

YOUR COLLEGE CONCIERGE PRESENTS



**THE ULTIMATE
COLLEGE APPLICATION**

Guide for high school students

WWW.YOURCOLLEGECONCIERGE.COM



YOUR COLLEGE CONCIERGE

WE help YOU help YOUR CHILD succeed.

www.YourCollegeConcierge.com

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*“ It doesn’t
matter where
you come from,
you make your
own success.”*

UNKNOWN

INTRODUCTION

MEET THE AUTHORS OF THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO COLLEGE APPLICATIONS, PETER AND JILL RATZAN. WITH EXPERIENCE AS A HIGH SCHOOL GUIDANCE COUNSELOR, COLLEGE PLANNING AND FINANCIAL AID CONSULTANTS, PARENTS AND ALSO COLLEGE STUDENTS THEMSELVES AT ONE POINT...THEY CAN GUIDE YOU TO SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATE THE COLLEGE UNIVERSE.

Meet Peter Ratzan

Peter has been helping students prepare for college for more than two decades, first as a high school social studies teacher then as a guidance counselor to 12th grade students in Miami, Florida, and finally as the CEO & Founder of Your College Concierge in 2007.

He has personally helped more than 1100 families (and counting) successfully navigate the college process (and stay sane in the process).

Meet Jill Ratzan

Jill spent 12 years with Discovery Channel, plucked straight from graduate school in 1995 to help build their college internship program. In 1997, Jill was transferred to Miami to launch and manage the people part of Discovery Latin America/U.S. Hispanic. Throughout her tenure with Discovery, she personally hired &/or trained more than 1,200 new employees on 3 different continents.

She joined Peter full-time in 2011 to head up the development of Your College Concierge, a digital learning platform to complement the private college guidance and funding services they offer.



“It’s not where you go to learn that’s important; it’s what you choose to do with what you learn after you are there.”

PETER & JILL RATZAN

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INTRODUCTION
ORIENTATION

Step 1

ORIENTATION

Congratulations, you're about to embark upon an exciting journey!

And although I know that it may seem otherwise right now, applying to college does not have to be a sanity-sucking, unmanageable or overwhelming process. Here are some guidelines that we ask you to follow that will help make your Admissions experience more productive, more enjoyable and more successful.

Our 3 Key Guiding Principles

1

THEY ARE CALLED “ADMISSIONS” OFFICERS -- NOT DENIAL OFFICERS.

It's easy to get swept up in the media hype and anxiety around "getting into your dream school" and forget that the admissions officers who will read your college application are real human beings that were in your shoes at one time. Be real with them and be engaging in your essay. Your chances of success are much higher than if you try to project an image of someone you are not.

2

SELF-WORTH SHOULD NEVER BE DEFINED BY THE COLLEGE YOU GO TO.

For parent and student alike, though it may seem crucial at the time, where you end up going to college is NOT a reflection of your abilities, intelligence or potential. Future employers will look to your character, commitment, integrity, experience and skills when aking a decision to hire you. While a particular school may help you make *connections* to a professional alumni, it won't get you a job.

3

YOUR NEIGHBOR IS NOT A COLLEGE EXPERT.

Nor is your aunt or your best friend's cousin. People who may offer you "college advice", unless they are a college planning professional or a guidance counselor, don't have the full understanding of the college admissions and college funding process. This is your family's journey and unique to you. What works for one student can be completely different for another.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Dear Student,

Your responsibility is to get engaged, ask for help, use the tools you have access to, do your best in school, reach out if you're overwhelmed or confused, keep a good attitude and respect the turnaround times of your guidance counselor and admissions officers.

Here's How You Can Take Action:

- 1 Determine the characteristics that you are looking for in a college
- 2 Research colleges that possess those characteristics
- 3 Communicate directly and meet with college representatives at schools of interest if possible
- 4 Register accounts for online applications (Common App, Coalition, or school-specific)
- 5 Be familiar with college deadlines
- 6 Register for the SAT or ACT
- 7 Send test scores to colleges in advance of the deadlines, recognizing the lead time it takes for scores to arrive
- 8 Request transcript requests from your guidance office at school
- 9 Complete SSAR (Student Self-Reported Academic Record) in advance of deadline (if applicable)
- 10 Complete all college applications on time
- 11 Complete class assignments and homework on time
- 12 Request teacher recommendations during spring of 11th grade, or by September 1 of 12th grade
- 13 Complete any state financial aid or grant applications, if applicable
- 14 Prepare resume and share resume with a teacher or mentor for review
- 15 Show up for scheduled classes

ADMISSION CRITERIA

- 1 **Academic Record/Grades** (HS transcript)
- 2 **Courses Selected** relative to the course program strength (determined by your high school's profile)
- 3 **Test Scores** (SAT, ACT, subject tests)
- 4 **Letters of Recommendation** (counselor, core subject teachers, other)
- 5 **Extra-curricular Activities & Awards:** work experience, community service, clubs, honors (shown on your application resume)
- 6 **Special Skills & Talent:** fine art, performing arts, music, athletics (portfolio, sizzle reel, audition)
- 7 **Experience(s):** work, community service, enhanced learning/hobbies (shown on your application resume)
- 8 **Essay(s):** Common Application, supplements
- 9 **Interview:** on campus, alumni, school
- 10 **Demonstrated Interest:** college fair, campus visit, email, social media

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

It's not just a form.

- 1 Application Form(s)/Fee(s):** The Common Application, Application(s) for Colleges/Universities not using Common Application
- 2 Transcript(s):** You will report your grades on The Common App, but you must also have an OFFICIAL transcript sent to each college by your Guidance Department. NOTE: Some schools are now requiring that you complete and send a Self-Reported transcript in lieu of an official transcript
- 3 Secondary School Report** (The Common Application)/Guidance Counselor Form(s)
- 4 TWO teacher letters of recommendation** (if required): preferably at least one from a core subject matter teacher (English, Foreign Language, Science, Math, Social Science)
- 5 Test Scores (if required):** Scores are self-reported on Common Application*, but all scores must be sent by College Board or ACT to be considered OFFICIAL and YOU are responsible for contacting the College Board and/or ACT and making that request
- 6 Essay(s), Short Answer Questions:** Common Application, supplements, individual college requirements (NOTE: when it comes to essay(s), "optional" basically means mandatory)
- 7 Activities List** (Application Resume)
- 8 Other Admissions Requirements:** if required, a Mid-Year Report Form, Financial Aid and Scholarship Applications (some require additional essays)



GETTING
STARTED

Step 2

RESUME CHEAT SHEET

Creating your Application Resume is easy and fun, not to mention important. You'll need one to complete your application forms, request your teacher recommendations and to ace your interviews. Your Application Resume is a written document that summarizes what you've accomplished.

Your Application Resume Should Include:

- ~ Honors and Awards: academic and other (e.g., for special talent, leadership, service)
- ~ Leadership Positions Held
- ~ Extra-curricular Activities and Club involvement
- ~ Community Service Activities
- ~ Work Experience (Paid/Unpaid Employment and Internships)
- ~ Additional Educational Experiences and/or Programs
- ~ Hobbies and Interests
- ~ College and Career Goals

Tips:

- ~ Start by making a list of your work experiences, activities, accomplishments and special skills
- ~ Then, list your activities by grade and order of importance
- ~ Be sure to describe your role(s) and responsibilities
- ~ Don't forget to highlight special accomplishments and leadership positions
- ~ Be Authentic;, consistent and contextually relevant (an Admissions Officer can spot a 'padded' resume from a million miles away)



Sample Admissions Resume

Taylor A Student 1000 Main Street
Anywhere, FL 99999
(999) 999-9999

Academic Honors and Awards

- Academic Honor Roll - all semesters
- National Honor Society - 2005
- scholar Athlete Award - all semesters - Volleyball
- Golden State Exam Honors and Recognition - Biology

Other Awards and Distinctions

- Junior Olympics: Silver Medalists 2003
- Youth National Volleyball Team: 2003-4

High School Leadership Activities

- Varsity Letter: Volleyball 2002-2005
- Team Captain: Volleyball - 2005
- Producer and Director: Coopersville High School morning news
- Leader: Link Crew 2004-2005 - Selected by Administration for mentor program.
- Educational Advisor Team: Nominated by principal to select and Interview advisors 2003
- Chairperson: Spring Canned Foods Drive 2004
- Active Member: Chess Club 2002-2005, World Wildlife Club 2003-2005
- Founder: Teens Against Tobacco and Drug Use 2002





Community Service and Leadership

- President: Light of Life Philanthropic Organization 2003-4
- Volunteer: Coast Animal Hospital: 2003 (32 hours)
- Volunteer: Help for Children'- activities for terminally ill, underprivileged area children. 1994 -present
- Volunteer: Teens Against Tobacco and Drug Use (30 hours) 2002-2004
- Certified Junior Lifeguard: Anywhere Beach, 2002-4
- Coach: Summer Volleyball Camp 2003-4
- Church: Confirmed, active member of ABC Church Youth Program 1998-2004

Summer Programs and Internships

- Academic Journalism Workshop at Boston University
- PADI Scuba Diving Certifications: Summer 2003

Paid Employment Experience

- Camp counselor: Explorers Beach Camp, Anywhere, FL Summer 2003
- Website Administrator: www.sombusiness.com. 2003-2004

College and Career Goals

I have a passion for writing which has resulted in my interest in journalism and communication as possible majors. I hope to pursue a career in broadcasting, and am interested in politics and debate as well. My non-career mission is to work with animals and to donate time and money to the prevention of animal extinction.



TEACHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Many selective colleges require and rely on teacher recommendations to help Admissions Officers learn more about your work habits, academic passion, participation and potential to enrich their campus.

Who Should You Ask For a Recommendation?

- ~ Someone who knows you well (and likes you)
- ~ At least one 11th grade teacher from a core subject (English, Foreign Language, Math, Lab Science, Social Science)

When Should You Ask?

- ~ As soon as possible - by end of September at the latest (end of 11th grade or the summer before 12th grade is even better)
- ~ Allow MINIMUM two weeks for them to complete

How Should You Ask?

- ~ Preferably in person first, then invite/assign them to your application online, if using Common App)
- ~ Check with your Guidance Department to clarify and follow school procedures
- ~ Check with colleges on your list to confirm their requirements

Tips

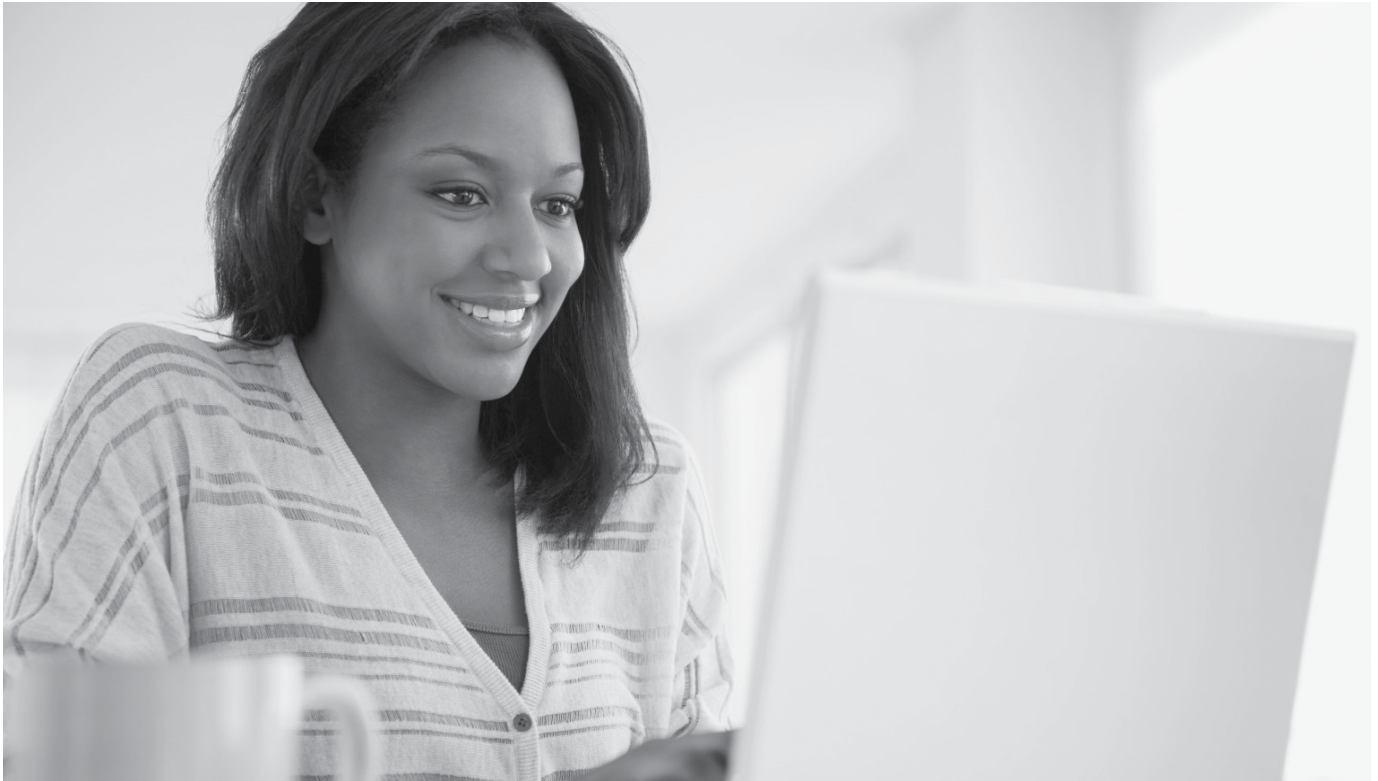
- ~ Do your Application Resume first & provide it to the teacher when s/he agrees to write your recommendation
- ~ Provide pre-addressed, stamped envelopes for all colleges that don't accept soft copies (Common App schools have an online process)
- ~ Go the extra mile and make it personal and SUPER easy for your teachers to get this done (gift card for a coffee, hand-written thank you note w a gift card for a coffee)



**THE APPLICATION
ESSAY**

Step 3

ESSAY MINDSET & APPROACH



**“WORDS ARE THE MOST POWERFUL DRUG USED BY MANKIND.” -
RUDYARD KIPLING**

THE ESSAY IS YOUR CHANCE TO SEPARATE YOURSELF FROM THE HERD.

A great essay can easily turn a “maybe” into a “yes”. Use your essay to showcase your personality, your character and your humanity.

Before you even analyze the prompt(s), you might want to first take some time to take stock of yourself and consider who you really are, what made you that way and what you want to say.

BRAINSTORMING

This brief questionnaire will help you in 2 ways to prepare for writing your college application essay:

1. It will help **clarify** your interests, background, goals and direction.
2. It gives you a chance to **express** your interests, background, goals and direction.

Answer the Following With the First Thing That Comes To Mind:

1. List 2 items in your room you are proud of:
2. List 2 words your friends would use to describe you:
3. List 2 favorite songs:
4. List 2 favorite movies:
5. List 2 favorite subjects in school:
6. List 2 things you enjoy doing outside of school:
7. List 2 favorite foods:
8. List 2 places you would like to visit:
9. List 2 favorite authors:
10. List 2 causes that matter to you:

Now What?

With this list of items unique to you, you have a springboard of potential topics you can use for your college application essay. The next step is to review the essay prompts and choose which one you'll use for your application essay. You can view the general [essay prompts for colleges in Coalition for Access, Affordability and Success](#) and [the prompts for the Common Application](#) on both organization's websites (they update each year).



Get Feedback

It's extremely hard to critique your own work effectively. You can look at your essay over and over again, trying to figure out if you wrote about the right topic, if your tone is appropriate, if it's compelling or average, if your grammar is correct...and so on.

Give yourself a break and have someone **who's qualified** review it for you.

This doesn't mean to simply have your parents or best friend read it. In most cases, their opinion may be biased or they may not have a background in English writing skills.

Ask a teacher, guidance counselor or tutor to look it over. Allow enough time for them to fit it into their schedule.

GETTING STARTED

"You write your first draft with your heart, and you re-write it with your head. The first key to writing is to write, not to think."

- William Forrester in *Finding Forrester*

- Free write. Set a timer for 15 minutes and write down everything you can think of that has 1) pissed you off; 2) changed you for the better 3) inspired you
- Pretend that you are writing a letter to an acquaintance that you want turn into your closest friend.
- Write the way you speak. Avoid getting too formal or trying to impress with fancy vocabulary.
- Keep a notebook by your bed... something may pop into your mind as you fall asleep or wake.
- Ultimately, the essay is about YOU. It's not about your grandfather, or the orphanage in Haiti, or the lacrosse team, or the national math competition...it's about YOU.
- Admissions officers are reading to learn about you---not so much what you've done as much as learning WHY you do what you do.



**SUBMITTING YOUR
APPLICATION**

Step 4

AVOID THESE LANDMINES



Relying on the self-reported transcript

As you would imagine, with a self-reported transcript, it may be tempting to not be *entirely* accurate.



Skimming the writing requirements

Misunderstanding, misreading or overlooking a requirement could cost you admission due to demonstrating your lack of attention to detail.



Not reporting disciplinary issues or fabricating the truth

Discuss any disciplinary issues with your guidance department prior to submitting applications. Avoid the temptation to exaggerate accomplishments or make things up.



Waiting too long to request necessary documents and not following up

You need to allow a MINIMUM of 2 weeks for teachers and MINIMUM 4 weeks for guidance counselors since many other students are requesting the same thing. Follow up if you don't hear from them after the 2-4 week period, and be sure to send a "thank you" note for any recommendations.



Senioritis

We know, we know...you're SO close. But hang in there.



Ignoring your email

CHECK your email. While you may use texts and apps to communicate with friends and family, with schools and professionals email is still king.



Not communicating with your parents or guidance counselor

They can help you get questions answered or contact someone who can, but they can't do it if they have no idea what you need.



Letting your parents do stuff for you

Don't let your parents call the admissions office for you, write your essay or fill out your application. Admissions officers WILL notice this and it can compromise your acceptance.

SUBMITTING THE APPLICATION



The next step is creating your online account and following the steps to fill out the application.

GO TO COMMONAPP.ORG OR THE COLLEGE WEBSITE

When you have the [necessary documents](#) and are ready to submit your application, go to [CommonApp.org](https://www.commonapp.org) and search for the college you are applying to. Nearly 700 colleges use the CommonApp.org website for students to submit applications. If you are applying to multiple schools, you may be able to submit to most or all of the schools here. If you do not see the college of your choice listed, go to the college's website and follow the directions for applying.



THE APPLICATION
CHECKLIST

Step 5

THE APPLICATION CHECKLIST


Ready to send it in?

NAME OF COLLEGE _____

Application Deadline _____ Username _____ Password _____

Have you included... **Date Started or Requested / Date Completed**

- ✓ Guidance Counselor Letter/Secondary School Report? _____
- ✓ Transcript? _____
- ✓ Recommendation Letter (name _____)? _____
- ✓ Recommendation Letter (name _____)? _____
- ✓ Recommendation Letter (name _____)? _____
- ✓ Essay 1? _____
- ✓ Essay 2? _____
- ✓ Essay 3? _____
- ✓ ACT Score? _____
- ✓ SAT Score? _____
- ✓ Completed Application? _____
- ✓ Supplement? _____
- ✓ Application Fee? _____
- ✓ Financial Aid Forms?
 - FAFSA _____
 - CSS Profile _____
 - Supplemental _____
- ✓ Mid-Year Report? _____
- ✓ CONFIRMED RECEIPT? _____



YOU ARE ON YOUR WAY

Congratulations...and good luck!

For personalized support with the college planning and financial aid process, visit www.YourCollegeConcierge.com to review our online programs as well as our consulting packages.