Chapter 6: Creating the Application
Options and Deadlines, The Application, Who Sends What, Applying Online, and The Essay

OPTIONS AND DEADLINES

For every application you complete and intend to send there will be schedules and deadlines to which you must adhere. **Note that in general, a deadline is the date by which an application must be sent, physically or electronically.** However, for a few colleges, the deadline is the date by which the application must be received. If in doubt, call the admission office well ahead of the deadline and ask. **As a general rule, you should treat all deadlines as if they were the receipt date. Doing so will help ensure that you get everything in on time.**

The different possibilities are defined as follows:

**Regular Admission**
Under a regular admission schedule, you apply by a certain deadline, usually between January 1 and March 1, and are notified of a decision on or shortly after a specific date, most often between March 15 and April 15.

**Rolling Admission**
Colleges that use rolling admission will review your credentials shortly after they are received (usually not before the end of the first high-school marking period of the senior year), and will notify you of its decision within a few weeks. You normally do not have to tell the college whether you will be attending until May 1. As a rule, the stronger your credentials, the earlier you may receive a letter of acceptance. Note that in these competitive times, many rolling admissions institutions become more selective as the year goes on. It may be best, therefore, to apply early in the year. Always check with your counselor about timing.

**Early Decision (and Early Decision II)**
Students who return for their senior year planning to “go ED” have one college that they have researched and are absolutely sure they would like to attend. The Early Decision deadline is much earlier than the regular one, often November 1, and the student is usually notified of the college’s decision one month later. Because of this early deadline, you must keep in mind that colleges will not see fall term grades before they render an admission decision. Their decision will be based on grades through the end of your junior year. If your junior year grades are not as strong as you would have hoped, you should discuss the ED decision with your college counselor. It may be wise to wait until fall term marks are in and apply ED Round II, if it is available.

One of three decisions is possible: Accept, Defer, or Deny. An accepted student is ethically committed to attending the college and must withdraw any other active applications. Students who are deferred are simply put back in the pile and looked at again with the regular pool of applicants. If deferred, they are no longer committed to attending the college should they be accepted later in the year. Some colleges have a policy of denying Early Decision applicants they deem unqualified. While an outright denial can hurt, it does relieve the anxiety of having to wait another four or five
months for a decision. Obviously, a student may submit only one Early Decision application at a time. However, several institutions have ED I and ED II deadlines for students who were not ready to submit an Early Decision application earlier in the year. Other institutions have Early Decision deadlines that are relatively late—for example, January 1—which serve the same purpose as ED II. Early Decision candidates must be ready to apply to other colleges immediately in the event that they do not receive an acceptance of their ED application.

Unfortunately, many colleges now use Early Decision as a marketing tool, designed to make them look more selective. In a nutshell, the result of this practice is that many institutions are somewhat easier to get into when one applies early. It is essential to ask admission offices about their ED policies in this regard. If you do not get a satisfactory answer—which sometimes you will not—speak with your counselor before making any commitment.

**Early Action**
This plan is similar to Early Decision except that there is no commitment on the part of the student to attend if accepted. You may apply Early Action to more than one school, with the exception of a few institutions that follow a “Restricted Early Action” policy. With these, you may apply EA to more than one school, but you may not submit an ED application at the same time.

Since colleges change their application plans constantly, it is imperative to check with each school before submitting an application.

**College Counseling Office’s “INTERNAL” deadlines:**

- **Early Decision:** You must make your request for an early decision mailing **in writing** to the College Counseling Office at least two weeks before the college’s deadline. This means that for a November 1 ED deadline, you must inform us by October 15.

- **Regular:** For all other colleges with specific deadlines, you must inform us **in writing** that you are applying at least two weeks before the deadline.

- **Rolling Admissions:** Materials may be submitted any time after the first trimester (late November) and will be processed within two weeks. Important: You may be pressured by some admission offices into sending in a rolling admissions application as early as possible, even in October. **Doing so is not always in your best interest. Always consult with someone in the College Counseling Office before you ask us to send a transcript early.**

If you make your request late, we will do our best to get materials out on time. However, we work on a first-come, first-served basis, so if we have a great many applications to process, those submitted late will be sent last.

Your intention to apply to a given college or university must be communicated **in writing** to the College Counseling Office, as must any subsequent changes to your list. Simple forms for this purpose are available in the office. Only by using these forms can we keep an accurate and updated list of where to send your materials on time. Failure to keep the College Counseling Office
informed in a timely fashion can result in an incomplete application and eventual denial of admission.

THE APPLICATION

A megabyte or two of electronic information, a few sheets of paper: this is your application to college. In a very real sense, this “package” is an extension of yourself, for its purpose is to represent you before the admission committee at each college or university to which you are applying. Because it must do such an important job, your application needs to be put together with great care and attention to detail.

For a large majority of seniors, the college application is the Common Application, a document designed and accepted by about 400 colleges and universities, with more schools joining the Common Application organization each year. You can log onto www.commonapp.org and see a listing of the colleges that accept the Common Application. (While you’re there, create an account; you’ll need it when it comes time to work on the application itself.) The chances are very good that most of the schools you apply to will accept the Common Application. However, almost all of those that do not (the list includes most state colleges and universities), have an online application of their own.

Many schools that accept the Common Application also require their own supplement, which may be a short questionnaire (“Why do you like our college?”), a set of specific shorter essays, another long essay, or a graded paper with teacher comments. Be certain to check the requirements for each school to which you apply; the Common Application website has the information and the supplement forms. Some supplements are completed online; others must be downloaded as PDF files, filled out and sent in the mail.

One note on completing supplements: One of the most common questions on a supplement is “Why are you interested in this institution?” or some variant such as “Explain how this institution will serve your needs, academically, extra-curricularly and personally.” These are very hard to answer unless you have gotten to know a school fairly well before applying. Herein lies the importance of taking good notes when you visit a campus! They will be lifesavers when you have to write about why you love a college you saw three months previously on a tour of ten schools. If you have not visited, do as much research as possible online and in reference books, and talk with your counselor. We can usually help you with these questions.

Though a few students still complete and mail paper applications (mainly because a few institutions still require them), the overwhelming majority of you will complete and send electronic forms online.

Whether you use the Common Application or a college’s own form, you will find that their components are quite similar. Here is some information on the different components and how they get to college admission offices.
WHO SENDS WHAT?

Applications have two parts: “yours” and “ours.” You have your responsibilities to fulfill, and the College Counseling Office has its own for each school to which you apply.

You are responsible for sending the following parts of your application:

- Your personal information (the application)
- One or more essays (the personal statement)
- Various types of supplements (a college’s own essay question, a graded paper, a peer reference) if required
- Early Decision agreement form (if applicable; counselor, parent and student must sign it)
- The application fee
- Your SAT and/or ACT scores directly from the testing agency
- TOEFL scores if you take it (see your counselor)

You must notify the College Counseling Office when you have sent these materials. Always send materials at least two weeks before the deadline. If a college uses rolling admissions, you must notify us at least two weeks before you plan to send your materials.

Note: Most applications include forms labeled “School Report,” “Midyear Report,” and Teacher Recommendation.” Lawrence Academy does not use these, as we have our own version of each. Simply ignore them when completing applications.

We are responsible for mailing the following:

- Your transcript
- Two teacher recommendations (you are responsible for asking the teachers to write these on your behalf)
- Counselor statement
- Lawrence Academy profile (a brief description of Lawrence Academy, our educational philosophy, graduation requirements, and clarification of programs such as the NGP, CSC, IIP, Winterim, and so on)

Again, you must take responsibility for letting the College Counseling Office know where and when to send these forms. We require that you notify the College Counseling Office, in writing, of your intention to apply to a given school at least two weeks before the deadline. We have specific forms for this purpose.
APPLYING ONLINE

While online applications are generally reliable and relatively simple to fill out, and while they can take considerably less time than their paper equivalents, they pose their own challenges and problems. Here are some things to watch out for:

An online application “lives” on the Internet, not on your computer. Therefore, be sure to save your application every time you log on and work on it! **Just one failure to save can wipe out hours of labor.**

- When you create an **account** for the Common Application or any other online form, write down your user names, passwords and PINs and keep them in a couple of safe places, perhaps one on the computer and one on paper where you won’t lose it. You should also give this information to your counselor. This advice holds for the College Board as well: Save your personal information when you sign up for the ACT or other tests!

- Don’t wait until the last minute to start an online application on the assumption that you can do it in fifteen minutes. You can’t; you will make mistakes, want to change things, etc. So give yourself plenty of time. You should have an online application finished at least a week before you submit it. Then give it a last thorough check before you press the Enter or Return button. (That’s how you submit an online application: One click of a computer key!)

- Plan to have the **Common Application** done **well before your earliest deadline**. You may add colleges to the list of recipients after you have submitted.

- Proofread very carefully, and ask your counselor or a parent to go over the application with you before you submit it. Changes can be made after submission in most cases, but it is not always easy.

- Be sure you have a **credit card** when you submit an application. Though some online applications are free, most colleges charge a fee that must be paid at the time of submission.

- When completing Common Application supplements, be aware of which ones can be sent electronically and which ones must be printed out, completed and mailed. This information is clear on the Common Application Website. Also, concerning supplements, note if a college is labeled “hand in hand.” These colleges require that both your application and your supplement be submitted from the same registration account before your application will be processed and you are considered an applicant. Most important, if you submit your application electronically to a “hand-in-hand” college, you must submit your supplement electronically as well (it cannot be printed and mailed).
THE ESSAY

Why an essay?
Most colleges and universities require students to write an essay as part of the application (not all—many state institutions do not have this requirement). Why? Because they want to see: a) how well you write, b) as one admission officer puts it, “how students can wrap their brains around broadly based questions,” and c) who you are, in your own words and from your own point of view. Except for possibly the interview, the essay affords your best chance to share your thoughts, insights, and opinions; to highlight your accomplishments; and to convey your maturity and outlook on life. Look at the essay, then, as an opportunity. One dean of admission at a major university likens the application process to building a house, and the essay creates the windows. “It’s what distinguishes you from other applicants; it’s what allows us to see in.” College essays are therefore different from those you write for English, history or other classes. You try to write well and to “wrap your brain around questions” for your teachers, but usually you do not write about yourself.

Some students find it hard, when applying to college, to shift gears and write about a topic that may be close to them personally. The task need not be difficult, however. Here are a few tips, many gathered from admissions people.

Choosing a topic
Some colleges simply assign a topic, such as:

- Describe a person or an event and its importance to you.
- If you had to choose four things to put into a time capsule to be opened in a thousand years, what would they be and why?
- Write about an issue of local, national or global importance and its impact on you.

Whatever you choose to write about, bear in mind:

- No topic is inherently a “good” or “bad” one. Admission people want to discover something about you that they can’t learn from your transcript or test scores, so write about something that matters to you, not what you think they want to hear.

- While there are few “wrong” topics, there are wrong approaches. In general, do not dwell on specific experiences, but on your perception of or reaction to those experiences. For example, writing a travelogue about your summer trip to France is trite. (“The view from the Eiffel Tower was the most breathtaking thing I’ve ever seen!!!”) Instead, write about something you learned or that truly moved you while you were there. If you can’t do that, find another subject. Some of the most interesting topics are right under your nose, in the little events of daily life!

- Some topics do need to be treated with great care, and avoided if you can’t do so. It is very difficult, for example, to write about the three D’s: Death, Divorce and Disaster. If you choose one of these subjects, be sure to focus less on the events than on how they affected you—and never wallow in self-pity! Likewise, it is best to avoid sensitive political,
social or religious issues such as abortion or the U.S.’s role in the latest war. You never know whom you may offend.

- Good advice from one admission person: Avoid writing about privilege or anything that costs money.

Writing the essay

- Be yourself, and write for yourself; use your own voice. Generally, we are taught to write for a particular group. The college essay has no audience per se except a group of strangers known as the admission committee. With no specific audience, students may compose an essay that attempts to convey an “educated” writer. This approach can result in stilted diction, posturing, and labored prose, rather than writing that reflects energy and spontaneity. The admission director mentioned above encourages students not to be overly cautious. “Real emotion, real feeling has to come through. What we’re trying to do [at our institution] is create a community, and we want to be sure the people we’re placing in it are going to thrive here. Writing about something that reveals more about you helps us in that process.” If you write from the heart about a topic that is meaningful to you, you will be writing for yourself, and, as a result, your essay will be much more memorable to that group of strangers.

- Do not use a thesaurus. You don’t ratiocinate or cogitate, for example. You think.

- Don’t try to be funny unless humor comes naturally to you and you’re experienced—and good—at humorous writing.

- Good writing, as one admission officer put it, is lean, progressive, imaginative, grounded in specifics, energized by apt verbs, and respectful of the reader’s intelligence. Tell your story in a way that shows, rather than merely claims, that you have learned or matured through the situation or experience you are describing.

- Your opening sentence needs to “grab” the reader. Admission people read so many essays that an imaginative opening will grab their attention.

- Do not allow family members or friends—anyone—to become involved in the writing process, other than as proofreaders. It will be obvious if someone else wrote the essay for you, and it will work against you!

- Likewise, do not even consider for one moment “buying” an essay from one of the Internet “essay services”! Not only it this wrong in every possible way, but it is extremely likely that you will get caught and your application simply eliminated from consideration.

- Spelling, punctuation, grammar, clarity, and neatness all matter; neglecting mechanics can sabotage an otherwise competent and compelling essay.

- Allow plenty of time to write your essay(s). Edit, re-edit and proofread again and again! If you wait until the last minute, it will show.