



## How to Prevent Application Mistakes

By Kevin McMullin, Collegewise Founder and President

Author Dan Pink [shares this tip](#) to help you anticipate (and prevent) big mistakes when working on an important project—do a premortem.

While a postmortem is what a medical examiner does after a death to determine the cause, a premortem is anticipating the factors that could cause an important project to fail, then addressing those factors preemptively.

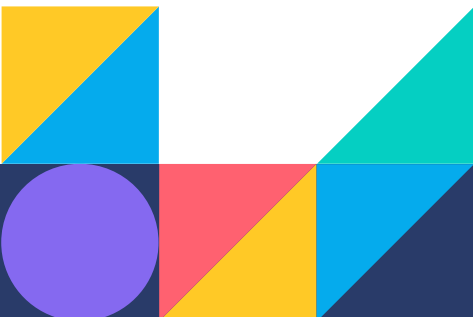
For families of seniors applying to college, here's how I'd apply that technique to your application process.

Imagine your college application process is over and it can only be described as an abject failure. What would that look like? Here are a few examples:

- The student procrastinated until there was no choice but to race to beat the deadlines.
- The entire process was stressful.
- The student failed to take responsibility for their application process.
- The parent hijacked the process from the student.
- Parents and kids argued constantly.
- You didn't seek out good advice and made mistakes because of it.
- You missed deadlines.
- You failed to apply for financial aid and can't afford the colleges that accepted you.
- You weren't admitted to enough (or any) colleges.
- You have regrets about the entire process and wish you could do it over again.

That would certainly be a failure of epic proportions. But thankfully, just about all of those things can be prevented with a premortem.

Have honest family conversations about college and the process of getting there. Parents, step back. Students, step up. Seek advice from people who know what they're talking about, like your high school counselor, admissions officers, or a qualified private counselor. Commit to moving forward with your essays and applications so that procrastination doesn't leave you sprinting to meet the deadlines.



On the other hand, if your imagined version of an epic application failure is “I didn’t get into an Ivy League schools,” you have a different problem entirely, but one that can also be addressed premortem.

No matter how strong your application, the odds are not in your favor of being admitted to any school that denies almost all of its applicants. I don’t mean this to be discouraging. [It’s just math.](#) Take your best shot if you believe you fit with one or more prestigious colleges. But you can only influence, not control, what any college decides about you. Focus your vision of failure on things you can control and change. Broaden your list, change your definition of success (and failure), and have the confidence in yourself to know that hard work and character always pay off no matter which colleges say yes.

Finally, if you’re reading this now, make the most of what might be the single biggest advantage you have—time. A family who wakes up in December and realizes they’re headed for a failure can’t do a premortem. All they can do at that point is try to necessitate their process and get back on track. But you’re way out in front of this college application process. And you have every opportunity to get it right the first time.

Do the premortem now, and instead of doing a postmortem next spring to figure out what went wrong, you’ll almost certainly be celebrating your success.

*Want more expert application tips from Kevin? Check out his blog at [wiselikeus.com](http://wiselikeus.com).*

