

Online application dos and don'ts

Do create user names, PIN numbers and passwords that you'll remember easily. Write them down and keep them in a safe place.

Don't treat an online application casually — it's an important document that reflects on you. So never use abbreviations as if you were text messaging.

Don't be too quick to click. Take your time, follow all directions and complete each step with care. Scroll each page from top to bottom and read every pop-up to be sure you don't miss any information.

Don't forget to periodically save your work. You might get "timed out" if you don't enter anything for a while (usually 30 minutes). If you need to take a break, use the save/log-out feature to store your application, then log back in.

Don't compose your essay or personal statement in the space allotted online. Draft (and redraft) these separately in a word-processing application, such as Microsoft Word, then copy and paste the final draft into the online application.

Do print and save a hard copy of the completed application. Proofread it before you hit the "send" button — sometimes your information in text boxes can get cut off.

Do ask someone else to review the application for errors before you send it. Two sets of eyes are always better than one.

Do print and save a copy of the confirmation page that should appear after you submit the application, so that you'll have a record of your application ID number.

Do tell your school counselor about every online application you submit. Better yet, give your counselor a hard copy printout. This is critical because your application won't be complete until your counselor forwards your transcript and any other material the college may require.

Don't apply online and then send a paper copy in the mail. That will just confuse things.

Do call or email the college if you haven't received an email confirmation of receipt within 48 hours. Online submissions do get lost occasionally (that's why it's so important to print and save).

Don't apply online the week before the application deadline. Because of high volume, application websites tend to get slow and cranky at this time. It's also the most likely time for a system failure. If you're up against the deadline, it's safer to apply through the mail.

Source: Get It Together for College, 2nd ed. *The College Board*, 2011

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