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Remember that this is a comprehensive guide, and readers can choose to read the sections that apply to their specific circumstances. With careful planning and thoughtful execution, students can maximize their chances of success in the college admissions process and find the best-fit institution for their future academic and personal growth.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Understanding the College Admissions Landscape

Welcome to our comprehensive guide on maximizing success in college admissions! As college consultants, we are thrilled to be your companion on this journey towards unlocking your potential and securing a spot at your dream college.

The college admissions process can be both exciting and daunting. It is a significant milestone in your academic journey, shaping your future opportunities and experiences. Before we delve into the strategies and tips that will enhance your chances of success, let's take a moment to understand the college admissions landscape.

College admissions are highly competitive, with thousands of students vying for limited spots at prestigious institutions. Each year, colleges receive a flood of applications, and admission officers have the difficult task of selecting the most promising and well-rounded candidates. This guide aims to equip you with the knowledge and tools needed to stand out from the crowd and present your best self to college admissions committees.

1.2 Setting Goals and Expectations

The first step towards maximizing success in college admissions is to set clear goals and realistic expectations. Reflect on your aspirations, interests, and academic strengths to identify the type of college that aligns with your values and ambitions.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What are my academic interests and intended major(s)?
- What type of college environment do I thrive in? (Large research university, small liberal arts college, urban campus, rural campus, etc.)
- Are there specific geographic regions where I prefer to study?
- Do I have any extracurricular passions or talents I want to pursue in college?
- How much can my family afford to contribute to college expenses, and am I eligible for financial aid or scholarships?

Once you have a clear sense of your priorities, you can create a balanced list of reach, target, and safety schools. Reach schools are those where your academic credentials fall slightly below the average admitted student, target schools are where you align closely with the average admitted student, and safety schools are where your academic achievements exceed the average admitted student's credentials.

ECC Pro-tip: *Admissions will spend approximately 4 minutes or less reviewing your entire application package, so you need to have a clear understanding of your passion, values and goals and be able to communicate that through your application, resume, essays, recommendations, and interviews.*

Remember that college admissions are not solely about getting into the most prestigious institution but finding the **right fit** for your personal and academic growth. Each college has a

unique culture, resources, and opportunities, and success can be achieved at various institutions.

As we embark on this journey together, keep an open mind, stay motivated, and remain true to yourself. The path to college success is not a one-size-fits-all approach, and we will explore various strategies that will help you present a compelling application that showcases your individuality and potential.

In the next chapter, we will focus on preparing for success during your high school years, laying the foundation for an impressive college application. Let's dive in!

Chapter 2: Preparing for Success: High School Years

The journey towards college success begins long before you submit your application. Your high school years provide a valuable opportunity to build a strong foundation of academic excellence, engage in meaningful extracurricular activities, and demonstrate leadership qualities.

2.1 Academic Excellence

Academic performance plays a critical role in college admissions. Admission committees seek students who have challenged themselves with a rigorous course load and have demonstrated consistent academic growth. Take advantage of advanced courses, honors classes, and opportunities for dual enrollment or AP/IB courses when available. The appropriate level of academic rigor is different for every student, so it is important to challenge yourself while maintaining good grades. The goal is to grow academically, stretch yourself and strengthen your study skills over time.

Consistent effort and active participation in class will not only boost your GPA but also build essential skills such as time management and critical thinking. Remember that while grades are essential, they are not the sole determinant of your worth or college potential. If you encounter academic challenges, seek support from teachers, counselors, or tutors to overcome obstacles and showcase your determination.

Your college application will have a space for your academic awards, such as National Merit Finalist, Math Olympiad, etc. International and National awards will distinguish you more to admissions than state and local awards but consistently making Dean's List or Honor Roll in your high school is considered an academic award.

2.2 Extracurricular Engagement

Participating in extracurricular activities is an excellent way to showcase your passions, leadership abilities, and commitment to the community. Admissions officers value students who go beyond academics and actively contribute to their school and local community.

Identify clubs, organizations, or sports teams that align with your interests and invest time in meaningful involvement. Quality over quantity is crucial; rather than spreading yourself thin across various activities, focus on a few that truly resonate with you. Aim for leadership roles to demonstrate your ability to take initiative and make a positive impact.

ECC Pro-tip: *Colleges like to see students take a deep dive into their interests. Colleges look at the type of impact you are making on your school, community, and family. For example, your interest in Speech and Debate can extend to the creation of a non-profit to bring this opportunity to underserved school districts.*

2.3 Community Involvement

Community service is not only a way to give back but also an opportunity to demonstrate your dedication to making a difference in the world. Engage in volunteer work that aligns with your passions and interests, allowing you to contribute authentically to causes you care about.

Consider participating in service projects during school breaks or dedicating regular time to volunteer at local organizations. The impact you create and the lessons you learn from community involvement will shape your character and enrich your college application.

Ultimately, colleges are looking for potential future alumni that will be successful and who will use that success to "give back" and further the long-term objectives of the school.

ECC Pro-tip: *Colleges are looking for consistency and impact. You can impact a lot of people if you have been running food drives several times a year for 4 or more years. Collecting and distributing eight tons of food over time will catch the eye of admissions and make a strong impression about what you care about and your dedication.*

2.4 Developing Leadership Skills

Colleges seek students who can lead and inspire others to make a difference. Cultivate your leadership skills by taking on responsibilities in school clubs, community organizations, or even starting your own initiatives. Leadership goes beyond holding titles; it involves motivating others, problem-solving, and navigating challenges with resilience.

Seek out mentorship opportunities and participate in leadership development programs to further enhance your abilities. Your demonstrated leadership potential will set you apart in the college admissions process and prepare you for success in your future endeavors.

In the next chapters, we will delve into mastering standardized tests, crafting an outstanding application, and exploring various college options. By focusing on academic excellence and engaging in meaningful extracurricular activities, you will lay a strong foundation for your college journey. Stay dedicated, stay focused, and let's continue this exciting path together!

Chapter 3: Mastering Standardized Tests

Standardized tests, such as the SAT and ACT, play a significant role in college admissions. These exams serve as one of the essential components of your application, providing admission committees with a standardized measure of your academic abilities. To maximize your success in college admissions, it is essential to prepare effectively for these tests.

While many colleges went test optional during Covid and remain test optional, standardized tests remain a compelling and persuasive part of your application package. We counsel all our clients to decide which test is right for them, prepare diligently and take the test multiple times to get the best results.

3.1 SAT vs. ACT: Which Test to Take?

Both the SAT and ACT are widely accepted by colleges across the United States, and many students often wonder which test to take. It is essential to understand the key differences between the two and choose the one that best aligns with your strengths and test-taking preferences.

The SAT is known for testing critical reading, writing, and mathematical skills. It includes an optional essay section. On the other hand, the ACT comprises four sections: English, math, reading, and science, with an optional essay. Some students may find the ACT more straightforward if they excel in math and science.

Consider taking practice tests for both the SAT and ACT to determine which test suits you better. You can also consult with your school counselor or a test prep professional to get personalized guidance.

3.2 Effective Test Prep Strategies

Preparing for standardized tests requires dedication and consistency. Start by familiarizing yourself with the test format, question types, and timing constraints. Several test prep resources, including official study guides, practice tests, and online tutorials, can help you get started.

Create a study schedule that allows you to balance test preparation with your academic commitments and extracurricular activities. Practice regularly, focusing on areas where you need improvement. Review your mistakes and understand the reasoning behind the correct answers.

Consider enrolling in a test prep course or working with a tutor if you prefer structured guidance and personalized feedback. Practice tests are essential to build your test-taking stamina and identify areas for further improvement.

Chapter 4: Crafting a Standout Application

Your college application is your opportunity to present yourself holistically to the admission committee. It is more than just a collection of test scores and grades; it is a representation of your unique personality, interests, achievements, and aspirations. In this chapter, we will explore how to create a standout college application that reflects your true self.

4.1 Building an Impressive Resume

Your academic achievements, extracurricular involvements, community service, and work experiences collectively contribute to building a robust resume. Take the time to list all your accomplishments, both in and out of the classroom.

Highlight leadership roles, significant awards, and any special projects or initiatives you undertook. Quantify your impact whenever possible to demonstrate the scope of your contributions.

Remember to keep your resume concise and well-organized. Use action verbs to describe your activities and focus on the most relevant and impressive accomplishments. We have attached a list of Resume Action Verbs.

ECC Pro-tip: *Your resume should include the hours and weeks per year spent on each activity and a good action-oriented description highlighting any special titles, contributions, or leadership role. Colleges want to know how you spent your time, how deeply you investigated your interests and the impact you made on your school and community. Before attaching your resume to your application give it to someone you trust who is not familiar with your accomplishments to review to make sure it tells your story.*

4.2 Writing an Authentic Personal Statement

The personal statement, also known as the college essay, is your chance to showcase your unique voice and share your story. Be authentic and honest in your writing and choose a topic that allows you to highlight your strengths, growth, and values.

Start early and take the time to brainstorm, draft, and revise your essay. We suggest you begin your brainstorming using our Introspection Worksheet. Seek feedback from teachers, counselors, or trusted mentors to ensure that your essay is engaging and effectively communicates your message.

Avoid clichés and generic topics, like winning the big game; instead, provide specific examples and anecdotes that illustrate your experiences and character. Show the reader, do not just tell. Your personal statement is an opportunity to stand out, so make it memorable and reflective of your true self.

ECC Pro-tip: *Your essay must convince admissions that you are a compelling candidate. What will they know about you after reading your essay that will persuade them to admit you? We recommend you begin brainstorming using the Introspection Worksheet in this book as a guide. Before beginning to write, create a clear and concise outline that will support a 5 or 6 paragraph essay. You should start your essay in the action and your body paragraphs should have a lot of show or evidence to support what you are trying to convey.*

4.3 Showcasing Strong Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation provide valuable insights into your character, work ethic, and potential as a college student. Choose recommenders who know you well and can speak to your academic abilities and personal qualities.

Build strong relationships with teachers, counselors, or other mentors by actively engaging in class, seeking help when needed, and participating in discussions or activities. Share your college goals and aspirations with recommenders to help them craft personalized and compelling letters.

Provide recommenders with ample time to write their letters and provide them with your resume and any relevant information that will aid their writing process. A thoughtful and positive letter of recommendation can significantly impact the perception of your application.

4.4 Understanding Supplemental Essays

Many colleges require supplemental essays in addition to the personal statement. These essays are tailored to each college and provide an opportunity to demonstrate your interest and fit with the institution.

Carefully read and understand each college's essay prompts. Research the college thoroughly to understand its unique offerings, values, and campus culture. Use this knowledge to craft thoughtful and specific responses to the supplemental essays.

Avoid generic responses that could apply to any college. Instead, provide details that showcase your genuine interest and explain why the college is an ideal match for your academic and personal goals.

In the next chapters, we will discuss how to make the most of college visits, choosing the right college fit, and nailing the college interview. Remember that your college application is your chance to tell your story and present yourself as a compelling and well-rounded candidate. Stay true to yourself, put your best foot forward, and let your passion and potential shine through in your application.

Chapter 5: Making the Most of College Visits

Visiting colleges is an essential part of the college search process. It allows you to get a firsthand experience of the campus, interact with current students and faculty, and gain valuable insights into the college's culture and academic programs. In this chapter, we will explore how to make the most of your college visits.

5.1 Campus Tours and Information Sessions

Most colleges offer campus tours and information sessions to prospective students. Take advantage of these opportunities to explore the campus, learn about the college's history and values, and get a sense of the student body's diversity.

During campus tours, pay attention to the facilities, dormitories, libraries, and other academic resources. Take notes and ask questions to gain a comprehensive understanding of the campus environment. See our College Visit Preparation and Planning Guide,

Information sessions provide valuable information about the college's admission process, financial aid, and any unique programs or opportunities they offer. Engage actively during these sessions and take notes to refer to later.

ECC Pro-tip: *You can register for a college tour on the college website, typically under “Visit.” You can use our College Visit Preparation and Planning Guide to get ideas on what questions you may ask. It is important to remember that while you are learning about potential majors, student-life, and campus activities during your tour, your tour guide is learning about YOU as a candidate. Many college admission offices have their tour guides take note of the attendance and participation of prospective students, especially at selective schools. Try to remain actively engaged with your guide and remember to ask questions.*

5.2 Meeting with Professors and Current Students

If possible, arrange meetings with professors in your intended major or academic area of interest. These meetings allow you to gain insights into the department's offerings, research opportunities, and faculty-student interactions.

Additionally, try to connect with current students to learn about their experiences, campus life, and extracurricular involvements. Current students can provide candid insights that might not be readily available during official tours and information sessions.

5.3 Leveraging Virtual Tours and Resources

If visiting campuses in person is challenging due to distance or other constraints, many colleges offer virtual tours and online resources. Take advantage of virtual tours, webinars, and online Q&A sessions to get a sense of the campus and college community.

Utilize online forums and social media platforms to connect with current students and admission representatives. These virtual interactions can still provide valuable information and help you assess whether the college is the right fit for you.

Chapter 6: Choosing the Right College Fit

Selecting the right college is a crucial decision that will shape your academic and personal growth over the next few years. In this chapter, we will explore how to make an informed decision and find the college that best aligns with your goals and values.

6.1 Identifying Your Priorities

Begin by revisiting the priorities you established in Chapter 1. Reflect on your academic interests, preferred campus environment, geographic location, financial considerations, and other factors that are important to you.

Make a list of your non-negotiables and preferences for your college experience. Keep in mind that your priorities may evolve over time, so stay open to reassessing them as needed.

6.2 Considering College Culture, Size and Geography

College culture and size can significantly impact your experience as a student. Research each college's values, traditions, and student body demographics to assess whether you would feel at home in that environment.

Consider whether you prefer a small liberal arts college with close-knit communities and personalized attention or a larger research university with diverse academic programs and resources.

You should consider the geographic locations or regions around the country that you prefer. The community in and around your college will be yours for at least 4 years and there is a strong chance that you will live and work in the area for some period of time after you graduate.

6.3 Evaluating Academic Programs and Resources

Explore the academic programs offered by each college and the strength of the faculty in your intended major. Look into research opportunities, internships, and study abroad programs that align with your interests and career goals.

Assess the college's support services, such as tutoring centers, career counseling, and academic advising. A robust support system can greatly contribute to your success and overall college experience.

ECC Pro-tip: *When investigating research and internship opportunities be sure to assess those typically available to undergraduate students, particularly at large universities.*

6.4 Navigating Financial Aid and Scholarships by Developing the Right College List

Diversifying your college list means developing a list of colleges that you would be happy to attend, offer your intended major, and have different costs. This can be as simple as adding both public and private colleges to your list.

Public colleges tend to cost less than private ones, so including a few of each on your list gives you more options when making your final college decision. However, if you have strong grades, many private colleges offer rich merit aid scholarships that may make the cost of attendance lower than a public college.

College costs can be a significant factor in your decision-making process. Investigate each college's financial aid options, including grants, scholarships, and work-study opportunities.

Compare financial aid packages and calculate the net cost of attending each college. Be aware of any special scholarship opportunities or merit-based aid programs that might be available to you.

Incorporate your financial considerations into your final decision while also keeping in mind the value of the education and experiences each college can offer. It is important to consider all factors that may help you succeed and whether the college you choose is worth the time and money you'll be investing.

Colleges often report statistics that provide data about how successful past students have been at that college. Retention rates, graduation rates, percentage of students employed post-graduation, and even average income for students who have attended are often available on the college's website. Checking for these factors at each college can help you create the Right College List.

ECC Pro-tip: *Every college offers a Net Price Calculator on their website. We recommend that you use this tool to understand your potential out-of-pocket expense for every school on your final list.*

In the upcoming chapters, we will discuss how to prepare for college interviews and writing effective supplemental essays. By carefully evaluating your college choices and understanding their offerings, you can make an informed decision that aligns with your aspirations and sets you on the path to success. Remember, finding the right college fit is about finding a place where you can thrive academically and personally.

Chapter 7: Nailing the College Interview

College interviews provide an opportunity for you to showcase your personality, passions, and potential beyond your application. In this chapter, we will explore how to prepare for college interviews and make a strong impression on admission officers.

7.1 Preparing for the Interview

Research the college's interview format and whether it is optional or required. Schedule the interview in advance, and make sure you know the location or have the necessary technology for virtual interviews.

Practice answering common interview questions with a friend, family member, or college consultant. Be prepared to discuss your academic interests, extracurricular activities, and why you are interested in attending that specific college.

7.2 Articulating Your Goals and Aspirations

During the interview, articulate your academic and career goals clearly. Discuss your passions and how the college's programs and resources align with your interests.

Highlight any unique skills or experiences that set you apart from other applicants. Be enthusiastic and show genuine excitement about the prospect of attending college.

7.3 Answering Common Interview Questions

Familiarize yourself with common college interview questions and practice thoughtful and concise responses. Be prepared to discuss challenges you've faced, how you've grown from them, and your contributions to your community. We have included our *How to Prepare for Your College Interview* to guide you.

Practice answering questions about your strengths, weaknesses, and your potential contributions to the college's community and campus life.

Chapter 8: Demonstrating Interest in Colleges

Colleges value applicants who show genuine interest in their institutions. There are many ways to show or demonstrate your interest in colleges which we will explore in this chapter. It is important to note that some colleges will track every interaction you have with them, whether it is through email, in-person or virtually. However, not all colleges track or use demonstrated interest in the admissions process.

8.1 Attending College Fairs and Information Sessions

Take advantage of college fairs and information sessions, either in-person or virtually. Engage with admission representatives, ask questions, and express your interest in the college.

8.2 Engaging with Admission Representatives

Connect with admission representatives through email or during college visits. Ask thoughtful questions that go beyond basic information to demonstrate your curiosity and genuine interest.

8.3 Connecting with Alumni and Current Students

Reach out to alumni and current students through college networks or social media platforms. Seek their perspectives and insights about the college to gain a better understanding of the student experience.

8.4 Showcasing Your Genuine Interest

Use the supplemental essays to demonstrate your genuine interest in college. Share insights gained from campus visits, conversations with current students, or research about the college's programs.

Chapter 9: Leveraging Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities play a vital role in shaping your college application. In this chapter, we will explore how to leverage your extracurricular involvements effectively.

9.1 Identifying Your Passions

Focus on extracurricular activities that genuinely interest you. Choose activities that align with your academic and personal goals and allow you to make a meaningful impact.

9.2 Making a Meaningful Impact

Commit to a few key extracurricular activities and take on leadership roles whenever possible. Showcase your dedication, initiative, and ability to effect positive change.

Colleges evaluate your commitment to your interests by the amount of time you have contributed and how deeply you have investigated and engaged the interest. For instance, if you started a quarterly food drive to benefit a local food bank in ninth grade you would be able to collect tons of food over the course of your years in high school and impact many people facing food insecurity in your local community.

9.3 Highlighting Achievements and Growth

Emphasize your achievements and growth within your extracurricular activities. Use specific examples to illustrate how your involvements have shaped your character and skills. Remember that you can start small and grow both your leadership role in an organization and your contribution when you stay committed over several years.

Chapter 10: Navigating Early Decision and Early Action

Some colleges offer early decision and early action application options. In this chapter, we will explore the benefits and considerations of applying early.

10.1 Understanding Early Admission Options

Differentiate between early decision and early action applications. Understand the binding nature of early decision and the non-binding nature of early action. Early Decision is binding, and the student commits that they will attend if admitted and withdraw all other applications. Early Decision is only appropriate if you have a number one college, and your parents are willing to pay full tuition if you are not awarded merit or financial support. Colleges can have Early Decision I and II with different deadlines allowing you to use this strategy for your first and second choice colleges.

Early Action is non-binding and means you will receive your admissions decision early. Both Early Decision and Early Action have strict deadlines for receipt of your complete application and all documents.

10.2 Weighing the Pros and Cons

Consider the benefits of applying early, such as increased acceptance rates and receiving admission decisions earlier. Early Decision will give you an admissions advantage of varying degrees depending on the college. However, it is binding so you will want to be certain of your choice.

Early Action will also provide some increase in your chance of admission but less than that of Early Decision. Be aware that not every college offers Early Decision and Early Action, and you should investigate the admission plans available at every college on your list.

10.3 Preparing for Early Decision and Action Deadlines

If you decide to use Early Decision or Early Action, you must pay particular attention to the deadlines. Plan your application timeline to meet early decision and early action deadlines. Ensure that your application is complete, including transcripts, test scores, and recommendation letters.

Chapter 11: Crafting an Outstanding Arts Portfolio

If you are applying to an arts program, an outstanding portfolio can be a significant asset. In this chapter, we will explore how to create an impressive arts portfolio.

11.1 Showcasing Your Artistic Talents

Select your best and most representative pieces for your portfolio. Showcase a range of styles and techniques that highlight your artistic abilities.

It is important to have either a trusted art teacher or fellow artist review your portfolio and offer a critique. Some colleges will offer review days to meet with faculty and preview your portfolio and provide feedback. This can be extremely valuable and help you edit your portfolio.

11.2 Creating a Cohesive Portfolio

Organize your portfolio to create a cohesive narrative or theme. Consider the flow and arrangement of your artwork to make a strong visual impact.

11.3 Preparing for Auditions or Interviews

If required, prepare for auditions or interviews for arts programs. Practice in advance and showcase your passion and dedication to your art form.

ECC Pro-tip: *While preparing your portfolio seek guidance from teachers, mentors, and fellow artists to be certain that your portfolio includes a good sample of your work and your journey as an artist. Colleges will sometimes offer portfolio review opportunities for potential candidates. You should make every effort to take advantage of these opportunities, particularly if that college is on your list.*

List of Action Verbs for Resumes & Professional Profiles

Management/ Leadership Skills

administered
analyzed
appointed
approved
assigned
attained
authorized
chaired
considered
consolidated
contracted
controlled
converted
coordinated
decided
delegated
developed
directed
eliminated
emphasized
enforced
enhanced
established
executed
generated
handled
headed
hired
hosted
improved
incorporated
increased
initiated
inspected
instituted
led
managed
merged
motivated
organized
originated
overhauled
oversaw
planned
presided
prioritized
produced
recommended
reorganized
replaced
restored
reviewed
scheduled
streamlined
strengthened

supervised
terminated

Communication/ People Skills

addressed
advertised
arbitrated
arranged
articulated
authored
clarified
collaborated
communicated
composed
condensed
conferred
consulted
contacted
conveyed
convinced
corresponded
debated
defined
described
developed
directed
discussed
drafted
edited
elicited
enlisted
explained
expressed
formulated
furnished
incorporated
influenced
interacted
interpreted
interviewed
involved
joined
judged
lectured
listened
marketed
mediated
moderated
negotiated
observed
outlined
participated
persuaded
presented
promoted

proposed
publicized
reconciled
recruited
referred
reinforced
reported
resolved
responded
solicited
specified
spoke
suggested
summarized
synthesized
translated
wrote

Research Skills

analyzed
clarified
collected
compared
conducted
critiqued
detected
determined
diagnosed
evaluated
examined
experimented
explored
extracted
formulated
gathered
identified
inspected
interpreted
interviewed
invented
investigated
located
measured
organized
researched
searched
solved
summarized
surveyed
systematized
tested

Technical Skills

adapted
assembled
built
calculated

computed
conserved
constructed
converted
debugged
designed
determined
developed
engineered
fabricated
fortified
installed
maintained
operated
overhauled
printed
programmed
rectified
regulated
remodeled
repaired
replaced
restored
solved
specialized
standardized
studied
upgraded
utilized

Teaching Skills

adapted
advised
clarified
coached
communicated
conducted
coordinated
critiqued
developed
enabled
encouraged
evaluated
explained
facilitated
focused
guided
individualized
informed
instilled
instructed
motivated
persuaded
set goals
simulated
stimulated

List of Action Verbs for Resumes & Professional Profiles

taught
tested
trained
transmitted
tutored

Financial/ Data Skills

administered
adjusted
allocated
analyzed
appraised
assessed
audited
balanced
calculated
computed
conserved
corrected
determined
developed
estimated
forecasted
managed
marketed
measured
planned
programmed
projected
reconciled
reduced
researched
retrieved

creative skills
acted
adapted
began
combined
conceptualized
condensed
created
customized
designed

developed
directed
displayed
drew
entertained
established
fashioned
formulated
founded
illustrated
initiated
instituted
integrated
introduced
invented
modeled
modified
originated
performed
photographed
planned
revised
revitalized
shaped
solved

Helping skills

adapted
advocated
aided
answered
arranged
assessed
assisted
cared for
clarified
coached
collaborated
contributed
cooperated
counseled
demonstrated
diagnosed
educated
encouraged

ensured
expedited
facilitated
familiarize
furthered
guided
helped
insured
intervened
motivated
provided
referred
rehabilitated
presented
resolved
simplified
supplied
supported
volunteered

Organization/ Detail Skills

approved
arranged
cataloged
categorized
charted
classified
coded
collected
compiled
corresponded
distributed
executed
filed
generated
implemented
incorporated
inspected
logged
maintained
monitored
obtained
operated
ordered

organized
prepared
processed
provided
purchased
recorded
registered
reserved
responded
reviewed
routed
scheduled
screened
set up
submitted
simplified
supplied
standardized
systematized
updated
validated
verified

More verbs for Accomplishments

achieved
completed
expanded
exceeded
improved
pioneered
reduced (losses)
resolved (issues)
restored
spearheaded
succeeded
surpassed
transformed
won

Appendix B

Essays That Worked

Having explored the myths from ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt, my curiosity was piqued in eighth grade by a simple legend from Japanese lore. If you fold one thousand paper cranes, the gods will grant you one wish. I took it as a challenge. My previous forays into origami had ended poorly, but I was so excited to begin my quest that this detail seemed inconsequential. My art teacher loaned me a piece of origami paper and armed with an online tutorial, my quest began. Like an early prototype of the airplane, I ascended towards my dreams for a glorious moment before nose-diving into the ground. The first crane was a disastrous failure of wrinkly lines and torn paper. Too embarrassed to ask for another, I turned to my stack of Post-it notes. By the third attempt, I ended up with a sticky pink paper crane. Holding that delicate bird, I was flooded with triumph and elation.

The first two hundred cranes were all crafted from Post-it notes. Armed with a pack of highlighters, I decorated each piece of paper individually. I folded cranes at home, between classes, and in the [Grab your reader's attention with a great quote from the document or use this space to emphasize a key point. To place this text box anywhere on the page, just drag it.]

car. My fingers were permanently sticky from the glue I scraped off every square. Slowly, my collection grew: first ten, then fifty, then one hundred. Before the task could become monotonous, I started experimenting. How small was it possible for a crane to be? Smaller than a golf ball? Smaller than a dime? Small enough to sit on the end of a pencil? Any size was attainable. I could make a crane smaller than almost any arbitrary form of measurement. Soon I could finish a crane in fifty seconds or with my eyes closed. Anything square and foldable became my medium. Paper towels, candy wrappers, and aluminum foil joined my vibrant menagerie of carefully folded paper. I was unstoppable; that wish was as good as mine.

By six hundred cranes, the increasing demands of high school academics caused my pace to slow. I despaired. I wouldn't let this be another ambitious project that I couldn't finish.

My cranes mattered to me. As an outlet for expression, they served as a way to defuse frustration and sadness, and a source of pride and joy. Their creation allows me to bring beauty to the world and to find a sense of order in the bustle and chaos of life. There is a lot of beauty to be found in tiny things. I'm reminded that little gestures have a lot of meaning. I have given away cranes to my friends as a pick-me-up on bad days, and I have made cranes to commemorate people, such as the dark green crane I made the day my grandmother died. They are a symbol of hope to remind me what I have accomplished.

So, I pushed myself to keep working and to keep folding one crane at a time. My determination paid off, and in the summer after sophomore year, my passion was reinvigorated. One month before the end of junior year, I folded my thousandth paper crane. As I leaned over the open drawer brimming with origami pieces in a multitude of sizes and colors, I felt a rush of satisfaction and triumph. Not only was 1,000 cranes an achievement in its own right, but I proved to myself that I can finish what I start.

The world is filled with big numbers. College tuition, monthly rent, and car prices deal in the many thousands. Those figures are incomprehensible to someone who has never interacted with anything so large, and I wanted to understand them. A thousand will never simply be a number to me: it is hundreds upon hundreds of hand-folded cranes combined with years of effort.

So what did I wish for? It turns out, I didn't need the wish. I learned I have the power to make things happen for myself.

A question that every high school senior is familiar with is: “What kind of college is the right fit for you?” My criterion doesn’t appear in the deluge of admissions pamphlets; that’s because I want my school to resemble my favorite dish: the hummus-tabouli wrap.

...and Johns Hopkins University is the creamiest, tangiest, most flavorful hummus-tabouli wrap in existence.

The secret to any savory wrap lies in how its flavor is contained. Regardless of what outside influences are imposed upon it, the pita bread expertly holds all of its ingredients without allowing them to spill. Hopkins opposes outside pressures, unapologetically supporting individuals who are unafraid to break tradition. The OUTlist, an online database for Hopkins affiliates who openly identify themselves as members of the LGBT community, revolutionized the visibility of LGBT individuals in higher education and created a support network at the university. For students who are struggling with their identity (due to the fear of coming out to their families or friends), I want to help them express themselves and understand that they are not alone. I want to serve as an advocate as well as a source of comfort, like a homemade pita that is warm and soft, yet tenacious.

Next on our wrap is the core layer of hummus, lathered on the pita and heavy with expectation. Being the most renowned staple of the Mediterranean diet comes with its pressures, but hummus handles it well, always stepping up to the plate, ready for any intimidating food critic. Similarly, Hopkins’s academic diversity lives up to its reputation and more. The Classics Department offers 83 different undergraduate courses, with varied paths that students can take in the pursuit of cultural and literary knowledge. I hope to study the interrelationship of modern literature and culture and its classical roots in Latin by examining international texts in courses such as Latin Literature Beyond Hermeneutics taught by Professor Butler. I intend to further facilitate international communication—a modern necessity—by researching how English is adapted by different cultures. I can imagine narrowing my research from World Englishes to the fundamentals of the English language that bring about its malleability under Professors Celenza or Roller of the Classics Department.

After the hummus follows the influx of diced tomatoes, onions, and parsley, all varied in taste, combining to form the tabouli sauce. Tabouli is accepting of its ingredients, which when combined, bring to it a taste that is unparalleled by any other ingredient of wrap. I hope to spend my next four years in the Hopkins community learning alongside students from backgrounds starkly different from my own, who, like each component of tabouli sauce, bring their varied perspectives to discussions, an invaluable trait when studying how English has been adapted by different cultures.

In this world of flavorful foods and people, the delectable allure of Johns Hopkins University entices the palate of my mind. And I hope to eat my fill.

One day this year, as I was walking by my perpetually empty locker, I was struck by an idea. I cannot identify what sparked its conception, but as my idea started to grow, thinking of possible solutions and analyzing and assessing feasibility issues began to consume me. My father calls this a “designer’s high,” and it was very familiar to me. I’ve experienced it often while collaborating with my robotics team, and in the hours I’ve spent with my father on design concepts for his prefabricated homes. Still, nothing I had worked on before was similar to the feeling this “out of the box” idea had triggered.

Growing strawberries in a high school locker seemed fairly simple at first. Despite knowing that this is not the typical habitat for strawberry plants, I knew from my green-thumbed mother that strawberries are among the easiest fruits to grow. Many students and teachers became interested in my project, yet were skeptical of my botanical prowess and quick to conclude that a plant could not possibly receive its basic necessities in a locker, which didn’t have proper ventilation, was hot and humid, and was shielded from both sunlight and any source of water. Still, I was determined to make this work. The unfriendly habitat and logistical obstacles did not deter me.

My horticultural roots stem from my mother and elementary level biology. It wasn’t until this year that my knowledge expanded beyond this casual level into a realm where biology, chemistry, and physics found beautiful, synergistic intersections. I was determined to apply what I had learned and got to work.

Due to the lack of electricity and direct sunlight, I decided to use a solar panel paired with a light sensor on the outside of my locker to power a strong, blue LED light, which is best for photosynthesis and plant growth. A friend taught me how to solder and helped me create the solar panel setup, which turns on the blue light only when it is dark outside so the plants experience the proper light cycles. I also set up a system to slowly water the plants automatically. This involved a series of drip bottles—which another friend had for his old, now deceased, pet guinea pig—arranged to drip into each other and then onto the soil.

Having addressed the issues of light and water, I focused on the need to circulate air. Leaving the door closed would provide essentially no circulation and would create a hot and moist environment, making the plants more susceptible to mold. After experimenting with various designs and a 3D printed prototype, I came up with an extension of the latching mechanism on the inside of my locker, which I called the “strawberry jamb.” The jamb, which I cut using our school’s CNC router, sufficiently boosts airflow by allowing the door to remain ajar about two inches while still maintaining the integrity of the existing locking mechanism. I made a beautiful wooden box, emblazoned with the laser-cut engraving “Strawberry Fields Forever” and provided proper drainage onto a tray inside the locker to avoid water damage to school property. The strawberry plants are now growing in my partially open locker providing a topic of conversation and much commentary from students walking by.

What began as a seemingly improbable idea fed my passion for creative thinking and mechanical engineering. This project not only allowed me to practically apply isolated academic principles I had studied, but it also pushed me to traverse multiple disciplines to creatively solve problems. Furthermore, it’s uniqueness beckoned for community input and collaboration, allowing me to access resources to achieve fiscally responsible solutions and ultimate success. For me, it was invigorating to propel a project that many deemed impossible into the realm of possible. I intend to continue to explore and invent because only then are new realities possible.

“Heads down and hands up to cast your vote” echoed across the conference room as I sat forward and looked down at my shoes, nervously tapping my heel against the carpet. “Michael Steen”. I heard rustling as a group of boys across the room raised their hands. “Zachary Quinto”. I heard chairs from everywhere creaking as boys moved to raise their hands while I stared down at my shoes. The seconds ticked by as the votes were counted which wasn’t a surprise; Zachary was a gargantuan football player with a booming voice who had received a standing ovation after his speech just five minutes earlier. Lastly, the moderator said “Tyler Clark”. I put my hand up instantly but could hear no other noises. My hopeful demeanor turned to disappointment, a feeling that would become familiar in the coming days. The level of applause after my speech may not have compared to Zach’s but did it warrant a shutout? I put my hand down in embarrassment and raised my head, as the moderator needed no time to count votes. They announced Zachary Quinto as the new Speaker of the House and he was warmly welcomed into the position. When I arrived at Keystone Boys State, a large-scale government simulation, I was excited to have been selected and wanted to run for as many positions as possible. Sure, the first loss was a hard introduction to the democratic political system but it was nothing compared to the defeats that followed. Seventeen defeats, to be exact.

At 2 AM three days later I stared at the blank piece of paper, unable to fathom how I was writing my 12th speech in a quarter as many days. Nor did I understand why I had lost 11 elections: I tried being serious, I tried being silly, I tried being conservative and liberal and everything in between. I had demonstrated my capability in my city, Stelacio, by passing legislation, negotiating trade agreements and making friends. But when I stepped on stage in front of two hundred boys from six different cities, I became a small fish in a big pond. Lined up next to towering football stars and cunning speech and debate champions, I was being overshadowed. Still, I felt the need to keep trying despite the fact that I was afraid to write even one word on the college ruled paper laid out in front of me. Failure was supposed to be a part of the experience, but tonight I resolved to not let failure define the experience.

I lost five more elections in the last two days of Boys State in spite of this resolve. I did, however, continue my spirited effort to improve Stelacio City and at the end of the week I was unanimously elected to be Head City Councilman. It was an unexpected honor to win the most important position in the city legislature given my bruised ego and my winless election record. I realized that my city had seen my hard work and dedication to further its economic, political, and cultural standing and my results had done the talking my previous speeches had failed to convey. Did I want to quit writing speeches? Of course I did. But I knew that if I quit, I would only take away a bitter taste of defeat and a knot in my stomach from the entire Boys State program. So, I forced myself to grit through it, knowing that my commitment and dedication would make the difference. I believe grit is the unwillingness to accept defeat. There will always be times when I want to throw in the towel, but I have learned that it’s better to use the towel to wipe off defeat and just keep going.

As a young woman in today's society, I have been conditioned to act a certain way and am expected to be treated a certain way. I am expected to be demure, I am expected to be nurturing, I am expected to be lovely. While there is nothing wrong with women who *are* demure, nurturing, and lovely, I am more. I am independent and strong. As a woman pursuing academic leadership and musical excellence, I have learned it is not easy to navigate being influential and strong as well as being female.

If I am a woman and want to be nurturing and caring, but also want to be a professional at a high level, the expectation is that I am only domineering and controlling. Often times the dichotomy of those two sides presents a significant challenge. The dance of demanding respect, yet being an elegant and respectable young woman is an exhausting performance. As president of my high school's National Honor Society chapter, I must lead meetings. However, I am often spoken over during these meetings. In these instances, I use my unexpectedly large voice, honed from my years of vocal training, to call the room to order. As a result, I am able to conduct a formal meeting, gain the attention of my peers, and set a precedent for future meetings. I claim my role as president, but I still hear critical voices as the commotion dies down. Not everyone agrees with my style. Often I speak up for myself, and my gender, but sometimes I remain silent for fear of more ridicule. Sometimes it seems like a strong woman is the worst thing you can be. Girls get called bossy. Boys do not.

If you ask my friends their favorite thing about me, most would respond praising my attentiveness to birthdays. Even for friends who dislike their own birthday, I will paint a card and bake a cake for them. I enjoy seeing happiness in the eyes of those I love. I *do* know my way around in the kitchen and I unashamedly enjoy baking. I am loving, I am soft. I am woman.

I am the high school's choir intern, as well as a *Maestra de Coro* in the Girl Choir of South Florida, leading warm-ups, running sectionals, and stepping in to conduct or teach music theory when the director is unavailable. This is my art and my passion. Though I have established myself in the music community, I still meet resistance to my leadership from the boys. In these moments, I look to my mentors: strong choral conductors, both male and female, who encourage me to be both assertive and a leader. They show me it is possible to be caring, while getting important work done. Girls get called bossy. Boys do not.

In addition to my leadership roles, I spend many hours babysitting, teaching young girls music, and using my Spanish proficiency to teach English as a Second Language to children after school. In these roles, I am nurturing, kind, and giving. I do not challenge societal norms. In these moments, I am what society expects a proper young woman to be. I am loving, I am soft. I am woman.

My existence confounds and challenges the belief that women cannot be lovely *and* opinionated, loving *and* strong, soft *and* respected. The balancing act of being Amanda Goldberg is not a choice. I did not decide to challenge the societal standards that have been imposed upon me: it is inherent to who I am as an individual. Throughout college and beyond, I will aspire to be the kind of young woman that my mentors have been to me. While difficult at times, I know I must continue to challenge stereotypes for future young women. I am bossy. I am loving. I am opinionated. I am soft. I am inquisitive. I am loud. I am woman.

“Life isn’t about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself” - George Shaw

I learned to put on a mask before I learned to read. Growing up as the daughter of a CEO, I was taught to play the role of a perfect child. During my first father-daughter dance, my dad wouldn’t dance with me because I had spilled sauce on my dress: rather than embracing the memories we had created over my accident, I spent the rest of the evening trying to scrub away the red stain. No wonder Instagram resonated so strongly with me; I saw it as an opportunity to control what others saw. Much like the stain on my dress, Instagram rewarded me for perfect form over substance.

My childhood forced me to mature at a very young age and contributed to struggles with my self-image. I viewed images of perfect bodies, vacations, and families and knew my blended family was far from perfect. My parents had not been in the same room together since they divorced when I was six years old and as a result, my twin sister and I lived in separate houses, me with my dad and my sister with mom. At six years old, I inadvertently broke the news of my mom's infidelity to my father. He distanced himself from me, and I blamed her for it. Unwelcome at my mother's, the only place to turn was my father’s home, where mistakes and personal struggles were not to be discussed. I felt utterly alone, and I craved the approval of my peers that I was not getting at home. The better I played my role, the more people I satisfied, the more I felt validated.

Instagram revolves around perfection, pushing individuals to present a flawless image. When others asked about my parents, I smiled and masked the truth because the truth was not desirable. Similarly, I would hide my stomach on Instagram because an imperfect body is not desirable. I often go so far as to smile when delivering bad news, reassuring others rather than reassuring myself. When my grandmother, who I was extremely close to passed, I apologized to my dad for crying at her funeral. I faked a smile, and forced myself to sing at her burial, burying *my* pain to uphold dad’s expectations.

On a hot July day, the summer before junior year, I stumbled upon a life-changing quote by George Shaw: "Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself." In school, I chased grades over learning to uphold a high GPA. At church, I memorized prayers to appear a staunch Catholic. I stayed in an unhappy romantic relationship for almost three years because I depended on that image. I had lost sight of who I was, believing that protecting my image protected me. With trepidation, I decided to delete my Instagram account and begin the journey of removing my masks.

I began to see the beauty in connection and companionship rather than my reflection on a phone screen. I spent a week in a remote log cabin learning about the obstacles of my grandparents' fifty-year marriage and my grandfather's difficult journey to sobriety. I learned that my best friend was struggling with suicidal thoughts and helped her find therapy. Slowly, I began to share my authentic self with the world, but the difficult part was not running back to my masks for security.

I no longer experience life as a reflection through a digital prism; instead, I am creating a genuine life. Each day I grow more confident in my inner strength and ability to make anything my mind can dream a reality. I am no longer settling for a life painted like a picture, reassuring others, smiling through my pain. I am consciously constructing a person who reflects *my* dreams and *my* values. College is the steppingstone that will be fundamental to fulfill my highest academic, personal, and professional potential.

Introspection Worksheet

Consider some or all of these questions prior to beginning your essay outline.

1. Describe your reading habits. Do you read for pleasure? What sorts of things do you read – books, magazines, or blogs? Describe something you have read for your own enjoyment.
2. When you have free time, what do you most enjoy doing purely for yourself?
3. What do you consider to be your most outstanding personal strengths and/or personality traits?
4. Pick at least four items below and identify your favorites.
 - a. Favorite book:
 - b. Favorite food:
 - c. Favorite music:
 - d. Favorite time of day:
 - e. Favorite movie:
 - f. Favorite keepsake:
 - g. Favorite quotation:
5. Pick any 3 of the following and write a paragraph or more (short answer essay) to answer the question.
 - a. Tell a story that you feel best describes who you are.
 - b. Describe one of your core values and describe why it is so important to you.
 - c. Name one or two teachers who have made a difference for you and explain why.
 - d. Describe your background, where you were born, how you were raised, family members, family dynamics, and any important moments in growing up. e. What do you wish you had more time for? Why?

Appendix D

High School Timeline for College Admission

Freshman/Sophomore Year: 2-3 Years Before Application Year

MONTH	ACTIVITY
June	Choose enriching activities and learning opportunities this summer! Read more about the best ways to spend your summer in preparation for college applications. Consider signing up for extra courses or find a book to expand your area of interest
July	Start a journal that logs your experiences of taking a course, extracurricular, or book you read this summer.
August	Explore extracurriculars. If you are interested in sports, join teams early!
September	Reflect on which subjects you are most interested in.
November	Start thinking about where you'd like to go to college. Learn more about the types of students that your dream university admits.
December	Assess your strengths and weaknesses. Which subjects are you enjoying? Are you closer to achieving your goals?
January	Take a mock SAT and/or ACT test. Map out your goals for the new school year.
February	Start to think about what type of learner you are. How can you improve your studying?
March	Think about your university goals. Do you want to study abroad? What types of internships or research projects interest you?
May	Start planning your preparation for the PSAT which is administered in the fall every year. The PSAT is a practice SAT and your scores are not sent to colleges. However, the PSAT your Junior year of high school will determine your National Merit eligibility. You should prepare if you have not already begun your focused SAT preparation.

Junior Year: 1 Year Before Application Year

MONTH	ACTIVITY
July	Use this month to research universities and majors. Create a list of safety, target, and reach schools.
August	Focus on getting the best grades possible. Make any final changes to your extracurriculars.
September	Start to plan when you will take the SAT or ACT.
October	Consider your summer opportunities and begin to apply. Summer after junior year is the most important and colleges will expect you to have a productive summer exploring your academic interests, volunteer, and internships or part-time job.
November	Discuss college application plans with your school counselor and take a look at scholarship options.
March	Start thinking about which teachers you will ask for recommendations.
April	Finalize your summer plans to continue building your candidacy! Apply to internships, enroll in classes, or plan projects.

Senior Year: Application Year

MONTH	ACTIVITY
June	Confirm teacher recommendations. Confirm Common App essay topic of choice. Begin writing your Common App Essay (personal statement)
July	Finalize School list. Decide on Early Decision and Early Admission schools. Write the final draft of your Common App Activities List.
August	Common App opens! Make your account. Start finalizing your Common App essay. Schedule interviews for any colleges scheduling same.
September	Work on Early Admission and Early Decision supplemental essays. Begin filling out financial aid forms.
October	Complete your essay drafts and carefully check your Common App for errors.
November	Early Action and Early Decision applications deadline.
December	Early Decision and Early Admission decisions released. If you are deferred to the Regular Decision pool let admissions know of your continued interest and any achievements, improvement in grades or scores or awards you have won since the filing of your application.
January	Prep for any upcoming interviews with alumni.
March	Check to see which admissions tests your dream university will require.
April	Confirm your choice of major.
May	Notify the university you've decided to go to. You did it!

College Visit Preparation and Planning Guide

To make the most out of your college visit we suggest you look over the questions and tips below. We would like you to use this document to inspire you to get the most of your college visit. You should aim to ask questions that are important to you and will help you learn more about the campus. Some of these questions will be answered in the course of your tour and information session but you may want to follow up for further clarification or additional information.

Planning your visit:

1. Visits are typically scheduled via the college website and there may be several options to choose from including, tour, tour with dorm, information session, sit-in on a class, interview, etc. Plan your day to maximize your time on campus.
2. Use the “Resources” on the ECC website to research and compare your colleges prior to your visits.
3. If you are an athlete, performer or artist you may need to schedule a visit to the department or facilities separately. If it is not obvious on the website, contact admissions and ask. Typically, a meeting with coaches and other faculty members need to be scheduled in advance.

Your campus visit:

Application Process, Financial Aid and General Info. (these questions should be addressed to an admissions officer but you don't want to ask questions that can be answered from information online or during the information session)

1. Do students apply to the school, or to a particular major?
2. When do students need to declare a major?
3. Do you require an audition as part of the admissions process if you want to be a theater or music major?
4. Can supporting documents be sent to the admissions office if an applicant wishes to highlight a particular artistic talent such as theater, music, dance or another art form? Are these documents used in the application review?
5. What is the best way to prepare for your school?
6. Is there a separate application for merit/scholarship opportunities?
7. What type of student seems happy here?
8. What are the most popular majors?
9. What if I am unsure about my major? Is this a good school to explore options?
10. What percentage of students graduates in 4 years?
11. How easy is it to double major? What percentage of double majors graduates in 4 years?
12. Do all majors have the chance to have internships and are they are common part of the educational experience?
13. Do students study abroad? Does your college or university have a study abroad program?
14. How easy is it to fit a study abroad program in and still graduate in 4 years?

15. What unique programs are incorporated into your school's curriculum?

College Life and Student Body (these are good questions for your tour guide or other students you meet on campus)

1. Why do students select this college?
2. What is the attitude of students about this college?
3. What do students on campus rave about?
4. What do students complain about most?
5. How active is the social life?
6. What are the most popular extracurricular activities?
7. What are the opportunities for extracurricular participation?
8. What are student traditions?
9. What happens here on weekends? Do students stay on campus?
10. How safe is your campus? Will I feel comfortable walking alone at night?
11. How are roommates chosen?
12. What do students do for fun?
 - a. What events does the campus activities board plan for students?
 - b. How often do students go off campus and where do they go?
 - c. What are some popular clubs, events, activities?
13. What are some examples of clubs and activities available to students?
14. Do students attend sporting events, theater events, and social events on campus?

Courses of Study and Professors (good questions for students, faculty or admissions)

1. What are typical course requirements? – how many exams, papers, etc.
2. Who teaches introductory courses – professors or grad students?
3. What arrangements are made for advising and tutorial help?
4. What opportunities exist for independent study and study abroad?
5. What constitutes a typical freshman year program?
6. How good is the faculty advising for selecting classes and fulfilling requirements?
7. Is there support to help students find an internship?
8. How accessible are professors? What are some examples of professor/student interactions outside of the classroom?
9. How large are the largest classes? How small are the smallest classes? What is the average class size?

Career Center and Planning

- 1.** When do students typically start using the career center?
- 2.** Can you tell me about the services the career center offers?
- 3.** How does your career planning department compare with other colleges/universities?
 - a. What are the results of graduate job placement surveys? What percentage of students find summer internships before graduating? What percentage find jobs upon graduation?
 - b. What companies recruit on campus?
 - c. How many companies recruit on campus?
 - d. Where do students typically work after graduation?
 - e. Are there internship fairs on campus? Are there job fairs on campus?

How to Prepare for College Interview Questions

For each of these questions, **I recommend jotting down some notes so that you can remember key points or details.** Don't try to completely write out your answers and memorize them. The way you speak in an interview is supposed to appear conversational and not rehearsed. Also, if you try to memorize your answers, and you forget your script during the interview, you'll end up looking confused and unsure of yourself.

Practice your responses by having somebody ask you these questions and then answering as if you were in the interview. **Remember that you want to be as specific and detailed as possible.** You want to separate yourself from all the other people who are being interviewed.

For some of these questions, it may be helpful for you to review your personal statement. Your personal statement probably has some details or stories that you can incorporate into some of your answers.

Question #1: Tell Me About Yourself or How Would You Describe Yourself to a Stranger?

This isn't even actually a question, but it's something you may be asked to do in an interview. Because it's so general, you may not know where to begin.

Why they're asking: Colleges are asking you to do this because they really do want to know more about you. That's one of the primary purposes of the interview.

What they're looking for: Paint a unique portrait of who you are to separate yourself from the other applicants. You should attempt to **avoid cliches or descriptions that would be too common.** Don't just say you're hard-working.

How to prepare: Rehearse answering this question. Talk about your passions, hobbies, and interests. You can discuss what inspires you or what your friends like about you. Be specific. Again, **you want to make yourself memorable.**

Question #2: Why Are You Interested in This College?

Why they're asking: This is an important question and one you should definitely prepare for because colleges want to see that you're taking the application process seriously and have a legitimate interest in attending their school.

What they're looking for: Talk about your interest in a major or academic program, the cultural values of the school, or extracurricular activities that drew you to the college. Again, be thorough and specific. Don't talk about prestige, rankings, or say that you just want to go there because it's close to home. That doesn't show genuine interest in that specific college.

How to prepare: To answer this question well, you should **do extensive college research before the interview**. You should be able to cite specifics in answering this question. Follow the same advice as if you were writing the answer to this question for your application essay.

Question #3: Why Do You Want to Major in _____?

If you indicate that you want to major in a certain subject, you may be asked why you're interested in that field.

Why they're asking: Colleges are interested in your academic goals and want to see that you're academically inclined.

What they're looking for: Talk about why a certain subject inspires you or why you're passionate about it. **Don't say that you're pursuing a certain major to make a lot of money or have job security.** That doesn't demonstrate genuine academic interests.

How to prepare: Think deeply about why you want to pursue a specific major. Why do you find it fascinating? What experiences have you had that provoked your interest in the subject? How will that major enable you to reach your future professional goals?

Question #4: What Are Your Academic Strengths?

Why they're asking: In an effort to get to know you as a student, colleges are interested in getting your perspective on where you excel academically.

What they're looking for: Don't make this answer too short. Don't just say, "I'm good at science." **When discussing your academic strengths, explain how you've capitalized on your strengths.** If you're an excellent writer, how have you used your writing skills to excel in school? How do you plan on continuing to use your strengths?

How to prepare: Make sure you know your academic strengths. You should be able to explain how you recognized your strengths, how you're currently using them, and how you plan to use them in the future.

Question #5: What Are Your Academic Weaknesses? How Have You Addressed Them? Or What Sort of Challenges Have You Faced In Life So Far?

Why they're asking: Colleges want to admit good students, but they're aware that we all have strengths and weaknesses. Colleges want to see that you have the persistence and work ethic to succeed despite difficulties.

What they're looking for: Students who can demonstrate their ability to confront and overcome challenges. You can reveal strategies or specific approaches you've taken to improve your academic weaknesses. Also, you can tell a specific story about how you managed to do well in a subject that challenges you.

How to prepare: Be aware of your academic weaknesses and how you've specifically addressed them. **It's not good to say that you don't have any weaknesses.** That's not very believable, and you'll come off as arrogant.

Question #6: What Do You Plan to Contribute to This School?

Why they're asking: Colleges want to admit students who will positively contribute to campus and academic life. They're looking for students who will make the school better.

What they're looking for: In short, specifics. Don't limit your answer to vague positive traits. **Don't just say that you'll contribute a good work ethic and a regard for others.** Is there specific research you wish to pursue? Do you want to have a leadership position in an extracurricular activity? Are there specific community service projects you want to do? How will your presence on campus and in the classroom make a difference?

How to prepare: You should know the specific contributions you want to make to the school. Identify your college goals and activities you want to do while you're in college.

Question #7: What Do You Expect to Be Doing Ten Years From Now?

Why they're asking: You don't need to have your future completely figured out. Colleges understand that you probably won't have everything figured out, and your plans are likely to change. However, they're looking for students with direction.

What they're looking for: They want students who are motivated to achieve their goals. The bad, general answer is to only say that you expect to have a fulfilling career and be making a positive impact on the world. What are some specific activities you'd like to do? How do you plan on impacting the world? You don't have to limit your plans to professional goals. Do you want to take your mom on a vacation? Do you want to have weekly gatherings with your best friends from high school?

How to prepare: You can write down some detailed notes answering this question. Paint a picture of the life you want in 10 years. **That picture should reveal your uniqueness.**

Question #8: What Would You Change About Your High School?

Why they're asking: With this question, colleges are looking for your ability to identify problems and get a better understanding of what you're looking for in a school. **By learning what you'd change, they get a chance to learn more about what matters to you.**

What they're looking for: They're looking for a thoughtful response. Be specific and respectful. Don't say, "I'd get better teachers." For example, you can say that you'd allocate more resources to the music department so that more students are given the opportunity to learn how to play new instruments. Then, you can discuss how learning an instrument helped you and describe the current state of the music department. In your answer, try to demonstrate that you want to improve your school to benefit the personal and academic growth of all your school's students.

How to prepare: Think about the strengths and weaknesses of your high school. What are some specific problems? What are the consequences of those problems? What steps would you take to make improvements?

Question #9: Whom Do You Most Admire?

Why they're asking: From this question, colleges can get a sense of your values. If the person you most admire is Justin Bieber, colleges may wonder about your priorities.

What they're looking for: Don't limit your answer just to naming the person. **Why do you admire that person?** For example, many people may say that the person they most admire is a parent. What specifically has that parent done that you admire so much? Don't forget the details.

How to prepare: Think about your response to this question. If your answer is somebody you know, practice by giving your answer to the person. If you answer the question well, you should be able to get some tears or a hug.

Question #10: What Is Your Favorite Book?

Why they're asking: This question is designed to help schools learn more about your interests, and colleges probably also want to make sure that you actually read books.

What they're looking for: Don't limit your answer to the name of a book. Why do you like this book so much? How did it inspire you? Did a particular character resonate with you? Did you learn something from this book that influenced your opinions or behavior? Did this book help shape your perspective or values?

How to prepare: Really think about things you've read that you connected with and why. I've also seen similar questions that ask about a news article you recently read.

Question #11: Why Do You Want to Go to College?

Why they're asking: For this question, colleges are trying to get an idea of why you're motivated to pursue higher education.

What they're looking for: Schools want to see that you have clear goals that you're trying to accomplish by attending college. Obviously, they don't want to hear that you want to go to college because your parents are making you or so you can go to good parties. **Emphasize how college will allow you to pursue your passions, aid in your personal development, and enable you to reach your future goals.** Again, be specific. What are those passions and goals? How will college give you an opportunity to pursue your passions? What activities that you plan to do in college will increase your awareness and facilitate your intellectual and emotional growth?

Question #12: What Do You Like to Do for Fun? And/Or What Are Your Top Extracurricular Activities, and Why Do You Like Them? And/Or How Did You Spend Your Time Last Summer and What Did You Learn From It?

Why they're asking: This question is designed to get a better sense of your interests and personality.

What they're looking for: Your answer doesn't only have to include activities that are academic. You probably wouldn't be believed if you said all you do for fun is read science textbooks and do math problems. However, it's commendable if some of what you do for fun is intellectual. Explain why you find those activities fun. **Try to avoid general answers like "hang out with friends."**

How to prepare: You shouldn't have to prepare much for this question because I assume you know what you like to do for fun. However, think about why you enjoy those activities.

Question #13: What Was an Obstacle You Have Faced and How Did You Get Through It?

Why they're asking: Here, colleges want to learn if you've faced any significant challenges that you've had to overcome. Also, they want to see if you're persistent and willing to work hard to overcome obstacles.

What they're looking for: It's fine if you haven't had some awful, incredibly difficult obstacle in your life. Think of a time when you faced a problem that challenged you, and you put in significant effort to solve it. **Your obstacle can be related to your home life, school, or an extracurricular activity.** Explain how the obstacle challenged you and emphasize what exactly you did to overcome it.

How to prepare: Think of a significant challenge you had in your life and how you dealt with it. What did you learn from the obstacle? How did you solve it?

Question #14: What Makes You Unique?

Why they're asking: Basically, this question is what all the other questions are meant to determine. This is another general question that can be difficult to answer. We're all unique, but it can be difficult to put into words exactly what separates you from other people.

What they're looking for: Schools ask this question because they want to get to know you better. You can discuss a trait or multiple traits that you possess. Give examples or stories that demonstrate these traits. Do you have unique interests? Goals? Is your background very unique?

How to prepare: I recommend doing some serious brainstorming to address this question. **Write out specific attributes and anecdotes you can share that would demonstrate your uniqueness.** When do you feel most comfortable? What makes you the proudest?

How Do You Answer Questions That You Didn't Prepare For?

Undoubtedly, the questions I described above aren't the only possible interview questions. **Regardless of how much you prepare, you'll almost definitely be asked a question that you weren't expecting.** There's no need to be too nervous, though. Just try to give honest, detailed answers. As long as you're thoughtful and professional, you don't have too much to worry about.

Also, you may be able to incorporate some of the details from the other questions you prepared for in your responses. For example, for any question related to academics, you may be able to include details from your response to "what are your academic strengths?".

If you want to get more comfortable with the interview process, have somebody ask you questions about yourself, and respond as if you were in the interview (Mock Interview)