museums? Are there professional sports teams in town? If possible, take some time to explore the area around the school. Ask about concerts, theaters, and music clubs in the area. It is easy to get around, or do you need a car.

QUESTIONS FOR COLLEGE ADVISORS OR RECRUITMENT OFFICERS

- What activities and services are available to help students get settled? (academically and socially)
- Are all freshmen assigned an academic counselor?
- Can I take courses from more than one academic division?
- How soon must I declare my major? Can I change majors?
- What kinds of scholarships are available?
- Will I be able to work with professors on research projects?
- Are courses taught mostly by faculty members or graduate students?
- Are there internship opportunities? Can I study abroad?
- Is there a career center on campus? If so what services are provided?
- Do I need to buy a computer before I get to campus?
- How will my roommate be chosen?
- Where do most freshmen live? Can I take a tour?
- Are there a wide variety of food options on campus?
- What are the athletic facilities like? Pools? Training rooms? Fitness equipment? Are there fees to use these?
- Do students receive free tickets or discount tickets to campus events such as sporting events and performances?
- Are there a lot of student organizations?
- Is it a friendly campus?
- Is there a good library?
- What is the surrounding community like?
- Is there a comprehensive student health center?

*** Take notes after each college visit so you don't forget your initial impression.**

APPLICATION GUIDELINES

FOLLOW DIRECTIONS

- Every college/university application differs slightly. Read all directions **BEFORE** filling it out.
- Submit all required materials, completed and on time. Never skip or omit what is required or suggested.
- Use a computer for completing application materials, even if electronic transmission is not required.
- Compute grade point average according to the instructions. Different schools have different methods.
- If you are not sure what they mean or you are confused by certain questions, ask.

THE FIRST IMPRESSION IS THE ONLY IMPRESSION!

- Make sure that you have completed and included everything.
- Don't leave blank spaces.
- If you are unsure about declaring a major, mark or write *undecided*.
- When listing activities, don't limit yourself to high school activities (unless specified).
- Have other people proofread and review your application before submitting.
- Begin drafting application and essays a few weeks before the deadline. This will limit the possibility of errors through rushing.
- Don't forget to include letter of recommendations and make copies of them before you submit them.
- Have transcripts sent.
- Make a copy of your application and all attached materials before sending.
- Include your application fee, if not already paid on-line. When paying by check paperclip to application.
- When sending application by mail, use the proper amount of postage.

MAKE YOUR APPLICATION STAND OUT

- Be clear, concise and use specific detail.
- Present yourself in a powerful and persuasive way, while remaining honest.
- Submit evidence of your scholarly and creative endeavors.
- Communicate what has made you the person you are, what you truly enjoy doing, what inspires you, and what holds meaning for you.
- The admission forms are a place to chronicle family background, school history, activities, work experience and other autobiographical information.
- While writing the essay (if one is required for the application process), be sure to express your non-academic qualities. Focus on explaining what events or activities have changed you or made you the person you are today. They want to know what you have learned from your experiences, not just what you have done.
- Submit evidence of your scholarly and creative endeavors. This may include: power points with graphics or photo highlighting awards or personal work; CDs

- or DVDs of performances; samples of creative writing, journalistic writing; poetry, and art work; copies of independent research; internship reports; or whatever else you feel is important.
- Try to set-up a personal interview if at all possible.

TOP TIPS FOR ADMISSIONS

- Take rigorous courses. Don't take courses that simply pad your GPA.
- Do volunteer work. Volunteer for activities that reflect your personality.
- Prepare for the ACT/SAT before taking it. Having a high ACT/SAT score is a crucial factor in getting admitted to any college or university.
- Use a computer, word processor, or typewriter when filling out an application. Do not handwrite.
- When filling out the application, do not confuse "county" for "country".
- Compute grade point average according to the instructions they provide on the application. Different schools use different methods. If the application does not specify, then make a quick call to the school's admissions office to clarify "their" GPA formula.
- Craft an excellent application essay by brainstorming for an original topic, organizing your key points, writing clearly and concise, and carefully editing before submission.
- Submit the correct essay format. If it says to submit a 200 word essay, then submit a 200 word essay!
- If an essay question has more than one section, provide an answer for every part. Make sure that your responses answer the questions and its clear which response goes to which question.
- Get great letters of recommendation well in advance. These should come from adults who know you well such as teachers, coaches, clergy, employers, and community leaders. When you ask for someone to write you a letter of recommendation always provide the recommender with a Personal Data Form. (Next page).
- Submit applications as early as possible.
- Call the admissions office after you have sent your application and notify that it is on its way.

PAYING FOR COLLEGE

WHAT IS FINANCIAL AID? INTRO TO GRANTS AND LOANS

- **Grants:** money awarded by the government to an undergraduate student (a college freshman-senior) based on financial need.
- Grants DO NOT need to be repaid.
- You must reapply for grants every year.
- **Federal Perkins and Stafford Loans:** these are educational loans guaranteed by the government at a very low interest rate. This means that you and your family do not need to use personal credit to qualify. These loans are based on financial need, but most students qualify.
- Loans must be repaid upon college graduation or less than full-time attendance.
- You must reapply for loans every year.
- **Subsidized Loans:** the government pays the interest on your loan while you are in college. The interest you must pay off will not begin to accumulate until you graduate or are no longer attending college full time. At this time the borrower is responsible for all interest as well as loan amount.
- **Unsubsidized Loans:** interest begins to accumulate as soon as loan is finalized; the borrower is responsible for all interest as well as loan amount.
- Loans must begin being repaid after graduation from college or if a student or if a student drops below full-time enrollment. Repayment occurs through scheduled monthly payments at this time.
- Amounts can vary anywhere up to \$8,500 for subsidized and up to \$20,000 for unsubsidized loans. These amounts are available each year.
- REMEMBER... you are responsible for paying off all loans and their interest whether they are subsidized or unsubsidized.
- There are many variables involved in determining financial need, so apply even if you don't think you can qualify; you have nothing to lose.
- You can apply for grants and government loans through FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) which can be done on-line at www.fafsa.ed.gov.

WHAT IF I AM OFFERED WORK STUDY?

- Work Study allows you to apply for on-campus and off-campus jobs for which only Work Study approved students can apply.
- Employers receive government compensation for hiring Work-Study approved students, so this will give you an advantage in finding a job while attending College or the University.
- Work Study is a government program and can only be granted by applying for financial aid through www.fafsa.ed.gov.
- You must apply for Work Study every school year.

WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR APPLYING FOR FINANCIAL AID?

STEP 1: Get free information and help from your school counselor, the financial aid office at the college or career school you plan to attend, or from the US Dept. of Education.

STEP 2: Get a PIN, personal identification number. This is required to sign your on-line FAFSA application. To do this, go to www.pin.ed.gov.

STEP 3: Collect documents needed to apply: income tax returns (parents) and w-2 forms (parents and yours). A complete list of required materials is at www.fafsa.ed.gov.

STEP 4: Complete a FAFSA between January and June of your senior year in high school. These are state and federal deadline dates, so don't be late!

STEP 5: FSA will send you a Student Aid Report (SAR) within 4 weeks from the time you completed your on-line application. Review your SAR, and if necessary, make changes or corrections and submit your SAR for reprocessing. Your complete, corrected SAR will contain your Expected Family Contribution (EFC) - the number used to determine your federal student aid eligibility.

STEP 6: If you are selected for verification, your college/university's financial aid office will ask you to submit tax returns and other documents, as appropriate. Be sure to meet the college/university's deadlines, or you will not receive federal student aid.

STEP 7: Whether you are selected for verification or not, make sure the financial aid office at the college/university has all the information needed to determine your eligibility.

STEP 8: All students: contact the financial aid office if you have any questions about the aid being offered. **First-time applicants:** review award letters from schools to compare amounts and types of aid being offered. Decide which school to attend based on combination of (a) how well the school suits your needs and (b) its affordability after all aid is taken into account.

WHO GETS FEDERAL STUDENT AID?

BASIC ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- Demonstrate financial need (determined by FAFSA info you will provide).
- Be a U.S. Citizen or eligible non-citizen with a valid social security number.
- Be working toward a degree or certificate in an eligible program.
- Have a high school diploma or GED Certificate.
- Registered with the Selective Service, if you are a male between the ages of 18-25.
- Maintain satisfactory academic progress once in college.

HOW TO GET SCHOLARSHIPS

- Be prepared to do the footwork. How to work brings about better results.
- Make sure you have taken the ACT at least twice. This can be done in October of your senior year.
- Make a resume highlighting all your strengths.
- Become familiar with the PGHS web site; it has current scholarships posted on it. Go to Pghs.alpine.k12.ut.us. Click on *counseling*, and click on *SEOP Packet*.
- Narrow your choices to potential colleges/universities. You may attend scholarship info seminars and get a good understanding of how to apply for the academic scholarships at each school. This can be researched through college/ university websites.
- Check for scholarships with **Mrs. Black** or Mrs. Whitmer in the counseling center. These scholarships are from the community, businesses, and individuals.
- Avoid scholarship scams. Never pay money for on-line scholarship services and never give out personal information to unknown web sites. There are free searches available. Check with Utahfutures, fast web, and other sites linked to the PGHS web page.
- Get involved in school and community activities and give service. This looks good on a resume.
- Get letters of recommendation well in advance of scholarship deadlines.
- Check with collegescholarships.com for tips on how to win scholarships.

SCHOLARSHIP SEARCH WEB SITES

| | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Collegescholarships.com | Wiredscholar.com |
| Princetonreview.com | Collegiate.net |
| Fedmoney.com | Supercollege.com |
| Frenshinfo.com | Scholarship.geoportals.com |
| Fastaid.com | Collageboard.com |
| Collegeview.com | Fastweb.com |
| Collegenet.com | Anycollege.com |
| Nextstepmag.com | Uheea.org |
| Utahfutures.org | Zinch.com |

UTAH REGENTS SCHOLARSHIP (go to www.utahscholars.org)

- Students must complete the following requirements in grade 9-12 with no core grade lower than a “C” and a cumulative high school GPA of 3.0: 4 years of English; 4 years of progressively advanced math (at minimum, Algebra 1, Goniometry, Algebra 2, and senior-year class beyond Algebra 2; 3.5 years of social studies; 3 years of lab science (one each of biology, chemistry, physics); and 2 years of the same language, other than English.
- The fulfillment of these requirements qualifies them for a base scholarship of \$1000. Students who complete the above requirements with no grade lower than a “B” in the core course of study, obtain a 3.5 or higher cumulative high school GPA, and achieve a 26 or higher on the ACT, **are eligible for an Exemplary Academic Achievement Scholarship worth 40% of tuition for two years of full-time college enrollment at any Utah college or university, public or private.**

Personal Data Form
Letter of Recommendation

It is IMPORTANT that this form be filled out accurately and completely to aid your counselor in preparing the recommendation for your college or employment application.

Student Name: _____

List four teachers or staff members who know you well.

1. _____ 2. _____
3. _____ 4. _____

Describe your college/career plans.

List advanced courses which you have completed or in which you are currently enrolled (i.e. AP courses, Math, Physics, etc.).

List clubs, activities, sports, and/or student government participation (indicate grade levels and offices held).

List any awards and/or honors you have received.

Describe community service or church activities in which you have participated.

Describe work or volunteer experiences you have had.

Describe your travel experiences.

If there is something special or unique about you that you would like to have mentioned in the letter, please explain.

Discuss your personal and professional goals.

The Application Essay

***The following guidelines also apply to scholarship essays**

The secret to a great essay is to know you. You've had many experiences up to this point in your life; one of them will form the perfect departure point for your essay. The key to standing out is your unique personality, verbalized in a compelling and effective manner, highlighting your character and your achievements in your own voice.

Sample Essay Questions:

- Please tell about a significant event or experience that has had a profound effect on you and why?
- What do you think has been the most important social or political event of the last 100 years? Do you share a personal identification with this cause?
- In applying to this college you have shown an interest in some aspect of our environment. What do you envision your future contribution to our community to be?

Insider Tips:

- Write a story. Avoid listing all your brag sheet activities. Colleges want to hear a personal story about a moment that was meaningful to you.
- Show, don't tell. Try to evoke your personality and character without actually stating your specific attributes.
- Do not delay! Begin writing at least a month before the application is due. Write multiple drafts and edit them carefully.
- Revise, share your work, revise again, and proofread. You may even want to set an appointment with your English teacher to read through your final draft to make sure it is perfect!
- Use present tense if at all possible. This will make your readers witnesses of the action.
- Write in first person. You want this essay to give the readers a personal connection to you.
- Beware of humor. Only use it if you are truly funny. There is nothing worse than being the only one who laughs at your own jokes. And remember...sarcasm can be taken the wrong way and create the wrong impression.
- Keep it short. Admissions counselors spend an average of 20 minutes on your application folder (your folder will be read by 8-12 readers).
- Follow directions. If an application allows for one extra sheet of paper beyond the given space, make sure you attach only one page. In addition, to everything else, the application is a test of your ability to complete an application. Follow directions and pass the test.
- As a general rule, it is always a good idea to have a catchy first sentence. If it grabs the reader's attention, the reader will be encouraged to continue reading. Avoid clichés and dry, generalized statements such as, "High school has been a really educational experience." Sometimes it is easier to write the body first and then come back and create an exceptional first sentence later.

More on the Application Essay

Myth vs. Reality

Myth: You need a gimmick to make your essay stand out from the competition.

Reality: Don't rely on gimmicks. They are merely an attempt to compensate for a bad essay. Instead, spend time getting to know yourself, probing your thoughts, and mining your past for a great story.

Myth: in your personal essay, list as many achievements you can from your personal data sheet in order to ensure that your admissions reader is aware of all the great things you have done.

Reality: Admissions committees want to know something about you that they can't learn from your applications; so choose a single incident from your past, a single moment that defines who you are and write a clear and creative essay about it. You may write in detail about something on your personal data sheet, but listing your achievements in the essay is redundant and insults the intelligence of your reader.

Myth: The content of the essay is important, not the look.

Reality: Presentation can make or break your college/university essay. Catch all typos and grammatical errors, and be sure to read the instructions! They vary from application to application.

Guidelines for Writing an Outstanding College/University Essay

Style and Tone: Show, Don't Tell

In your personal essay, you want to avoid making overt statements about your character such as "I am a great person" or "I'm responsible, hard-working, intelligent, creative, and an effective leader." Although this is precisely what colleges/universities want in an applicant, there needs to be more finesse in the way you get your point across.

Diction and Vocabulary: let the reader hear your own voice

You should use vocabulary with which you are familiar, not complex words taken from a nearby thesaurus that end up sounding not only pretentious but uneven and stiff. Your own voice will distinguish what you have to say more effectively than an unnatural, borrowed diction. Trying to tailor your essay to the imagined expectations of an admissions committee is a recipe for disaster. The essay is a prime opportunity to express your individuality.

Format and Length:

Most colleges/universities require the essay to be typed and usually electronically submitted. Follow the instructions, but if given a choice, never go beyond two pages double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman. An admission officer's time is limited and valuable; he/she will take no more than twenty minutes per application. Stick to the topic and use wording that is concise and effective.