

Finding the Perfect College

Most students want to find the “perfect” college. The truth is, there’s no such thing. You can find many colleges where you can be happy and get a great education. The college search is about exploring who you are and what you want and then finding colleges that will meet your goals.

BEFORE SEARCHING, CONSIDER THESE **8 FACTORS**

Size	Location
Available majors and classes	Available extracurricular activities
Distance from home	Makeup of the student body
Housing options	Campus atmosphere

Questions to consider:

- Which of these aspects are things you feel you must have to be comfortable at a college?
- On which factors are you flexible?
- What do you want to accomplish in college?
- Do you want to train for a specific job or get a wide-ranging education?
- If you have a major in mind, do the colleges you are considering specialize in that major?

Bigfuture.collegeboard.org is a great option to sort through the many options out there, based on your preferences.

Here are steps you can take to find colleges where you will thrive.

KEEP AN OPEN MIND

Although it’s good to have some ideas in mind about what sorts of colleges will be right for you, stay open to all the possibilities at the beginning of your search.

TALK TO PEOPLE WHO KNOW YOU

Tell parents, teachers, relatives, friends, and your school counselor about your goals, and ask if they can suggest colleges that may be a good fit for you.

DON'T LIMIT YOUR SEARCH

At the start of this process, you may rule out colleges because you think that they are too expensive or too hard to get into, but this may not be the reality. Remember that financial aid can make college more affordable, and colleges look at more than just grades and test scores.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Once you have a list of schools, it’s time to do some research. To learn more about the colleges you’re considering, check out college guidebooks and websites. Jot down your questions and get answers by:

- Talking to your school counselor or teachers
- Checking out colleges’ student blogs, if available
- Contacting college admission officials
- Asking admission officials to recommend current students or recent graduates with whom you can have conversations
- Visiting college campuses, if possible

Tips for Parents on Finding the Right College

How can your child find colleges that match specific needs? First, identify priorities. Next, carefully research the characteristics of a range of schools. Finally, match the two. Here are some college characteristics to consider.

SIZE OF STUDENT BODY

Size will affect many of your child's opportunities and experiences:

- range of academic majors offered
- extracurricular possibilities
- amount of personal attention your child will receive
- number of academic resources

In considering size, your child should look beyond the raw number of students attending. For example, perhaps they are considering a small department within a large school. Your child should investigate not just the number of faculty members, but also their accessibility to students.

LOCATION

Does your child want to visit home frequently, or is this a time to experience a new part of the country? Perhaps an urban environment is preferred, with access

to museums, ethnic restaurants, or major league ball games. Or maybe it's easy access to the outdoors or the serenity of a small town.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

If your child has decided on a field of study, they can research the reputation of academic departments by talking to people in their field of interest. If your child is undecided, as many students are, they may want to choose an academically balanced institution that offers a range of majors and programs. Students normally don't pick a major until their sophomore year, and those

students who know their major before they go to college are very likely to change their minds. Most colleges offer counseling to help students find a focus.

In considering academic programs, your child should look for special opportunities and pick a school that offers a number of possibilities.

CAMPUS LIFE

Before choosing a college, your child should learn the answers to these questions:

- What extracurricular activities, athletics, clubs, and organizations are available?
- Does the community around the college offer interesting
- How do fraternities and sororities influence campus life?
- Is housing guaranteed?
- How are dorms assigned?

COST

In considering cost, look beyond the price tag. Because of financial aid, most students pay less than the "sticker price," so don't rule out a college that would be a good fit for your child before you find out how much financial

aid it will offer. Most colleges work to ensure that academically qualified students from every economic circumstance can find financial aid that allows them to attend.

DIVERSITY

Your child should explore what the advantages of a diverse student body would be. The geographic, ethnic, racial, and religious diversity of the student body can help

students learn more about the world. Investigate which student organizations or other groups with ethnic or religious foundations are active and visible on campus.

RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES

One of the best ways to measure a school's quality and the satisfaction of its students is to learn the percentage of students who return after the first year and the percentage of entering students who

go on to graduate. Comparatively good retention and graduation rates indicate that responsible academic, social, and financial support systems exist for most students.

Family Action Plan: 11th Grade

Junior year usually marks a turning point. This is because for most students and families, it's when college planning activities kick into high gear. Here are some things you can do this year to support your child and give him or her the best options.

SUMMER

- **Get the facts about what college costs.** You may be surprised by how affordable higher education can be. Start by reading [Understanding College Costs](#).
- Explore financial aid options. These include grants and scholarships, loans, and work-study programs that can help pay for college costs. Find out more about how financial aid can make college affordable.

FALL

- **Make sure your child meets with the school counselor.** This meeting is especially important this year as your 11th-grader starts to engage in the college application process. Learn more about the [counselor's role in applying to college](#).
- **Help your child stay organized.** Work with your 11th-grader to make weekly or monthly to-do lists to keep on top of the tasks required to get ready for applying to colleges. For more time management tips, see [8 Ways to Take Control of Your Time](#).
- **Help your junior get ready for the PSAT/NMSQT® in October.** This is a preliminary test that helps students practice for the SAT® and assess their academic skills. Juniors who score well on the test are also eligible for scholarship opportunities. Find out more about the [PSAT/NMSQT](#).
- **Encourage your child to set goals for the school year.** Working toward specific goals helps your high school student stay motivated and focused.

WINTER

- **Review PSAT/NMSQT results together** by logging in to the [student score reporting portal](#). Your child's score report shows what they should work on to get ready for college; lists Advanced Placement® courses that might be a good match for them; and connects them to **free, personalized SAT practice** on Khan Academy® based on their results.
- **Help your child prepare for the SAT.** Many juniors take the SAT in the spring so they can get a head start on planning for college. See [which other tests](#) your high school junior may need to take.
- **Discuss taking challenging courses next year.** Taking honors courses or college-level courses like Advanced Placement as a senior can help your child prepare for college work — and these are also the courses that college admission officers like to see. Learn more about [advanced classes](#).

WINTER (CONTINUED)

- **Encourage your junior to consider taking SAT Subject Tests™.** Many colleges require or recommend taking these tests to get a sense of your child's skills in a certain academic area. In general, it's best to take a Subject Test right after taking the relevant course. Learn more about **SAT Subject Tests**.
- **Encourage your child to take AP® Exams.** If your 11th-grader takes AP or other advanced classes, have him or her talk with teachers now about taking these tests in May. Read more about the **AP Program**.

SPRING

- **Search together for colleges that meet your child's needs.** Once you have an idea of the qualities your child is looking for in a college, help him or her enter these criteria into **College Search** to create a list of colleges to which he or she should consider applying.
- **Help your child research scholarships.** This form of financial aid provides money for college that doesn't need to be repaid. Learn more through the College Board's **Scholarship Search**.
- **Attend college fairs and financial aid events.** These events allow you to meet with college representatives and get answers to questions. Your child can ask the school counselor how to find events in your area. Check out the **College Fair Checklist** for more information.
- **Help your child make summer plans.** Summer is a great time to explore interests and learn new skills — and colleges look for students who pursue meaningful summer activities. Help your high school student look into **summer learning programs** or find a job or internship.
- **Visit colleges together.** Make plans to check out the campuses of colleges in which your child is interested. Use the **Campus Visit Checklist** to learn how to get the most out of these experiences.
- **Remind your child, if they are a student-athlete, to ask the school counselor at the end of the year to send or upload their transcript to the NCAA Eligibility Center.** If your child took classes at more than one high school or program, an official transcript must be submitted for each school.

Visit bigfuture.collegeboard.org for more information and to access these resources.

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Family Action Plan: 12th Grade

Senior year is a whirlwind of activities. This is a big year for your child as he or she balances schoolwork, extracurricular activities, and the college application process. Use the suggestions below to help you and your child successfully navigate this important time.

SUMMER

- **Visit colleges together.** If you haven't already, make plans to check out the campuses of colleges in which your child is interested. Use the **Campus Visit Checklist** to learn how to get the most out of these experiences.
- **Ask how you can help your senior** [analyze a college list](#). You can help him or her choose which colleges to apply to by weighing how well each college meets his or her needs, for example. Find out more about how to [analyze a college list](#).
- **Find out a college's actual cost.** Once your 12th-grader has a list of a few colleges he or she is interested in, use the **Net Price Calculator** together to determine the potential for financial aid and the true out-of-pocket cost — or net price — of each college.
- **Encourage your child to get started on applications.** He or she can get the easy stuff out of the way now by filling in as much required information on college applications as possible. Read about [how to get started on applications](#).
- **Help your child decide about applying early.** If your senior is set on going to a certain college, he or she should think about whether applying early is a good option. Now is the time to decide because early applications are usually due in November. Read about the pros and cons of [applying early](#).
- **Gather financial documents.** To apply for most financial aid, your child will need to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). You'll need your most recent tax returns and an FSA ID to complete the FAFSA, which opens Oct. 1.

FALL

- **Encourage your child to meet with the school counselor.** This year, he or she will work with the counselor to complete and submit college applications. Learn more about [the counselor's role in applying to college](#).
- **Create a calendar with your child.** This should include application deadlines and other important dates. Your child can find specific colleges' deadlines in **College Search**. If your child saves colleges to a list there, he or she can get a custom online calendar that shows those colleges' deadlines.
- **Help your child prepare for college admission tests.** Many seniors retake college admission tests, such as the SAT®, in the fall. Learn more about helping your 12th-grader [prepare for admission tests](#).
- **Help your child find and apply for scholarships.** He or she can find out about scholarship opportunities from the school counselor. Your high school student will need to request and complete scholarship applications and submit them on time. Learn more about [scholarships](#).

FALL (CONTINUED)

- **OTer to look over your senior's college applications.** But remember that this is your child's work so remain in the role of adviser and proofreader and respect his or her voice.
- **Fill out the FAFSA to apply for aid beginning Oct. 1.** The government and many colleges use the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to award aid. Now it's easier than ever to fill out this form because you can automatically transfer your tax information online from the IRS to the FAFSA. Read **How to Complete the FAFSA** to learn more.
- **Complete the CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE[®], if required.** If your child needs to submit the PROFILE to a college or scholarship program, be sure to find out the priority deadline and submit it by that date. Read **How to Complete the CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE**.
- **Encourage your child to set up college interviews.** An interview is a great way for your child to learn more about a college and for a college to learn more about your child. Get an overview of the **interview process**.

WINTER

- **Work together to apply for financial aid.** Have your child contact the financial aid offices at the colleges in which he or she is interested to find out what forms students must submit to apply for aid. Make sure he or she applies for aid by or before any stated deadlines. Funds are limited, so the earlier you apply, the better.
- **Learn about college loan options together.** Borrowing money for college can be a smart choice — especially if your high school student gets a low-interest federal loan. Learn more about the **parent's role in borrowing money**.
- **Encourage your senior to take SAT Subject Tests[™].** These tests can showcase your child's interests and achievements — and many colleges require or recommend that applicants take one or more Subject Tests. Read more about **SAT Subject Tests**.
- **Encourage your child to take AP[®] Exams.** If your 12th-grader takes AP or other advanced classes, have him or her talk with teachers now about taking these tests in May. Read more about the **AP Program**.

SPRING

- **Help your child process college responses.** Once your child starts hearing back from colleges about admission and financial aid, he or she will need your support to decide what to do. Read about **how to choose a college**.
- **Review financial aid offers together.** Your 12th-grader will need your help to read through financial aid award letters and figure out which package works best. Be sure your child pays attention to and meets any deadlines for acceptance. Get more information on **financial aid awards**.
- **Help your child complete the paperwork to accept a college's offer of admittance.** Once your child has decided which college to attend, he or she will need to review the offer, accept that college's offer, mail a tuition deposit, and submit other required paperwork. Learn more about your high school senior's **next steps**.

Visit bigfuture.collegeboard.org for more information and to access these resources.

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FAQ: College Entrance Exams

GENERAL

What are college entrance exams? These tests are designed to measure students' skills and help colleges evaluate how ready you are for college-level work. The SAT® and ACT are both accepted by nearly all colleges and universities.

Do all colleges require a college entrance exam as part of the application process? Most four-year institutions require a college entrance exam score. The ones that do not require these scores will indicate that in their admission policies.

What other tests may be recommended or required? Some colleges may require SAT Subject Tests™ as part of the admission application, for application to certain majors, or for course placement.

How many times should a college entrance exam be taken? Most students take a college entrance exam twice—once in the spring of the junior year and once at the beginning of the senior year.

SCORES

How do colleges use test scores? They are used to apply a common standard for all students no matter where they went to high school. Colleges look at your test scores, along with your high school grades and courses, to see how well prepared you are for college-level work.

Does a college receive all scores from every college entrance exam you've taken? Some colleges will allow you to select which scores you would like considered for admission and others might have specific instructions about which scores get reported. This information, along with how they require them to be sent, will be included in their application guidelines.

PREPARING

What is the best way to prepare for a college entrance exam? The best way to prepare is to work hard both inside and outside the classroom. Take challenging courses, study hard, and read and write as much as you can.

What are other ways to prepare for the tests?

- Know what to expect. Being familiar with the test's format is the single best way to prepare for that test. Go to the testing organization's website to get familiar with the various test sections and the instructions for each part.
- Take preliminary tests. These tests (such as the PSAT™ 8/9, PSAT™ 10, and PSAT/NMSQT®) are meant to be taken in the sophomore or junior year and have the same format and question types as the admission tests. You can use your score reports to help identify specific areas you need to focus on.
- Practice, practice, practice. Students can use Khan Academy® to practice for the SAT for free with a world-class platform offering personalized and instructional content. Using free resources like Khan Academy and practice tests from the testing organizations' websites, you can discover your strengths and weaknesses and learn how to manage your time wisely during the test.

Campus Visit Checklist

Visiting a college campus helps you get a sense of what a college — and life at that college — is like. This can help you decide whether the college is right for you.

GATHER INFORMATION

Find out what you need to do to apply, and see if the college's class and major offerings are what you want:

- Take part in a group information session at the admission office.
- Interview with an admission officer.
- Pick up financial aid forms.
- Sit in on a class that interests you. If classes aren't in session, just see what the classrooms are like.
- Meet a professor who teaches a subject that interests you.
- Talk to students about what they think of their classes and professors.
- Get the names and business cards of the people you meet so you can contact them later if you have questions.

EXPLORE THE CAMPUS

Get a feel for student life, and see if this college is a place where you will do well:

- Take a campus tour.
- Talk to current students about the college and life on campus.
- Check out the freshman dorms, and stay overnight on campus if possible.
- Visit the dining hall, fitness center, library, career center, bookstore, and other campus facilities.
- Talk to the coaches of sports that you may want to play.
- Walk or drive around the community surrounding the campus.

CHECK OUT CAMPUS MEDIA

Tune in to learn what's happening on campus and what's on students' minds:

- Listen to the college radio station.
- Read the student newspaper.
- Scan bulletin boards to see what daily student life is like.
- Go to the career center and learn what services it offers.
- Browse the school's website and any campus blogs.
- Read other student publications, such as department newsletters, and literary reviews.

20 Questions to Ask College Representatives

Whether you meet them at a college fair or on a campus visit, college representatives genuinely enjoy talking to high school students and answering questions about their college. The following questions will help start a good dialogue.

1. What makes your college unique?
2. For what academic programs is your college known?
3. How would you describe the students at your college?
Where are most of them from?
4. Where do students hang out on campus?
5. What happens on weekends — are there things to do on campus or in town, or do most students go home?
6. Are fraternities and sororities a big part of campus life?
7. What are the housing options for freshmen?
8. Do many students live off campus?
9. Is there a sports complex or fitness center?
10. What are the most popular clubs and activities?
11. What's the security like on campus?
12. What's the surrounding area like? Is it easy to get around?
13. What are the most popular majors?
14. How would you describe the academic pressure and workload?
15. What support services (academic advisers, tutors, etc.) are available?
16. Do I need to bring my own computer?
17. What's the faculty like? Are they accessible outside of class?
18. Are there opportunities for internships?
19. Is there job placement help for graduates?
20. Are there any big changes in the works that I should know about?

How to Make the Most of a College Interview

The interview is primarily for you to learn about the college and to allow the interviewer to learn about you. Use it as a tool to assist your college selection. The interview can have a positive effect on your admission — rarely a negative one. Relax and be yourself!

- Your interview will usually be with an admission staff member, but it may be with a student, an alumnus, or a professional interviewer. Keep this person's perspective in mind.
 - The interviewer is eager to get to know you and will try to put you at ease. The interviewer will answer your questions but will be more interested if you have helpful questions that show you have already done some research on the college.
 - Be prepared. Know your rank, your test scores, and your present areas of interest. If you are undecided about your career, feel free to say so (half of college students change their intended major). Think through some areas you would like to explore, competencies you would like to develop, and projects or situations that intrigue you.
 - Do your homework about the school to get the obvious questions answered. You don't want to be silent when asked, "What would you like to know about our college?"
- Questions or comments like, "What kinds of internships are offered, and how often do students take them?" show more maturity in your thinking than asking about the number of books in the college library.
- Interviewers may ask questions about your interests, extracurricular activities/jobs, books you've read, meaningful experiences, reasons for applying to this college, life at school, and similar topics. Be ready to talk about these subjects.
 - Be honest. Everyone has strong and weak points.
 - Plan to have your interview alone. Most admission officers prefer to speak with your parents after talking with you, rather than during the interview.
 - Choose appropriate clothes to wear for the interview.
 - When you return home, send a thank-you note to the interviewer. Thank the person for his or her time and refer to something specific you discussed.

GET THE MOST OUT OF A CAMPUS VISIT IN 6 STEPS

1 DECIDE WHERE AND HOW

See if your school arranges group trips to colleges or if you could get a group of friends together and visit the campus. A family trip is another option and allows you to involve your family in the process.

2 PREPARE FOR YOUR VISIT

Before you set out, get a map of the college campus and pick out places of interest. Call the college's admission office to schedule a guided tour of the campus.

3 TAKE YOUR OWN TOUR

Just wandering around the campus on your own or with friends can be the best way to get a feel for what a college is like.

4 EXPLORE THE FACILITIES

Finding the spots on campus where students gather or asking a student where the best place to eat is can give you a feel for the character of the college. Visit the library and check out the gym or theater. Ask an admission officer if you can tour a dorm and a classroom.

5 MAKE CONNECTIONS

Talk to current students. Ask the students at the next table or sitting nearby what they like best about the college.

6 TAKE NOTES

During your visit, write down some notes about your experience. What did you see that excited you? Are there aspects of the college that you don't like? If so, what are they?

Questions to Ask During Your Visit:

ASK TOUR GUIDES/STUDENTS

- What are the best reasons to go to this college?
- What's it like to go from high school to college?
- What do you do in your free time? On the weekends?
- What do you love about this college?
- What do you wish you could change about this college?
- Why did you choose this college?
- What is it like to live here?
- What does the college do to promote student involvement in campus groups, extracurricular activities, or volunteerism?

ASK PROFESSORS

- What are the best reasons to go to this college?
- Can a student be mentored by professors, graduate students, or upperclassmen?
- How are professors rated by the college? Does the college think mentoring and meetings for project guidance are important?
- How does the college help students have access to professors outside class? Do professors join students for lunch, help with community service groups, or guide student organizations?
- How many students do research or other kinds of projects for a semester or more?

ASK FINANCIAL AID OFFICE

- How much has your total college cost for each student risen in the past year?
- How much do your students usually owe in loans when they graduate?
- What is the average income of graduates who had the same major that interests me?
- Will my costs go up when your tuition goes up, or can we use the same tuition rate I started with so I'll know the costs for four years? What should I expect in terms of increases in living expenses?
- How many students usually graduate in the major that interests me? How long do these students usually take to get their degrees? In what ways does the college help students graduate in four years?

How to Get the Most Out of a College Fair

GOING TO A COLLEGE FAIR

- Take a pen and a small notebook.
- Take a bag to carry the brochures you pick up.
- Print out some address labels with your name, address, phone number, email address, high school, and year of graduation. Spend your time at the college tables asking questions, not filling out contact cards!
- When you arrive, check out the floor plan and find out where the tables for your top choice colleges are located so you can go directly to them.
- Write down your most important questions in advance so you don't forget them.
- Check on whether any information sessions, such as financial aid, are being offered. Interested? Budget your time accordingly.
- Jot down notes about a college while your memory is fresh, such as right after visiting the table.
- Pick up the business cards of any representatives you talk to, so you can contact them if you have any more questions.

AFTER YOU GET HOME

- Make a point of going through the materials and your notes within one week after the fair. You'll probably remember more about your conversations with college representatives while the memories from the fair are still fresh.
- Follow up with any college that interests you by contacting the admission office to ask further questions and, if possible, plan a visit to the campus.

The Anatomy of a College Application

In order to get your college application together, you need to get many different pieces together to give the admission team a glimpse into who you are. Be sure to stay organized and find out from your school counselor or principal which of these items you have to send and which items your high school will send.

APPLICATION

Application Forms

This is the most common first step required to show your interest in a college. It might require information and forms from your parents. Both online and paper application forms are available, as well as services (such as the Common Application) that let you complete one application for multiple schools.

Application Fees

Fees vary, but generally it costs from \$35 to \$75 to apply to each college. Fees are nonrefundable. Many colleges offer fee waivers to students who can't afford to pay. If you need application fee waivers, speak with your counselor or principal.

SCORES AND REPORTS

College Admission Test Scores

Most colleges require that you send your scores from a college entrance exam (such as the SAT®). Some colleges will only accept scores that are sent directly from the testing organizations. Check with each college to verify their policy on receiving test scores.

High School Transcript

This is the record of the classes you have taken and your grades in each one. This is one of the most important parts of your application. Review your transcript for accuracy prior to completing your college application. Follow the procedure outlined by your high school for the submission of your transcript to your prospective colleges.

Secondary School Report

Some colleges require a Secondary School Report form to be completed by a high school official, usually a school counselor, with information about the school, the graduating class, and specific information about you. Your high school is responsible for sending this form to the college.

Midyear School Report

Much like the Secondary School Report, this form is submitted by your high school; it typically includes the fall semester grades of your senior year and updates to your spring semester schedule (if any apply). All colleges do not require this form.

LETTERS, ESSAYS, AND INTERVIEWS

Letters of Recommendation

Many colleges require letters of recommendation from teachers or other adults who know you well. Ask your references to write recommendations well in advance of the deadlines. You may want to give them a short written summary of your achievements and goals to help them write about you.

Essays

Many colleges require an essay or a personal statement as part of your application. Your essay is a chance for you to give admission officers a better idea of your character and strengths. Your essay should be drafted well in advance of the application deadline to ensure adequate time for review and revision.

Interviews, Auditions, and Portfolios

It is a good idea to ask for an interview, even if it is optional. It shows you're serious and gives you a chance to connect with someone in the admission office. Even if a college is far away, you may be able to interview with a local alumnus. If you're applying to music, art, or theater programs, a college may want to see samples of your work as part of your application. This means you may need to audition, send portfolios, or submit videos demonstrating your artistic ability.

College Application Materials Checklist



Use this checklist to keep track of the application forms and materials required by each school to which you're applying.

FORMS

- Requires secondary school report
- Requires midyear school report

College 1 College 2 College 3 College 4

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

TEST SCORES

- Requires entrance exam
- Requires test scores be sent from testing agency
- Requires SAT Subject Tests™
- Requires other state test scores

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

RECOMMENDATION LETTERS

- Requires teacher letter of recommendation
- Requires counselor (or other school official) letter of recommendation

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

ESSAYS/INTERVIEWS

- Requires essays
- Requires interview
- Recommends interview

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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FINANCIAL AID FORMS

- Requires FAFSA
- Requires CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE®
- Requires supplemental institutional form
- Requires state form

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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College Application Tips

Here are some tips to keep in mind as you start your college application process.

STAY COOL

College applications can be stressful to complete, but this is also an exciting time. Work with your counselor, your parents, and others to get through it all. You got this!

PLAN AHEAD

Review each part of the applications before you get to work. Some applications will require the same basic information and others will have unique requests.

GET ORGANIZED

Keep track of the materials and many parts for each application. Make a folder for each application to keep all materials together. Tell your counselor or other appropriate school personnel which materials your school needs to send to the college (such as your transcript and recommendations).

BE ACCURATE

Ensure that you put together an organized and accurate application. Review for grammar and typos. Make sure your name is the same on all elements of your application. Double-check that all documents you're submitting (like transcripts) are correct.

SUBMIT AND SAVE

Print and save the completed application before you send it and keep a copy for your files. And remember: only submit it once—either online or via mail.

USE A FEE WAIVER

If you used an SAT® fee waiver, you are automatically eligible for application fee waivers to over 2,000 colleges.

ASK FOR HELP

Ask your counselor, teachers, or parents to review your application, essays, and other materials before you submit them. Request a letter of recommendation at least two weeks before your deadline and provide supporting material to help them write the best one for you.

SET A SCHEDULE

Allow for time to get your requirements together, get input from your counselor or other adults, review them as a whole, and revise as needed. Keep a close eye on the application deadline, along with other deadlines for financial aid and scholarships.

BE CAREFUL NOT TO

- Procrastinate! There is a lot to do, especially if you have several applications to complete and essays to write. You may not do the application (and yourself) justice if you leave it until the last minute.
- Type your essay directly into the application. Draft it separately, and then upload the final proofread version.
- Send a photocopy of your own test score report unless requested to do so. Ask the testing organization to send your official test scores directly to the colleges.
- Take on the application process alone. Your school counselor is your best resource in the college application process. Teachers and parents can also help provide advice and support.

College Application Tracker



Use this form to note the dates you've completed each task in the application process. It will help you remember what you've already done and what you still need to do.

	College 1	College 2	College 3	College 4
APPLICATION				
Made copies of all application materials	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Signed and submitted application (online or paper)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Requested transcript sent	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Paid application fee	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Sent additional materials if needed	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Confirmed college received all materials	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Gave counselor (or school official) midyear school report	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
TEST SCORES				
Took entrance exam	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Had test scores sent	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Had additional required test scores sent (SAT Subject Tests™, AP® Exams, etc.)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
RECOMMENDATION LETTERS/FORMS				
Gave teacher(s) form for recommendation	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Provided teacher(s) with helpful information (i.e., résumé, deadlines)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Gave counselor (or other school official) secondary school form	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Wrote thank-you notes to recommenders	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
ESSAYS				
Completed first draft of essay	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Had two people proofread essay	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Revised and submitted essay	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

CAMPUS VISITS/INTERVIEW

Scheduled visit/interview
Made campus visit
Completed interview
Wrote thank-you notes to college representative
and interviewer

	College 1	College 2	College 3	College 4
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

FINANCIAL AID FORMS

Completed and submitted FAFSA
Submitted additional required forms
(i.e., CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE®, college form)

	College 1	College 2	College 3	College 4
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

ADMISSION

Reviewed letters of admission decisions
Reviewed and responded to financial aid offers
Made enrollment deposit to chosen college
(by May 1)
Notified the colleges you will not attend

	College 1	College 2	College 3	College 4
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

NOTES

Tips for Letters of Recommendation

Whether it is required for a college application or a scholarship opportunity, a letter of recommendation plays a crucial role in painting the complete picture of YOU. While grades, entrance exam results, and extracurricular activities all describe the type of student you are, the letter showcases your accomplishments, personal attributes, and skills.

WHEN TO ASK

- The earlier you ask, the better!
- One month before your earliest application deadline, especially when asking a teacher or counselor who might be writing many letters of recommendation.
- Early decision applications might require a recommendation at the start of your senior year.

WHOM TO ASK

- Often colleges request letters of recommendation from a teacher, your school counselor, or both. If you're considering a specific major, you might consider getting a recommendation from a teacher of a related subject.
- A counselor's recommendation broadly showcases the student's potential, while a teacher's recommendation provides a more specific focus on academic performance.
- If it can be any teacher, core subject teachers, such as your English, math, science, or social studies teachers, make good candidates.
- In some cases additional recommendations may come from a coach, work supervisor, or community member, but be sure to follow the specific guidelines provided by the college regarding letters of recommendation.
- It is recommended to ask a teacher from your junior year or a current teacher if they have known you long enough to form an opinion.
- It is best not to go back too far, as colleges want current perspectives on their potential candidates.
- A teacher who can speak to your potential outside the classroom as well is a great bonus!

HOW TO ASK

- Ask in a way that allows a teacher to decline comfortably if he or she does not have time to do a good job.
- For example: "Do you feel you know me well enough, and have enough time, to write a letter of recommendation for me?"
- On the application form, waive your right to view recommendation letters. This gives more credibility to the recommendations in the eyes of the college.

HOW TO HELP

- Advise teachers and counselors of appropriate deadlines, especially noting any early deadline dates.
- Take some time to speak with them, even if they know you well.
- Make it easy for them to give positive, detailed information about your achievements and your potential by providing them with a résumé or a “brag sheet” to reference.
- Follow up with your recommendation writers a week or so prior to your first deadline to see if they need more information before they mail their letters.
- Answer some of the questions below to provide your recommenders with the information they need to write the best letters for you.

Helpful Questions to Answer for Recommendation Writers:

- 1** What two adjectives best describe you? Give one example of why one of those words came to mind.
- 2** Are there any special circumstances, living situations, or relevant family aspects that have had a significant impact on your personal or academic life?
- 3** What do you consider some of your greatest strengths and how did you come to realize them?
- 4** What extracurricular activities have you been involved in? What achievements have you accomplished? Describe the ones that are most meaningful to you.
- 5** Why is a college education important to you? What are some of your long-term academic goals and what do you intend to study?
- 6** Have you had any experience in a leadership position? If so, what did you learn from the experience?
- 7** Have you served your community or had any volunteer experience? If so, which of these was the most memorable or meaningful and why?
- 8** Are there any challenges you have faced and overcome that you would want someone to know? Be sure to include what you learned from the experience.

The College Essay

The college essay is your chance to use your voice to add to your college application. Many colleges require the essay as a way to hear from the student directly and to get a sense of who you are in your own words. It's a great opportunity to personalize your application beyond the grades, scores, and other information you've provided and can make a difference at decision time.

8 KEY POINTS THAT ADMISSION OFFICERS LOOK FOR:

- A command of the basics of good writing
- A direct answer to the essay question
- A strong opening paragraph that captures the reader's interest
- A comprehensive argument or narrative—make your point and stick to it
- A style that is comfortable for you and that is appropriate for the subject matter
- Correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling
- Correct data—check your facts, dates, and names
- Succinctness—pay attention to the recommended length

WHAT THE ESSAY CAN DO FOR YOUR APPLICATION:

- Demonstrate your writing ability, a key component of success in college.
- Show that you have thought carefully about where you are applying and why you are a good match for the college, in your own words.
- Explain your commitment to learning and that you are willing and able to be a contributing member to the college community.
- Draw distinctions between you and other applicants, something that selective colleges especially rely on.

An essay will rarely take an applicant out of consideration at a college, but it certainly can elevate an applicant in an admission committee's eyes.

MAKE IT PERSONAL:

- Often you will be asked to write about a personal experience, an achievement, or a person who has been significant to you. Go beyond the what or the who and dig into the how and the why.
- If you write about a trip or event, describe how this experience affected you and is meaningful to you.
- If you are writing about a person in your life, be personal and specific, not just sentimental. Explain how or what this person did for you that is important to you.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

Revise, revise, revise. Take the time to reread and revise. This process will help you develop a strong opening and a solid direction, and refine what you are trying to express.

Show, don't tell. Give readers such convincing evidence that they will come to the conclusion that you want. Provide detailed examples instead of providing a list of things.

Be authentic. Don't stress trying to write what you think they are looking for—just showcase who you are!

Just get started! Writing something meaningful can be a long process, so get started right away to allow for time to draft and revise. Be sure to write your essay long before the deadline.

For Parents: Financial Aid Tips

College is usually more affordable than many families think, thanks to financial aid. The tips below can help you navigate the financial aid process and get the most money possible for college.

Create your Federal Student Aid (FSA) ID

(username and password). You can do this by the end of your child's junior year. This is an easy step and one of the few that you can complete early in the financial aid application process. For the most up-to-date information, visit the federal student aid website at studentaid.ed.gov.

Attend a financial aid presentation at your local high school or college fair. Learning about the financial aid process as early as possible is very helpful.

Ask financial aid questions when you visit a college campus. Ask the school representative if it's possible to visit the institution's financial aid office (if necessary, call ahead to make an appointment).

Ask financial aid representatives about cost medians instead of only looking at a college's published cost.

Complete the college's supplemental financial aid forms or the CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE® if the college to which your son or daughter is applying requires it. Visit css.collegeboard.org to complete your PROFILE. Also, remember that some institutions' financial aid and scholarship forms may have deadlines that are PRIOR to the college application form deadline.

Review forms and deadlines required by each college. Creating a chart or spreadsheet can be very helpful for keeping track of the different requirements and dates.

Fill out helpful worksheets prior to filing the FAFSA at fafsa.gov.

When in doubt, ask a financial aid professional.

Call a financial aid office of any college in your area when you have a question, even if your son or daughter does not plan to attend that institution. Financial aid officers can answer many general questions and are happy to help.

Keep all tax records and documents up-to-date and handy when speaking with a financial aid officer. If your financial situation changes (health issues, loss of job, etc.), alert your financial aid officer immediately.

The FAFSA application includes a feature called the Data Retrieval Tool (DRT) that allows you to transfer your tax return information to the FAFSA. Information is available on the FAFSA and IRS websites.

Look out for the Student Aid Report (SAR) that confirms you completed your FAFSA. It will provide your eligibility index for federal and state aid. If there are errors or incorrect information on the SAR, you can make corrections online.

Compare financial aid packages side by side.

Using an award letter comparison tool will allow you to get a clearer picture of where your student's financial aid is coming from and will help you make a more informed decision. There is a "Compare Your Aid Awards" tool, along with other free tools, on the BigFuture™ website, bigfuture.collegeboard.org.

Most important: When your child expresses an interest in a college, try to refrain from making your first question, "How much does it cost?" You can check on that later.

College Exploration Worksheet



Audience: Grades 9–11 Purpose: To develop college research and assessment skills Materials: Computer lab or college information books

Name of College: _____

Location of College: Small town Urban/city
 Suburban Rural
 Other: _____

Type of College: Two-year Four-year
 Public Private

Type of Classroom: Lecture
 Small seminars
 Independent study
 Other: _____

Instructors: Full-time faculty
 Part-time faculty
 Graduate student teaching assistants

Financial assistance (type of financial aid, average financial aid package, average student graduation indebtedness): _____

Size of the college: _____
Total

Undergraduate *Graduate*

Commuters *Residential*

Benefits of the location (activities, etc.): _____

Student body makeup: _____

Special academic programs: _____

Residential housing: _____

Academic support services: _____

Noteworthy alumni: _____

Special opportunities (internships, study abroad): _____

Why might you recommend this college to a friend?

Career services: _____

Handy Resources

bigfuture.collegeboard.org

Students and parents are provided a wealth of information regarding postsecondary education planning at this website. Topics range from the college search to the financial aid process. Videos from students and counseling professionals provide insightful advice.

collegereadiness.collegeboard.org

This website provides information regarding the SAT® Suite of Assessments. Included on the site are descriptions of the assessments, important dates, practice questions, and much more.

satpractice.org

Access free, world-class test practice for all students through Official SAT Practice on Khan Academy®. Students can practice for the redesigned SAT using Khan Academy's online tools, including diagnostic quizzes, full-length practice tests, interactive problems, and personalized practice recommendations. Students will also receive instant feedback on their answers so they can see their progress and make the most of their study time.

studentaid.ed.gov This is the comprehensive U.S. government site that covers all information related to financial aid. It also has a "Prepare for College" section that details the financial benefits of attending college, explores career options, and provides academic and financial aid checklists.

counselorworkshops.collegeboard.org

In addition to providing registration links for our in-person counselor workshops, this website also provides registration links for all webinars offered during the school year. The webinars are specifically designed for counselors and cover college advising topics such as the college application process, writing letters of recommendation, financial aid, advising special student populations, building your counseling program and leadership, and much more.

boost.poweredbyaction.org/communities/college-board-counselors/about

Join our online counselor community and engage in helpful dialogues with other counseling professionals. Learn about professional development and tools and resources to develop sustainable solutions that expand educational access and opportunity for all students.

nacacnet.org

The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) is an organization of more than 14,000 professionals from around the world dedicated to serving students as they make choices about pursuing postsecondary education. This site provides excellent resources for counseling professionals, students, and parents.

schoolcounselor.org

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) supports school counselors' efforts to help students focus on academic, career, and social/emotional development so they can achieve success in school and be prepared to lead fulfilling lives as responsible members of society. ASCA provides professional development, publications, and other resources, research, and advocacy to professional school counselors around the globe.