

Beginning the College Application Process: Reflection Activities

One of the most important things that an aspiring college student can do to begin the process of working on their applications is to do some reflection exercises. The reason for this is simple: many students apply for school without ever taking the time to think about who they are, what their goals are, what they believe college is for, and how college can help them achieve these goals. Performing a few small self-checks can make the tasks of filling out applications, writing essays, and choosing school much easier, but most importantly, these activities can offer some insight into why you may want to start your college journey in the first place.

1. The “You” Lists

One way to start thinking about what makes you tick is to generate some lists. Some of these lists can deal with “school” things, but you’d be surprised—often, you get ideas about yourself when you’re trying to think of something seemingly unrelated, like your favorite songs. Consider making lists of the following:

- a. Hobbies
- b. Clubs and Extracurriculars
- c. Favorites: places, foods, songs, shows, books
- d. Issues you care most about

2. The Solo School Day

Imagine that you walk into school, and it’s empty. You have to spend the day there. No one is there to bother you, but you have to **work** on something. It can be anything—not necessarily something for one of your classes. What do you spend your time doing? What do you **choose** to work on?

3. Why College?

Applying to college is hard. Attending college involves a lot of work. Paying for college is expensive. So before you jump in, reflect on why you want to do this in the first place.

- a. What are your major reasons for going to college?
- b. What do you hope to DO there?
- c. What major questions do you have about college, at the start of this process?

A few last tips:

- People think and reflect in all kinds of ways, at all times of the day or night. When you feel like you’ve had a good insight about yourself that may be helpful in figuring out the college process, write it down! Put it in your phone, jot it down on a piece of paper, anything.
- Many times, we get distracted by our day-to-day routines. Set aside some time that is just for you—no phones, no games, no other people. This could be as little as ten minutes, but make it a thoughtful ten minutes.
- Take a walk! For a lot of people, walking helps thinking, and it can free you up for some solo reflection.
- These are big questions, and it’s easy to let yourself get psyched out. Just remember—you **will** get through this, and the thought and work **will** pay off.