

COLLEGE BOUND: CHECK THIS LIST BEFORE YOU HIT SEND

A former reader for Princeton admissions suggests reviewing your application one last time.

By **PAT BERRY** *For Montclair Local* September 22, 2019

It's not every day you get an inside view of what matters to people who are making decisions about your future, especially when those people work in college admissions. As a reader in Princeton University's admissions office for several years, Kate Sonnenberg was on the receiving end of college applications. Now an independent college consultant for Montclair-based [KS College Success](#), Kate recently shared with me her top tips for hitting SEND with confidence.

1. **Be crystal clear with dates.** Whether explaining summer jobs or extracurricular activities, make sure the reader can easily understand when you did what. You don't want an admissions officer to have to waste valuable time cross-referencing different sections of your application for clarity.
2. **Don't embellish.** Except in the case of, say, a serious athlete or pre-professional musician or dancer, 20 to 25 hours per week spent on an extracurricular activity is usually a red flag.
3. **Consider mentioning important activities in more than one section of your application.** For example, summer study abroad should be on a list in both the Activities section of the Common Application and in any Summer Activities questions posed by specific colleges. If an activity comes up more than once, it comes across not as redundant but as something you feel passionate about.
4. **List activities on the Common App in detail and in order of importance to you, regardless of whether they are chronological.** Be specific about leadership positions in clubs and on teams, including dates for when you held them. For instance, if you captain the soccer team and you write about soccer elsewhere in the application, mention your captaincy in both places.
5. **List all of the awards or recognitions you have received.** A prize that doesn't strike you as important may in fact be quite meaningful to the college.
6. **Make sure that information on your resume (if you submit one) is consistent with the information you enter in the Activities section of the application.** And make every effort to keep your resume to a single page.
7. **Do not use the "Additional Information" section of the application to write a second Common App essay.**
8. **Proofread every essay carefully.** This goes without saying, but one pitfall that often catches students is mentioning the wrong college. "Recycling" supplement essays is common practice, but make sure you don't tell Wesleyan why Duke is your first choice. The most competitive colleges may disregard the error — they assume that they are everyone's first choice — but for a small liberal arts college, this kind of mistake can be the kiss of death.
9. **Think twice before including an Arts Supplement.** It is not always helpful, especially if the art is not your intended major. There is a difference between listing, for example, piano as an activity — even if you write an essay or supplement about it — and trying to promote yourself as a candidate for the orchestra. If you get a low rating from the art professor or staff member evaluating your submission, you have not done yourself a favor.
10. **Take care when writing essays or supplements about someone who inspires you.** The risk is that that person becomes the subject, not you. If you choose that

prompt, make sure the Admissions Office is learning about you, not, say, your grandmother, who is not the one applying to college.

11. **Avoid being snarky or trying too hard to be funny.** For example, some schools ask you to identify your favorite website. Mentioning commonapp.org simply isn't cute. On the other hand, if you're an artist and name moma.org as your favorite, that makes sense.
12. **Think carefully about who you ask to write letters of recommendation.** If a college asks for letters from two teachers of academic subjects, don't ask for rec letters from your English teacher and your band instructor.

Bottom line: By the time you reach senior year, you've done most of the hard work already, challenging yourself at school and spending your downtime at activities you care about. Support those efforts with college applications that provide the best possible representation of you.