

MAKING

TO

COLLEGE



A COMPLETE GUIDE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS
APPLYING TO U.S. COLLEGES

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5 Who's this coming from?

Before you read this book, I think it is important to know from whom this information is coming. So, this book has been prepared by the contribution of current international students studying at U.S. universities. My goal while preparing this was to provide guidance to international students who may lack the resources and support of a counselor. I have been through this process and understand how confusing and tiresome it can be, especially if you don't have the support of someone familiar with this process.

I wrote down the learnings and resources that I think will be useful during your journey of applying to colleges in the U.S. I am not an admissions counselor and DO NOT have years of experience working in this field. However, I know the process well enough to share some insights as I was able to make it to a U.S. college with a financial aid and scholarship package covering most of my expenses (tuition, room and board).

So, if you are interested in applying to colleges in the U.S. and want some insights, this book is for you. Think that you are conversing with a

fellow student who has been through the process you are currently going through. It's possible that everything I say may not be helpful, but some of the content can prove really beneficial. It is always good to have a counselor's help as a good counselor will probably know this process inside out; however, not everyone has the resources for that, which is why this book exists. The purpose of this book is to talk about the application process from a student's perspective, and if you don't have the support of a counselor, to be that support for you.

Please know that I highly appreciate any suggestions and/or concerns about this book, so if there is anything that you think I can improve, please let me know [here](#) because this book is for you all!

I hope it will be helpful!



5 *The whole process at a glimpse*

The application process will vary for everyone depending on your personal situation and when you start. However, as the deadlines are the same for everyone, the process will probably be similar towards the end. Below is a glimpse of how the entire process was for me. I wasn't very proactive and started with the process very late. However, it's good to know once I did start, I put a lot of hours into the application process every day.

Researching colleges and building up a list:

July, August

Brainstorming, writing, and revising essays:

September, October

Getting recommendation letters and teacher evaluations: October

Finishing Financial Applications and Submitting

Early Deadline (ED I and E.A.) applications:

November

Finalizing colleges for Regular Decision (as the ED I school rejected my application): November

Brainstorming, writing, and revising essays for

R.D. schools: December, January

Submitting R.D. applications: January

Interviewing and Attending Virtual Events: February, March

Again, as this timeline is based on my personal situation, it may not apply to everyone, but I just wanted to share it as it may be helpful to know.

Before we move on to part 1 of the book, I also wanted to share the following the Coursera course that is offered by the University of Pennsylvania for international students about applying to colleges in the U.S.:

<https://www.coursera.org/learn/study-in-usa>

I went through this course when I was applying to U.S. colleges too, and found it to be really helpful. If you want and have some available time, you can also go through the course (it's free).

Now, it's time to move on to part 1.



PART 1

56 *Setting Priorities*

Now that you have decided and are ready to start applying to colleges abroad, the first step would be to build up your college list. And the very first step in this process would be to set your priorities clearly. This could be the location of the school, the availability of a particular major, the generosity of financial-aid packages/scholarships, the alum network, or anything else. You need to be precise about what you're looking for while applying to any college. Once you have your priorities on paper or in your mind, it is also a good idea to arrange them in order. Is there any factor that you just cannot ignore and that you really want from a school? It could be anything, and similarly, what aspects are you willing to give up if you have to? Knowing the answers to these questions will also help you make a wise decision once you receive acceptance letters from multiple schools.

Your priority list needs to look something like this:

Financial aid (I can only attend if awarded a full ride covering all of my expenses) > Test-optional (I don't want to give the SAT/ACT) > Location (I want to study in NYC) > Academics ((I want to

study in a liberal arts college) > School size (I prefer a small community of about 2000 students)

Based on your needs, you should make a priority list like the one above (notice how the priorities are arranged in a specific order). For example, if your top priority is that you only want to study in California, then you should only research schools in California as it will save you time. Similarly, if you can only attend a school if they offer you a full ride covering all your expenses, then you should only look into schools that offer such financial aid packages to international students (assuming you are one). Usually, these would be private universities, as most public universities don't offer very generous financial aid or merit scholarships to international students. In some cases, you may still get an amazing merit scholarship from a public university.

Once you have completed your priority list, it is time to start browsing the internet to find schools to apply to.





Finding Schools

The simplest way to research colleges is to do simple internet searches. Just type what you're looking for. E.g.- 'Best liberal arts college in New York City,' 'U.S. colleges with full financial aid for international students,' or 'Best economics major in the U.S.' I hope you get the gist of it. This is the simplest and probably the very first step in building your college list. At this point, your aim is to stumble across as many school names as possible because you want to choose the best option for you. Don't worry if you have to research hundreds of schools before submitting your application. My college list had more than a hundred schools that I researched by visiting their websites, sending emails, etc. Remember, the more you look, the more options you have, and you never know what school may fit all your priorities really well. Here is a peek into what my college list looked like (I made it on google sheets).

		SCHOLARSHIPS					EXAMS		
	NAME	SC. TYPE	SC. VALUE	NUMBER OF SC ACCEPTANCE	SC. LINK	RATING	SAT/ACT	TOEFL/IELTS	APP. FEE
165	Bowdoin College	Need Aware	Tuition, Living		https://www.bowdoin.edu	1	No	No	\$65
166									
167	Carleton College	Need Aware			https://www.carleton.edu	0.75	No	No	No
168									
169	Claremont McKenna College	Need Aware			https://www.cmc.edu	0.75	No	No	\$70
170									
171	Davidson College	Need Aware	Tuition, Living		https://www.davidson.edu	1	No	No	No

After doing this, you should probably already have some schools on your list. Remember that it's a good idea to keep doing this because there are always new posts on the internet that may inform you of a school that you have never heard of before.

The next resource to use would be The College Board's website and, specifically, their college search tool. It is an absolutely fantastic tool with filters that you can use to find exactly what you are looking for. The colleges you can find using this tool will be tailored entirely to what you are looking for, so you will find some very relevant schools here.

The above-mentioned two ways are probably the best way to start building your college list, and most of the schools on your list would emerge from these methods. Now, you can still stumble upon some new school names in an article/video, word of mouth, or even in this book, so make sure that you follow relevant sources like YouTube channels or online forums for students going through the application process. If you know someone (like a friend or a family member) who's going through this process or has been through it already, you should also connect with them. Just keep yourself open to finding as many schools as

possible and always keep looking even after you have started working on your application or perhaps even submitted some of them.



6 Researching

The next step in the process would be to start researching about the schools on your list so that you can filter them down later. Most people would say that 6-10 is a good number of schools to apply to; however, I have also met people who applied to more than 30 schools. So, in the end, it all comes down to you, how much workload you can handle and how much application fee you would be willing to pay. I personally applied to 11 schools as I could probably only manage to write essays for those number of schools. Moreover, they all offered application fee waivers, so I didn't have to pay an application fee for any of them.

For researching information about the colleges on your list, the best way, in my opinion, is to use their website. U.S. colleges generally keep their websites up to date, and in case you have any further questions, you can and should definitely email them. Below is how you can navigate a college's website.

Usually, any school's website will have many self-explanatory sections such as 'academics,' 'admissions,' etc. So, for example, let's say you

have Harvey Mudd on your list and want to know about their application requirements. You would go to their website and then to the 'admission' section. This is where you can find information about their admission/application requirements, things such as test requirements, types of applications accepted, etc. Similarly, to find information regarding financial aid and scholarships, you would go to the financial-aid section. This is where you will find information regarding financial-aid grants, merit scholarships, loans, and more.

Most of the information that you need about any school can be found on their website, however, there are times when you need to ask something very specific, or you don't find an appropriate response to your question on their website. In that case, you should definitely send an email to the school.

Depending on the type of your query, you can choose the appropriate department at that school to send it to. If you don't know which department you should send your email to, you can just send it to the admissions office.

Some schools also have a designated email address for international students, so make sure you use that, if available. Sending emails to

schools is important as it shows them that you are genuinely interested in their school and are taking the initiative. Moreover, you would learn a lot while communicating with different schools and staff members. Here are two articles that will help you write better emails to schools:

<https://bit.ly/3ALVZqw>

<https://bit.ly/3ekIaHR>

One more resource that can be really helpful while building up your college list is the Common Data Set (CDS). It is a document that colleges post after every admission cycle and contains data on their acceptance rates, financial aid offered, and much more. It is an official document published by the school and is easily accessible on their website. You can use this to your advantage and judge your chances of acceptance at that particular school. Here is an article that will help you navigate a common data set:

<https://bit.ly/3wY4C01>

I highly encourage you NOT to ignore this and use this to your advantage. To find common data set for any school, just search that school's name and type common data set on the internet. Here is a quick example of Macalester's CDS from 2020-21:

Macalester College

2020-21 Common Data Set

CONTENTS:

- Section A - General Information
- Section B - Enrollment and Persistence
(includes graduation and retention rates)
- Section C - First-time, First-Year Admission
- Section D - Transfer Admission
- Section E - Academic Offerings and Policies
- Section F - Student Life
- Section G - Annual Expenses
- Section H - Financial Aid
- Section I - Instructional Faculty and Class Size
- Section J - Degrees Conferred

So, for instance, if you want more information on the financial aid offered by Macalester, you can go to section H and find information such as how many students applied for financial aid and how many received financial aid.

		First-time Full-time Freshmen	Full-time Undergrad (Incl. Fresh)	Less Than Full-time Undergrad
A	Number of degree-seeking undergraduate students (CDS Item B1 if reporting on Fall 2020 cohort)	544	2009	
B	Number of students in line a who applied for need-based financial aid	430	1495	
C	Number of students in line b who were determined to have financial need	372	1347	
D	Number of students in line c who were awarded any financial aid	372	1347	
E	Number of students in line d who were awarded any need-based scholarship or grant aid	369	1335	
F	Number of students in line d who were awarded any need-based self-help aid	321	1199	
G	Number of students in line d who were awarded any non-need-based scholarship or grant aid	39	101	
H	Number of students in line d whose need was fully met (exclude PLUS loans, unsubsidized loans, and private alternative loans)	282	857	

I highly encourage you to visit the mentioned article and learn how to navigate a Common Data Set. Note that although this is a fantastic resource, some schools may very strategically manipulate the CDS data.

Researching colleges is a long and perhaps boring process, especially if you have a lot of schools to research, just like I did. But you have to get through this to start working on the 'fun' part of working on your applications. Trust me, the feeling of finishing and submitting your applications is really good.

Once you are ready with your list of colleges and the information you need about each one of them, you are ready to now move on to the next and last step before you start working on your applications.

56 *Filtering Down*

The last step is to filter down and make a final list of colleges you will apply to. Now, this is where you will decide whether to apply to a particular school or not, so make sure that you have all the information you need about each school to make that decision wisely. If you do, below is some additional information that will help you make a wiser decision.

Admission Deadlines (Early Decision (I and II), Early Action, Restrictive Early Action, Regular Decision, Rolling Admission):

All these are the different types of application deadlines that you can choose from. For example, let's say you want to apply to school X, which offers two deadlines, Nov 15th for Early Action and Jan 15th for Regular Decision. This means that you can submit your application by either of the two deadlines (not Both). If you choose to apply as an Early Action candidate, you must submit your application before the Nov 15th deadline. If you decide to apply as a Regular Decision applicant, you have to submit your application before the Jan 15th deadline. Now, why would you choose to submit as an Early

Action applicant when you could just wait and work on your application until the Regular Decision deadline? So, here's the thing, submitting your application as an Early Action applicant would show the school X that you are immensely interested as a student in their school and that you want to apply to that school before you apply anywhere else. So usually, early deadline applicants have a higher chance of getting in and getting their admissions decision earlier than the regular applicants.

The point is that you have to strategize your application process to maximize your probability of getting into the schools you want to.

Like Early Action, there is also Early Decision, which is basically the same thing as Early Action but with a few additional rules. With Early Decision, you can only apply to one school. You can apply to other schools along with that but NOT as an early decision candidate. This is because Early Decision is a binding agreement. This means that if you get into the school, you apply as an Early Decision candidate, you are expected to attend that school and not any other school. Now, there are exceptions to this, such as if the school didn't offer you enough financial aid and you can't afford to attend the school. In that case, you can decline their offer and choose

to attend another school that you can afford.

So, for Early Decision, you have to apply to that ONE school that matches your priorities the best among your list. Applying as an E.D. (early decision) candidate would also increase your chances of getting in as it shows the school that they are your top priority. There are two types of Early Decisions, ED I and ED II. The only difference between them is the deadline. So, for example, if you don't get into your ED I school, you can also apply to another school which is probably your second priority as an ED II candidate. ED II deadlines are usually in January, along with other Regular Decision deadlines. So, I believe it's a good idea to use this option of ED I (and ED II if needed) to your advantage.

Here is a summary of all the major application deadlines:

Early Action: Non-binding; apply to as many E.A. schools as you want to

Early decision (I and II): Binding; you can apply to only one ED I school and one ED II school

Regular Decision: Non-binding; you can apply to as many schools as you want to. This is the

usually the biggest applicant pool, and the admit rates are comparatively lower than E.A. and E.D. as a significant portion of the incoming class is filled during the early rounds (especially at highly competitive schools).

There is also restrictive early action, which is exactly like early action, but the only difference is that in restrictive E.A., you can only apply to one school. This means that you cannot apply to any other private school as an E.D. or E.A. applicant. The admission offer is non-binding, just like early action.

Other than that, there is also rolling admission which means that the school keeps its application open until they admit enough students on a rolling basis.

Conclusion:

If you are applying to a school that offers an early action deadline, try to finish your application and apply as an E.A. candidate instead of a regular decision candidate. For your top priority school, try to apply as an early decision candidate. If you don't get into your ED I school, you can always apply to another school as an ED II candidate, which also shows them that you are committed to attending that school.

For students seeking financial aid:

Here is some important information for any applicant seeking financial aid from U.S. institutions (there is more information about the financial-aid applications later in this book). The schools offering financial aid can be either need-blind or need-aware. So, for instance, let's say there is a student 'John' and another student 'Leo.' They both apply to school X. John requires a full ride to attend school X while Leo only requires 50% of the tuition fee as Leo can pay for the other 50% of the tuition along with other expenses such as living expenses and transportation.

Now, if school X is need-aware, it will take into account the fact that Leo requires less money than John, and they will see this as a merit in Leo's application. However, if school X is need-blind, they wouldn't consider either student's financial situation as a part of the application process. They would treat their application solely based on merit.

Now, this means that if you require a lot of financial aid, you MAY have a better chance with need-blind schools than with need-aware schools. Now, this in no way means you can't get a full ride from a need-aware school. You can, and many applicants do. It's just that the other parts

of your application will have to be stronger. At the same time, need-blind schools are usually more competitive than need-aware schools.

Acceptance rates:

While making your final call regarding which schools you will apply to, you also have to focus on the historic acceptance rates of these schools. This means that it's probably not a good idea to apply to only highly competitive schools with an acceptance rate of, let's say, less than 10%.

Similarly, it's probably not a good idea to apply to comparatively less competitive schools with an acceptance rate of, let's say, more than 70%. You need to have a balance of both. In general, it's a good idea to have a few 'safety' schools. These are schools where you know you can easily get in. Likewise, it's also a good idea to have some 'dream' schools, i.e., schools that you would really want to get into but may have a very low acceptance rate. So, you must be mindful of acceptance rates while making your final college list.

P.S. Let's say you are an international student looking for a full ride by a U.S. school and can only attend if offered a full ride. In such a case, you may not have a 'safety' school as it is competitive to get a full ride, and that's alright.

What you can do is look for schools where you have a higher chance of getting a full ride as compared to highly competitive schools like Harvard, Yale, or MIT. On the other hand, if you are willing to take a loan or spend some money, it is probably a good idea to include some safety schools, i.e., schools with higher acceptance rates where you have a good chance of getting in.

Ready to apply?

So now, do you have a final list of colleges that you want to apply to? You don't have to fixate on a particular number right now. Just select some colleges that you really want to apply to and then have some extra options that you may apply to if you have additional time in the end.

Also, if you are planning to apply to any school as an early deadline applicant (which I highly recommend), you don't really need to have a list of schools that you may later apply to as a regular decision applicant. I personally had a primary list of some schools that I wanted to apply to first and then another list of somewhere around five schools arranged in a specific order that I would apply to if I had additional time for writing their application essays (in that particular order).

Once you have built up your college list and know some schools that you are going to apply to, you're ready to move on to the second part of this book which covers the application process.

PART 2

56 *Intro to Applications*

For applying to colleges in the U.S., you are most probably going to use one (or more) of the following applications:

The common application, coalition application, or any school-specific application

Common app or the common application is the most widely used application for applying to colleges in the U.S., and you're most probably going to come across it as well. The good thing about common app is that it is accepted by most of the schools in the U.S., so there is a good chance that you may be able to apply to all of the colleges on your list just by using common app.

The next application is the coalition application. The sections of the coalition app are more or less similar to the common app, and there is not a huge difference (starting from August 2022, coalition app has partnered with Scoir, but the application questions are still very similar to the prior version).

Other than the common app, and the coalition app, some schools also offer their own application portal. This portal will most probably be very similar to the common/coalition app. Depending on the specific school, you may or may not have a personal essay. For instance, MIT has its own application portal called 'my MIT,' in which you have to provide five short essays (as of 2021-22) rather than an extended personal essay.

56 Filling the Applications

Most of the sections on these applications are self-explanatory and easy to fill. However, some sections require a little more work than others, and below is some information about those sections (I will be using the example of common app, but the process should be very similar for other applications).

Common App Fee Waiver:

Inside the profile section of the application, there is an option for applying for a fee waiver. Many schools (especially private schools) offer an application fee waiver for students who think that the application fee poses a financial burden on them or their families. To get the fee waiver and submit your application for free, you have to select the 'Yes' option inside the fee waiver section on your common app.

Do you meet one or more of the [Common App fee waiver](#) eligibility criteria?*

Yes

No

Clear answer

Then, your counselor will have to approve it from their common app portal (more information on this later). Overall, it's an easy process as long as your high school counselor is willing to approve your fee-waiver request (see the picture below).

The image shows a screenshot of the Common App 'Fee waiver' form. On the left is a navigation menu with items: 'Student info' (FERPA waived), 'School report' (In progress), 'Fee waiver' (In progress, highlighted with a blue arrow), 'Counselor recommendation' (In progress), 'Optional report' (Not yet available), 'Optional report 2' (Not yet available), 'Mid-year report' (Not yet available), and 'Final report' (Not yet available). The main content area is titled 'Fee waiver' and 'Review and submit'. It includes an affirmation statement: 'Please affirm the following before you submit your form.' followed by a checked checkbox: 'By signing and submitting this form, I affirm that the form and all accompanying documents are not customized for a particular institution. I understand that after I submit, I cannot edit or revoke my submission. I understand that these forms are available to every college that this student applied to using Common App.' Below this are fields for 'Signature' (containing 'J.J. Thomson') and 'Date' (containing 'November 8, 2021'). At the bottom are 'Back to fee waiver' and 'Submit' buttons. Four red arrows with circled numbers point to: 1. The affirmation text, 2. The signature field, 3. The date field, and 4. The 'Submit' button.

Honors:

In the education section, there is a subsection where you can add your Honors. This is an excellent addition to your extracurricular activities (which we will discuss soon) as you get five additional spots to add your Honors. So, make sure to add any awards/achievements here.

Activities:

The activity section is among the most crucial parts of your application. This is where you should explicitly mention your extracurricular activities. I said 'explicitly' because you will probably also highlight your extracurriculars in

your essays, but you have to be very subtle about it there. The activity section is where you should boldly highlight your impressive extracurriculars. Below are some free resources with suggestions for filling this section.

Now, instead of mentioning tips/suggestions for this section, I have included the resources that I personally used. Make sure to spend a decent amount of time on this section, as it can make your application stand out instantly. Note that some of these videos are made by students based on their personal experiences, so take everything with a grain of salt (the same also goes for any advice that I give to you). The students who have made the last three of the six videos above got into pretty competitive schools (Princeton, Stanford, and University of Pennsylvania, respectively), so their insights may be helpful.

College Essay Guy: <https://bit.ly/3AQ2tEy>

College Essay Guy: <https://bit.ly/3cJ0UR5>

Supertutor TV: <https://bit.ly/3wVRIiU>

College Advisor: <https://bit.ly/3KOzLII>

Shaurya Sinha: <https://bit.ly/3KKmBfY>

Haley Kang: <https://bit.ly/3wXWSLj>

P.S. There are many more useful videos on YouTube regarding this topic, and you can spend as much time as you want on this section. I just

included the videos that I thought would give you a great idea about writing the activities section.

Writing:

The common app also includes a writing section where you have to write the 'common app essay' or the 'personal essay.' It will probably be the longest essay in your college application (the word limit is 250-650 words). It is a really important essay as most colleges require this essay, and it will probably be sent to most, if not all, of the colleges on your list. I will cover the details of the personal essay in the 'essays' section.



Testing

Standardized test scores play a crucial role in your admission decision. A good SAT/ACT score can show the universities that you are a committed and hard-working student. But at the same time, having an exceptional score is not a requirement to get into prestigious schools or any school for that matter. Some students score less than 1500 on the SAT and get into the 'prestigious' Ivy League institutions, and there are people with a perfect score (1600) who get rejected.

The main idea is that having a great SAT/ACT score can be a positive for your application, and having a low score can hamper your chances. But again, the admission process is holistic, and standardized test scores are just a part of it.

I personally didn't take the SAT as most of the schools in the U.S. adopted a test-optional policy because of the COVID pandemic the year I was applying. However, now that I think about it, having a great score could have made my application even stronger as not taking the exam could also hamper your chances, especially as an international student, as most colleges are familiar with the SAT grading system but may not

be familiar with your country's educational system that much. Depending on when you are reading this, some schools may revert to requiring an SAT score, and some may still be test optional.

If they are test-optional, I would suggest that if you have the time and resources and believe you can get a good score, then go ahead and take the SAT. And mainly, you only need time and dedication to get a good score. You can prepare for the exam for free as there are many excellent free resources. The only place where you will have to pay is the SAT/ACT exam fee and to send your scores to the colleges (you can send your score to up to four schools for free if you designate them within nine days of taking the test). However, there are waivers and discounts offered by institutions and even College Board themselves (the company that administers SAT), so you may look into that if you want.

Below are some resources to prepare for the SAT /ACT as recommended to me by students with scores in the top 1-3 percentile range (score 1490+).

Khan Academy SAT Prep: <https://bit.ly/3RVVNfl>

College Panda SAT (India): <https://amzn.to/3KOUVXm>

College Panda ACT (India): <https://amzn.to/3BgE1xB>

Another standardized test that most universities will ask you for is an English standardized test. For U.S. schools, it is mostly TOEFL. An interesting fact to know here is that you may not need to take this test if you attend an English school in your country. Most students don't know about this, as universities don't advertise this that much. But if you have and you believe that you are proficient in English, you can let the colleges know that you have studied in an English school for X number of years and request them to waive off the TOEFL requirement.

In this way, you won't have to take the TOEFL exam hence saving a reasonable amount of time, money, and effort. I was able to waive this requirement too, as English is a common language in my country (India) and I studied in a school where the classes were in English and not a regional language.

Another method that became popular during the COVID pandemic is the Duolingo English test. If you have to take an English test and the university you are applying to accepts the Duolingo English test, I highly suggest you look into the Duolingo test over TOEFL, as the Duolingo test has many benefits. You can take it online from anywhere (you don't have to go to a test center), you can get the results faster as

compared to TOEFL, plus the fee for the Duolingo test is way cheaper than most other standardized English tests (\$49 as compared to around \$200).

Also, if you are not a fluent English speaker and have to practice English, it may be a good idea to focus on listening and speaking. This is because there are four components to a language exam, reading, listening, writing, and speaking. The former two are forms of INPUT, and the latter two are forms of OUTPUT. So, if you work on your listening (INPUT) and speaking (OUTPUT) skills, you will naturally improve your reading and writing skills. I am not saying to completely ignore preparing for the reading and writing section of the exam. I am just saying that practicing listening and speaking more than reading and writing may be beneficial. But again, everyone has different strengths and weaknesses, so this may not apply to you.



Essays

Essays are a fantastic way to show what you're like as a person to the admission committee of a school. You can use this opportunity to highlight your accomplishments, share your thought process, or perhaps just a past experience and the lessons you learned. At the crux of it, the admission counselors are trying to understand you as a person because your transcripts and awards don't really explain that. So, essays are an amazing way to highlight the best version of yourself. These few words can be the difference between an acceptance and a rejection. Other than that, I feel it also has an incredible personal benefit for you. It makes you introspect on things that you probably never thought of before. I personally have learned so much about myself while writing these essays.

Before you begin writing the essays, make sure that you take your time to understand the essay question well. It may sound trivial, but students often just misunderstand the question and write about something irrelevant. So, it's always better to reread the question, word by word, to understand what exactly the school is trying to ask from you.

Also, another important thing I want to highlight is the idea of lying in your essays. If you think about it, essays are to portray your true personality to schools. Now, if you do not portray a true version of yourself, you may get rejected from the schools that are an excellent fit for you, and you may end up getting into schools that would be a terrible environment for you. Plus, the idea of lying is just not ethical. So, I strongly recommend you stay true to yourself while writing these essays.

Here are some suggestions that I think may be helpful while you are writing your college essays.

Just dump ideas.

As you start writing your essays, you will probably struggle with questions such as 'what's the best topic I can write about,' 'how can I start my essay,' and 'how to connect all paragraphs together.' These questions can give you a hard time, and one thing that really helped me was just to write everything that came to my mind. Put a timer and keep writing without stopping. You don't have to think if it is relevant or not; just write everything that you have in your mind. Because once you have every idea in front of you, you can then start thinking about other questions. By doing this, you will not let go of any amazing ideas that you may have in your

mind. So, just dump everything you have in your mind on your writing application or paper (I strongly recommend using a software application here). And once you have everything in front of you, you can start arranging and editing.

Ask for feedback. You definitely need it.

I couldn't emphasize more on the importance of asking for feedback. Believe me, some of the things you are writing may not make sense to others because everyone has a different set of experiences and cultural upbringing. Your essays will probably be read by someone from another country with possibly a completely different set of values and culture. So, it's always a great idea to get as much feedback on your essays as possible. You need to ask people who won't be shy to point out your mistakes. For this, you can ask your friends, school teachers, relatives, or anyone you think has a good command of the English language, especially writing. It may be possible that you don't have anyone to help you with this; in that case, you can use an essay review service. I know that there are many such services that students run for a meager cost. So, look for them online if you need them, but asking for feedback is definitely very important. I know that it can be hard to get criticized for your writing (I've been through this), but this criticism has the potential to make your essays so much

better. If I didn't get all the feedback on my essays, I don't think any schools would have admitted me.

Keep making new versions.

This is just a neat little method that can be very helpful later on. As you edit your essays, make different versions of those rather than editing everything in the same document. This is because you may sometimes want to go back and read your previous versions for inspiration. I personally made a new version every time I got feedback from others and made changes.

Check the flow.

As you reach the end of writing your essay, it is very important to check if your essay has a nice flow to it. This means that your paragraphs (if your essays have paragraphs) are well connected to each other. One way I learned to do this is to take out the first line of every paragraph and arrange them in order vertically. Now, if these first sentences of the paragraphs make a story, then your essay probably has a nice flow. I found this very stringent, so I modified it a little. I took each paragraph's first and last sentences and arranged them in order. Then, I checked if these sentences made a nice story.

Keep reviewing until you have said everything you wanted to.

I understand that the process of writing these essays can get monotonous, especially towards the end. Still, you have to keep reviewing your essays again and again until you are confident that you have said everything about yourself that you want the school to know. Furthermore, you are satisfied that whatever you have written is an absolutely delightful piece to read. This means that it has a nice flow, you have used appropriate grammar, and the reader would just love to read this particular piece of writing.

It takes time, and that's all right.

At last, I just wanted to say that this process of writing essays is easy for some people, but it takes hours and hours of work for others (like me), especially those who don't have experience writing such essays. So, in this process, just try to do your best. And remember, this process in itself will teach you so much about yourself and writing too. You are absolutely going to learn a lot during this process.

Before we begin diving into some specific essay topics, here are three articles about writing college application essays that I found to be really helpful.

Top Universities: <https://bit.ly/3BepFhq>.

US News: <https://bit.ly/3qcW4ly>

Princeton Review: <https://bit.ly/3D1n2AG>

Other than these resources, I found the resources by College Essay Guy very helpful, and I personally used them a lot.

Website: <https://www.collegeessayguy.com>

YouTube Channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/c/Collegeessayguy/featured>

Free resources: <https://bit.ly/3AH1Z3u>

The Common App Essay:

I have already mentioned that the common app essay will probably be the longest and most prominent essay you will write for your college applications. While writing the common app essay, remember the tips I shared about writing college application essays earlier, and also use other resources if needed. The common app essay prompts are broad enough to allow you to write about anything you want. Here are the seven prompts for this essay (as of 2022):

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
2. The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
3. Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
4. Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?
5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
6. Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?
7. Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.

I found these two articles really helpful for writing the common app essay specifically.

Best Colleges: <https://bit.ly/3AQkoew>

ShemmassianConsulting: <https://bit.ly/3AKYGZn>

The Coalition App Essay:

The coalition app essay is more or less the same as the common app essay. The prompts would again allow you to write about anything you want, and the word limit is roughly the same (500-650 words). Here are the prompts for the coalition app essay (as of 2022):

1. Tell a story from your life, describing an experience that either demonstrates your character or helped to shape it.
2. What interests or excites you? How does it shape who you are now or who you might become in the future?
3. Describe a time when you had a positive impact on others. What were the challenges? What were the rewards?
4. Has there been a time when an idea or belief of yours was questioned? How did you respond? What did you learn?
5. What success have you achieved or obstacle have you faced? What advice would you give a sibling or friend going through a similar

experience?

6. Submit an essay on a topic of your choice.

I personally used my common app essay as the coalition app essay too. If you end up using both applications, you can surely use the same essay or write a new one if you want to share something else. Overall, the resources shared about the common app essay would also be applicable here.

Supplemental Essays:

Other than the common app or coalition essay, most schools also require you to submit additional essays. These are called supplemental essays, and they are specific to each school. The topic of these essays could be anything and depends on the school. However, there are some general topics, such as the infamous 'why this school?' or 'community essay.' Some schools may also have some 'optional' essays, but you should know that they are probably not optional (xD). Not submitting an optional component can, more often than not, lower your chances of admission. However, if you do good on these essays, you show the school that you are not just randomly applying to that school but are genuinely interested in them. This component is known as

'demonstrated interest' and could be a substantial contributing component of your application. This is because if the school knows that you are highly interested in attending that school, then you will probably accept the admission offer they send you. If you do so, you will improve what is known as the 'yield rate.' It is the percentage of students who accepted their admission offers. Having a higher yield ratio helps the school get better rankings. Note that demonstrated interest is most likely to be considered at less competitive schools as the highly competitive schools already have a good yield ratio.

Here are some of my tips for writing supplemental essays:

Show that you have researched about that school.

One great way to use supplemental essays is to highlight your demonstrated interest in the school, i.e., show that you are genuinely interested in attending that particular school. The way you highlight that in your supplemental essays is by showing that you have put in the time and effort to learn about the school. This could be knowing about the student clubs, specific professors, or classes, visiting the school, or perhaps even attending a program at the school. Now, as an international student, it may be challenging to visit the school or attend a

program, and they are not expecting you to do the same. So, use other ways to highlight demonstrated interest, such as attending virtual events (which you can mention in your supplemental essays), talking to current students online (I personally used to find student vloggers on YouTube, and then send an email to the email address mentioned on their channel's about page). There are just so many creative ways to show that you are really interested in a school.

Know what each school values, and then connect their interests with yours.

Other than some specific values, such as academic abilities and/or leadership, certain schools may be looking for a particular set of qualities in their future students. For instance, Macalester college values service to society, and Soka University of America values peace-building and global citizenship. So, while writing your supplemental essays, it is a good idea to know what qualities the school is looking for in the candidates and then highlight those qualities through your application.

Try not to talk much about generic things such as location, weather, or other things that can be found in other schools too.

While writing your supplemental essays, make sure you are not emphasizing generic features

such as the location or size of that school. Now, I am not saying you can't mention them, you can if they are important to you and fit well in your whole essay, but I am saying that they shouldn't be the main reason to apply to a school. For instance, if you state that the school is in Southern California and you would love to live there, then guess what? There are hundreds of other schools in the same location, why don't you attend those? The point is that you need to mention some really specific reasons as to why a particular school is a perfect match for you (if you think it is) and let the location factor just be a cherry on top of the cake rather than being the main reason.

Do not repeat the same things mentioned in your Common App/Coalition Essay.

There is a reason why schools ask you for supplemental essays, and that is to know more about you that they probably can't from your common app/coalition essay. Make sure you don't repeat the same stuff you mentioned earlier. Think of each essay as a new opportunity to tell them more wonderful things about yourself.

Reusing your supplemental essays.

You are probably going to apply to multiple schools, and they will probably ask you for

multiple supplemental essays. Now you don't have much time to write all these essays, so what you should do is strategically reuse your essays. For instance, if four of the schools on your list require a 'why us' essay, then you should probably make a generic theme (your own unique theme, not copied from someone else) and then reuse the same theme. Now, you don't have to do this, and you can write all four essays in a completely different way. That way, you are probably also going to improve each time. However, if you want to apply to a lot of schools and can come up with a nice generic theme, then you can save a lot of time. Eventually, it's up to you and depends on how many schools you are going to apply to and how much time you have left until you submit your application.

Here is a fantastic resource: a database of supplemental essays for a lot of U.S. schools.

<https://www.collegeessayguy.com/supplemental-essays>

Short Answer Questions

Other than asking you for regular supplemental essays, some universities may also ask you for some short answers questions (one word/sentence or a few characters). These short answers questions can be really intimidating. Most highly competitive universities may ask you such

questions. Here is an article that I found extremely helpful when writing short answers for my application.

<https://www.collegeessayguy.com/blog/a-brief-how-to-guide-for-the-short-answer-questions-for-highly-selective-colleges>

5 Transcripts and Recommendations

Besides your essays, extracurriculars, and standardized test scores, colleges also want to know about your high school education. This section is where the schools you apply to will see your high school grades, recommendation letters, and evaluations from teachers. These documents will have to be uploaded from your high school teacher's and counselor's account, and for this, you will have to find teachers who would be willing to write you a stunning recommendation letter. A piece of advice here is to find teachers who really know and appreciate you and can write you a stunning recommendation letter compared to just a regular recommendation letter. The number of recommendation letter(s) and subject area of the teachers depends on the school(s) you are applying to and your intended area of study. For instance, if you are applying for a computer science or tech-related program, having your computer science, mathematics, or other teachers with similar expertise write you a recommendation letter will be great.

Nevertheless, it is important that the teacher

knows you well enough to write you a recommendation. I personally asked my language teacher and my computer science teacher for a recommendation as I was sure that they knew me well and appreciated me as a student (I had put my intended major as 'undecided', however, my application was based around my interests in music and philosophy). Also, make sure to give your teachers enough time to write you a recommendation as they are also occupied with a lot of other stuff, and other students may also ask them for a recommendation. I would personally suggest that you ask your teachers as early as possible and as soon as you know which teachers you're going to ask.

For some international students, it is possible that your teachers will just ask you to write a recommendation for yourself and then share it with them. So just be prepared for that!

Here are some resources to get/write stunning recommendation letters.

MIT: <https://bit.ly/3cMU0dq>.

College Board: <https://bit.ly/3wVhFIY>

Another important person is your high school counselor. You are most probably going to need a recommendation from your counselor as well.



Furthermore, your counselor will also need to approve your other forms (such as the application fee waiver form I mentioned earlier). Now, the thing is, if you are an international student, your school may not have a counselor, and that's completely alright. Most U.S. colleges understand this, and that is why you can just assign anyone in your high school as a counselor. This could be your principal, vice-principal, or perhaps another teacher of yours. I asked one of my other teachers to be my counselor (my homeroom/class teacher). I would suggest you ask someone that you are really comfortable talking to and working with because that will make this whole process smoother.

Once you know who to assign as your counselor (if you don't already have one at your school) and which teachers to ask for a recommendation, you can send them an invite from the 'Recommenders and FERPA' section under each college's name under the 'My Colleges' tab.

✓ **Teacher**

Please select and assign the Teacher(s) below whose recommendation will be submitted to this college on your behalf. You must invite a teacher with the Invite Teacher button before you can assign them to this college.

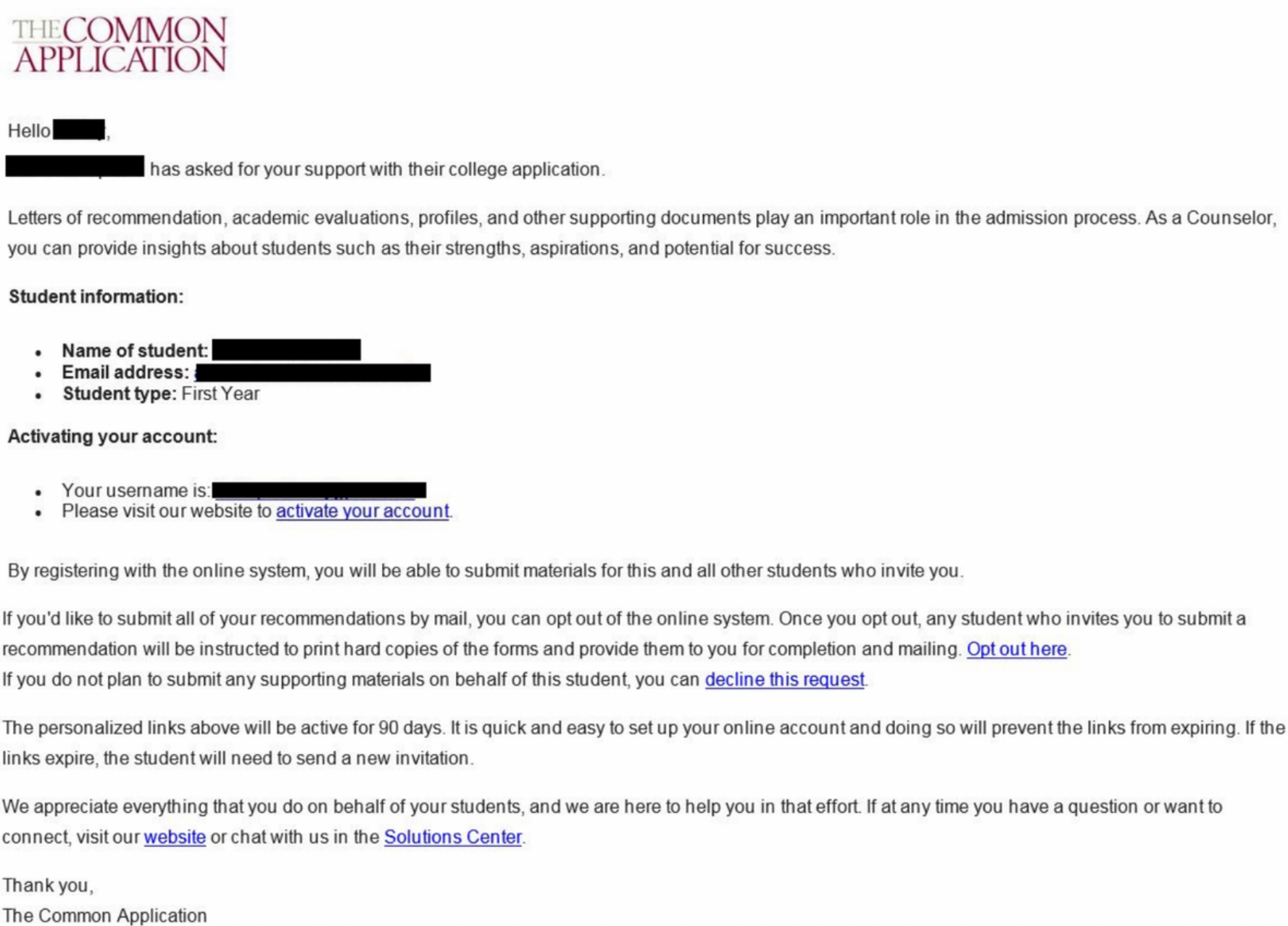
Required: 1 **Optional: 2**

Melissa Manning Math Assigned on 08/21/2021	 
Teacher Evaluation	Not Started

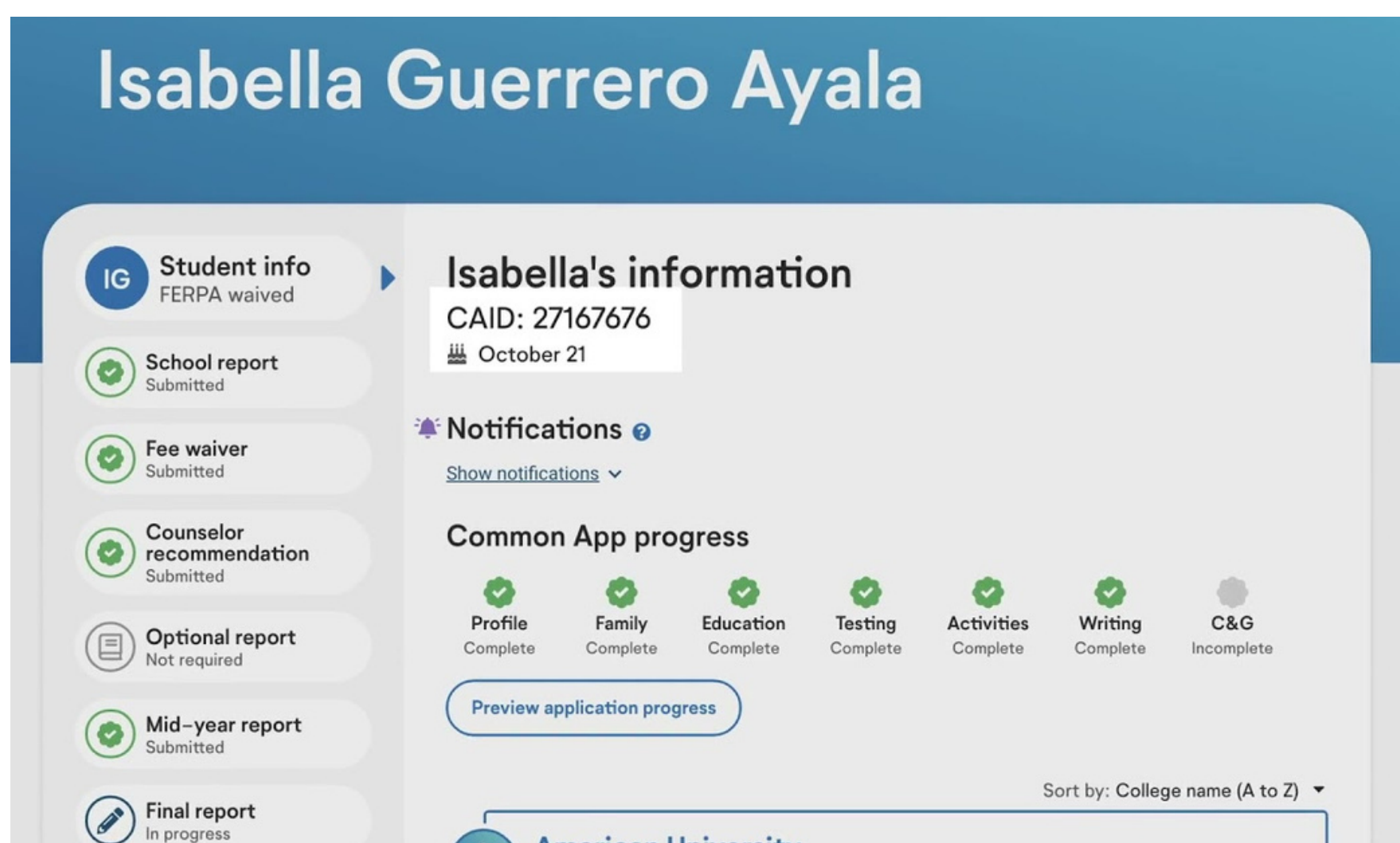
[Invite Another Teacher](#)

You will have to add your teachers to each college separately, but your teachers will NOT have to upload your forms each time. Once you send an invite to your teachers and counselor, they are going to get an email following which they can set up their account.

The email will look something like this:



Also, just to give you an idea, this is what a recommender's account looks like on the common app.



There are different sections for them to complete. These sections depend on if they are your teacher or counselor. Your counselor will have more sections compared to your teachers (the above picture is of a counselor's portal). The school report section asks for information about your current high school, such as the class size, grading system, etc., from your counselor.

If you applied for an application fee waiver from your common application portal, then your counselor will have to approve it from their 'fee waiver' section.

The recommendation section is where your recommenders will upload their recommendation letter and answer certain questions regarding you.

The optional report is to submit updated transcripts or to correct any previous errors. The 'mid-year report' is not required by all schools, but some schools do require your counselor to submit the mid-year report as well. It contains your mid-year examination grades. Your counselor may NOT have to submit your mid-year report if you already have a final report which contains your final high school grades. You may already have a final report depending on your country's educational calendar or if you took one or more gap year(s) after high school.

Also, if you are currently in the last year of high school, you may not have the final grades of your last year. In this case, you are usually required to submit estimated scores given by your high school teachers to the college. It is basically an official letter addressed as 'to whom it may concern' and states your estimated scores for each subject separately with a signature (and/or stamp) by a school official (such as the principal) at the end.

The colleges will use these predicted grades while viewing your application. Based on this, you will get your acceptance offers. Some universities may offer you an unconditional acceptance, while some may give you a conditional acceptance offer, which basically would say that they will admit you if you get a particular score. This score could be exactly the same as mentioned in your predicted scoresheet or somewhere around that score.

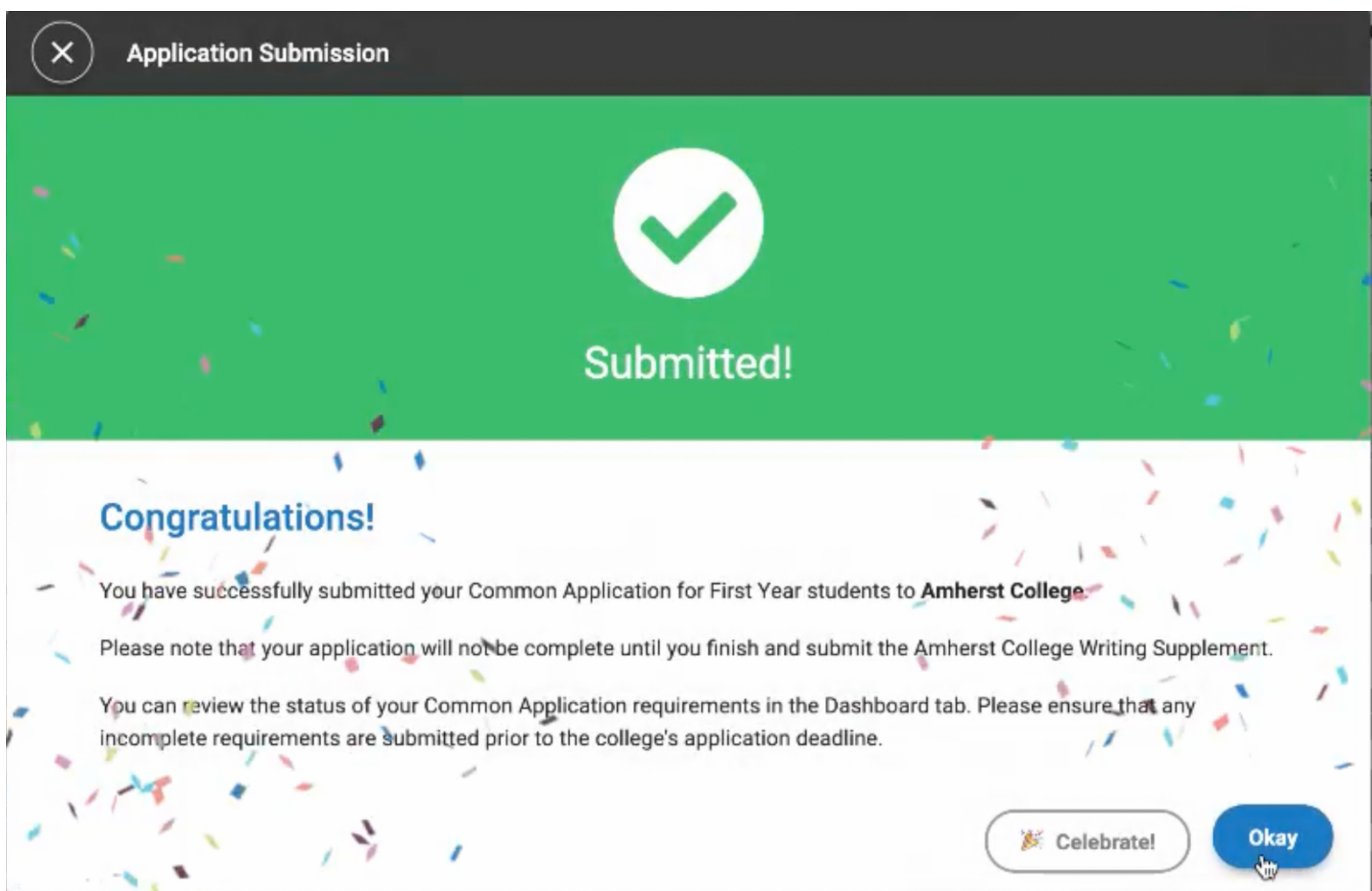
Once you receive an acceptance offer and are willing to enroll in a university, you will have to submit your final grades after you receive them. They will be submitted in the final report section from your counselor's portal (or a similar section if you use any other application than the common app).

Also, sometimes schools may require you to get your transcripts evaluated and converted to the U.S. grading system from a third-party company such as IERF or WEF. In that case, you will have to send your transcripts to these companies (either online or by physical mail, depending on their requirements), and then they will send your evaluated report to the university.

These services have their own cost associated with them, so plan accordingly. Some universities also waive off this requirement or may reimburse you if this fee poses a financial burden on you. I personally did have to use IERF for one of the schools that I applied to. The process in itself was smooth as I just had to send my transcripts to them digitally. Then after around two weeks, they sent my evaluated report to the university and also sent an applicant's copy to me via email. I did that during the COVID pandemic, so by the time you read this, you may have to mail your transcripts to them physically.

So now, after all these things are done, it's finally time to submit your application to schools. You can submit your common application under the 'my colleges' tab by clicking 'review and submit common app' and then following the necessary steps. Once your application is submitted, you will see a congratulations

message and confetti (see the picture below).



6 After submitting your applications

Once you submit your application, you will probably get an email from the school with information on accessing your application portal. This is where you will receive your admission decision and upload any application material (if required). Moreover, for most schools, this is when you can schedule interviews which I highly encourage you to do.

Interviews:

Some schools require you to interview, some keep it optional, and some don't offer interviews at all. The thing to note here is that if they are optional, you should still try to do them. If you let a school know that you want to interview, that shows demonstrated interest which could benefit your application.

It is important to know that interviews are usually NOT a vital component of your application. This is because they are mainly conducted by current students or alums, and the admission committee does consider it, but it doesn't significantly impact your application. This is something I learned from the 'Inside the Yale Admissions Office' podcast by Yale University. I

did have a few interviews, and they were with current students. Interviews are mainly to see if you would be a good fit at a school by knowing more about you and judging your English capabilities (in the case of international students). But overall, they are just casual conversations. I would recommend you to definitely research about the school that you are going to interview for and also have questions for them because this is also an opportunity for you to know more about the life at that school so that you can make a better decision if that particular school accepts you. Other than voluntary interviews, some schools may invite you for an interview later in the process as the admission committee may want to know more about you. Highly competitive schools usually do this before selecting their final admits, and it is important that you nail these interviews.

Below is a list of some common questions you might be asked during a college admission interview and some questions you may want to ask your interviewer. Please do not confine yourself to this list, and feel free to ask whatever helps you make a better decision.

List: <https://bit.ly/3ARhxlh>

One last piece of advice I would give you is to learn a bit about American conversation culture. The interviewers definitely don't expect you to do this, but this may make them more comfortable, and you may have a better conversation with them. For instance, people in the U.S. would usually call each other by name. So, let's say your interviewer is a fourth-year student or an alumnus of the university. Usually, it would be completely alright to refer to them by their name (it's always a good idea to ask them, just in case). However, in your country, this may be seen as disrespectful as you may usually use the words 'sir' or 'madam' to refer to elders. I personally used the words 'sir' and 'ma'am' a lot, and now that I think about it, I realize that this may have made my interviewers very uncomfortable. But again, they probably are used to this as they also interview other international students. However, if you can, definitely look a bit into this.

56 Financial Applications

This section is for students interested in applying for scholarships or financial aid. Depending on your personal financial situation, you may be looking for different amounts of aid. Some may be looking to cover just their living expenses, some may be looking for a full ride, and so on. Before we start talking about applying for financial aid or scholarships, let's understand some terms.

Need-based financial aid: It basically refers to any aid awarded based on need (need depends on your personal financial situation and is evaluated by the school).

Scholarships: Scholarships, on the other hand, are awarded based on merit such as academic, athletic, artistic, etc. Scholarships can be considered a form of financial aid itself as they help cover college expenses.

So, there are two aspects to getting aid from an institution. One is based on need (need-based financial aid), and the other is based on merit (merit-based scholarships).

This aid could further be awarded in many forms. It could be awarded as a grant, meaning you DO

NOT need to repay that amount. It could be awarded as a loan, meaning you DO need to repay that amount. It could also be awarded as a work-study program, meaning you are offered a job to cover your expenses.

Applying for merit scholarships:

If you think you excel in a particular field (such as academics, sports, etc.) and are interested in applying for merit scholarships, you can start looking at the scholarships offered by the schools you are applying to. You can usually find these on their website. Some schools offer many different scholarships with different amounts, while some only offer a few, or perhaps none. Once you do find some scholarships that you think you are a good candidate for, you should start looking into the application process.

Depending on the institution, this process varies a lot. For some, you may not need to do anything additional, and you will be considered for these scholarships automatically once you submit your primary application (such as the common app). For others, you may have to write additional essays, do interviews, etc. Other than the scholarships offered by schools, there are also merit scholarships offered by outside institutions (such as companies or organizations). You should also look into those if you are looking to apply for merit scholarships. This could be a long and

tedious process, but considering how much money you can get just by submitting a few applications is probably going to motivate you.

Applying for financial aid:

If you are applying for financial aid as an international student at a U.S. school, they are most probably going to ask you to submit either a CSS profile, an ISFAA (international student financial aid application), or a school-specific application. The CSS profile is offered by the college board, and there is a cost associated with submitting that application. However, most schools do offer a CSS fee waiver. So, if a school requires you to submit a CSS profile and the fee poses a financial burden for you, you can just email them, and they may provide you with a code that waives off this CSS fee. The ISFAA is a pdf document that you just fill out yourself and submit via email or upload to the application portal, so there is no cost associated with it. The same goes for most school-specific financial applications that you may need to submit.

Filling the applications:

Most of the questions on financial aid applications are self-explanatory and depend on your personal situation. However, I have included some videos below that you can use in case you need any help. One important thing I

would like to share is that I don't think it is a good idea for you to lie on these financial applications. This is because pretending to fake your finances (either more or less) can later put you in a situation that you may not like. So, I believe it's the best idea, just to be honest (and this goes for the entire application process, not just the essays or the financial applications).

CSS profile: <https://bit.ly/3D1rmQq>.

ISFAA: <https://bit.ly/3AQopj5>

If you need to fill out any school-specific financial aid application, they will most probably be very similar to the CSS profile and/or ISFAA. Also, depending on the school and the application you use (CSS/ISFAA/others), you may be asked to submit financial documents for verification. This can include documents such as bank statements, tax returns, etc., but it depends on your personal situation. For instance, if you or your family haven't filed a tax return for the last few years, the school will probably ask you for another document. Overall, I would say this process is simpler than you would assume it to be. However, you still need to ensure that you plan enough time to fill and submit all these documents before the deadline.

Combining Awards:

One amazing thing about scholarships and financial aid is that you can usually combine them. This means that if one of the schools you applied to offers you financial aid worth \$20,000, and then you were also awarded a named merit scholarship of \$10,000 by the school, you can generally combine these awards (in some cases, the terms may NOT allow you to do so). This can be really helpful if you are looking for a good amount of financial aid, such as a full ride or full tuition. This mindset change was so useful for me as I could just look for many different awards and then combine them. And eventually, I did end up combining a financial aid grant (which covered my full tuition fee) and a merit scholarship (which covered almost all of my living expenses) to fund my education.

PART 3

66 Waiting for the decision date

This is an excellent time to engage with the colleges you have applied to and keep demonstrating interest. You can do that in many ways. If possible, you can schedule an in-person visit to the campus. As an international student, you can do virtual campus visits and attend virtual admission events that many colleges offer. You can also connect with college representatives and ask them questions that you genuinely have.

Another thing you can do during this time is to keep looking for more schools. If you applied for an early deadline, you could start looking into colleges to apply to in the regular decision and/or ED 2 deadline. Also, you can look into schools in countries other than the U.S. if you are interested. You never know, you may find a school that checks all of your priorities really well.

5 After receiving the decisions

So, once you receive your admission decision, you need to evaluate many things.

Let's say you didn't get into any of the schools you applied to, or you couldn't attend the ones you got into because of other reasons (financial, medical, etc.)

Firstly, there is nothing to be sad about. Life is an amazing journey that doesn't always give you what you want but what's good for you.

If you still want to try again, there is always the option to take a gap year and try again in the next year's admission cycle. During this time, you can also enroll in a university in your home country. That's what I did, and I know many people who did that before they got accepted into U.S. universities with really generous financial aid packages. So, you shouldn't worry. Great things are waiting for you!

If you did get into any of the schools you applied to and are planning to enroll in one of them, you should probably refer back to the priority list you made while researching for schools. That may help you make a better decision on which school

to enroll in. One thing I would like to mention here is that you can also negotiate your financial aid package (if any) with the schools that you got in. For instance, if one of the schools offered you a comparatively lower financial aid package than another, you can negotiate with that school (respectfully) and ask them to increase your package so that you can attend that school. Once you have decided to enroll in a school, make sure to follow the official process. Usually, it includes that you pay an enrollment deposit (which will usually be somewhere around \$400). The deadline for most U.S. schools to accept your admission offer is May 1st, so make sure to keep that in mind.

Now, if you are finally planning to attend a university abroad (especially in the U.S.), I have included some very useful and practical resources such as tips on packing, finding cheap flights, and F-1 visa below.

Packing:

Yudi J: <https://bit.ly/3KTtBHt>

YM Grad: <https://bit.ly/3AGfssw>

My Click Journal: <https://bit.ly/3KTAf0w>

Visa:

Lingua Marina: <https://bit.ly/3wYI92N>

Yudi J: <https://bit.ly/3RwkMFu>

Yudi J: <https://bit.ly/3RzKzN5>

Yudi J: <https://bit.ly/3KKs06K>

Yudi J: <https://bit.ly/3TGK85y>

List of possible questions: <https://bit.ly/3AOojZ9>

Flights:

For flights, I would strongly recommend you use services such as Skyscanner, Google flights, and Student Universe. I have personally used student universe to book flights multiple times, and I really liked their service.

Parth Vijayvergiya: <https://bit.ly/3q9BT4j>.

Business Insider: <https://bit.ly/3qdJi2S>





Thank you!

I hope you found the insights and resources included in this book helpful!

As this book is free, I would really appreciate it if you could share your suggestions/concerns regarding the content [here](#) so that we can keep improving it and thus help more and more students.

At last, wherever you are in the application process, I would just like to say, don't get disappointed with rejections, and don't forget to help others if you make it.

I wish you good luck!

