Collegewise

If You Haven't Finished (or Started) Your Applications
By Kevin McMullin, Collegewise Founder and President

If you're a senior with unfinished (or yet-to-be-started) college applications, let's confront the brutal facts. Your college applications are important, and you don't have a lot of time left to do them. But you still have plenty of time to do them well if you're smart about it. Here's how.

1. Make your applications a priority.
You don't need me to tell you this, I know. But I mention it because if you half-heartedly work on your applications until 24 hours before the deadline, I promise you that you will regret that decision. You can avoid that fate by starting in earnest now. Do it. It will be worth it.

2. Complete the applications before you do the essays.
There is no college application that, without the essays, cannot be filled out in less than 2 hours. So rather than complete each application in its entirety before moving on to the next one, complete everything but the essays (short or long—it doesn't matter). Whenever you come to an essay prompt, copy and paste the prompt into a separate document to be addressed later. But for now, just complete the applications themselves.
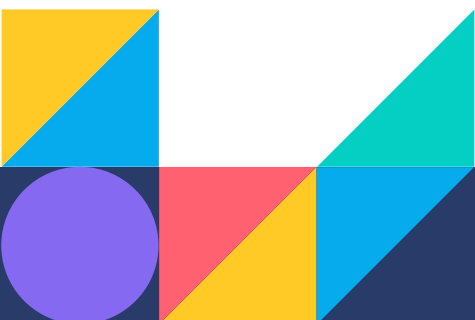
There are two reasons this is a good strategy. First, it feels good to get some quick victories. In one day, you can probably complete all the applications. Sure, you've still got essays to do. But you'll have momentum. And it's easier to push through and do the work when you're already making progress.

It's also easier to write essays when you have all the prompts in one place. Which brings me to…

3. Group your essay prompts based on the story you want to tell.
Instead of working on your essay prompts by school, work on them by theme. If you're going to talk about coaching a youth basketball team in more than one essay, group those prompts together. Answer one of them, then use what you can from that essay in the next similar prompt. Again, you want to use momentum here. Once you write about coaching youth basketball, it's easy to answer other prompts where you're writing about the same subject. Sometimes you can even recycle an essay in its entirety. But even if you have to do slightly different versions of the basketball story for each application, it will be easier than trying to switch back and forth between unrelated stories.

You'll get more done in a shorter amount of time when you group your essay prompts this way.

4. Leave some time to [sleep on it](#).
Some of the best application and essay revisions come after you've had some time to sleep on them. Build that sleep time into your timeline. Leave at least 48 hours (preferably more) between the time that you're pretty sure you're done and the time you hit "Submit."

5. Expect to doubt everything you've done right before you submit.
Your mind does terrible things to you before you make a big, irrevocable decision (that's why so many people are nervous on their wedding days). Before you hit "Submit," you're going to second guess your essays. You're going to wish your SAT scores were higher.   You're going to be embarrassed that you got a B in trig or don't have more community service hours or only played varsity softball for one year. Remember that this is just a normal albeit unfortunate reaction. Once you expect it to happen, it's a lot less uncomfortable when it actually arrives. I'm not trying to get psychological on you, but you'll see what I mean once you're about to submit your applications. Expecting the nerves is the best way to diffuse them.

Lastly, just remember this. One year from now, you're going to be arriving home for the holidays from college. Maybe you'll arrive home wearing the sweatshirt from the school that today is your top choice. And maybe it will be a different school. It doesn't matter. It's still going to be college. Work hard, trust yourself, and have faith that it's all going to work out because it almost always does.

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