

Top Ten Rules for Choosing a College or University

1. Never make your final college selection without **visiting at least your top two or three choices**. No matter how well you think you know a college, you can learn a lot (good and bad) by spending a few hours on campus, including whether or not the college feels like a good “fit” for you. **Having family member accompany you on college visits** is a great idea because it gives you extra eyes and ears and people with whom you can discuss your impressions.
2. There are NO exceptions to rule #1.
3. A college is not necessarily right for you because its name is familiar. That might seem pretty obvious, but you wouldn’t believe how many students equate educational quality with name recognition.
4. **Investigate at least three or four colleges you know little to nothing about**, but that offer the field(s) of study that interest you, are appropriately selective for a student with your grades and SAT/ACT scores, and are located in geographic areas that are attractive to you. You have nothing to lose and you might make a great discovery. A little research and an open mind can greatly increase the odds of making a good college choice.
5. **There are few worse reasons to select a college than because your friends are going there. Choosing a college because a boyfriend or girlfriend is going there is one of them. If there is a worse reason to choose a college, it escapes us.**
6. Investigate, investigate, investigate and be sure to separate reality from (often baseless) opinions. Lots of folks will refer to a college as “good” or “hard to get into” or a “party school” or “too expensive”, without really knowing the school. Don’t accept these kind of generalizations without your own evidence.
7. Do not rule out a college because of cost. Many colleges offer scholarships, financial aid, and tuition installment plans that make them far more affordable than they may first appear. You can’t/won’t know how much it will cost to attend a college until the very end of the process.
8. Deadlines, whether for college applications, SAT or ACT registration, financial aid, scholarships, campus housing, etc. are not suggestions! Miss a deadline and you find yourself in deep you-know-what. **Write them down on a calendar and adhere strictly to deadlines.**
9. Don’t be afraid to apply to a few “reach” schools. You might be pleasantly surprised by the results if you are not entirely unrealistic. Then, apply to at least three colleges which are highly likely to admit you. Remember, choose at least two “safety” colleges – colleges to which you are virtually certain you will be admitted. However, choosing “safety” schools you don’t really like is a mistake many students make. If you take the time to choose safety schools you would be happy to attend, you will eliminate all the anxiety that some students experience in the admissions process.
10. When it is time to make your final choice, discuss your options with your family, school counselor and other people who know you well and whose judgment you value. **If you have a tough time choosing between two or more colleges, it is probably because you’ve done a good job putting together your list and you will be happy at whichever option you select.** Once you make the choice, don’t agonize over it. If you have followed these rules and have taken the most active and central role in your search process, there is an excellent chance that your final choice will be a great choice.