

English Transcript for *Identifying Reach, Target, and Safety*

Your school list is now filled with university names, data, information, and answers to questions, which means it's time to cut your list down to the lucky group of schools where you're going to apply. That brings up a questions that student often ask. How many schools should I apply to? You're going to get a lot of different answers to this question. But I advise students to apply to six to eight schools with ten as the maximum. That's right, 4,000, down to ten. Like many students, you're probably asking, why so few? So I'll ask you. How many things can you do well at the same time? You're listening to this lecture and maybe taking notes at the same time. Now, what if I asked you to write an email? Now, what if I asked you to solve a math problem and hop on one foot? And drink a cup of coffee? How many of these things can you do well all at the same time? With applications, you want to identify a reasonable number of schools that are a good fit for you and focus on submitting your best application to those schools. It's a matter of quality over quantity. It is better to submit eight well-done, strong applications that give you the greatest chance of acceptance instead of submitting 15 quickly done weaker applications. Many students don't love this answer, and they'll say, but this is my only chance to apply to U.S. colleges and universities. I want to apply everywhere so that I have options. To those students I would simply say, sometimes more is just more. If you have an empty one liter bottle, how much water can you put into it? What good is it having two liters of water when your bottle will only hold one liter? You can only attend one school. And therefore, technically, you only need one acceptance. Now, we would never take the chance of only applying to one school. But what is the purpose of 15 acceptances when you're only going to go one place? You're going to do a lot of research, so choosing the best school for you should be somewhat easy. Having too many schools on your list could be a sign that you maybe did not do enough research. Now if you have, say six schools that you really like, and three schools that you kind of like. I would say go ahead and apply to all nine of those schools. If however you have 15 schools that you really like, and 10 more schools that you kind of like. Then you really need to think about your choices. To be honest, the number of schools on your list is far less important than having a balance of reach schools, target schools, and safety schools. Let's start by talking about reach schools. There are two types of reach schools. First, there are schools that are a reach for everyone. Schools that are so selective that perfect grades and test scores do not mean that you will be accepted. Highly selective schools fall into this category. It doesn't matter what qualifications you have in your application. No one is guaranteed to be accepted. Recognize that schools that accept 25% or less of their applicants are really automatically reach schools. The second type of reach school is a school that is a reach for you. This is a school whose requirements are greater than your qualifications. They ask for a 3.5 GPA and you have a 3.0 GPA. They want a 32 on the ACT and you have a 29. It doesn't mean that you don't have a chance of getting accepted. It just means that you are reaching for admission. The next type of schools are target schools. And target schools are where your qualifications match the school's requirements. They want a 3.5. You have a 3.5. They want a 90 on the TOEFL. You have a 90 on your TOEFL. It doesn't mean that you're guaranteed admission, but based on quantitative factors, you should have a good chance to be accepted. Finally, there are safety schools, and I want to talk about the term safety. Students will often say safety like it's a bad word. Oh, that's my safety school. And I honestly don't understand that. Safety is a good thing. Who doesn't want to be safe? A safety school is one where your qualifications exceed the university requirements. They want a 3.0 and you have a 3.5. They want a 600

SAT Math and you have a 650. Now there is still no guarantee for admission, but based on the quantitative factors, you should be accepted. Unfortunately the only way to judge if a school is a reach, target or safety is by the numbers. You should be referring back to your research on acceptance rate, grade and GPA requirements, SAT and ACT score averages, and TOEFL and IELTS score averages. Take a look at the numbers and compare them to your qualifications. It should become clear which schools on your list are reaches, which are targets, and which are safeties. Now some students find it helpful to break these categories down even more by identifying schools as high or low. An example, a target school is one where their requirements and your qualifications match. You're hitting the bullseye right in the middle of the target. A high target could be a school where their requirements are higher than your qualifications but not so much higher that the school becomes a reach. A low target might be a school where you exceed their requirements. But not so much that the school is a safety. When looking at reach schools, a school that has a 10% acceptance rate could be a high reach, probably should be a high reach. While a school with a 25% acceptance rate, might be just a reach or maybe even a low reach depending on your qualifications. Choosing your reach schools is easy. You probably knew your reach schools before you ever signed up for this course. But choosing your safety schools is important. Every list should include at least two safety schools. Why two? So that no matter what happens with your reach and target, you still have options with your safeties. When it comes to choosing your safety schools, use your reach schools as guidance. Maybe you like the location of a reach school. Are there other schools in that same area that could be a safety? Maybe you like the facilities at your reach school. Are there other schools that have similar facilities, but maybe admission is less competitive? You should like your safety schools just as much as you like your reach schools. They share the same qualities. It just happens that your safeties are easier to get into than your reach schools. And you might be surprised that even highly-ranked schools can be safeties. A good school list has a balance of all three types of schools. A list that only has reach schools is a recipe for disaster. With only reach schools, you risk not being accepted anywhere. But with good safeties as your foundation, you have the freedom to add target schools and reach schools to your list. All students should have reach schools on their list. If you really love a reach school, go for it. The worst thing that can happen is that you get denied. And if you do? That's okay. If you know a school is a reach, try your best and see what happens. We always, always, always encourage students to apply to reach schools. As long, as those reached schools, are balanced with target and safety schools. Once your list is balanced, you're ready to take the next step.