

A Planning List for Parents of Ninth- and 10th-Graders

It may seem early to start thinking about getting your child ready for college, but it really isn't — important groundwork should take place in ninth and 10th grades. Here's a list to help you make sure your child is on the right path.

GRADE 9

- 1. Create a four-year high school plan.** Once your child is settled into ninth grade, introduce the idea of preparing an overall plan for high school that relates to their goals.
 - Make sure you and your child know what high school courses are required by colleges, and that their ninth-grade courses are on the right track.
 - Map out when these courses should be taken.
 - Familiarize yourself with the various levels of courses offered by your child's school.
- 2. Tell your child to start thinking about careers.** Encourage your child to develop a tentative career goal. Of course it will change — often — but it's the thought process that counts.
 - Help your child to identify interests — likes and dislikes — not just in academics but in all areas. This will help your child focus on goals.
 - Encourage your child to discuss career options with others, such as the school counselor, teachers, recent college graduates who are working, professionals in the community, etc.
- 3. Suggest extracurricular activities.** Encourage your child to actively take part in a sport, school club, music or drama group, or community volunteer activity.
 - If your child may want to play sports in college, research the National College Athletic Association eligibility requirements. The NCAA requires completion of certain core courses; you can find the specifics at eligibilitycenter.org.
- 4. Meet with the school counselor.** The school counselor knows how to help your child get the most out of high school. Make sure your child has an opportunity during the school year to discuss post-high-school plans with the school counselor and map out courses to take during the rest of high school.
 - You should participate in this meeting, too.
- 5. Ask if the PSAT™ 8/9 is offered to ninth-graders.** The PSAT 8/9 will help you and your child's teachers figure out what your child needs to work on the most so that they're ready for college when they graduate from high school. It tests the same skills and knowledge as the SAT®, PSAT/NMSQT®, and PSAT™ 10 — in a way that makes sense for their grade level.
- 6. Save for college.** It's still not too late to start a college savings plan, if you haven't already. Every little bit helps!
 - Investigate state financial aid programs and 529 plans.
- 7. Obtain a Social Security number for your child if you don't already have one.** This is often required for applications, testing, scholarships, and other opportunities.



GRADE 10

- 1. Meet with the school counselor — again.** Make sure your child meets with their school counselor to ensure that she or he is enrolled in college-preparatory courses.
 - Check to see that your child is taking any prerequisites to advanced-level junior- and senior-year courses.
- 2. Ask if the PSAT 10 or PSAT/NMSQT is offered to 10th-graders.** While the PSAT/NMSQT is usually taken in the 11th grade, it is also often offered in the 10th. That's because it provides invaluable feedback on the student score report; 10th-graders can then work on any disclosed academic weaknesses while there is still ample time to improve them.
- 3. Is your child interested in attending a U.S. military academy?** If so, they should request a precandidate questionnaire and complete it. Your school counselor can help with this.
- 4. Attend college and career fairs.** These often take place in the fall at your school or in your area.
- 5. Support your child's participation in a school activity or volunteer effort.** Extracurricular activities help students develop time-management skills and enrich the school experience.
- 6. Tour college campuses.** If possible, take advantage of vacation or other family travel opportunities to visit colleges and see what they're like.
 - Even if there is no interest in attending the college you are visiting, it will help your child learn what to look for in a college.

Visit bigfuture.collegeboard.org for more information.

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College Planning: 11th Grade

Junior year 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 stay on track for college.

FALL

- Start with you:** Make lists of your abilities, social/cultural preferences, and personal qualities. List things you may want to study and do in college.
- Learn about colleges.** Look at their websites and find colleges at bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search. Talk to friends, family members, teachers, and recent grads of your school now in college. List the college features that interest you.
- Resource check:** Visit the counseling office and meet the counselors there. Is there a college night for students and families? When will college representatives visit your school? (Put the dates in your calendar.) Examine catalogs and guides.
- At school, speak to your counselor about taking the PSAT/NMSQT[®],** which is given in October. If you plan to ask for testing accommodations (because of a disability), be sure the College Board has approved your eligibility.
- Make a file to manage your college search, testing, and application data.** If appropriate (for example, if you're interested in drama, music, art, sports, etc.), start to gather material for a portfolio.
- Estimate your financial aid need.** Financial aid can help you afford college. Use the College Board's *Getting Financial Aid* and the financial aid calculator at bigfuture.org to estimate how much aid you might receive.


WINTER

- Sign up to take the SAT[®] in the spring.** You can register online or through your school. SAT fee waivers are available to eligible students. To prepare for the SAT, you can access free, personalized SAT practice tools at satpractice.org, including thousands of interactive questions, video lessons, practice tests, and more.
- Begin a search for financial aid sources.** National sources include the College Board's Scholarship Search and electronic sources. Don't overlook local and state aid sources. (Ask a counselor for help or check your public library.)
- With your family, make an appointment with your counselor** to discuss ways to improve your college-preparation and selection processes.
- Ask a counselor or teacher about taking the SAT Subject Tests[™] in the spring.** You should take them while course material is still fresh in your mind. You can download *The SAT Subject Tests Student Guide*, which offers test-prep advice, from satsubjecttests.org.
- Explore AP.** The Advanced Placement[®] Program helps hundreds of thousands of high school students achieve their college dreams each year. Get the facts at apstudents.collegeboard.org.

SPRING

- Contact your counselor** before leaving school for the summer if you are considering military academies or ROTC scholarships. If you want a four-year ROTC scholarship, you should begin the application process the summer before your senior year.
- Develop a list of 15 or 20 colleges that are of interest to you.** You can find many colleges at which you'll 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.
- Stay open to all the possibilities—don't limit your search.** To find the best college for you, you should apply to colleges of varying selectivity. Selective colleges admit a portion of students who apply. Some colleges are highly selective while others are less selective. Make sure to apply to public, private, in-state, and out-of-state schools so that you have plenty of options from which to choose.
- Take the SAT.** The test is typically offered in March, May, and June. Make sure you start preparing for the test several months in advance using the tools available at satpractice.org. And remember, if you're not happy with your scores when you get them, you might want to test again in the fall. Many students take the test a second time as seniors, and they usually do better.
- Start to gather documents for financial aid:** Be sure to keep a copy of your tax returns handy. You'll use these to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®), which opens on October 1.


SUMMER

- Register with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Eligibility Center** if you are an athlete planning to continue playing a sport in college (eligibilitycenter.org).
- Get your FSA ID:** Before you can fill out your FAFSA, you need to get a username and password (also known as an FSA ID).
- Find a full-time or part-time job,** or participate in a summer camp or summer college program.
- Visit colleges.** When planning your campus visits, make sure to allow time to explore each college. While you're there, talk to as many people as possible. These can include college admission staff, professors, and students. Take campus tours and, at colleges you're serious about, make appointments to have interviews with admission counselors.
- Create a résumé**—a record of your academic accomplishments, extracurricular activities, and work experiences since you started high school. 
- Download applications.** Go to the website of each college's admission office and either complete the application online or request a paper application from colleges to which you'll apply. Check application dates—large universities may have early dates or rolling admission.
- Visit some local colleges**—large, small, public, and private. A visit to a college campus can help you decide if that college is right for you. Make a plan ahead of time to get the most from your visit. Attend college fairs, too.
- Scan local newspapers** to see which civic, cultural, and service organizations in your area award financial aid to graduating seniors. Start a file.

College Planning: 12th Grade

Want to know if you're on track in the college application process? This checklist shows you what you should be doing, and when.

FALL

- Narrow your list of colleges to between 5 and 10.**
Meet with a counselor about your college choices and, if you've not yet done so, download college applications and financial aid forms. Plan to visit as many of these colleges as possible.
- Create a master list or calendar that includes:**
 - ◆ Tests you'll take and their fees, dates, and registration deadlines
 - ◆ College application due dates
 - ◆ Required financial aid application forms and their deadlines (aid applications may be due before college applications)
 - ◆ Other materials you'll need (recommendations, transcripts, etc.)
 - ◆ Your high school's application processing deadlines
- Ask a counselor** to help you request a fee waiver if you can't afford application or test fees.
- Take the SAT® one more time:** Many seniors retake the SAT in the fall. Additional coursework since your last test could help you boost your performance. Plus you already know what to expect on test day.
- Be sure** to have your SAT scores sent to the colleges to which you are applying. 
- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®):** To apply for most financial aid, you'll need to complete the FAFSA. October 1 is the first day you can file the FAFSA.
- Complete the CSS Profile™:**
CSS Profile is an online application used by certain colleges and scholarship programs to determine eligibility for their aid dollars.
- Prepare** early decision/early action or rolling admission applications as soon as possible. November 1–15: Colleges may require test scores and applications between these dates for early decision admission.
- Ask a counselor or teacher** for recommendations if you need them. Give each teacher or counselor an outline of your academic record and your extracurricular activities. For each recommendation, provide a stamped, addressed envelope and any college forms required.
- Write first drafts** and ask teachers and others to read them if you're submitting essays. If you're applying for early decision, finish the essays for that application now.
- Complete** at least one college application by Thanksgiving.
- Ask counselors** to send your transcripts to colleges. Give counselors the proper forms at least two weeks before the colleges require them.

WINTER

- Keep photocopies** as you finish and send your applications and essays.
- Give the correct form** to your counselor if the college wants to see second-semester grades.
- Have your high school send a transcript**—it is sent separately by mail to colleges if you apply online to colleges.

SPRING

- Keep active in school.** If you are waitlisted, the college will want to know what you have accomplished between the time you applied and the time you learned of its decision.
- Visit your final college before accepting.** You should receive acceptance letters and financial aid offers by mid-April. Notify your counselor of your choice. If you have questions about housing offers, talk to your counselor or call the college.
- Inform every college** of your acceptance or rejection of the offer of admission and/or financial aid by May 1. Colleges cannot require your deposit or your commitment to attend before May 1. Talk to your counselor or adviser if you have questions.
- Send your deposit** to one college only.
- Take any AP® Exams.** Show what you've learned in your AP classes. A successful score could even earn you credit, advanced placement, or both, in college.
- Waitlisted by a college?** If you intend to enroll if you are accepted, tell the admission director your intent and ask how to strengthen your application. Need financial aid? Ask whether funds will be available if you're accepted.
- Work with a counselor** to resolve any admission or financial aid problems.
- Ask your high school** to send a final transcript to your college.
- Review your financial aid awards:** Not all financial aid awards are the same, so it's important to choose the aid package that's best for you and your family. Be sure to note what you have to do to continue receiving financial aid from year to year, and how your aid might change in future years.

College Admission Glossary

What's a transcript? What's the difference between early action and early decision? When applying to college, you are bound to come across unfamiliar terms. This glossary can help you make sense of all the information you're sorting through.

ACT

A standardized college admission test that features four main sections: English, math, reading, and science—and an optional essay section.

Admission Tests

Also known as college entrance exams, these tests are designed to measure students' skills and help colleges determine if students are ready for college-level work. The ACT and the College Board's SAT® are two standardized admission tests used in the United States. The word "standardized" means that the test measures the same thing in the same way for everyone who takes it. Visit bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/testing/which-college-admission-tests-do-i-need-to-take.

Articulation Agreement

An agreement between two-year and four-year colleges that makes it easier to transfer credits between them. It spells out which courses count for degree credit and the grades needed to get credit.

Candidates Reply Date Agreement (CRDA)

An agreement many colleges follow that gives applicants until May 1 to accept or decline offers of admission. This agreement gives applicants time to receive responses from most of the colleges to which they have applied before deciding on one.

Class Rank

A measurement of how your academic achievement compares with that of other students in your grade. This number is usually determined by using a weighted GPA that takes into account both your grades and the difficulty of the courses you've taken.

Coalition Application

A standard application form accepted by members of the Coalition for Access, Affordability, and Success. You can use this application to apply to any of the more than 90 colleges and universities that are members of the Coalition. For more information, visit: coalitionforcollegeaccess.org

College Application Essay

An essay that a college requires students to write and submit as part of their applications. Some colleges require applicants to answer specific questions, while others simply ask them to write about themselves. Colleges may refer to this as a "personal statement." Visit <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/essays>.

College Credit

What you get when you successfully complete a college-level course. You need a certain number of credits to graduate with a degree. Colleges may also grant credit for scores on exams, such as those offered by the College Board's AP Program and CLEP®. Visit <http://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/testing/learn-about-the-ap-program>.

Common Application

A standard application form accepted by all colleges that are members of the Common Application association. You can fill out this application once and submit it to any one—or several—of the nearly 700 colleges that accept it. For more information, visit: commonapp.org

Deferred Admission

Permission from a college that has accepted you to postpone enrolling in the college. The postponement is usually for up to one year.

Early Action (EA)

An option to submit your applications before the regular deadlines. When you apply early action, you get admission decisions from colleges earlier than usual. Early action plans aren't binding, which means that you don't have to enroll in a college if you are accepted early action. Some colleges have an early action option called EA II, which has a later application deadline than their regular EA plan. Visit <http://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/applying-101/the-facts-about-applying-early-is-it-right-for-you>.

Early Decision (ED)

An option to submit an application to your first-choice college before the regular deadline. When you apply early decision, you get an admission decision earlier than usual. Early decision plans are binding. You agree to enroll in the college immediately if admitted and offered a financial aid package that meets your needs. Some colleges have an early decision option called ED II, which has a later application deadline than their regular ED plan. Visit <http://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/applying-101/the-facts-about-applying-early-is-it-right-for-you>.

Financial Aid

Money given or loaned to you to help pay for college. Financial aid can come from federal and state governments, colleges, and private organizations. Visit <http://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college/financial-aid-101/financial-aid-can-help-you-afford-college>.

Grade Point Average (GPA)

A number that shows overall academic performance. It's computed by assigning a point value to each grade you earn. See also Weighted Grade Point Average.

Legacy Applicant

A college applicant with a relative (usually a parent or grandparent) who graduated from that college. Some colleges give preference to legacy applicants (also called "legacies").

Need-Blind Admission

A policy of making admission decisions without considering the financial circumstances of applicants. Colleges that use this policy may not offer enough financial aid to meet a student's full need.

Open Admission

A policy of accepting any high school graduate, no matter what their grades are, until all spaces in the incoming class are filled. Almost all two-year community colleges have an open-admission policy. However, a college with a general open-admission policy may have admission requirements for certain programs.

Placement Tests

Tests that measure the academic skills needed for college-level work. These tests cover reading, writing, math, and sometimes other subjects. Placement test results help determine what courses you are ready for and whether you would benefit from remedial classes. Visit <http://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-started/inside-the-classroom/get-college-ready-now>.

Priority Date or Deadline

The date by which your application—whether it's for college admission, student housing, or financial aid—must be received to be given the strongest consideration.

Registrar

The college official who registers students. The registrar may also be responsible for keeping permanent records and maintaining your student file.

Rolling Admission

An admission policy of considering each application as soon as all required information (such as high school records and test scores) has been received, rather than setting an application deadline and reviewing applications in a batch. Colleges that use a rolling admission policy usually notify applicants of admission decisions quickly.

SAT

The College Board's standardized college admission test. It features three main sections: math, reading, and writing and language, including an optional written essay. For more information, visit: sat.org

SAT Subject Tests

Hour-long, content-based college admission tests that allow you to showcase achievement in specific subject areas: English, history, math, science, and languages. Some colleges use SAT Subject Tests™ to place students into the appropriate courses as well as to make admission decisions. Based on your performance on the test(s), you could potentially fulfill basic requirements or earn credit for introductory-level courses. For more information, visit: satsubjecttests.org

Sophomore Standing

The status of a second-year student. A college may grant sophomore standing to an incoming freshman if they have earned college credits through courses, exams, or other programs.

Transcript

The official record of your coursework at a school or college. Your high school transcript is usually required for college admission and for some financial aid packages.

Transfer Student

A student who enrolls in a college after having attended another college.

Undergraduate

A college student who is working toward an associate or a bachelor's degree.

Universal College Application

A standard application form accepted by all colleges that are Universal College Application members. You can fill out this application once and submit it to any one—or several—of the more than 3,044 colleges that accept it. For more information, visit: universalcollegeapp.com

Waitlist

The list of applicants who may be admitted to a college if space becomes available. Colleges wait to hear if all the students they accepted decide to attend. If students don't enroll and there are empty spots, a college may fill them with students who are on the waitlist. Visit bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-in/making-a-decision/what-to-do-if-youre-wait-listed.

Weighted Grade Point Average (GPA)

A grade point average that's calculated using a system that assigns a higher point value to grades in more difficult classes. For example, some high schools assign the value of 5.0 (instead of the standard 4.0) for an A earned in an AP class. Visit <http://pages.collegeboard.org/how-to-convert-gpa-4.0-scale>.

Your High School Résumé

A helpful resource to have during the college and scholarship application process is a résumé. A résumé provides a quick summary of your extracurricular activities, special abilities and talents, and leadership skills. You may want to prepare several versions for different audiences (colleges, scholarship organizations, etc.). Be sure to have several people review your drafts for feedback on format and information.

KEY FEATURES OF AN EFFECTIVE RÉSUMÉ

- **Be concise:** Most readers will not have time to review a lengthy, rambling résumé. You want to make the most of the time you have their attention.
- **Prioritize:** Know your audience and what information will be most important for them to see. Choose your key activities or skills to highlight at the beginning of the document. This shouldn't be a long list of activities, but rather the top activities to which you have committed a longer period of time and had in-depth participation.
- **Highlight honors and awards:** With the name of the award be sure to summarize what the award was for, why you received it, and the date.
- **Provide detail:** Give a short description of the activity, time commitment, specific projects on which you served, and the leadership roles and your specific responsibilities in that position.
- **Avoid acronyms:** Although initials may reference a school club, an acronym may have no meaning to your reader. Be sure to provide a clear name of the group, and if not self-explanatory, a short description of the club's purpose.
- **Include summer programs or jobs:** Be sure to provide a brief description of the program or your job responsibilities.

YOUR AUDIENCES

- **Colleges:** If the college requires or encourages the inclusion of a résumé with the application, be sure to do so. You don't need to repeat any academic information that is available on other parts of the application (i.e., transcript).
- **Scholarship organizations:** Be sure to highlight your specific achievements or talents that meet the criteria for the scholarship. This is where your details and descriptions can be very important.
- **Educators:** For someone writing a recommendation for you, a résumé can be helpful in reminding them of your talents outside the classroom.
- **Teachers:** Mention a specific class assignment, project, or participation that they can reference in their recommendation.
- **Counselors:** Highlight any specific circumstance you would want them to comment on in their letter.
- **Interviewers:** If you are interviewing for a college, scholarship, internship, or job, you may want to have a résumé to give to the interviewer or to include in your follow-up thank-you note.

College Resources for Students and Families

GENERAL WEBSITES

- **Campus Tours: Virtual College Tours.** Virtual tours with still pictures and descriptions, webcams, campus maps, and videos of hundreds of colleges throughout the United States. Provides a first look at colleges. campustours.com
- **The College Board.** A complete site, with college and scholarship searches, information about the SAT® and SAT Subject Tests™, and other material pertaining to the college search and application process. Easy-to-use college search feature. collegeboard.org
- **eCampusTours.com.** Virtual tours of colleges. Useful for its 360-degree views of dorm rooms and other buildings. ecampustours.com
- **NCAA Eligibility Center.** Official NCAA website that gives details of student-eligibility requirements to play NCAA sports. Watch this site for changes in eligibility; students can print the *Guide for the College-Bound Student-Athlete*. ncaapublications.com
- **Peterson's Education Portal.** An all-purpose site including a college search, as well as information about summer programs, summer camps, and jobs. The site asks you to register before using some of the search engines and other resources, but there is no registration fee. There is a charge for some of the services provided. petersons.com
- **U.S. Department of Education.** The federal government's website is easy to use and an excellent source of information on financial aid, much of it in Spanish as well as English. ed.gov

FINANCIAL AID WEBSITES

- **The College Board.** A website that includes a scholarship search, a loan calculator, and an online application form for the CSS Profile™, which is required by some colleges. collegeboard.org
- **FAFSA® on the Web.** The website for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. This form must be submitted in the senior year for families applying for need-based aid. Students may complete it electronically at this site. fafsa.ed.gov
- **Fastweb.** Extensive information on merit- and need-based scholarships and aid. fastweb.com
- **FinAid!** Good site for information about types of financial aid and applying for financial aid. finaid.org

BOOKS

Comprehensive objective directories

- *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*. New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc. Updated every two years.
- *College Handbook*. New York: The College Board. Published annually.
- *Four-Year Colleges*. Princeton, N.J.: Peterson's Guides. Published annually.
- *Two-Year Colleges*. Princeton, N.J.: Peterson's Guides. Published annually.

Subjective guides

- Fiske, Edward, and Robert Logue (contributor). *The Fiske Guide to Colleges*. Naperville, Ill.: Sourcebooks Trade. Updated annually.
- Pope, Loren. *Colleges That Change Lives: 40 Schools You Should Know About Even If You're Not a Straight-A Student*. New York: Penguin. Paperback 2014.
- Yale Daily News staff. *The Insider's Guide to the Colleges*. New York: St. Martin's Press. Updated annually.

Source: Department of Education.

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](https://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

Types of Colleges: The Basics

Is a college the same thing as a university? What does “liberal arts” mean? Why are some colleges called public and others private? Here are the basic types of colleges.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COLLEGES

Public colleges are funded by local and state governments and usually offer lower tuition rates than private colleges, especially for students who are residents of the same state.

Private colleges rely mainly on tuition, fees, and private sources of funding. Private donations can sometimes provide generous financial aid packages for students.

FOR-PROFIT COLLEGES

These are businesses that offer degree programs that typically prepare students for a specific career. They tend to have higher costs, which could mean graduating with more debt. Credits earned may not transfer to other colleges.

FOUR-YEAR AND TWO-YEAR COLLEGES

Four-year colleges offer four-year programs that lead to a bachelor’s degree. These include universities and liberal arts colleges.

Two-year colleges offer two-year programs leading to a certificate or an associate degree. They include community, vocational-technical, and career colleges.

LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES

These colleges offer a broad base of courses in the liberal arts: literature, history, languages, mathematics, and life sciences. Most are private with four-year bachelor’s degree programs that can prepare you for a variety of careers or for graduate study.

UNIVERSITIES

Universities often are larger and offer more majors and degree options—bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees—than colleges. Most universities consist of several smaller colleges, such as colleges of liberal arts, engineering, or health sciences. These colleges can prepare you for a variety of careers or for graduate study.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Community colleges offer two-year associate degrees that prepare you to transfer to a four-year college to earn a bachelor’s degree. They also offer other associate degrees and certificates that focus on preparing you for a specific career. Community colleges are often an affordable option with relatively low tuition.

VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL AND CAREER COLLEGES

Vocational-technical and career colleges offer specialized training for a particular industry or career. Possible programs of study include the culinary arts, firefighting, dental hygiene, and medical-records technology. These colleges usually offer certificates or associate degrees.

ARTS COLLEGES

In addition to regular coursework, arts colleges and conservatories provide training in areas such as photography, music, theater, or fashion design. Most of these colleges offer associate or bachelor’s degrees in fine arts or a specialized field.

SINGLE-SEX COLLEGES

All four-year public colleges, and most private colleges, are coed. But there are some private colleges that are specifically for men or for women.

RELIGIOUSLY AFFILIATED COLLEGES

Some private colleges are connected to a religious faith. The connection may be historic only, or it may affect day-to-day student life.

SPECIALIZED-MISSION COLLEGES

Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) focus on educating African American students. Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) are colleges where at least 25% of the full-time undergraduate students are Hispanic. HBCUs and HSIs may offer programs, services, and activities targeted to the underrepresented students they serve.

2 Paths to a Degree and a Career

Liberal Arts Majors and Career-Oriented Majors

Some college majors focus on preparing students for very specific careers. For example, a nursing major gives you the technical skills and knowledge you need to work as a nurse and prepares you to pass the licensing exam for that career. We call majors like these career-oriented majors.

Another road to a career is a liberal arts major. “Liberal arts” is an umbrella term for many subjects of study, including literature, philosophy, history, and languages. Students who major in these subjects don’t build technical skills for a specific profession, but they still learn valuable career skills. An example of a skill acquired in a liberal arts environment would be the ability to communicate effectively and solve problems creatively.

CAREER-ORIENTED MAJORS

Range of subject matter. If you choose a career-oriented major, you’ll probably take the majority of your courses in your major. That’s because you’ll have to take several required courses.

Course requirements. Career-oriented majors have more course requirements than liberal arts majors. For example, an engineering major would probably have to take several math, physics, chemistry, and other lab science courses from freshman year on.

Career planning. Once you choose a career-oriented major, your career path is well mapped out. Note that some careers, like engineering, require so much specific knowledge that students often start preparing in high school.

LIBERAL ARTS MAJORS

Range of subject matter. If you choose a major in the liberal arts, you’ll probably take classes in a wide range of subject areas, which can include English literature, history, sociology, economics, and philosophy.

Course requirements. Your eventual major within the liberal arts curriculum will be the subject area you take the most classes in and eventually earn a degree in. For example, you may major in—and earn a bachelor’s degree in—history or English literature.

Career planning. Some liberal arts majors don’t have a specific career in mind when they choose their major, but some do. Many future lawyers, for example, choose a liberal arts education as undergraduates—majoring in subjects such as political science or English—and then go to law school for advanced study.

Both Types of Majors Prepare Students for Careers

CAREER OPTIONS

Here are a handful of popular liberal arts majors and a few careers they can lead to:

- English: editor, marketing executive, writer
- History: archivist, museum curator
- Foreign languages: foreign service officer, translator, interpreter
- Political science: community organizer or activist, lawyer, policy analyst
- Psychology: market researcher, social worker, therapist

Some career-oriented majors include:

- Radio and television broadcasting
- Culinary arts
- Paralegal studies
- Mechanical engineering

WHERE TO
LEARN MORE

Read more about any college major in our **Major and Career Search** on [cb.org/bigfuture](https://collegeboard.org/bigfuture). You can also search for colleges offering majors of interest in **College Search**.

Campus Setting: Rural, Suburban, Urban

One of the steps in finding the right college for you is deciding what type of campus setting you prefer. Rural, suburban, and urban campuses have different advantages. The key is to find which setting lets you make the most of your college experience.

Which Is Right for You?

RURAL CAMPUSES

Rural campuses are located in the country, often near farms and wilderness areas, and usually near a small town. Here are things to consider about rural campuses:

- Most rural campuses are self-contained, with a majority of the students living on campus. This can increase a college's sense of community.
- Rural campuses can provide access to outdoor learning opportunities, particularly in fields like agriculture or environmental science.
- Many rural colleges bring entertainment to their students and provide free events. Comedians and bands may perform on campus during college tours.
- Most rural colleges provide on-campus transportation options, such as buses, for students.
- The landscape of rural campuses can vary widely. A rural campus in Ohio, for example, will be much different from a rural campus in Alaska.

SUBURBAN CAMPUSES

Suburban campuses are in small cities, large towns, or residential areas near cities. Here are things to consider about suburban campuses:

- Suburbs often combine some of the best features of urban and rural areas.
- Suburban campuses usually offer access to nearby cities and to outdoor activities.

- Suburban colleges are frequently self-contained, which can create a strong sense of community.
- Suburban colleges often have connections to the towns where they're located. This can provide opportunities such as jobs and entertainment.
- Public transportation may be available in addition to a college's transportation options.

URBAN CAMPUSES

Urban campuses are located in cities. Here are things to consider about urban campuses:

- Some urban campuses are spread throughout a city while others are self-contained within a city.
- Many urban colleges offer off-campus learning experiences. This may mean a chance to explore the work world through cooperative classes and internships.
- Urban colleges tend to attract culturally diverse students.
- Students can find entertainment options—such as museums, concerts, and plays—on and off urban campuses.
- Cities usually offer substantial public transportation options.

Sizing Up Colleges: Big vs. Small

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

As you begin your college search, one of the first decisions you need to make—and one that helps narrow your list—is what size college you want to attend. U.S. colleges offer many options, from small colleges with fewer than 1,000 students to large state universities with more than 35,000 students. What's best for you depends a large part on your personality and academic goals.

THE BIG COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

Do you picture yourself at a Big Ten university that offers everything from televised sporting events to countless degree programs? Are you itching to break free of the high school fishbowl and enjoy the anonymity that comes with being one of thousands of students? Then a big college might be a good fit for you. Here are some of the benefits associated with big colleges.

- Wide variety of majors and courses
- Well-stocked libraries
- Variety of housing opportunities
- Well-funded sports programs
- Wide range of academic choices and student activities
- Distinguished or famous faculty
- State-of-the-art research facilities

Things to Consider

- To succeed at a big college, it's best to go in knowing what subjects or general areas you're interested in. Students who do best at large colleges tend to be go-getters who take advantage of the many opportunities available.
- Introductory classes at a large college may contain hundreds of students. Some students find this environment exciting. Others feel overwhelmed.
- Another point: If you're attracted to a college because of its famous faculty, find out how many classes are actually taught by the professors, not by their teaching assistants.

THE SMALL COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

Do you enjoy personal attention from teachers and advisers? Then a small college may be just what you need. Some students find that a smaller setting is a better fit. There may be fewer facilities, but there are also fewer students to compete with. Here are some of the benefits associated with small colleges:

- Small class sizes
- Hands-on learning opportunities
- Individually designed majors
- Strong advising system; advisers know students well
- Strong sense of community
- Professors, not teaching assistants, teach most courses
- Opportunity to get to know professors well

Things to Consider

- Small colleges don't offer as many majors as big colleges; however, some of them let you design your own.
- Courses at small colleges are usually taught by professors, not teaching assistants. The professors may even know your name and areas of interest.
- Be aware that small colleges don't have the research facilities of large universities. If you're hoping to be a research assistant, find out what kind of work and facilities are available before you apply.
- Although you'll find a robust social life at most small colleges, you'll find less in terms of big sporting events and the variety of events.

START YOUR SEARCH

Whether you're considering a big university, a small college, or something in between, look carefully at the options and see what's most important to you. Keep in mind that college size is one of many factors to consider as you build your college list. Visit [cb.org/bigfuture](https://collegeboard.org/bigfuture) to begin a college search.

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.

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?

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?

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 outlets for students?
- 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.

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: _____

Assessing Your List of Colleges

As you develop a list of colleges that interest you, be sure you can answer these questions about them.

THE BASICS

- Where is the college? Can you locate it on a map? Is it too close to home? Is it too far? Is it too cold or too hot there?
- Have you taken the course work the college requires for admission?
- What size is the college? How many students are undergraduates?
- What is the college's selectivity ratio (what proportion of applicants were admitted last year)?
- Does the college offer majors that interest you?
- Is the college coed or single sex?
- What percentage of students live off campus?
- How many of the students graduate in four years? Five years? Six years?
- How many first-year students return for their sophomore year?
- How much does the program cost? What is the total per-year expense?
- What type of financial aid is available?

WHERE WOULD YOU FIT IN?

- What are the admission test scores at the colleges of interest to you? Where does that place you?
- What were the high school GPAs of most of the freshmen last year?
- Are freshmen guaranteed on-campus housing? If not, where do they live?
- Are there extracurricular activities that interest you?

VISIT THEIR WEBSITES AND READ COLLEGE GUIDEBOOKS

- What are their strong academic programs? (Ask a college representative, students, graduates, and teachers.)
- What courses are required for graduation?
- Are the courses you need/want available each semester? At convenient times?
- Are there special programs (study abroad, internships, etc.) of interest to you?
- What is the social life like? What percentage of students join fraternities or sororities?
- Do the pictures and the language the college uses to describe itself attract you?
- What is your general impression of the college?
- Is the school accredited?
- If professional certification is required for employment in the field that interests you, how many students enrolled in the school's program pass the certification exam?

ADMISSION PROCESS

- When are applications due?
- What does the application contain? Are essays required?
- Is an interview suggested or required? Is an interview available from staff or alumni?
- When may you visit the college? What is its policy regarding campus visits?
- What are the financial aid deadlines? What financial aid forms are required?

NOW ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS

- Am I a strong candidate for admission to this college?
- Do I want to visit this college?
- If I am not a strong candidate, what are my chances?
- What additional information do I need?

Source: Susan Staggers, Cary Academy, North Carolina.

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 and the Coalition for College 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

	College 1	College 2	College 3	College 4
Requires secondary school report	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Requires midyear school report	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

TEST SCORES

	College 1	College 2	College 3	College 4
Requires entrance exam	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Requires test scores be sent from testing agency	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Requires SAT Subject Tests™	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Requires other state test scores	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

RECOMMENDATION LETTERS

	College 1	College 2	College 3	College 4
Requires teacher letter of recommendation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Requires counselor (or other school official) letter of recommendation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

ESSAYS/INTERVIEWS

	College 1	College 2	College 3	College 4
Requires essays	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Requires interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recommends interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

FINANCIAL AID FORMS

	College 1	College 2	College 3	College 4
Requires FAFSA®	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Requires CSS Profile™	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Requires supplemental institutional form	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Requires state form	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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!

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.

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.

USE A FEE WAIVER

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

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).

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.

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.

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.

APPLICATION

	College 1	College 2	College 3	College 4
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"/>

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.

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.

Source: Adapted from material prepared by Gloria Mueller, Glenbrook High School, Illinois.

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.

Make Your Social Media Work for You

The impression that you make on a college admission officer may involve more than just an essay, a transcript, and some test scores. According to new data, colleges and universities do pay attention to what prospective students post on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc. In addition, potential employers for internships or permanent positions may also review your public social sites.

WHAT YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA TELLS OTHERS

- It sheds light on your interests and passions.
- It may give a more in-depth look at your volunteer work or special projects.
- Your creativity and technology skills may be spotlighted.
- It may provide evidence of your interest in a particular major, college, or career.

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA TIME

- Keep your profile information up to date.
- Consider providing a link to your social media sites in your college application materials (provided the college allows/encourages this).
- Invest the time to maintain quality in your postings, blogs, and videos.
- Showcase your leadership, awards, or expertise in a meaningful manner.

REMINDERS

- Review your email address to ensure it doesn't include rude or inappropriate language or references.
- Carefully consider your tweets and other comments, particularly any negative references about prospective colleges, your teachers, or your peers.
- Monitor what photos you choose to post. Don't include those that may depict alcohol and certain party and peer activities that would reflect poorly on your judgment or character.
- A good rule of thumb is: Don't put anything on social media that you wouldn't include with your college application.

NCAA Eligibility Center

The NCAA Eligibility Center is responsible for certifying the academic and amateur status of all Division I and II incoming student-athletes. College-bound student-athletes can create an account with the Eligibility Center by visiting eligibilitycenter.org. We recommend that students register during their sophomore year of high school to ensure they have adequate time to confirm they are on track for meeting initial eligibility requirements.

Academic requirements for each college-bound student-athlete are based on the student's core-course grade point average and their ACT or SAT score.

WHAT IS A CORE COURSE?

Core courses are those that are academic in nature, taught at or above your high school's regular academic level, receive credit toward high school graduation, and are four-year college preparatory courses. To be used in an academic certification, the courses need to be listed on the student's transcript with their grades and credits. Core courses must be in one of the following academic areas:

- English
- Math (Algebra 1 or higher)
- Natural/physical science
- Social science
- Foreign language
- Comparative religion or philosophy

DIVISION I ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- Graduate from high school.
- Complete 16 core courses in the following areas:
 - ◆ English—four years
 - ◆ Math (Algebra 1 or higher)—three years
 - ◆ Natural/physical science (one year of lab if offered)—two years
 - ◆ Additional English, math, or natural/physical science—one year
 - ◆ Social science—two years
 - ◆ Additional courses (in any of the above subject areas or comparative religion or philosophy)—four years
- Complete 10 of the 16 core courses prior to the start of the seventh semester, including seven in English, math, or natural/physical science.
- Complete the 16 NCAA-approved core courses in eight academic semesters or four consecutive academic years from the beginning of ninth grade. If students graduate from high school early, they must still meet core-course requirements.
- Earn an SAT® combined score or ACT sum score that matches their core-course GPA (minimum 2.300) on the Division I sliding scale.

DIVISION II ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- Complete 16 core courses in the following areas:
 - ♦ English—three years
 - ♦ Math (Algebra 1 or higher)—two years
 - ♦ Natural/physical science (one year of lab if offered)—two years
 - ♦ Social science—two years
 - ♦ Additional English, math, or natural/physical science—three years
 - ♦ Additional courses (in any of the above subject areas or comparative religion or philosophy)—four years
- Graduate from high school.
- Earn an SAT combined score or ACT sum score matching your core-course GPA on the Division II sliding scale.

COLLEGE-BOUND STUDENT-ATHLETES TIMELINE

GRADE 9: PLAN

- Start planning now! Take the right courses and earn the best grades you can.
- Ask your counselor for a list of your high school's NCAA core courses to make sure you take the right classes. Or, find your high school's list of NCAA core courses at eligibilitycenter.org/courselist.

GRADE 10: REGISTER

- Register for a Certification Account or Profile Page with the NCAA Eligibility Center at eligibilitycenter.org.
- If you fall behind on courses, don't take shortcuts to catch up. Ask your counselor for help with finding approved courses or programs you can take.

GRADE 11: STUDY

- Check with your counselor to make sure you are on track to graduate on time.
- Take the ACT or SAT, and make sure NCAA gets your scores by using code 9999.
- At the end of the year, ask your counselor to upload your official transcript.

GRADE 12: GRADUATE

- Take the SAT or ACT again, if necessary, and make sure NCAA gets your scores by using code 9999.
- Request your final amateurism certification after April 1.
- After you graduate, ask your counselor to upload your final official transcript with proof of graduation.