



**Doorway  
to College**  
Foundation

A young woman with long, dark, wavy hair is smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a blue t-shirt and holding a blue spiral-bound notebook against her chest. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with green trees and a bright sky.

# COLLEGE APPLICATIONS: TOP 10 COMMON MISTAKES YOU MUST AVOID

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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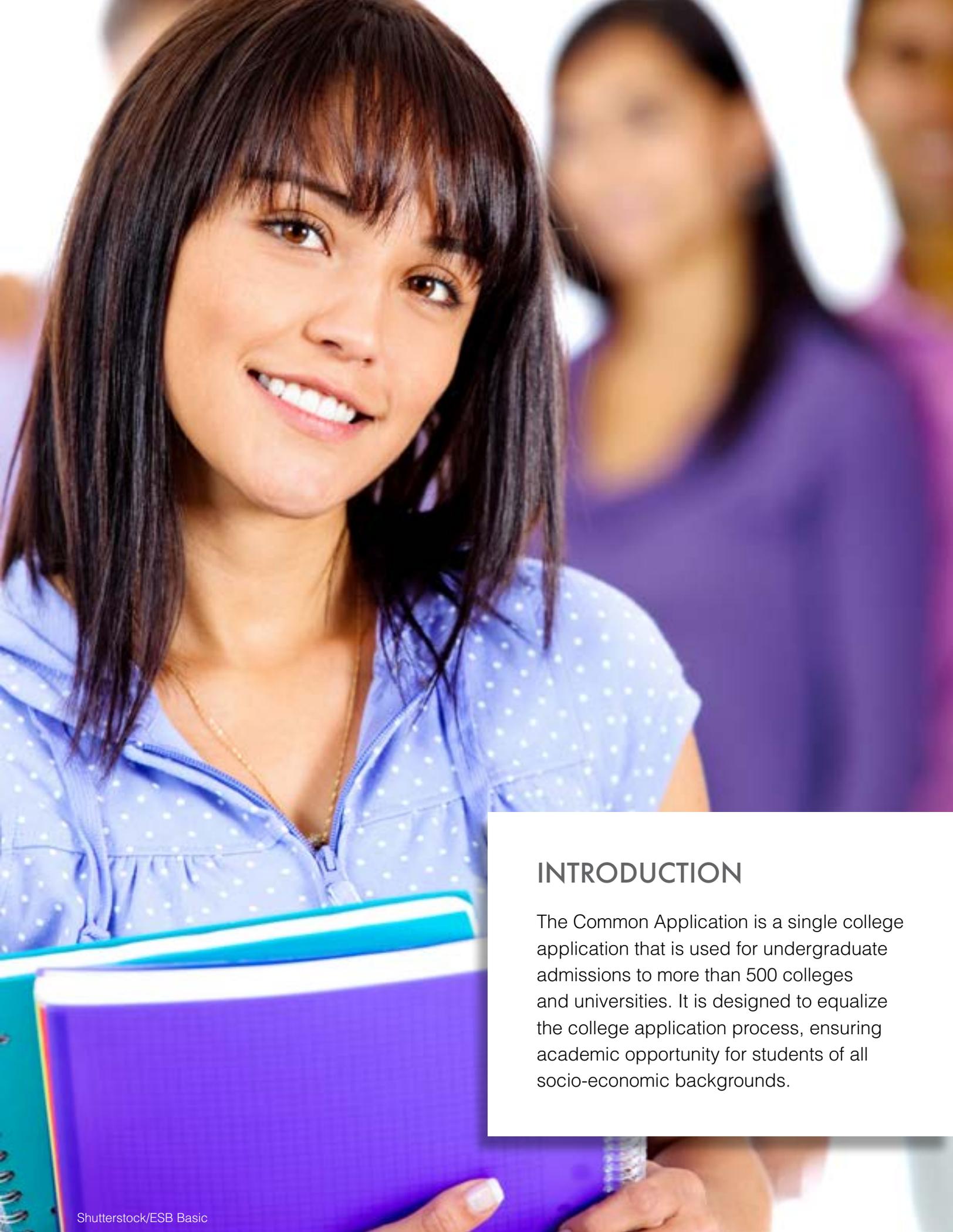
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## INTRODUCTION

The Common Application is a single college application that is used for undergraduate admissions to more than 500 colleges and universities. It is designed to equalize the college application process, ensuring academic opportunity for students of all socio-economic backgrounds.



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The admission staff at participating schools will take into consideration more than just your GPA and college entrance exam scores. The Common Application covers many areas of your academic and personal credentials, such as:

- Educational data
- Personal data
- Standardized test scores
- Family information
- Academic honors

- Extracurricular activities
- Work history

Although schools using the Common Application are evaluating students with a holistic approach, this evaluation process also creates ways for applicants to make mistakes. Even one mistake made on a college application has the potential to jeopardize your chances of being admitted to the school of your choice.



## MISTAKE #1

### NOT KNOWING WHY YOU ARE APPLYING TO COLLEGE

It's common for a teenager facing her senior year of high school to be unsure of what she wants to do with the rest of her life. Often, high school students aren't even aware of all the choices they have in front of them.

Knowing why your child is applying to college is the only way to determine if a college has the appropriate program of study. This knowledge also aids in the important task of providing admissions staff with the information they need. If your student is unable to state why she wants to be in college, admissions staff is equally unable to determine why she should be accepted to their college.

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## AVOIDING MISTAKE #1:

Work with your child to research schools of interest and list specific reasons why each school stands out or features what you want out of your college experience. By taking an honest look at why you are applying to a college, the rest of the process starts to take shape.



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## MISTAKE #2

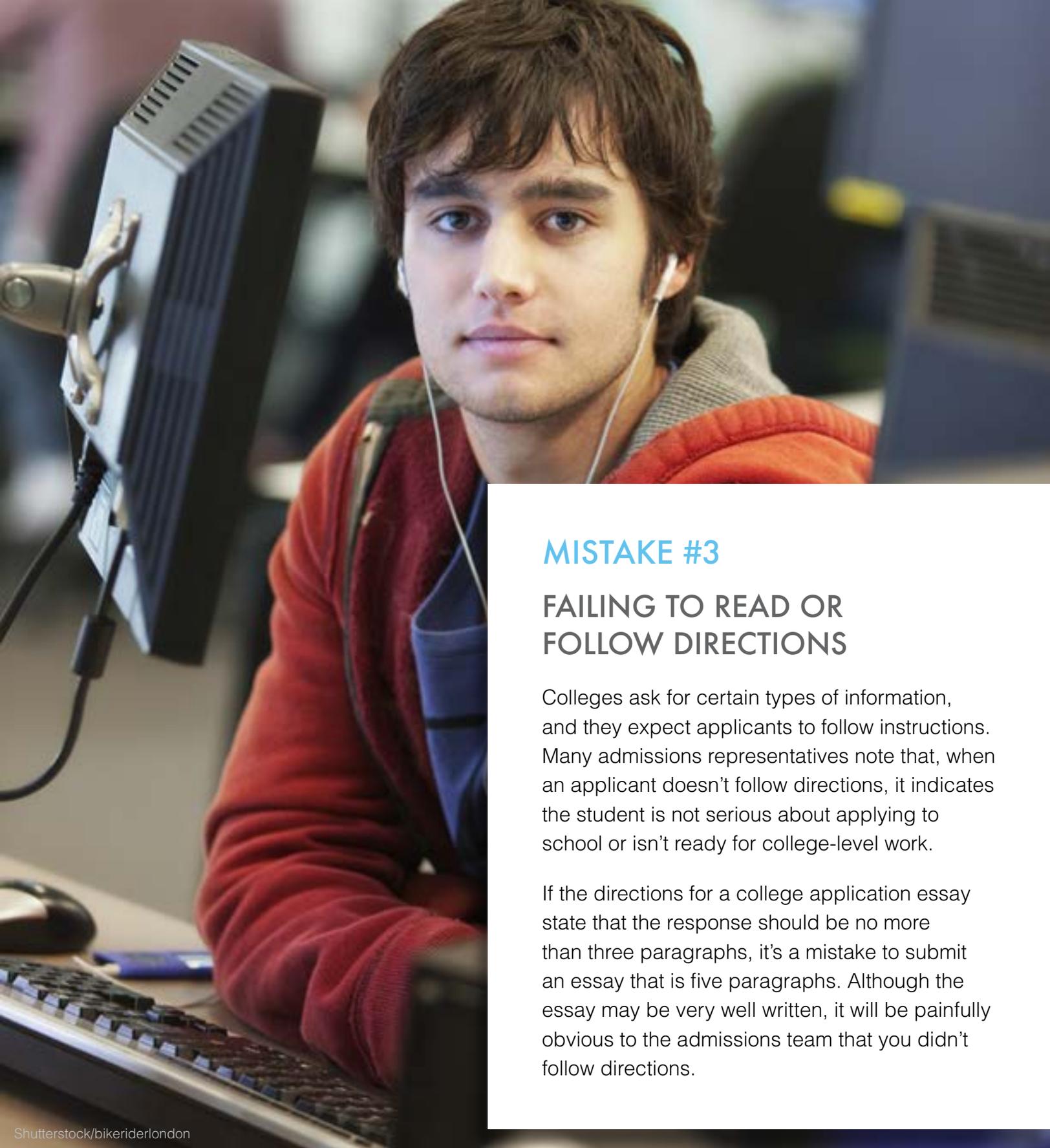
### NOT TAKING OWNERSHIP OF THE APPLICATION PROCESS

The college application process is, in fact, a process. The act of filling out and submitting forms is only a small part of the whole process, and the whole process is quite a lot of work. You will need to gather academic records, financial information, and teacher recommendations. Ask for help as needed, but we encourage you to take ownership of this process.

Although you want your parents or guardians to be as supportive as possible during the college application process, it's up to you to be responsible for your college education. Colleges evaluate applicants to find students who are genuinely right for their school. It's a big mistake for a parent to fill out the forms, call colleges for information, or write admissions essays. As the applicant, that's all a part of your job.

## AVOIDING MISTAKE #2:

Conquer the college application process by filling out the forms, making the calls, and (most definitely) writing the essays yourself. You can ask for advice and proofreading, but just don't expect your parents or anyone else to do the work for you..



### MISTAKE #3

## FAILING TO READ OR FOLLOW DIRECTIONS

Colleges ask for certain types of information, and they expect applicants to follow instructions. Many admissions representatives note that, when an applicant doesn't follow directions, it indicates the student is not serious about applying to school or isn't ready for college-level work.

If the directions for a college application essay state that the response should be no more than three paragraphs, it's a mistake to submit an essay that is five paragraphs. Although the essay may be very well written, it will be painfully obvious to the admissions team that you didn't follow directions.

### AVOIDING MISTAKE #3:

Ask a parent or other responsible adult to check to see that you followed all instructions, and make sure you provide the specific information requested by each school. Most schools also have supplemental applications, so don't assume each college wants the same generic information.



## MISTAKE #4

### FAILING TO COMPLETE THE ACTIVITIES SECTION AND SUBMITTING A LENGTHY RESUME INSTEAD

Due to a high volume of applications, colleges don't have enough resources to review every application for a long period of time. Because of this, it's a fairly serious mistake for you to detail out every activity you've ever done in your life.

Colleges are not impressed with a list of 15 different extracurricular activities. They want to see that you have a passion or specific interest in one or two meaningful activities. This exemplifies a dedication over a long period of time, which translates into your ability to stick with a course of study — especially if it's something you are truly interested in.

Note, too, that sending a resume when it's not requested is another example of Mistake #3.

## AVOIDING MISTAKE #4:

Keep each application as concise as possible. Less is more. The goal is to create an application packet that is an accurate picture of you and your unique abilities.



## MISTAKE #5

### NOT PROOFREADING COLLEGE APPLICATIONS PRIOR TO SUBMISSION

It's very easy to make simple grammatical or spelling mistakes when filling out multiple college applications. However, while the smallest mistakes may seem minor to you, they speak volumes to admissions representatives.

Because admissions representatives are tasked with making difficult decisions when choosing between applications — especially when space becomes limited — errors or incorrect information become a deciding factor in narrowing the field.

## AVOIDING MISTAKE #5:

Do not rely on spellcheck or grammar check to review your college applications. Ask someone who is skilled in spelling and grammar to proofread and double check the information on every single application you fill out.



## MISTAKE #6

### SUBMITTING A “GENERIC” ESSAY TO MORE THAN ONE COLLEGE

Although the Common Application allows you to submit the same essay to more than one college, this is a mistake. Each college is unique, and each is going to react differently to the content of your essay.

It's a common pitfall to cut-and-paste the same essay into every single college application. Almost nothing sinks an applicant faster than submitting an essay that speaks to the characteristics of one college when the application is for a different college.

## AVOIDING MISTAKE #6:

View the essay process as an opportunity to showcase who you really are. Research colleges to determine what each school values and is seeking in an applicant, then speak to these values on each individual essay.



## MISTAKE #7

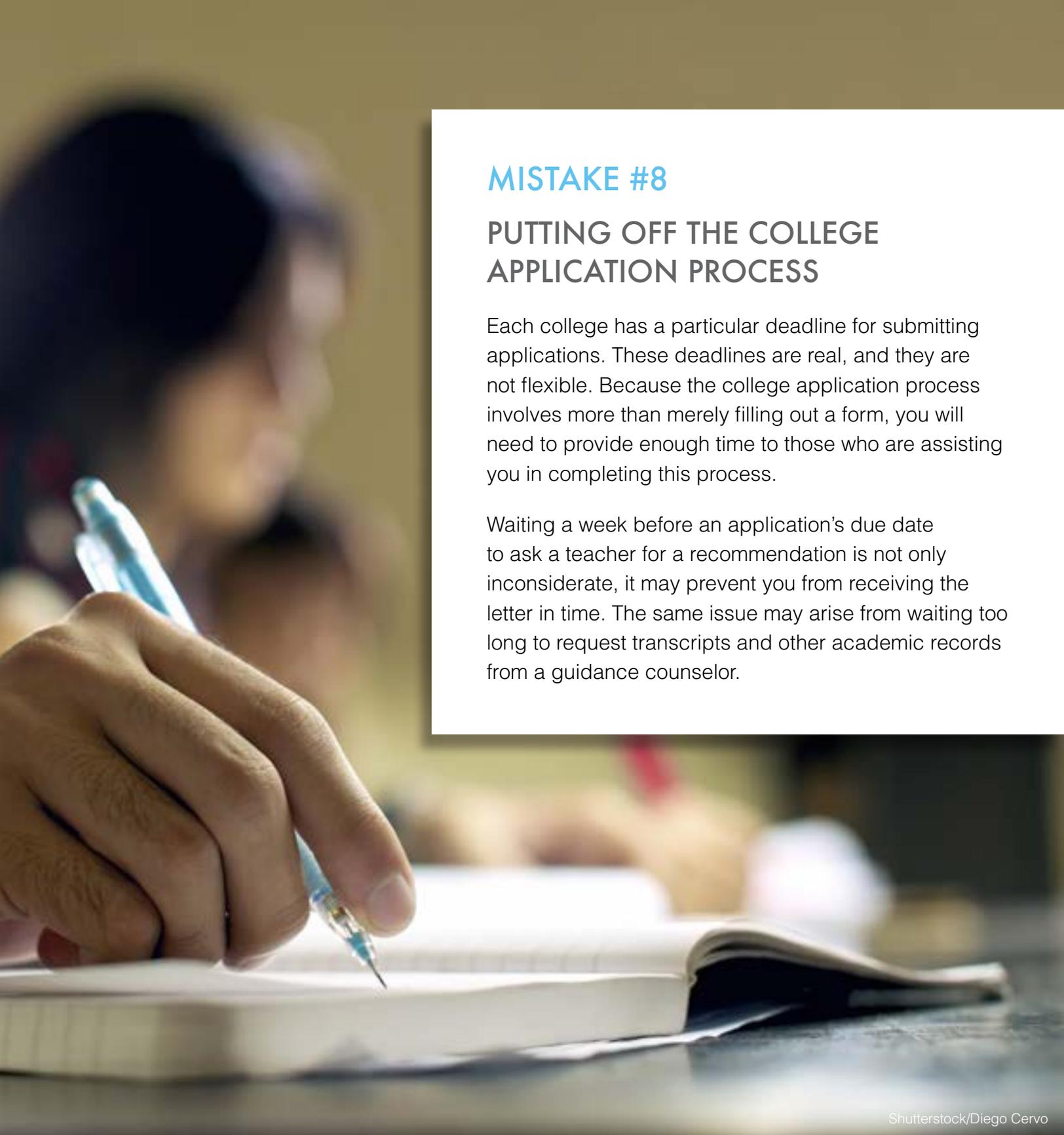
### BEING REPETITIVE IN COLLEGE APPLICATION SUBMISSIONS

One of the most frequently heard statements in college admissions staff meetings is, “The thicker the file, the thicker the student.” Essentially, a bigger college application packet doesn’t translate well to admissions representatives. Instead, each document your child submits — the application, an essay, a list of activities, a recommendation, or a record of outstanding achievements — needs to add something new to her profile.

Restating an achievement or activity over and over adds to the thickness of your file, but not the depth. Your aim is to avoid appearing as a one-dimensional candidate.

## AVOIDING MISTAKE #7:

Ensure your application highlights everything that makes you unique without being redundant. Look to submit one recommendation that vividly encapsulates your profile.

A close-up photograph of a student's hand holding a blue pen, writing in a notebook. The student's face is blurred in the background, and the focus is on the hand and the pen. The notebook is open, and the pen is positioned over the page.

## MISTAKE #8

### PUTTING OFF THE COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS

Each college has a particular deadline for submitting applications. These deadlines are real, and they are not flexible. Because the college application process involves more than merely filling out a form, you will need to provide enough time to those who are assisting you in completing this process.

Waiting a week before an application's due date to ask a teacher for a recommendation is not only inconsiderate, it may prevent you from receiving the letter in time. The same issue may arise from waiting too long to request transcripts and other academic records from a guidance counselor.

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## AVOIDING MISTAKE #8:

If procrastination is an issue for you, approach it as an opportunity to discuss your future with your parents or other adults who are important to you. Write college application deadline dates on a calendar or use an electronic reminder system on your computer or smartphone. Ask your school counselor about signing up to receive deadline reminders via email.



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## MISTAKE #9

### BEING UNFAMILIAR WITH THE COLLEGE'S ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS

Just because you are graduating from high school does not mean that you have met all of the academic requirements for admission to a particular college. Beyond GPA requirements and college entrance exam scores, it's a mistake to assume that your high school curriculum has provided all the classes needed for acceptance into a particular school.

## AVOIDING MISTAKE #9:

Before senior year begins, research academic prerequisites for admission to your preferred schools. This information is usually found on colleges' websites. Ask a school counselor for assistance in selecting courses to ensure that you have met college admission requirements.



## MISTAKE #10

### SELECTING A COLLEGE BASED UPON YOUR PERCEIVED LIMITATIONS AS AN APPLICANT

Although you may not be applying to the Ivy Leagues, you shouldn't limit school considerations based on the belief that you don't have the grades or college test scores to gain admission.

It would be a big mistake not to fully realize the opportunities you have before you in life. Don't be deterred from applying to schools that may seem slightly out of reach.

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## AVOIDING MISTAKE #10:

Once you have identified schools that fit your academic needs, check out the schools' admissions requirements for GPA or ACT / SAT scores. This will let you know whether you need to retake the ACT or SAT test to improve your score and become a more attractive applicant.



## AND ANOTHER THING ...

It's important to note one more mistake many college applicants make: thinking that the application process ends once the forms are turned in. Application packages are reviewed several times before final selections are made.

Make sure you maintain your grades during senior year and keep colleges informed of your progress as a student. It's completely acceptable for you (but not for your parent) to stay in touch with the colleges you have applied to, and provide them with any new information that's relevant to the admissions decision.

Obviously, you won't want to become a pest to admissions representatives, but you shouldn't be passive during the process, either.

Ready to learn more about the college admissions process to help your student get into the college of his or her dreams?

**[Click here to learn about other college admissions help from Doorway to College](#)**  
**or call toll free at 1-877-927-8378.**

# ABOUT DOORWAY TO COLLEGE FOUNDATION

Doorway to College Foundation strives to demystify the college application process in its many forms. We give parents and students the information needed to be fully informed and prepared for the challenges and changes that lie on the horizon. For more information about products and services from Doorway to College, including college admissions support and test prep, visit us at [www.doorwaytocollege.org](http://www.doorwaytocollege.org).



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