

Beginning Tips for Students and Parents

Parents naturally care deeply about the college application process. For starters, they want their students to be successful and happy at the school that is the best fit for them. And then there's the issue of money! Here are five tips for students and parents.

1. **That deep difference:** There is a deep difference between parents who genuinely support their students and parents who overstep to the point of intrusion.
2. **First question:** What parents can do at the outset of the application process is to sit with their students and ask this question: “What is it that you want schools to know about you, beyond grades and test scores and service activities and travel adventures?” Oftentimes students will respond, “I don’t know.” Parents can help their students reflect and, thus, prepare.
3. **Healthy distance:** During the essay writing process, parents can offer constructive, ethical support by keeping a healthy distance. They should certainly read essays if asked to by their students, but they should not offer writing advice. They should read essays for theme and focus without suggesting which words to use.
4. **Focus and accept:** More than ever before due to the pandemic’s disruption of academic life, students and parents need to focus on what can be controlled and try to accept what can’t. That is easier said than done, we know, but this focus is critically important to adapting to predictable—and unpredictable—changes in college application, selection, and admissions processes.
5. **COVID-19 essay topics:** Students and parents should neither immediately embrace or shirk this topic. But if students ultimately decide to write about it, make sure to answer these questions: a) “What did you realize during this time that you gave up?”; b) “Did you figure out something that you didn’t expect to figure out?”; and c) “What did you start doing, and what did you stop doing?” Those answers will lead to genuinely authentic essays.