

Student Starter Kit

A clear, honest guide to college admissions — without stress, panic, or pretending

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Welcome to your college admissions journey. What you're about to begin is one of the most self-revealing experiences of your academic life — not because it requires perfection, but because it asks you to think seriously about who you are, what you value, and where you want to go. That's actually a gift, even if it doesn't always feel that way.

This kit is your starting point. It's not a checklist of achievements to manufacture. It's a framework for thinking clearly, writing honestly, and making good decisions — with Dr. Hurwitz guiding you every step of the way.

"Admissions officers aren't looking for impressive students. They're looking for genuine ones — students who think, reflect, and show up as themselves."

What This Process Is Actually About

College admissions is fundamentally a communication challenge. You have a story — one made up of experiences, relationships, curiosities, and growth moments that belong entirely to you. The application is your opportunity to share that story with people who genuinely want to understand who you are.

Here's what admissions officers are actually looking for:

Thoughtfulness. Can you reflect on your experiences in ways that reveal genuine insight? Do you understand why things affected you the way they did?

Self-awareness. Do you know your strengths, your growth areas, and your values — without being told what to say?

Voice. Do you communicate in a way that sounds like a real person — not a robot, not a résumé, and not what you think they want to hear?

Fit. Will you contribute something meaningful to their campus community — intellectually, socially, culturally, or creatively?

Readiness. Are you prepared to do the work, handle independence, and engage seriously with your education?

The Most Important Thing to Understand

You are not being evaluated on being extraordinary. You are being evaluated on being thoughtful, self-aware, and honest. Every student has a real voice and real insights — the work we do together is about drawing those out and helping you express them clearly.

How We Work Together

Working with Dr. Hurwitz is different from working with a tutor or a test prep service. It's collaborative, structured, and deeply personalized. Here's what you can expect:

1

One-on-One Coaching Sessions

Every session is a conversation — about your life, your thinking, and your writing. We discuss meaningful experiences, explore what they reveal about you, and shape them into a compelling narrative. No generic advice. No cookie-cutter prompts.

2

A Clear Writing Process

The essay doesn't emerge from nowhere. We work through a structured sequence: reflection, theme discovery, outlining, drafting, revision, and final polish. Each session ends with a specific assignment so you always know what comes next.

3

A Realistic Timeline

We build a schedule that fits your life — school, activities, testing, and everything else. Nothing stalls, nothing snowballs. The process moves forward consistently so you arrive at deadlines with work done, not panic.

4

Clear, Actionable Feedback

You'll never leave a session wondering what to do. Every piece of feedback is concrete, specific, and tied to your next step. We don't say 'make it better.' We say 'here's what's working, here's what's not, and here's how to fix it.'

5

A Calm, Organized Space

College admissions is inherently stressful — but our sessions don't have to be. We focus on what matters, set aside what doesn't, and keep the process manageable without minimizing its importance.

The Writing Process — A Deep Dive

Writing a college essay is not like writing a class assignment. It's a specific genre with specific demands — and most students have never been taught how to do it. Here's a detailed look at how the process actually unfolds.

1

Reflect

Before you write a single word, you need raw material. This means thinking carefully about your life — not just your accomplishments, but your moments: the conversation that changed your mind, the failure that taught you something, the small habit that reveals something large about how you think.

- Revisit experiences from the past three to four years that felt meaningful — even if you can't explain why yet.
- Notice what stays with you: recurring questions, persistent feelings, moments you return to.
- Don't screen for 'impressive.' Screen for true.

2

Discover

Reflection gives you material. Discovery gives you meaning. This step is about asking: What do these experiences actually say about me? What insight have I gained? Why does this particular thing matter to me more than something else?

- The difference between a mediocre essay and a great one is almost always at this step.
- A great essay doesn't just describe what happened — it explains what it meant.
- Ask yourself: If I cut out all the events and kept only the insights, is there still something worth reading?

3

Write

The first draft exists for one purpose: to get the thinking on paper. It doesn't need to be good — it needs to exist. Most students overthink the first draft and never start. The antidote is to write badly on purpose and fix it later.

- Start with an outline that maps your structure: opening moment, development, insight, forward-looking close.
- Write through the draft without stopping to edit. Editing while writing kills momentum.
- Aim for something honest and specific — even if the prose is rough.

4

Revise

Revision is where the real essay is built. It's not about fixing typos — it's about deepening meaning, sharpening focus, and cutting anything that doesn't serve the story you're trying to tell.

- Does the opening pull you in immediately — or does it take half a page to get going?
- Is the insight clearly stated, or does the reader have to guess what you learned?
- Is every sentence earning its place — or are some just taking up space?
- Does the ending leave the reader with a clear sense of who you are and where you're headed?

5

Clarify

The final stage is about refinement: making sure the language sounds like you, the flow feels natural, and the message is impossible to miss. This is not the time for major restructuring — it's the time for polish.

- Read it aloud. If you stumble, the sentence needs to be rewritten.
- Ask: Does every word earn its place? Cut aggressively.
- Have someone who doesn't know your story read it and tell you what they learned about you. If it surprises them, you're on the right track.

Understanding the Personal Statement

The personal statement is the centerpiece of your application — 650 words to answer one fundamental question: *Why will you be a valuable member of their campus community?* Not 'what are your achievements?' Not 'how hard do you work?' But: who are you, and what will you bring?

What Makes a Strong Personal Statement

Tells a story of growth. Something changed — your thinking, your behavior, your understanding of yourself or the world. The essay tracks that arc.

Shows perspective or empathy. You see things from angles others might miss. You consider other people's experiences alongside your own.

Reflects honestly on experience. You don't perform feelings. You don't dramatize for effect. You tell the truth about what happened and what it meant.

Focuses on insight, not event. What happened matters less than what you understood because of it. The insight is the essay.

Sounds like you. It doesn't sound like a brochure, a LinkedIn profile, or a list of accomplishments. It sounds like a thoughtful person having an honest conversation.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Writing about your accomplishments instead of your growth or insight.
- Using the essay to explain a weakness or low grade — that's what additional information sections are for.
- Starting with a quote. It signals that you haven't found your own voice yet.
- Trying to impress instead of connect. The former pushes readers away; the latter pulls them in.
- Repeating your résumé in prose form. The essay should add new information, not restate what's already listed.
- Being vague. Specificity is what makes an essay vivid and believable.

Essay Structure Options

There's no single right structure for a personal statement. Here are three proven frameworks — choose the one that fits the story you're trying to tell.

A	Past → Change → Now
	<i>Best for a pivotal moment that transformed you.</i>
	Open directly in the moment — in scene, with specific details. Show who you were before. Trace the change. Close with who you are now and what you carry forward. This structure works because it has a clear arc and a clear insight.
B	The Lens
	<i>Best for showing who you are through one recurring thing — an activity, habit, object, or responsibility.</i>
	Introduce the thing (an instrument, a job, a kitchen, a ritual). Explain why it matters. Share a specific moment that crystallizes its meaning. Reveal what it has taught you about yourself. This structure works because it's concrete and specific — readers can see what you're describing.
C	Question → Exploration → Growth
	<i>Best for students who are intellectually curious and think in frameworks.</i>
	Open with a question you've genuinely wrestled with. Explore it from multiple angles — not to show off, but to reveal how you think. Share the insight that clarified your thinking. Explain how that insight now shapes your behavior or worldview. This structure works because it demonstrates intellectual depth without requiring a dramatic life event.

College Admissions FAQs

These are the questions Dr. Hurwitz hears most often — and honest answers to each.

When should I start thinking about college?

Sophomore or early junior year is ideal. Starting early doesn't mean stressing early — it means you have time to be strategic, avoid panic, and make better decisions. Students who start late often sacrifice quality because they're racing against deadlines instead of refining their work.

Do I need to know my major?

No — and this is more common than you think. Many students apply undecided or change majors within the first year. Colleges value intellectual curiosity and genuine engagement far more than a fixed plan. If you have genuine interests, talk about those. Don't invent a major for the sake of 'focus.'

Do colleges actually read essays?

Yes, and they matter more than most students realize. At highly selective schools, the essay is often the primary differentiator between applicants with similar grades and test scores. An honest, specific, well-written essay can change outcomes. A generic or performative one can sink an otherwise strong application.

Do I have to write about something traumatic?

Absolutely not. You are never required to share pain, hardship, or difficulty. The most powerful essays are often about ordinary things — a family dinner, a piece of music, a habit, a failed project — that reveal something extraordinary about how you think. Growth, curiosity, and insight matter far more than suffering.

What if my grades aren't perfect?

Colleges evaluate applications holistically — trends, effort, context, and trajectory all matter. A student who struggled early and improved significantly is often more compelling than one who cruised through without effort. The essay and the additional information section are your opportunity to provide context. Strong writing can meaningfully shift how an uneven transcript is interpreted.

What if I don't get into my first-choice school?

Many — perhaps most — genuinely successful people didn't get into their first-choice school. What matters is your experience in college, not the name on the diploma. A student who is engaged, curious, and active at any school will outperform a disengaged student at a 'better' one. The goal is fit, not prestige.

How many schools should I apply to?

Most students apply to somewhere between eight and fourteen schools — a mix of reaches, targets, and likelies. More isn't always better: every application requires a real supplemental essay, and a thoughtful application to twelve schools beats a rushed one to twenty. Quality over quantity, always.

Myth vs. Reality

College admissions is surrounded by mythology — stories that cause unnecessary panic and bad decisions. Here's the truth.

MYTH	Only perfect students get into top colleges.
REALITY	Colleges value growth, character, and fit. A complete, authentic, well-written application from a student with a 3.7 GPA often outperforms a sterile, generic one from a student with a 4.0.
MYTH	You need an extraordinary or traumatic story.
REALITY	Reflection and thoughtfulness are more important than drama. Everyday moments become powerful essays all the time — the key is depth of insight, not intensity of experience.
MYTH	Everyone else has it all figured out.
REALITY	Nearly every student feels uncertain, underprepared, and behind. The ones who do well are simply the ones who keep moving forward — with or without certainty.
MYTH	One mistake, gap, or weakness will ruin your chances.
REALITY	Admissions are holistic. The whole application matters — one low grade, one difficult semester, or one missed opportunity does not define you. Context and trajectory matter.
MYTH	The most selective school is always the best choice.
REALITY	The best school is the one where you will thrive — where the academic support, campus culture, social environment, and opportunities align with who you are and what you need. Prestige is a factor, but it is not the only one.

College admissions isn't about being perfect. It's about showing who you are, how you think, and how you're ready to grow. With preparation, honesty, and support, this process can feel manageable — and even empowering.