

Top 10 ways to annoy admissions counselors

Don't pester your dream school, give them what they want!



It can seem impossible to decode how colleges decide who gets in.

Ultimately, though, college admissions counselors are people. There are certain things that irritate them.

Here are the top 10 ways to annoy the admissions office. Consider this list a guide of what **NOT** to do when you apply to college.

Don't...

1. Send unexpected extras with your application

The admissions office at Carnegie Mellon University (www.cmu.edu) has received science projects from applicants who want to study physics. Prospective music majors have sent compositions they've written. That doesn't help admission counselors like Justin Mohny, assistant director of admissions at Carnegie Mellon who was a business administration major in college. If you want to add extra materials to your application, he advises to first ask if it's OK. Also, send a concise explanation in language accessible to someone who's not an expert.

2. Ask about majors that don't exist

"You can play soccer in college, but you can't major in it," says Jenny Peacock, director of admissions at William Peace University (www.peace.edu). You can't major in "CSI" either.

3. Put the name of another college in your essay

Mohny says, "There's nothing that feels worse as a reviewer than reading an essay and getting excited about an applicant, [then] getting to the last line of the essay and reading, 'That's why I've always wanted to go to one of your main competitors.'"

4. Be unaware of your GPA

Your grades and test scores are important when you're applying to college. Peacock says that when you talk to an admissions counselor, you should at least have a good idea of what they are.

5. Let your parents complete your application

Believe it or not, some parents fill out their kids' applications. Admissions officers often figure it out when the social security number on an application belongs to the applicant's mom.

6. Stop at a college fair information table without talking to the admissions officer

At a fair, you walk into a high school gym and see dozens of tables with information about different colleges. Behind each one will be an admissions representative who spent hours on a plane or in a rental car just to chat with students like you. But a lot of students walk up to a table, grab a brochure and walk away. Admissions officers call them "drive-bys." (Don't be one of them.)

7. Call or email everyone in the office

Admissions counselors like students who really want to go to their schools. But some are too eager. Jay Murray, director of admissions at Post University (www.post.edu), says some students (or their parents) will pose a question to one counselor, and if they don't like the answer, ask the same question to each other person in the office. If one counselor says your GPA is too low for you to get in, all the other counselors will say the same thing.

8. Call the admissions office every week

You've probably heard that colleges accept applicants who demonstrate interest in attending. But calling just for the sake of calling won't help. Follow the college on Twitter instead. "It's a quality thing, not a quantity thing," says Mohny.

9. Let your parents ask all the questions

Admissions counselors want to talk to students, not their parents. You're going to college. Not your mom and dad.

10. Talk to an admissions counselor before researching the college

Can you find the answer to your question by poking around the college's website for 10 minutes? Then don't email an admissions counselor. Murray says some students don't even peruse his school's majors before a campus tour. "They'll drive two hours for a visit and they'll ask if we have [a program that we don't offer]," he says.

So, here's what you should do:

It's not hard to be a likeable applicant. Send in your application by the deadline. Make it easy to read. Put your full name on each part of it — and add your ZIP code in case you're one of two Joshua Smiths to apply to Dream University.

Ask how you should send any extras. Maybe the office would prefer a CD to an email attachment. If you have a question, try to find the answer on your own. People at the admissions office have poured hours into building an informative website with almost everything you'd like to know. Look there before emailing an admissions counselor. "If you've read something and you don't understand it, we can talk you through it," Peacock says.

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