

APPLYING TO COLLEGES, UNIVERSITIES, AND TECHNICAL SCHOOLS



AGENDA

- SESSION 1
 - Starter
 - Step One: Apply
 - Step Two: Take My Application, Please!
- SESSION 2
 - The Write Stuff: Why?
 - The Write Process
 - Conclusion
- Student Assessment

Objectives

Students will identify the benefits of applying to a range of schools.

Students will practice completing college applications.

Students will write model entrance essays.

Materials Needed

- Session 1: One copy of the “A+ Applications” activity sheet for each student (Part I)

- Session 1: Scissors and tape (Part I)
- Session 1: One copy of the “College Application Planner” activity sheet for each student (Part II)
- Session 1: College catalogs and brochures (Part II)
- Session 1: Highlighters (Part II)
- Session 1: One copy of the Common Application for each student (Part II and Session 2, Part I) (Note: If your guidance department does not have the Common Application, you may contact the College Board directly or find it online at www.commonapp.org.)
- Session 2: One copy of the “Apply Yourself” activity sheet for each student (Part I)
- Session 2: Copies of a sample essay, one for each group of four or five students (This essay may be taken from a book on college essays in the school library or guidance office.) (Part I)
- Session 2: One copy of the “Topic Brainstorming” activity sheet for each student (Part I)
- Session 2: Four or more index cards for each student (Part II)

SESSION 1

Starter (3 minutes)

Write these advertising slogans for a state lottery on the board: “Hey, you never know” and “You’ve got to be in it to win it.” Ask students how these ideas could connect to applying to and going to college. (Students may answer: if you don’t try, you’ll never know what you could accomplish.)

Explain to students that the next two sessions will take them through the step-by-step process of applying to colleges.

Part I Step One: Apply (20 minutes)

Purpose: Students identify the benefits of applying to a range of schools and the appropriate steps to filling out applications.

1. Students learn the purpose of applications.

Divide the class into groups of three or four. Instruct students to consider the following situation:

Suppose that we as a class decided to let five new students join us. We can select whomever we want. Much to our surprise, 100 students want to join our class! How will we choose from among them? What would we want to know about them? What criteria will we use to select the new students?

Give groups five minutes to develop an application or other admissions screening ideas. Then, have them share their ideas with the class.

Ask students to consider the process that they developed to identify some of the reasons for the college application process. Write student responses on the board.

2. Students organize the steps to filling out college applications.

Distribute copies of the “A+ Applications” activity sheet, scissors, and tape to the groups. Explain to students that these are the steps they should follow when filling out applications, but that they are out of order.

Instruct students to cut along the dotted lines and arrange the steps in the order they think is best. Have them tape their steps together to share with the class.

Discuss the different organizational plans. Have students revise within their groups. Tell students to write these steps in their journals or to save the activity sheets to use as reminders when they begin the application process.

Part II Step Two: Take My Application, Please! (20 minutes)

Purpose: Students identify a range of schools to apply to and determine how to request admissions applications.

1. Students identify a range of schools to apply to and contact for applications.

Explain to students that many guides suggest applying to four to six schools in three different categories: “reach schools” (less than 50% chance of being accepted), “good-shot schools” (50/50 chance), and “safety schools” (better than 50% chance). In the previous lesson, students identified three schools that interested them. Have them work with partners to review their notes and reexamine catalogs/brochures as needed in order to identify their reach schools, good-shot schools, and safety schools.

Distribute the “College Application Planner” activity sheet to each student. Have students write their three school choices (from Lesson 3 in this module) in the first column.

Read through the steps on the activity sheet to be sure students understand each one. Then have students check college catalogs to find out how to request applications. As a homework assignment, have students contact the schools they listed for applications and write the date of their request on their activity sheets.

2. Students review the Common Application.

Explain to students that many colleges use the Common Application—a standardized form that students fill out once and send to multiple schools. Distribute copies of the Common Application for students to use as practice.

Give students highlighters and have them work in small groups to read through the Common Application. Let them highlight unfamiliar terms or questions. If the group cannot answer the questions, bring the class together. Here are some terms that may need explanation:

- Early Action or Early Decision Candidate
- SAT or SAT I
- SAT II or Achievement Tests
- ACT: American College Test
- TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language

Tell students that the next session will focus on the essays that many schools require as part of the application process.

As a homework assignment before beginning Session 2, ask students to find interesting first sentences from their favorite books.

SESSION 2

Part I The Write Stuff: Why? (20 minutes)

Purpose: Students understand the purpose of the personal essay and prepare to write a model admission essay.

1. Students discuss why a personal essay is part of the application process.

Have students look at the information they've written on their practice Common Applications. Ask, "How would you feel if a decision about your future were made using just this information?" (Students might respond: the information is just numbers; it doesn't tell anything about them as people.)

Explain that the purpose of the essay is to give all applicants the opportunity to present themselves as the unique individuals that they are. Point out to students that the essay is not a test; rather, it allows colleges to get to know students personally.

Distribute copies of the "Apply Yourself" activity sheet. Give students a few minutes to read the article. Have them summarize the information by asking them to describe some of the essay-writing tips given in the article. (Students may answer: write about something personal, describe the event as it happened, don't try anything off-the-wall unless you are a strong writer.)

2. Students read and discuss sample essays.

Tell students that they are now going to review an essay.

Divide the class into groups of four or five. Distribute copies of a sample essay from a library or guidance office resource to each group. Ask students to imagine that they are admissions officers reading the essay. Then, give them about 10 minutes to read and discuss the essay. Discuss the following questions as a group:

- What topic did the writer choose?
- What are some examples of sentences that are personal or that contain vivid descriptions of an object or action?
- What did you learn about the writer?
- Would the writer fit in at our school?

3. Students explore essay themes and topics.

Refer students to the Common Application. Have them read the directions for writing the essay. Distribute copies of the "Topic Brainstorming" activity sheet to students in their small groups.

Explain to students that it is important to look for an original topic for their essays. Interesting or unusual topics make for interesting and unusual essays that will stand out. Give groups 10 minutes to brainstorm topics for each category on the activity sheet.

When the class is finished, have one group read its list for the first category, “Personal Relationships and Influences.” Have the other groups cross out the same topics if they appear on their lists. Then have another group read its list, and so on. Repeat for “Life Experiences” and “Personal Qualities.”

Students may be surprised by the number of repeated ideas. How many unusual topics did the class come up with? The answer could be none! If time allows, regroup students and repeat the activity, or try it again on another day. Work until students have brainstormed interesting, unusual ideas to write about.

Part II The Write Process (25 minutes)

Purpose: Students explore the writing process: looking for topics, choosing the important first sentence, and organizing a first draft.

1. Students explore personal resources for essay topics.

As students work through the following activities, remind them that the purpose of the essay is for them to express themselves. You may want to make signs in the shape of keys with the following reminders written on them: be yourself, be honest, and tell a story rich in details.

Explain to students that the best topic for their essays will be one that is meaningful to them and about which they know a great deal. Distribute four or more index cards to each student. Have students write one extracurricular activity, hobby, and work experience on each card. Then, give them five minutes to free-associate a list of thoughts, ideas, phrases, and images for each card.

Have students look through their journals and old essays for topics and ideas about which to write. Encourage them to discuss their ideas with other students using questions such as “Does this topic or theme sound interesting? What does it tell you about me?”

Tell students that top-10 lists are another way to generate ideas for topics. Have students brainstorm a variety of top-10 lists (e.g., 10 most important personal experiences, 10 most important people, 10 best movies, 10 book characters you’d like to meet, and so on).

You might also encourage students to draw clusters around a theme. For example, a student might put “work experiences” in a center circle and draw a web about their job experiences. Students should see one area of the cluster that looks particularly rich and for which they provided many details.

2. Students discuss sample first sentences.

Ask volunteers to share the first sentences from some of their favorite books. Instruct students to tell what they enjoyed most about the book.

Then ask students, “Why is an interesting first sentence important for your personal essays?” (Students might respond: you want to grab the attention of the admissions officer reading your essay so you stand out.)

3. Students review the steps of the writing process.

Explain to students that the process of writing their personal essays can take many months. The more time they allow for it, the better their essays will be. Review these writing steps:

- Take notes, writing stream of consciousness. Use index cards or pieces of paper folded into sections. Write one idea on each card or in each section. Don’t worry about mechanics (i.e., spelling, punctuation, and grammar).
- Organize your notes. Put your index cards or cut-up sections in order.
- Create an outline. Add specific details for each main point.
- Write a first draft.
- Rest the first draft by putting it away for a day or two.
- Revise and rewrite several days later.
- Rest the second draft, then revise and rewrite.
- Get feedback from peers, teachers, and school counselors.
- Revise and rewrite.
- Repeat draft writing, resting, and revising.
- Proofread. Check spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
- Make a final copy of the essay.

Suggest that when students begin to write essays, they work with writing partners. If necessary, remind students of the guidelines for constructive feedback and to use I-Messages and questions when critiquing someone else’s work. List appropriate questions or phrases partners can use when reading each other’s work, such as the following:

- I’m not sure what you mean in this sentence.
- I like these words together—they make me see X.
- I don’t understand how Y led to Z.
- How did X change the way you look at Y?
- I don’t get a sense of how this made you feel.

Conclusion (3 minutes)

Ask students to summarize the steps they must take to apply to college. Elicit from them the following **key points** that were taught in this lesson:

- Apply to a range of colleges, including reach schools, good-shot schools, and safety schools.
- Applications can be obtained over the internet, by phone, or by mail.
- Filling out the application takes time and patience.
- The essay is important because it is your chance to make a personal impression.

Student Assessment

SESSION 1

1. List the steps to filling out a college application.
2. List one reach school, one good-shot school, and one safety school to which you are considering applying. Explain why each is either a reach, a good-shot, or a safety school.
3. What is the Common Application?

SESSION 2

1. List three of your most important personal experiences, three of the most important people to you, and three of your favorite characters from a book or movie. Explain why each experience, person, and character is significant for you. Which of these topics can be expanded into an essay that would interest you?
2. Describe the steps of the writing process.

LESSON EXTENSIONS

Using Quotations

“Never let the fear of striking out get in your way.”

Discuss how this quote relates to applying to colleges, universities, and technical schools.

Addressing Multiple Learning Styles

Have students create graphs of schools in which they are interested. Have them include information such as degrees conferred; whether the school is a reach, good-shot, or safety school; requirements; tuition; location; etc.

Have students display their graphs on poster paper and hang them around the room.

Writing in Your Journal

Tell students to brainstorm challenges they have faced, why they want to pursue a certain course of study, what an application won't tell admissions staff, etc.

Have them outline a possible college essay on one of these topics.

Using Technology

Have students bring in their favorite song—one that they would write about in a college essay because it represents them. Play the songs for the class.

Have students describe why their chosen song represents them.

Homework

Have students obtain applications for the schools to which they wish to apply.

Have students compare and contrast the applications they receive.

Additional Resources

Have students refer to *The Best College Admission Essays* by Mark Alan Stewart and Cynthia C. Muchnick and *Essays That Will Get You into College* by Amy Burnham, Daniel Kaufman, and Chris Dowhan.

Have students describe the elements of a great essay.

A+ APPLICATIONS

Answer all the questions in detail.	Write or type neatly.
Proofread and revise.	Mark the deadline on a calendar.
Reread the application before mailing. Be sure that the necessary signatures and application fee are enclosed.	Consider submitting supplemental materials that illustrate long-term hobbies, describe part-time work, include an audio or video recording of original music or dance performances, or contain published poetry or other writing.
Read the entire application.	Copy your final draft.
Write a cover letter that draws attention to particular strengths or explains a situation that the application did not cover.	Make copies of the application for rough drafts.
Follow directions carefully.	Plan to give yourself plenty of time to complete each application.

COLLEGE APPLICATION PLANNER

Directions: Write the name of one of your top college choices in each column. Fill in the dates as you complete each step.

APPLICATION STEPS	COLLEGE	COLLEGE	COLLEGE
<i>Application requested</i>			
<i>Application received</i>			
*APPLICATION DUE			
<i>Personal data completed</i>			
<i>Educational data completed</i>			
<i>Test information completed</i>			
<i>Family information completed</i>			
<i>Honors, extracurricular completed</i>			
<i>Work experience completed</i>			
<i>Short essay draft 1</i>			
revised			
final			
<i>Personal statement outline</i>			
draft 1			
draft 1 revised			
draft 2			
draft 2 revised			
draft 3			
draft 3 revised			
final draft			
proofread			
completed			
APPLICATION MAILED			

APPLY YOURSELF

Every night this fall, Jenna Arnold, 17, rehearsed for her high school musical. But whenever Jenna had a spare moment, she worked on the story of her life. The senior from Elkins Park, Pa, doesn't want to be a writer—she hopes to be a set designer one day. But to achieve her goal, she knew she had to perfect a single, hugely important essay.

Like millions of college-bound seniors, Jenna has to wow admissions officers with her grades, SAT scores, activities—and a personal essay. “It’s the only part of the application where you have to express yourself and tell them who you are,” says Josh Berezin, 19, of Shaker Heights, Ohio, who turned the essay that helped him get into Yale University into the book *Getting into Yale* (\$14, Hyperion). “It’s your chance to be creative.”

But that can be tough if you haven’t had much practice writing.

Parke Muth, assistant dean of admissions at the University of Virginia, has seen plenty of essay triumphs—and failures. “One of the major problems is a lack of focus,” he says. “People think they have to come up with a huge, important topic—the Middle East, abortion. That’s much too large.”

To help you find your focus, check out these tips from Muth, Jenna and Josh:

- **Think small.** Choose a topic that allows you to write from a personal perspective and use specific details. Jenna focused on her bout with a rare disease, alopecia areata, which causes baldness. “There I was, trying to live a normal life and wanting to date boys,” she says. “And

I was always worrying about my wig falling off.” Jenna chose a single, traumatic episode to describe—the moment a friend accidentally knocked her wig off.

“I felt my wig slide slowly backward down the back of my head, like chocolate syrup rolling down a scoop of ice cream. My deepest fear became a reality; I was exposed. In the sunlight, out in the open, my secret was revealed, as were the few patches of hair I had remaining on my head.”

- **Write vividly.** And let the action flow naturally. Here’s how Josh described himself on the field:

“Even I have to laugh sometimes. Here I am, at 5-foot-8, surrounded by my fellow offensive linemen, who average 6-foot-2. It must be a sight to see. Me, in the back of the huddle, clawing my way back within earshot

of the quarterback, or stretching up on the tips of my toes, straining to read his lips.”

- **Be willing to take a risk.** Some applicants attach cartoons, write movie scripts or ignore the question and take off on fantasies of their own.

“Of course, you can crash and burn, too,” Muth says. “Someone who isn’t a strong writer probably should not take a risk.”

But sometimes a risk pays off big. Published author Josh says he never imagined himself to be much of a writer. “The only piece of advice I can think of is to be yourself,” he says. “It sounds stupid and clichéd and everything, but that’s the only way it’s gonna be good.”

—Joseph D’Agnese

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TOPIC BRAINSTORMING

Write one idea in each box.

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND INFLUENCES	LIFE EXPERIENCES	PERSONAL QUALITIES