

**WHAT I KNOW NOW THAT I DIDN'T KNOW THEN:  
A PARENT/GR. 12 TEACHER PERSPECTIVE ON THE PROCESS OF WATCHING  
ONE'S KID APPLY FOR COLLEGE / UNIVERSITY  
by Kerry Henderson**

1. Applying to college / university is a course in itself. The time it takes for a kid to complete all aspects of an application for several schools can be measured in TENS of hours, and not single digits.
2. The process causes much stress for kids for any number of reasons: time crunch, fear of rejection, inability to plan ahead, indecision over area of interest, struggles to put into words past involvement / experiences / jobs
3. The counselor will tell you to use the pre-Gr. 12 summer to do some preliminary research. She is right. Put this on the family calendar as a to-do. It's hard for a kid to think ahead in the summer but some encouragement re: spending a few hours scanning due dates / essay topics / programs / scholarships is **INVALUABLE** for a bit of mental preparation before the onslaught of a difficult year begins in Sept.
4. Put application / scholarship deadlines on the family calendar. Many applications include supplementary material / references / resumes / mini essays and these **CANNOT** be prepared the night before a due date.
5. Assume that a school's online submission site will crash the night before the due date.
6. The school's guidance counselor has often seen and heard it all. Call / listen / ask. She knows. She's there to help.
7. Once you know a deadline, **encourage your kid to start a month early**. School office staff cannot turn around transcript requests / teacher references with a day's notice. Transcripts can take 1-4 days. Teacher references can take 1-3 weeks.
8. Ask your kid to put some serious thought into considering which colleges / universities will be right for her / family circumstances. It's expensive and time consuming to apply to universities that really aren't realistically on the "I intend to go there" list. There's 'hedging your bets', and then there's 'make work' projects.
9. University applications cost money to submit. Prices range from \$50 - \$100 typically. They add up. Be prepared.
10. University tours can be invaluable. Kids get a sense of the school and parents do too. If you're not interested in the tour as a parent, use the tour time to talk to the Admissions staff at the school while your kid goes on the tour (usually in the same building where the tour starts) to get a genuine sense of what's required for supplementary applications. It will help you guide your kid if she asks for help.
11. Back to summer pre-planning: encourage your kid to begin to think about her answers to the supplementary application's essay questions. It's hard to think of material for leadership / initiative / creativity / extra-curricular that doesn't blend together. Again, this material needs some pre-thinking time to keep it fresh and original.

12. Save, oh save, all material that is written for one application. While each school has different requirements and topics, there is a similar thread between them and some material can be reused. Of course, the original source material has to be original. *The Admissions people speak very forcefully against plagiarism*, of course. With advanced prep time, kids won't feel pressured to cheat.
13. THE NOTEBOOK! Students need a system. I recommend keeping usernames and passwords for each university in a notebook by your laptop so they don't get lost. For some reason, this commonsense organization solution is often ignored. Too old school? Some schools have 3-5 separate code numbers. It gets messy. Record and save. Save, save, save.
14. Application sites time out (but some don't warn you of this) just as your kid has put the finishing touches on an essay but has forgotten to save it. It's a learning experience. All is lost. Screaming is heard. Save, save, save.
15. ...but some sites won't let you save. In this case, all writing and advanced thinking goes on a Word document that you save and then cut and paste.
16. ...however, make sure your kid reads to the bottom of each application (like a recipe) so there are no surprises. In the case of one university, we finished an application after hours online only to read the fine print at the bottom, "and submit academic reference home phone numbers." The student hadn't received permission to use home phone numbers and didn't have them. We had to shut down the application and start again (thankfully, the work was saved elsewhere).
17. Decide if it is worth it to apply for certain scholarships. Many have very specific criteria. Read the small print. They are very time consuming. There's no point in applying for a scholarship that you don't qualify for...
18. Ah, time zone changes. Many application sites are not clear – directions contradict, addresses don't match, contact phone numbers no longer work. Remember time zone changes too. For a BC student to get an answer from an Eastern university, she needs to be on the phone between 6 and 8 am.
19. On the subject of reaching a genuine, live voice at an Admissions office: some never answer while others answer promptly. Call as soon as it opens for the best chance of a quick response to a simple question. Be profuse in your thanks when help offered.
20. You've heard this before, but look at the prerequisites for Gr. 12 courses during the Gr. 10 programming season. Plan two years in advance. There are always surprises when going through the university application process. Minimize the surprises ahead of time.
21. Brothers, sisters, and older friends are often great sources of advice about what works and doesn't work in the application process. Use them. Listen to them.

Patience. Encouragement. Excitement. Trepidation. Pride.  
May the process be smooth and rewarding for you!

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