

User's Guide to Ten Steps to College with the Greenes

Think College

The *Ten Steps to College with the Greenes Kit* is a comprehensive set of resources to help students find and get into the right college.

This kit provides tools to help students make honest self-assessments, identify realistic goals, and develop workable strategies that make the college admission process far less daunting and far more successful.

The *Ten Steps to College with the Greenes* materials are designed to be helpful to students who are in or are entering high school, as well as their families, teachers, and other advocates.

As a long-range planning resource, the kit enables families, schools, churches, and after-school programs to promote a college-going culture . . . a way of enabling the goal of college to be a powerful motivating and organizing presence in a student's life.

Language Arts teachers will want to look through the User's Guide for ideas they can adopt in their classrooms. Colleagues might consider using the workbook and DVD as the foundation for a semester or yearlong course on college planning.

Parents might want to think about regularly scheduled family planning sessions. Guidance counselors might want to use the DVD or VHS as an opener for junior-year planning meetings with students and parents.

The Kit includes:

- A VHS version of *Ten Steps to College with the Greenes*, or DVD version with its additional special features, Q& A Session with the Greenes and Interviews with Admission Officers.
- *The College Planning Workbook*.
- Two books from the Greenes' Guides to Educational Planning book series:
 - *Making It Into A Top College*, and
 - *Presenting Yourself Successfully To Colleges*.

How to Dive In

Look over everything to develop a clear understanding of all the resources available.

- **Watch the Show!**
Watch it straight through, mentally noting the sections you will want to return to later.
- **Scan Each Table of Contents.**
Just seven pages in three books provides you with a thorough overview of the major activities, issues, and vocabulary you will want to be familiar with as your college application process unfolds.
- **Stay Organized.**
Find the "College Application Organizer", page 2 of the College Planning Workbook.
- **Find Your Place in the Timeline.**
The "Four Year Calendar for Your Selective Admissions Process" (page 459 of *Making It Into a Top College*; page 4 of the *College Planning Workbook*) can help families and schools plan and chart every step of the process. While the calendar begins with September of freshman year, 7th and 8th grade students can also get a fabulous preview of what's ahead.
- **Read.**
 - Start with the "Introduction" and "How to Use this Book" on page 1 of the College Planning Workbook
 - Begin *Making it Into a Top College*, the book that gave rise to the television show.
 - Put *Presenting Yourself Successfully to College* on your reading list for the summer before the junior year.

No matter who you are or what your situation, college planning is a "hands-on" activity. Take the initiative! Visit the project web site, www.pbs.org/tenstepstocollege. Spend some time at college and university websites. Finally, don't limit your options. Look for the best fit and don't let cost limit your options.

Celebrate The Process

Guidance Counselors can work with other faculty members to create and sustain a college-going culture in their community.

The “Four Year Calendar” (page 459 in *Making It into a Top College*; page 4 in the *College Planning Workbook*) lists the important activities and benchmarks along the college-planning path. Use it to alert students, faculty, and parents to key activities throughout the year.

- **Tell the Stories of The College-Bound.** Use the calendar to organize stories for the school newspaper and school television reports. Personalize the stories to enable younger students to learn from (and empathize with) their older peers.
- **Create a “Road to College” Display.** Use high-traffic corridors and bulletin boards to promote and organize the month-by-month activities of all four high school classes.
- **Post It on the Web.** Reprovision your community’s college-going information and stories on your school’s website.
- **Think Summer.** Pay special attention to helping students think about, explore, and plan summer activities. Form a student committee to organize and present a “Summer in February” Fair that explores options and opportunities for summer enrichment.

Learn About Colleges

Understanding what you want from your college experiences—and what colleges expect of you—is a journey of self-discovery as much as an exploration of different schools. There are important questions to ask each step along the way:

- What do I want from my college experience?
- What do colleges want from me?
- What is the best way to apply?
- How do I actually enroll?

Below are some ideas for getting started, which might work especially well for students beginning their junior year, although freshman and sophomores might want to try this exercise as well.

- Write down the names of the first three to five colleges or universities that come to mind.
- For each one, give a reason why it has come to mind (i.e., “I’ve seen their sports teams on TV”; “so-and-so’s brother goes there”; “I’ve heard they have a great pre-law program”; etc.).
- Watch *Step Six: Find the Right Schools for You* and the related *Special Features/Interviews with Admission Officers* on the DVD version to better understand the kind of “college fit” you hope to find.
- Look over and fill out the “Student” and “Parent” questionnaires on pages 20-23 in the *College Planning Workbook*. These pages will help you begin to think about the kind of college experience you might want to have. Consider how the three to five colleges or universities on your list fit with your questionnaire answers.
- Read “Know the Colleges”, pg. 94-118, *Making It Into a Top College*. Use the Greenes’ recommendations and criteria to look more closely at the three to five colleges on your initial list.
- Review the worksheets for Step Six, pages 37-48 in the *College Planning Workbook*.
- Think critically about the colleges on the initial list of schools. Why did they seem “right” in the first place? Do they still seem “right?” If not, why?
- Prepare a new list of colleges based on your discoveries.

Write to College

An essential part the college-going mindset is becoming comfortable with your need to show colleges who you are as a person and a student. Test scores and transcripts provide an important piece of the picture, but the full portrait of what makes you special and unique can only emerge when you are able to effectively describe who you are, what you’re capable of doing, and what you want to do.

Step Two and *Step Nine* of the television show deal specifically with these challenges. There are corresponding resources and suggestions in *Steps Two* and *Step Nine* of the

workbook. Make sure *Presenting Yourself Successfully to College* is on your reading list for you sophomore summer.

Consider all the different kinds of written communication that are involved in a successful college admissions campaign:

- Personal statements and essays.
- Résumés.
- Cover letters or letters of introduction to one's portfolio.
- Letters requesting recommendations from teachers and peers.
- Thank you letters.
- Peer recommendations.
- Supplemental communications with colleges.

The best and most successful student writers start early and work consistently. Practicing early can take some of the fear out of the process and build confidence, before crucial communication must take place.

Parents, Educators, Home-Schoolers, and After-School Administrators:

- **Assign an Annual Résumé Writing Project.** Early in the new school year, students can draft a résumé for you to review. This can start as early as 7th or 8th grade. As they work on the current year's version, have students think about the accomplishments and achievements they will want to include in next year's version. Help them find ways to highlight their achievements without embellishing or bragging. (See *Step Nine* of the television show, Step Nine, pg. 67, in the workbook; *Presenting Yourself Successfully to College*, pg. 212, "Putting Together a Strong Résumé"; *Making It into a Top College*, pg. 316, "Communicating Your Strengths by Documentation")
- **Assign Letters of Recommendation.** Have Students practice writing recommendations for friends, classmates, and teammates that provide support for selection as class officers, peer mediators, or team captains. ("A Recommendation from a Peer", pages 229-232 in *Presenting Yourself Successfully to College*.)
- **Give Thanks**
Writing thank you notes after school visits, in addition to being polite, helps admissions

officers further evaluate a student's quality as a citizen and community member. Start writing thank-you notes now, not just for birthday gifts, but thanking teachers, coaches, friends, and family for the positive impact they have had on your life.

Writing About You

College admissions essays, like standardized tests, are agonized over by many. The Greenes recommend recognizing essays and tests for what they are: opportunities to impress admissions officers and distinguish yourself.

It is challenging for anyone to write about oneself. (See "Feel Comfortable in Writing About Yourself", page. 342, *Making It into a Top College*.) The easiest and best way to become more comfortable with your writing style is to write more.

Step 9 in the television show and workbook and accompanying Special Features/Interviews with Admission Officer on the DVD; chapters 2, 3, and 4 in *Presenting Yourself Successfully to College*; *Step Eight*, pg. 306—357, *Making It into a Top College*.

Parents, Educators, Home-Schoolers, and After School Administrators:

- **See *Special Features/Interviews with Admission Officers***, Step 9 on the DVD about the importance of personal essays. The best writing speaks to a specific audience, and the admissions officers on the DVD are a great example of the people who will read—and make determinations based upon—college application essays. There's no better motivation than hearing directly from the readers themselves.
- **Help Students Prepare!**
Don't let deadlines set student schedules. Start practicing as soon as possible. Find this year's **Common Application Personal Statement** at www.commonapp.org. Essay questions are often posted on college and university web sites. Reader feedback should be about what works, what needs to be polished, and what might be better left unsaid.
- **Encourage Journaling.**
Do not merely keep a record of what has

happened during they day. Think and write about the possible significance of events and happenings.

- **Encourage Honest Reappraisals.**

Every month or so, suggest an essay about a particular personal strength or special interest. Use these compositions to practice rewriting, searching for the fine line between saying too much and saying too little.