

College Planning: How to Get Started

STEP 1: GET STARTED

Assess your strengths, weaknesses, goals, passions, learning style, and social skills. What is most important to you in the college-search process? What do you hope to learn from the process?

STEP 2: MAKE SOME BASIC DECISIONS

- Where do you want to live?
a small liberal arts college, or a historically black or religiously affiliated college?
- Will you go to college full time? Part time?
- Do you want to attend a single-sex school, a technical college, a public or private college, a large university,
 - How important is the cultural/ideological diversity of the student body?

STEP 3: ENLIST HELP

Who do you want to assist you in this process (parents, teachers, siblings, relatives, friends)?

STEP 4: CONSULT REFERENCES AND WEBSITES

Look at college directories (College Board's *College Handbook*, Barron's, Peterson's) and use college searches (<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/>). Visit the websites of the colleges that interest you.

STEP 5: TALK

Discuss your goals and plans with your parents, teachers, and school counselor. They can provide helpful advice.

STEP 6: MEET WITH COLLEGE REPRESENTATIVES

Visit with college representatives when they come to your high school. Make a list of your important questions to ask the representatives. Also meet college personnel at area college fairs.

STEP 7: VISIT CAMPUSES

Try to go to the college campus and take a tour, meet with admission and financial aid representatives, and ask students what they think about the college. Can't make the trip? Many colleges provide virtual tours on their websites.

Source: Amherst Regional High School, Massachusetts.

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**.

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

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 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.

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.

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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 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.

Source: Associated Colleges of the Midwest (acm.edu).

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?

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.

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.

Most 4 year schools do NOT require a college entrance test score. The majority are "test-optional."

*SAT phased out Subject tests a few years ago.

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.

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.

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.

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.
- But not too early! It might be ok to ask a teacher at the end of junior year, but some might prefer to wait to write until the fall.**

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.

You should ask *in-person* first, and then invite them through Naviance. You can't "invite" in Naviance until the start of your senior year - don't worry, we'll show you how. :)

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.

A Guide to SAT Fee Waivers

SAT® fee waivers are available to low-income 11th- and 12th-grade students in the U.S. or U.S. territories. U.S. citizens living outside the country may be able to have test fees waived. SAT Subject Test fee waivers are available for students in grades 9–12.

How to Get a Fee Waiver

If you think you're eligible, your school counselor or a representative of an authorized community-based organization will help you get a fee waiver.

Are You Eligible?

You're eligible for fee waivers if you say "yes" to any of the following:

- You're enrolled in or eligible to participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).
- Your annual family income falls within the Income Eligibility Guidelines set by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service.
- You're enrolled in a federal, state, or local program that aids students from low-income families (e.g., Federal TRIO programs such as Upward Bound).
- Your family receives public assistance.
- You live in federally subsidized public housing or a foster home, or are homeless.
- You're a ward of the state or an orphan.

How to Register Using a Fee Waiver

If you're registering online, enter the following information:

- The 12-digit fee waiver code
- The name of a high school counselor or another authorized person
- The way you qualified for the waiver

If you're registering by mail with a fee waiver card, make sure it includes this information, and send it along with your paper registration form. Be sure to complete the fee waiver information in the form's Payment Information field.

WHAT FEE WAIVERS COVER

Free Tests and Feedback

- 2 free SAT exams, with or without the essay
- 6 free SAT Subject Tests™
- 2 free Question-and-Answer Service (QAS) or Student Answer Service (SAS) reports

FREE COLLEGE BENEFITS

- Unlimited score reports to send to colleges
- Waived application fees at participating colleges
- Free CSS Profile™ applications to apply for financial aid from participating schools

OTHER BENEFITS

- Fee reductions for score verification reports
- No non-U.S. regional fees for free tests (if you're a U.S. student testing abroad)
- No late registration fees for free tests (if you're in the U.S. or U.S. territories)

How to Access Your Fee Waiver Benefits

You only have to be identified once as fee waiver eligible. If you used a fee waiver for the PSAT/NMSQT or SAT School Day, the first time you log into your College Board account after test day, you'll see a pop-up asking you to accept your fee waiver benefits. Once accepted, the benefits are available in your account. If you registered for an SAT weekend exam using a fee waiver code, your benefits will be available in your College Board account after test day.