

# What The People Who Read Your College Application Really Think

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Time to get together the transcripts, the test scores and put the final touches on those personal essays. It's college application season, again.

To a lot of students, the process seems wrapped in a shroud of mystery. What exactly happens when you send your application out into the unknown only to... wait?

Well, here's a glimpse behind the curtain at one school:

Inside a tiny conference room at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, the admissions committee is preparing to review 23 applications. They'll spend about two minutes on each before deciding whether to accept or deny admission, or place the application on hold.

To speed things along, the committee uses a lot of jargon, like "L-B-B" for late blooming boy, and "R-J" for rejection.

If it sounds like they're cutting corners, know that before the committee meets around the table, each application gets a close look from two of the members.

Then it's condensed into a single one-page profile. The one for this student says he comes off just a bit arrogant in his essay and interview:

"Academically he has everything. I wonder if a counselor call might be enlightening?" asks one member of the committee.

"It sounds like maybe he could work on it and be cognizant of it. I mean, he's strong academically," says another.

A third member chimes in, chuckling, "I think his classmates could bring him down to reality."

Ann McDermott is director of admissions at Holy Cross. "You have 13 people in a full committee room and 13 different perspectives so it can go any different way," she says.



And you hear from a lot of applicants at schools around the country that the admissions process can be frustrating. Disappointed applicants complain that when it comes to discerning between hundreds of students who seem to have the grades, teacher recommendations and test scores, the process comes down to luck.

But is there a method to the madness? It, of course, varies from big state universities to small private colleges, like Holy Cross, which will admit 700 freshmen this fall.

McDermott says there's no set formula. It's both an art and a science. "We balance our feelings with some facts."

Yes, feelings. That's because sometimes the facts, like test scores and grades, don't tell the whole story of the student.

She offers some tips on application *Dos* and *Don'ts* for prospective applicants.

### **Tip 1: Engage**

Visiting the campus, having a Skype or phone interview with an admissions counselor, or sitting in on a class shows admissions counselors you're interested in that particular school. It also gives the school a chance to get to know you better.

"Just like a teacher in the classroom wants a student engaged, we want students engaged in the process with us. I think it makes for better discernment of what a good fit is for both them and for us," says McDermott.

### **Tip 2: Don't "phone-it-in"**

When it comes to the application, admissions counselors say the biggest red flag is a sloppy, half-baked essay.

"Or over-thinking the topics so much that it becomes awkward and doesn't convey the student as it should," McDermott adds.

### **Tip 3: Take time to reflect**

Taking time to think about the kind of college experience you want can help you narrow down your list to schools that suit your personal and career goals. While you're making sure you're a good fit for the school, make sure it's also a good fit for you.

McDermott's last thought: "I think [high school] students should spend a little of time thinking what they liked in high school, what they didn't like, who they are, and not just going and rushing off and looking at schools and getting in the frenzy."