Application Dos and Don'ts:

Filling out college applications can be daunting, no doubt about it. But aid and comfort is on the way! These timely tips will help you do an outstanding job on your applications.

Do read directions. Pay attention to the specific directions for each application. For example, essays and short answer questions usually ask you to write a certain number of words.

Don't rush or work on automatic pilot. Rushing through your applications can cause you to miss key sections and leave in typos and misspellings. If you are filling out a paper application, fill out a practice copy first. If you are completing an online application, write your essay and short answers in separate documents that you can proof and spell check. Then cut and paste them into the application.

Do pay attention to deadlines. A college usually won't accept a late application. Different parts of an application may have different deadlines. If you are mailing an application, allow a realistic amount of delivery time and arrange for proof of delivery.

Don't procrastinate. There are probably plenty of things that you would rather be doing than filling out college applications, but putting them off to the last minute is a recipe for disaster. Give yourself plenty of time to work on your essay. Give your teachers at least a month to complete your letters of recommendation. Make sure you will have taken all required tests in time. Remember the tortoise? Slow and steady wins the race.

Do pay attention to grammar and spelling. You may be a fine college candidate, but admission counselors won't get past your poor writing. Keep your language simple and to the point. On top of that, neatness and correct writing really make a difference in how your application is perceived. Double-check your grammar, spelling and punctuation. Ask a parent or teacher to proof your application. If you have less than legible handwriting, and are submitting on paper, find a typewriter.

Don't let Mom or Dad fill out your application. They are not going to be around to hold your hand once you are in college. This is your job. Plus, admission officers are skilled at detecting a parent's hand in an application.

Do get organized. Staying organized is the easiest way of staying on top of your applications. Keep each application in a separate folder, make a calendar of all your deadlines, and give yourself your own deadlines so you won't put things off.

Don't make an extracurricular laundry list. Many students think a long list of activities will impress the admissions officer. But it is much more impressive to highlight those activities that got most of your attention. You want to show your commitment and leadership. Even a part-time job that you have held down over a period of time can show off these qualities.

Do use a respectable e-mail address. Most colleges ask you for an e-mail address so they can notify you of your application status. It's smart to create a separate account for your application correspondence. Set an account you can check from anywhere. This is not the time to use an address that is sarcastic or offensive. Choose a simple and adult-friendly username.

Don't take shortcuts on your essay. As tempting as it might be, don't "borrow" your essay from the Internet or a friend. Don't let someone else write or rewrite it. Don't write a generic essay that you use for your apps. Write an essay no one else could have written. Your essay should address the topic, make you stand out as a unique person, and explain why you want to attend that college. Take time to make it as polished, correct and compelling as possible. Admission officers do read essays closely and can tell when you put in a genuine effort.

Do keep all correspondence. Keep and date all information that you and a college have exchanged. Keep letters, print e-mail messages, and make notes of phone calls. Note the date and time received. Make a folder for each college in which to keep these records. Colleges receive an enormous number of applications, which can lead to a few mistakes. You may need to prove that you sent or received a document by a certain date.

Don't forget other application pieces. If you are applying online, it's easy to think your done when you click the submit mutton. Be sure to finish all the steps, such as arranging for teacher recommendations and completing supplements and financial aid documents.

Do clean up any social networking spaces. If you think the admissions officer will never look at your My Space or Facebook profile, you may be right. But you may be wrong. Don't take the risk.

Don't forget to breathe. Don't panic when you can't figure out an application question or don't know how to supply requested information. When you are stressed out you are more likely to make mistakes. Calm down, ask for help, or come back to the tough questions later. Both your peace of mind and your admission chances are bound to improve.