

COLLEGE

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PREPARING FOR COLLEGE

In many ways, you've been preparing your college application for years.

We like to say that the college application process is a 'test' of the self. Rather than testing your knowledge of the quadratic formula, photosynthesis, or the correct placement of a subordinate clause, applying to college is a time for you to demonstrate how well you know yourself. Your college applications are a display of your growth and development over the course of high school, and they offer universities the chance to get to know you as a student, a community member, and an evolving individual.

The college application process is also a time for you to consider the many, many options you've afforded yourself by your years of hard work in high school, as well as to think about how you'd like the topics you've studied and the experiences you've had to come together in a plan for your future. A large portion of the college application process is considering the type of university that would be a good fit for you. Take time to reflect on your past achievements, consider your future goals, and think about how you hope college will shape you socially and academically.

The good news is that you are never alone in this journey! High school counselors are excellent resources and can offer you professional guidance every step of the way. Likewise, parents, teachers, and friends can serve as invaluable sources for advice. Admissions officers at colleges across the country are also happy to provide perspective and serve as a resource. We know this process can be challenging and confusing because we've lived it as students, and also because we help other prospective students, like you, navigate this process every day.

Feel free to consult this guide as you progress through the application process. We hope that, once you've finished reading, you'll feel more comfortable navigating the application process at highly selective schools and also confident and excited about your path to college.

EXTRACURRICULARS

Extracurriculars are the activities that you do outside of class. They can include high school clubs, sports, hobbies, jobs, and even significant family responsibilities. Many colleges will ask about your extracurriculars to understand how you spend your time when you are not in the classroom and how you might contribute to their campus community.

Hopefully, you've enjoyed exploring your interests through clubs, activities, and community organizations throughout your time in high school! Find activities that matter to you and that you enjoy doing. Try to get as involved in those things as you can, and look for ways to develop your leadership skills. Remember: you do not have to be the president of 17 clubs to go to college! Colleges will be more impressed by genuine commitment to an activity, interest, or family responsibility than they will by superficial involvement in any number of activities.

COLLEGE LIST

Your college list will contain all the colleges where you want to apply. As you begin to create this list, prioritize schools that match your interests, goals, and talents. This will require a lot of research, but a good college list can give you a great start towards successful college applications and success once you arrive on campus.



COLLEGE LIST

SCHOOL TYPE

Regardless of where or how you look for schools, your first priority should be to find colleges that have shown **strong performance in these two categories:**

Graduation Rate

The graduation rate is the percentage of students that complete their studies at a college and receive a degree. The higher this number, the more confident you can be that a college offers a quality education and great support for students.

Average Student Debt

Average student debt reflects the affordability of a college's education. As with most things, more expensive does not always mean better! Find schools that offer good financial aid or low tuition costs in order to take on as little debt as possible and set yourself up for success after college.

STRIKING A BALANCE

Building a strong college list is also about researching a school's standards to see what combination of academic and non-academic features a certain university may have that makes it a good fit for you. Make sure to apply to a few different universities! Having a variety of options ensures that you'll have multiple choices that are well-suited to your skills and personality.

ONLINE COLLEGE RESOURCES:

- The Coalition for Access, Affordability, and Success (coalitionforcollegeaccess.org)
- Big Future by the College Board (bigfuture.collegeboard.org)
- College Greenlight (collegegreenlight.com)
- The College Scorecard (collegescorecard.ed.gov)

COLLEGE PREFERENCES TO KEEP IN MIND

Size: Student body size? Small or large class sizes?

Location: Urban, rural, or suburban? In-state or out-of-state?

Culture: Preferences in sports/NCAA rank or religious affiliation?

Academics: Core curriculum or general ed requirements? Preferences in major/minor offerings?

Type: Liberal arts school?

Financial Aid: Need-blind or need-aware? Scholarship offerings?

Opportunities: Post-graduate and internship offerings?

Services: Essential campus services?

THE COLLEGE APPLICATION

As you begin to think about your college applications, the most important thing to remember is that your applications will be more than essays, more than transcripts, and much more than test scores.

TRANSCRIPT

After you submit your application, your counselor will receive a notification to send your high school transcript to colleges. The transcript tells the story of your time in high school—classes in which you challenged yourself and did well, upward trends across your four years, and your grades and GPA. Rather than worry about any one particular class or grade, think about how each class fits into your overall story; that is what colleges are looking for.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

You should ask for letters of recommendation from teachers who have impacted you in your time in high school—teachers who inspired you, teachers whose class you looked forward to going to every day, teachers with whom you developed a quality relationship. Your college counselor also writes you a recommendation, which is a good thing, considering how well you’ve gotten to know them all these years! Many selective schools require a letter of recommendation from your college counselor and two additional letters of recommendation from your teachers.

TESTING

The SAT and ACT are used by colleges to measure students’ ability to solve problems and gauge college readiness. Most schools will accept either exam, but be sure to check specific testing requirements on their website.

ACT

- Contains multiple-choice sections in English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science, and an optional essay-writing section
- Scored on a scale of 1-36

SAT

- Contains multiple-choice sections in Reading, Writing and Language, and Math, and an optional writing section
- Scored on a scale of 400-1600

STUDY RESOURCES

- ACT offers free daily practice questions and a free study guide online at act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/test-preparation.html#free.
- ACT has partnered with OpenEd to provide free instructional videos and quizzes at resources.opened.com/act-practice.
- Khan Academy offers free online SAT prep in partnership with College Board. You can access over 4,000 questions and videos lessons, as well as SAT Tips and Strategies, at khanacademy.org/test-prep/sat.
- College Board has published a series of study guides on their website at collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/inside-the-test/study-guide-students. They also have a free mobile app that offers daily practice for the New SAT (download from the App Store or Google Play by searching “Daily Practice for the New SAT”).

ESSAYS

Your personal essay will be an integral part of your application. Whatever you choose to write about should reflect an aspect of your personality in a creative, attention-grabbing way. Your readers want something engaging; something that tells them about who you really are. Anyone can write platitudes and clichés; a successful essay takes true events from your life and relates it with insightful detail. **Tips for writing a short essay:**

- Remember: no idea is inherently bad! As long as it does not portray you in a negative light, anything about yourself and your life experiences can be used to craft an interesting and compelling narrative.
- Details are the most important component of your essay. Authentic details paint a vivid and memorable picture of you and your experience in your readers' minds. Know the line between good detail and excess.
- Remember: you will have a word limit, and schools may frown upon your exceeding it. While you want your narrative to be detailed, the way you tell it still needs to be concise and to the point.

INTERVIEWS

Some schools offer applicants interviews during the application process. When preparing for an interview, knowing yourself and how to talk about your strengths will enable you to present these qualities to admissions representatives.

Before your interview, make sure to:

RESEARCH

Do some research on the school. Know which majors, internships, and programs they offer that interest you in particular. What makes you a good fit for the school?

GO IN WITH QUESTIONS

The interviewer will ask you if you have any questions at the end of the interview. Having specific, targeted questions will indicate to the interviewer that you did your research and have a genuine interest in attending the college.

STRENGTHS

Consider some of your best strengths and how to effectively yet concisely communicate them. Are you a great team leader? Do you speak different languages? How might you provide a great, two-minute answer to a question about these skills?

DRESS NICELY AND ARRIVE ON TIME!

There is no need to wear business formal attire, but you should dress for the occasion—a button-down shirt or blouse and slacks is standard.

FOLLOW UP

Follow up by sending the interviewer a thank you email after the interview:

- Consider your word choice.
- Ensure that the body of the letter is direct.
- Include a specific reference that will allow the interviewer to recall who you are.

COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- What is your favorite subject/class in school? Why?
- What have you been involved in outside of class?
- Why did you apply to ---- College?
- What is your least favorite class in school? Why?

INTERVIEW ALTERNATIVES

Some schools will offer alternatives to in-person interviews, like a video submission. With a video interview, practice what you want to tell the school in the video, and make sure to review and edit the video before sending it in with your application. Keep in mind schools will also have varying deadlines, so make sure you give yourself enough time to create and upload the video.

DEADLINES

It is important to remember application deadlines when you are preparing your application. Colleges often have unique application deadlines or application plans that are detailed on their application website.

EARLY ACTION (EA)

Early Action is an application plan with an early deadline, generally around early November, for students who are applying to a top-choice college. Decisions are usually released in mid-December.

EARLY DECISION (ED)

Early Decision is an application plan for students who are applying to their top-choice college and are ready to make a binding commitment to attend. To apply ED, you, along with your parents and college counselor, must sign a contract that confirms that you will attend the school to which you applied, and will withdraw all your other college applications.

REGULAR DECISION

Regular Decision is a non-binding application plan with a deadline in late December. You can apply to as many schools as you want to under the RD plan. Decisions are usually released in mid-March.

RESTRICTIVE/SINGLE-CHOICE EARLY ACTION

Restrictive or Single-Choice Early Action is similar to EA, but students agree not to apply to other private colleges and universities under any Early application rounds (including EA, ED, and Restrictive/Single-Choice EA).

- You can apply to other **public** colleges and universities with a non-binding early application.
- You can apply to colleges and universities with a **non-binding** rolling admission process.
- You can apply to private institutions with a **non-binding** early application **IF** they have early scholarship deadlines or special academic programs.

ROLLING ADMISSION

Colleges with Rolling Admissions accept applications from fall of senior year through the summer, and usually notify you of your decision within a few weeks of applying. Apply early to improve your chances for acceptance, scholarships, and first choice in housing.

?? DECISIONS

ACCEPTED

Congratulations, you've been admitted! You have until May 1 to respond to your offer of admission. If you applied under Early Decision, you've committed to attending the college to which you were accepted. Withdraw your other applications and submit your enrollment deposit.

DEFERRED

The college wasn't prepared to make a decision yet, so you've been moved into the Regular Decision pool. Express your continued interest with a strong letter (sub-500 words) to the school, along with any relevant academic or extracurricular updates. You'll receive a decision when RD results come out. Being deferred and in the Regular pool means you can apply ED-II to another school.

WAITLISTED

When a college has more applicants it wants to accept than it has room for, students are waitlisted to be admitted as spots open up. If you've been waitlisted, express your continued interest with a strong letter (sub-500 words) after accepting your spot on the waitlist. Consider other schools you've been accepted to, in case your preferred school is unable to accept you off the waitlist.

DENIED

The college you applied to was unable to offer you admission. Selective colleges are often unable to offer admissions to all qualified applicants. Sit tight for your other decisions, and finish any other incomplete applications you may have.



FINANCIAL AID

There are various types of aid, including grants, scholarships, work study, and loans. Take into account the different aspects that play into how your financial aid is determined.

TYPES OF SCHOLARSHIPS

Need-Based: Solely for financial aid; “need” is determined by schools in proportion to the financial background of students

Academic: Solely for academic achievement; students should have a good GPA to apply (3.5 or higher in most cases)

Athletic: Solely for athletic talent; given with intent for the student to play the sport for the school

“Full-Ride”: Very competitive scholarships; pay for tuition and fees, room and board, and possibly student life costs (books, travel, etc.)

Full Tuition: Pay for tuition and fees (registration, classes, graduation, examinations, etc.) at the school

Merit-Based: Solely for achievements; given based on the value of the merit the student contributes to the school

Other: Anything and everything! Scholarships based off religion, ethnicity, location, personal preferences, family situation, disabilities, activities, service, academics, etc. (may or may not be affiliated with the school)

HOW TO APPLY

Research the possibilities!

Search for scholarships on the following websites: scholarships.com, cappex.com, scholarshippoints.com, fastweb.com, zinch.com, College Board Scholarship Search, scholarshipexperts.com, supercollege.com, nextstudent.com, and more!

- Make sure the scholarships are legitimate by cross-checking scholarships across different websites.
- Do not pay for a service to find scholarships for you.
- Review the application to see what it entails.
- Compile a list of scholarships you can apply to in the upcoming year.
- Be mindful of application deadlines!

SOME BIG SCHOLARSHIPS

Gates Millennium Scholars: A scholarship funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation that offers students of color the chance to pursue higher education without financial burden

Horatio Alger Jr. Scholar Program: A scholarship named after Horatio Alger Jr., a man who believed every person could achieve the American Dream with hard work despite adversity

Jack Kent Cooke Foundation: A scholarship program dedicated to giving students from low-income backgrounds the tools necessary to be successful in higher education environments

Stamps Foundation: Partner schools offer scholarships to students who show exceptional leadership qualities, academic merit, and strong character

Posse Foundation: A full tuition, nomination-based program for students to be in a “Posse” of about ten students from the same area who go to the same college/university and serve as a support system for each other throughout college

QuestBridge Scholar Program: A full-ride scholarship opportunity for students from low-income backgrounds

FINANCIAL AID

FAFSA (FREE APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID):

The FAFSA Document

The FAFSA is a straightforward document to fill out.

You will need:

- Your social security number
- Your parents' social security numbers (if you are a dependent student)
- Your driver's license number (if you have one)
- Your Alien Registration Number (if not a U.S. Citizen)
- Your federal tax information and tax returns, including IRS W-2 information, if applicable
- Your parents' IRS 1040 or Foreign Tax Return (if you are a dependent student)
- Records of untaxed income—child support received, interest income, veterans' noneducation benefits—for you and for your parents (if you are a dependent student)

FAFSA Awards

Colleges use your FAFSA to determine your eligibility for financial aid awards, **which include:**

- Federal Pell Grant: ~\$5,920 (amounts change annually)
- Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (for students with exceptional financial need): up to \$4,000
- Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education Grant (TEACH Grant, for undergraduate, post-baccalaureate, and graduate students pursuing a career in teaching): up to \$4,000
- Iraq-Afghanistan Service Grant (for non-Pell eligible students whose parent/guardian has died as a result of military service or the events of 9/11): up to the maximum Pell Grant amount
- Federal Work Study (part-time jobs on- or off-campus; money is earned while attending school)



Eligibility

To see if you qualify for federal funds, review eligibility criteria at: studentaid.ed.gov/sa/eligibility/basic-criteria.

Interest

All loans, whether federal or private, come with interest rates. An interest rate is a percentage of the student loan funds added onto the original sum of the loan that you took out. As you pay off your student loans, you must also pay off the interest that has accumulated over time. No loan is exempt from interest.

CSS/FINANCIAL AID PROFILE (FOR NON-FEDERAL FINANCIAL AID)

- Almost 400 colleges across the U.S. accept CSS. You can see a list at: profile.collegeboard.org/profile/ppi/participatingInstitutions.aspx
- Available for international students and non-US citizens!
- Instructions for applying can be found at: cssprofile.collegeboard.org

Net Price Calculators

Estimate your cost of attendance by using Net Price Calculators that are on colleges' websites.



RESOURCES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

EXPLORING COLLEGES

Many colleges offer virtual tours of their campuses online so that you can get a feel for the school and campus life even if you cannot visit. You can also research colleges on BigFuture at bigfuture.collegeboard.org.

LANGUAGE COMPETENCY

If your first language is not English, or if the primary language of instruction at your high school was not English, you'll most likely be required to submit proof of English language proficiency. Most schools will accept score reports from either of the following tests, but double check the application requirements of each school you are applying to.

TOEFL iBT Test (Test of English as a Foreign Language)

Serves as an indication of your English language abilities measured at the university level

- ETS offers free test prep on their website
- To register to take the test or to send scores to colleges, visit: ets.org/toefl

IELTS (International English Language Testing System)

University-level English language proficiency test

- To register to take the test or to send scores to colleges, visit: ielts.org/what-is-ielts/ielts-for-study

TAKING THE SAT/ACT/SUBJECT TESTS

Register early! Seats and test dates may be more limited if you're testing outside the US and US territories. The SAT is offered internationally in October, December, March, and May. SAT Subject Tests are offered internationally in October, November, December, May, and June.

- There is no late registration for international test takers for the SAT and SAT Subject tests.
- More information about the SAT and SAT Subject Tests for international students can be found at collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/register/international.
- The ACT is offered internationally in September, October, December, April, and June. You must register online.

VISAS AND WORK SPONSORSHIP

Visas to enter US and start school:

After you are admitted to college, your school will help you with the necessary paperwork to support you through the visa process, including helping you secure an I-20 supporting document. Each institution will have a different process, timetable, and instructions for how to go through this process.

H1B to work in the US:

Preference for STEM majors and jobs. For work authorization, bring your proof of employment to a Visa Office to get an SSN.

Financial Aid:

Many U.S. colleges and universities are need-aware during the application process. This means that during the application process, a college or university will take into account your request for need-based financial aid and how much aid you require. Each institution will have different policies for the amount of aid they award and the process of how to apply for aid.

Deadlines:

Deadline information and more can be found online at: international.collegeboard.org/prepare-to-study-in-the-us.



HIGH SCHOOL CHECKLIST

High school is a vital period for you to learn, get involved, and grow into the person you will become when you begin applying for college. Each year is an important step in the process. The following checklist contains tips and suggestions for you as you navigate your four years of high school and begin to think about college.

FRESHMAN YEAR

THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

- Focus on your grades! Your grades are one of the most important components of your college application. They attest to your work ethic and mastery of material.
- Start to plan your classes for the next four years. Most colleges like to see: 4 years of English, 3-4 years of Math, 3-4 years of Science, 3-4 years of Social Sciences, and 2-3 years of a Foreign Language. Many students exceed these expectations.
- High school is a time for discovery! Start getting involved at school or in your community through extracurricular activities, jobs, or volunteer work.
- Start filing your activities, accomplishments, and favorite essays on the Coalition website: use the Locker!

IN THE SUMMER

- Look into summer opportunities. Consider volunteering. Hospitals, parks, zoos, and museums—just to name some—are always looking for enthusiastic volunteers.

SOPHOMORE YEAR

THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

- Focus on your grades!
- Continue planning your classes. Look at the AP, IB, or Honors classes your high school offers.
- Stay involved and seek new opportunities. Consider taking up leadership roles in the activities in which you're most invested.
- Continue updating your Coalition Locker with your favorite projects and awards.
- Continue exploring college payment options with your parents.
- Start looking into colleges. Go to college fairs happening in your area.

IN THE FALL

- Take the PSAT/NMSQT. The National Merit Scholarship Program pools together the top performers on the PSAT and gives them a chance to be considered National Merit Scholarship Finalists. Finalists, if selected, receive various forms of college scholarship money.
- Ask your college counselor for a fee waiver.

IN THE SUMMER

- Continue looking into summer opportunities. Look into paid jobs and internships. Campaigns, public offices, local hospitals, and libraries, for example, all look for high school interns!
- Take summer classes or start looking into pre-college programs. Some high schools offer advanced summer classes that'll give you a leg up during the school year.



JUNIOR YEAR

THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

- ☐ Focus on your grades!
- ☐ Take advanced classes that interest you (AP, IB, Honors, etc.).
- ☐ Talk to your counselor about High School/College Dual Enrollment. Dual enrollment lets you enroll in college courses while still in high school.
- ☐ Connect with your counselor and begin exploring college options. Ask for help in drafting your list of colleges you are interested in.
- ☐ Continue getting involved, staying involved, and looking into leadership roles.
- ☐ Continue updating your Coalition Locker with important documents.
- ☐ Continue weighing financing options with your parents.
- ☐ Continue looking at colleges. Attend college fairs, go to info sessions, and make college visits.
- ☐ Pay attention to your health. School can become especially stressful around junior year. Don't be afraid to seek support from family, friends, teachers, mentors, and school counselors.

IN THE FALL

- ☐ Take the SAT, ACT, or SAT Subject Tests. Schools you apply to may require these tests. Please check their websites.

IN THE WINTER

- ☐ Apply to summer programs. QuestBridge offers scholarships to summer college programs at schools including Emory, Notre Dame, UPenn, Stanford, UChicago, and Yale.

- ☐ Register to take the SAT or ACT in the Winter or Spring.
- ☐ Make a preliminary college list.
- ☐ Look for scholarships. The College Board has excellent scholarship resources. Colleges also offer merit scholarships, which you can find on their websites.
- ☐ Set up appointments to visit your top college choices. Call the admissions office or use the college's website.

IN THE SPRING

- ☐ Take the SAT, ACT, or SAT Subject Tests if you have not done so already, or retake the test if you are trying to improve your score. Schools that you are applying to may require specific subject tests; be sure to check their websites for requirements.
- ☐ Take AP exams.

IN THE SUMMER

- ☐ Fill out all the sections of the Coalition App. Resources on how to utilize the Coalition platform can be found in the Appendix!
- ☐ Plan more visits to colleges you're interested in.
- ☐ Draft college essays.
- ☐ Update your preliminary college list.
- ☐ Make a college payment plan with your parents.
- ☐ Think about which teachers you'll ask for recommendations.



SENIOR YEAR

THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

- ☐ Focus on your grades!
- ☐ Continue getting involved, staying involved, and assuming leadership roles.
- ☐ Continue updating your Coalition Locker and identify the pieces you feel closest to. Use these pieces as inspiration for your college essays.

IN THE FALL

- ☐ Connect with your college counselor and develop a plan of action. Finalize your college list, determine which scholarships you're applying to, which financial aid applications you'll fill out, and be on top of your deadlines!
- ☐ Finish your remaining personal essays.
- ☐ Make sure your counselor sends your transcript.
- ☐ Obtain letters of recommendation.
- ☐ Make a calendar so you can mark down your application deadlines.

IN THE WINTER

- ☐ This is the last chance you have to retake your SAT Subject Tests!
- ☐ Early results! You'll either be Accepted, Deferred, or Denied.
- ☐ Finish filling out FAFSA and other financial aid documents.

IN THE SPRING

- ☐ Take AP exams.
- ☐ Regular Decision Results! You'll either be Accepted, Denied, or Waitlisted.

- ☐ Submit your enrollment deposit! May 1st is the national deadline for committing to the college of your choice (for non-rolling admission schools).

IN THE SUMMER

- ☐ Complete any other enrollment paperwork your college sends you.
- ☐ Research work-study opportunities. Contact the financial aid office to get a work-study job lined up for the fall.
- ☐ Contact your roommate(s)! You'll usually receive information about housing a few weeks before school starts, including who you're living with, which gives you the opportunity to get to know your roommate(s) before move-in day.
- ☐ Go to orientation. Attending orientation is essential in preparing you for the next four years.
- ☐ Depending on the school, there might be one college orientation for all incoming freshmen, or a few separate sessions. Your school will send you the information you need.
- ☐ Buy school supplies, dorm furniture, and textbooks. The campus bookstore should have everything you need!