

**Third  
Edition**

# **COLLEGE ADMISSIONS MASTERY GUIDE**

**FROM SCHOOL SELECTION  
TO SCHOLARSHIP SUCCESS & BEYOND!**

**UPDATED**

WITH A BONUS CHAPTER ON FUTURE-PROOFING  
YOUR COLLEGE EDUCATION & CAREER GOALS IN LIGHT OF  
**AI REVOLUTION!!**



**write track**  
ADMISSIONS

Discover Your Story.  
Get Admitted.

**Hamada Zahawi, Esq.**

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Edition**

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**write track**  
ADMISSIONS

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# Preface

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Welcome to the College Admissions Mastery Guide! This Guide has been 15 years in the making. Come to think of it, it was more like 25 years ago when I first applied to college!

There are likely hundreds of college admissions books in circulation today. Ours seeks to add to the conversation by capturing all these years of learning in a concise, practical guide for both U.S. and international students. We also created this Mastery Guide to be a companion to the College Admissions Mastery Course video series ([www.collegeadmissionsmasterycourse.com](http://www.collegeadmissionsmasterycourse.com)). After watching the three videos (don't worry, they're not too long), read the corresponding section in the Mastery Guide to get more details that will help you along the way. If you want to skip parts of the videos, you can. Still, we highly recommend at least reviewing those relevant chapters in this Mastery Guide, as they outline highly relevant ProTips, hacks, and tried-and-tested methodologies that have worked for our clients since the company's founding in 2008.

Like the video series, the Mastery Guide is divided into three sections that track the chronology of the admissions process. Section One, 'The Lay of the Land,' seeks to ensure whether college is right for you, discusses how to be the ideal college candidate, and provides a timeline of the application process. In Section Two, 'The Application Components,' we use **STARS** to review all the significant parts of the application, including **S**chool Selection, **T**esting strategies, **A**pplication requirements, and **R**ecommendation letters. Finally, in Section Three, 'The Final Mile,' we spend significant time uncovering the **S**toryCrafting process and then review application submissions, interview preparation, final decision strategy, and how to maximize your college experience.

Each chapter includes strategies, examples, resources, and key takeaways to help you through the process. There's a lot of information packed into these pages. Still, if you read it carefully, we can all but guarantee that you will be well-informed to tackle the application process efficiently and relatively painlessly.



So why are we giving away the secret sauce? We feel that by sharing our methodologies, we can impact more applicants around the world, to help get them on the Write Track to success! Additionally, let's think about three types of applicants: (1) those who plan to apply on their own but want to be informed before applying, (2) those who are not super committed to the process and will apply ad hoc, and (3) those who are committed but stressed, confused, strapped for time, and, frankly, overwhelmed by the process. Our Mastery Guide is well-suited for all three types of applicants, as a foundational guide to help them more efficiently and effectively put their best foot forward in tackling the often complex, demanding, and time-consuming application process.

All that said, we want you to note that this Mastery Guide is for more than just 12th graders applying to college in the fall. Instead, students can start using it as early as their first year of high school to begin preparing to be the best college applicant possible regarding what academic path to pursue, extracurricular activities to lead, life experiences to seek, and values to uphold. Parents can also use the Mastery Guide to uncover the secrets and strategies of the admissions process. With this vital information, they can better support their college-bound child. Together, the whole family can be prepared for the life-changing journey ahead.

While the Mastery Guide is a comprehensive account of the admissions process, the information presented herein may not apply to all colleges or completely reflect the current admissions landscape. To do so would require volumes and volumes of books constantly being updated in real time. Instead, you should use the Mastery Guide as a springboard for further targeted research that meets your individual needs. Further, the content of this guide is based on research, personal experiences, and best practices available at the time of writing. That said, we do not assume any liability for any links (some of which may no longer be working at the time of this publication), materials cited or actions and decisions made based on the information contained herein.

In that vein, the Mastery Guide is the first step. To ensure your highest chances of success, consider our personalized application services, which include not only guidance but also in-depth StoryCrafting, Editing, and Timekeeping (see *Introduction: GSET Framework*).

Let me conclude this Preface on a personal note. I started Write Track Admissions in November 2008, but the company was the brainchild of my close friend and former cofounder, Khaled Bey. I am indebted to his vision to serve thousands of applicants since the company's foundation. I also want to thank my incredible family and dear friends for their ongoing patience and unyielding support while we continuously go through the evolution of Write Track. Finally, I want to thank our actual admissions experts and the clients we've worked with over the years. Their insights, pain points, feedback, successes, and failures were all instrumental in helping us create the many revelations, strategies, and methodologies mentioned in these pages. Indeed, there is nothing more humbling than learning from the learners.

# Introduction

## Founder's Journey

Now let me take you back to the fall of 1997. I was entering my final year of high school abroad at a British International School where I was pursuing the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma. My grades were not that great. To make matters worse, I had already taken the SAT three times, and my scores were far from competitive for a top-50 college. Getting into a great school would require a small miracle in the form of a solid application.

For months, I tried to figure out which schools to apply to, who would be my recommenders, what would be the best theme for my central and supplemental essays, how to make my resume stand out, when to submit my applications, and much more. Frankly, even though we had high school counselors, they were far more knowledgeable about U.K. universities than those in the U.S., so I felt like I was on my own. This trial-by-fire process opened my eyes to the importance of mastering the college admissions process and giving myself the best chances of success, even with mediocre grades and below-average standardized scores.

So, what were the results? I was admitted to USC, UCSB, and a few other safety schools. After considering costs and rankings, I decided to attend UCSB as my best and most financially feasible option. But the story doesn't end there. I worked hard during my first two years of college and assembled a strong application to apply as a transfer student. I ended up getting admitted to UCLA, eventually graduating *summa cum laude*.



I never forgot what I learned through the college application process. When it came time to apply for graduate school, again I was hampered by below-average standardized LSAT scores. This time, however, I leveraged all my story crafting creativity and application knowledge to gain admission to UC Berkeley Law (J.D.) as well as the University of Cambridge (MPhil) with a partial scholarship. Years later, I used many of the same methodologies in this Mastery Guide to gain admission to Harvard University (MPA) with a full scholarship!

Recognizing the power of storytelling in the admissions process, I created Write Track Admissions in 2008 with the motto: *Discover Your Story. Get Admitted.* Since then, Write Track has successfully helped thousands of applicants from around the world—some facing significant application challenges—gain admission to their top-choice programs thereby fulfilling their lifelong dreams. Indeed, everyone deserves a chance to aim for the stars. Write Track is how I have paid it forward for all the help I received aiming for and achieving my moonshots throughout the college and graduate admissions cycles.

In short, we all have a story. If you tell yours well enough, you can overcome even the most significant challenges. And while no two applicants are ever alike, using the Write Track methodologies outlined in this Mastery Guide, you can truly discover your story, prepare a nearly perfect application, and get into your dream program. I know—I'm living proof of how this seemingly impossible possibility can become a reality!

## Why Master the College Admissions Process?

We often remind applicants that the college admissions process can be like a full-time job. It is very time-consuming, and the stakes are exceptionally high. Indeed, selecting and getting admitted to the right college can influence your personal development, graduate studies, career trajectory, your debt and subsequent income levels, community, friends, and even relationships!

Don't leave this to chance or wait until the last minute to apply. Colleges will recognize that you did not prepare or take this process seriously, thereby squandering what may be one of your most important, life-changing opportunities.

## Write Track's GSET Framework

Based on a decade and a half of experience, we wanted to create a process that would efficiently help applicants from inception to submissions without added stress. To this end, we designed Write Track's core pillars using a four-part framework, the GSET Framework: **G**uiding, **S**toryCrafting, **E**ditng, **T**imekeeping. Each of these pillars is interlinked to provide the applicant with the keys to success during the entire application process:



## GUIDING

Guiding provides you with the guardrails you need so you know what to focus on, which schools to apply to, who to ask for recommendations, how to maximize each application component, the best way to ace the interview, and much more. These learnings are effectively and concisely captured here in the Mastery Guide and video series.



## STORYCRAFTING

StoryCrafting is the next step in helping you create, craft, structure, and submit your WriteStory. We use several proprietary mechanisms to encourage, inspire, and empower you to achieve this critical objective and a series of tests to ensure you got it right!



## EDITING

**Editing** naturally follows the StoryCrafting process to ensure that what you create is bold, creative, and pen-dropping and helps you stand out from the thousands of other applicants.



## TIMEKEEPING

Often life gets in the way of your dreams—extracurricular activities, familial responsibilities, academic requirements, standardized testing, etc. So, we help you manage your application process using an effective timeline and a project management tool to submit well in advance and give you the best chances of admission success!

This Mastery Guide will spend significant time focusing on the 'Guiding' pillar while laying the foundation for the other pillars. However, to truly maximize our expertise and greatly increase your acceptances, ask about our **Comprehensive 1:1 Consulting Services** with one of our seasoned Admissions Experts. Your expert will serve as your personal coach, mentor, and guide throughout the entire admissions cycle to help you reduce your stress, manage your time, find your story, and prepare the best college application possible well before the deadlines (see *Next Steps*).