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## The Waiting Game in College Admissions

By Elizabeth A. LaScala, Ph.D.

So you've completed the college essays, ordered your transcripts, and pushed the submit button on your last college application. Now what should you do while you wait for responses? First and foremost, continue to be actively engaged in doing your best academic work. This is critical because colleges review final transcripts to be certain no courses were dropped and grades did not plummet. If something does change, be proactive and communicate directly to the schools with an explanation. This way you may be able to avoid a very unpleasant surprise, like a rescinded admissions decision later in the spring.

This is also a good time to visit schools you were not able to go to see yet. Don't wait for the acceptance letter to visit campuses. The decision deadline, May 1st, arrives soon after acceptance letters-so be prepared. If academic or financial concerns make visiting a campus impossible, continue to familiarize yourself with colleges in other ways. Read blogs, examine course catalogues, review housing considerations, email faculty, students and undergraduate admission counselors in order to make comparisons that will help you make an informed decision. Colleges expect and encourage applicants to research options carefully.

Do I Need to Choose a Major to Choose a College?

As you wait for responses, it is important to remember that you do not need to declare a major to select a college. If you have applied to schools that are good fits and have programs that meet your interests and needs, you should not have the added pressure to choose a major. In a recent report by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, employers who were surveyed identified teamwork, critical thinking and reasoning, and oral and written communication skills as the top competencies they search for in new hires. Rather than focus on a particular major, employers identified five areas to acquire proficiency:

- Learning to think critically and creatively
- Problem solving
- Developing the ability to speak comfortably to different audiences in different settings
- Thinking about educational aspirations from a global community perspective
- Writing well in every discipline

College advisors are ahead of the curve when they encourage students to apply to institutions where these valuable skills are emphasized during all four undergraduate years.

### Writing Well Should Be at the Top of Your List

If I were to prioritize the above skills I would start with writing well in every discipline. Good writing requires critical thinking and creativity. When you write, you also practice problem solving, for example when you determine how best to tackle an essay or research paper. Someone who may never be a great speaker can still greatly influence others by writing. Moreover, good writing transfers easily to effective oral presentations. Finally, written words can be translated into any language, so communication, like mathematics, is a universal language.

In my practice I help students improve their writing. Waiting until the college essay needs to be written may be waiting too long. When you write better, grades improve, test scores rise and you turn out better-quality college application essays.

It is important to bear in mind that writing is not an end in itself, but a process that helps you develop your ideas and think creatively, critically and logically. Here are some tips:

1. Start with an outline. You've heard it a thousand times, but here it is again. An outline helps you to stay on course, identify main points, and make a strong conclusion.

2. Write more than one draft. As you write you may discover that one of your last paragraphs is your best or that you've changed your point of view. That means writing helped you think through your thoughts and refine them. This is part of effective writing! Take the time to rewrite your outline and get yourself on track with your new focus.

3. Keep your audience and assignment in mind. For example, avoid book report summaries, when your teacher asks for an analysis. Remember your teacher has read the book!

4. Proofread. Take a break, and return to your work with fresh eyes. Make sure your writing is clear, well supported and makes sense when you read it aloud.

Writing takes time and practice. Allow sufficient time to show your draft to others, like a trusted peer who understands the assignment. Perhaps your teacher is willing to look over your draft. A new perspective can help you polish your writing. A final word: what you read influences how you write. Your reading material becomes a teacher. Keep this in mind when you choose between a popular book you can breeze through and a more challenging novel.



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