# Navigating the College Application Process

A guide for seniors — application types, recommendations, decision plans, essays, and finalizing your college list



# Today's Agenda

01 Application platforms & types

02 Decision plans: ED, EA, RD & rolling

03 Letters of recommendation

04 Essays & the personal statement

05 Finalizing your college list

# NC Graduation Requirements

### English

4 credits

- English I
- English II
- English III (or AP / IB)
- **English IV (or AP / IB)**

### Math

4 credits

- NC Math 1
- NC Math 2
- NC Math 3
- **One course above Math 3, aligned to postsecondary goals**

### Science

3 credits

- Earth/Environmental Science (or AP Environmental / IB Environmental Systems)
- Biology
- Physical Science, Chemistry, or Physics

### Social Studies

4 credits

- Civics Literacy or AP US Government
- World History or AP World History
- American History or AP US History
- **Economics & Personal Finance**

**Need credit recovery?** Your counselor will contact you directly if you're missing credits required to graduate.

Continued on the next slide — Health & PE and Electives.

# Graduation Requirements, cont.

### Health & PE

1 credit

### Electives

6 credits

- Including at least 2 credits from the Arts, CTE, or World Languages

**World Language is not required for graduation**, but a minimum of 2 years is required for admission to most 4-year public universities in NC.

Additional graduation endorsements are available — ask your counselor which options fit your plans.

# Diploma Name Check

Before your diploma is ordered, confirm that your legal name is correct and formatted exactly the way you want it to appear.

Scan the QR code or use the form link to submit your name check.

docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdFUBYIVHI5UaQ6K8_ZObVVOxlEcM2tcEdNeMBXf2uw9db-ww/viewform



# Join Remind for Senior Updates






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Learn

Any questions or
Can’t attend?  No worries!  Al

# Where You'll Apply

### Common Application

One profile and main essay sent to 1,000+ member colleges, each with its own supplements.

### Coalition & other platforms

Some schools use the Coalition App, ApplyTexas, or platforms like Scoir instead of, or alongside, the Common App.

### Direct / school-specific

Many public university systems (e.g. UC, some state schools) require their own separate application.

Tip: check each school's site early — you may need more than one platform.

# NC College Connect

A state program that directly admits NC public high school seniors to participating colleges — no essays, recommendation letters, or Common App required for those schools.

### 2.8+ weighted GPA

On track to graduate, with a 4th-level math course, get a personalized list of participating 4-year colleges

### Any GPA, on track

Every senior on track to graduate is directly admitted to their local NC community college

### Who participates

11 UNC System universities, 29 independent NC colleges, and all 58 NC community colleges

Some highly selective schools (e.g. UNC-Chapel Hill, NC State, Duke) don't participate — you can still apply to them the traditional way.

# Seeing & Accepting Your Offers

1

**Log in**

At NCCollegeConnect.org with your CFNC account, then click "Claim Your Spot"

2

**View your list**

See every college where you've been directly admitted, based on your GPA

3

**Accept your offer(s)**

Submit a short form for each school you're interested in — you can accept more than one

4

**Hear back**

The college follows up with next steps on enrollment, aid, and honors programs

Accepting an offer is not binding — it does not commit you to enroll.

# Good to Know

### Complete the RDS

The Residency Determination Service confirms NC residency for in-state tuition — needed no matter how you apply

### College Application Week

Most participating schools waive application fees during this week in October

### It doesn't limit you

You can still apply the traditional way to any school not on your personalized list

Still visit and research any school before accepting — a direct admission offer means you meet the requirements, not that it's the right fit.

Questions about your own offers? Talk with your counselor.

# Application Decision Plans

| Plan | Typical deadline | Binding? | Notified |
|---|---|---|---|
| Early Decision (ED) | Nov 1 / Nov 15 | Yes | Mid-December |
| Early Decision II | Early January | Yes | Mid-February |
| Early Action (EA) | Oct 15/Nov 1 / Nov 15 | No | Mid-to-late January |
| Restrictive / Single-Choice EA | Nov 1 | No, but limits other early apps | Mid-January |
| Regular Decision (RD) | Jan 1 / Jan 15 | No | March – April |
| Rolling Admission | Reviewed as received | No | 4-8 weeks after submission |

Exact deadlines vary by school — always confirm on the college's own admissions page.

# Choosing the Right Plan

### Consider ED or EA if...

- One school is clearly your first choice - ED only
- Your grades and scores are ready by November
- You don't need to compare financial aid offers
- You can commit before seeing other results (ED only)
- You are applying to any large, public, out-of-state school

### Consider RD if...

- You want more time to raise grades or scores
- You want to compare admission and aid offers
- You're still finalizing your college list
- You haven't settled on a clear top choice

# Letters of Recommendation

## Who to ask

- A core academic teacher from junior year
- Someone who knows your work in the classroom, not just your grade
- Your school counselor writes a letter automatically
- An optional extra (coach, employer) only if it adds something new

## How & when to ask

- Ask in person, at least 4-6 weeks before your first deadline
- Share a resume or "brag sheet" with context and examples
- List your deadlines clearly and follow up politely
- Send a thank-you note once the letter is submitted
- Must add recommender in Common App and attach each recommender to each individual school you apply to

# Your Counselor's Role

Alongside your own essays and forms, your counselor submits several required pieces directly to each college.

### Initial transcript

Your official course record and grades through junior year, sent with your application

### Secondary School Report

A profile of your school that gives colleges context for your transcript

### Senior-year grades

In-progress grades, then a mid-year report once first semester is complete

### Counselor recommendation

A letter plus ratings — including how demanding your course selection was

# The Counselor Letter

Required by the majority of colleges. Before your counselor can write it, you must assign your correct counselor in **Infinite Campus**, under **FERPA and Recommenders**.

**You must waive your FERPA rights in order for Counselors to submit recommenders, transcripts, etc.!**

In this letter, counselors address:

- Your pursuit of higher education
- Academic history, growth, and trends
- Any extenuating circumstances
- Special talents, interests, and community engagement
- A final recommendation statement

# Course Selection Rigor Rating

On the Common App counselor recommendation, your schedule's rigor is rated relative to what's offered at your school:

| Rating | Standard | Honors | Advanced Placement | Community College |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Less / Below Average | | | | |
| Average | | | | |
| Demanding | | | | |
| Very Demanding | | | | |
| Most Demanding | | | | |

GHS = your home high school. This is one factor among many — talk with your counselor about your own schedule.

# The Personal Statement

Your main Common App essay (about 650 words) — the one piece every reader sees, no matter which schools you apply to. It's where your voice, values, and story fill in what test scores and transcripts can't.

- Identity or background that shaped who you are
- A challenge, setback, or failure — and what you learned
- A belief, idea, or accomplishment that sparked growth
- A topic of your own choosing — any story worth telling

Common App prompts are published each spring — check commonapp.org for the exact current wording.

# Writing Tips That Actually Help

1. Start early — a strong essay usually goes through several drafts
2. Tell one specific story, not a summary of your whole life
3. Show through scenes and detail, don't just state qualities
4. Write in your real voice — readers can tell when it's not you
5. Get feedback from a few trusted readers, but keep it yours
6. Proofread out loud, then have someone else proofread too

# Strategies for Writing a Strong Essay

*Edit, edit, edit!*

- Does the essay fully and clearly address the prompt?
- Does the essay take any creative risks?
- Are all main ideas supported by details that are concrete, lively, and interesting?
- Is the writer's voice and tone consistent and interesting throughout?
- Does the essay reveal something about the writer?
- Does the essay communicate that the writer is a strong candidate for admission?

Adapted from The New York Times College Essay Checklist

# To Disclose, or Not to Disclose?

### It's a personal decision

- Will it help the admissions team gain insight into the skills, qualities, values, and interests you'll bring to a college campus?
- Will it explain a gap in academic performance?
- Have you fully overcome the challenge?

### If you do write about it

- Focus on positives
- Keep it simple
- Use the additional info section for context that doesn't fit the essay
- Seek further advice from your counselor

# Making the Mundane Exciting

### A boring personal statement...

- Chooses a common topic
- Makes common connections
- Uses common language

### A stand-out personal statement...

- Chooses an uncommon topic
- Makes uncommon connections
- Uses uncommon language

You **CAN** take a common topic and turn it into a stand-out personal statement — by making uncommon connections and using uncommon language.

# Supplemental Essays

Some colleges ask for one or more short essays beyond the personal statement. Track requirements per school — word counts and prompts vary widely.

### "Why this college?"

Name specific programs, professors, courses, or opportunities — generic praise ("great campus, great people") doesn't stand out.

### Short answers

Be concise and concrete — these are chances to show range, not repeat your main essay.

# Finalizing Your College List

A balanced list of 6-10 schools, spread across three categories:

### Reach

Highly selective, or above your typical admit profile. Worth a shot, not a guarantee.

### Target

Your grades and scores fall within the school's typical admitted range.

### Likely

Comfortably within range, with strong odds of admission — and ones you'd be glad to attend.

# How Many of Each?

## 2-3 Likely

High chance — 61%+

- Your academic profile is above the school's average admitted student
- You have a high probability of acceptance
- These schools provide security in case more competitive schools don't work out

## 2-3 Match

Medium chance — 26%-60%

- Your academic credentials are similar to the average admitted student at these colleges
- You have a reasonable chance of being admitted

Match schools are also sometimes called "Target" schools.

# How Many of Each?, cont.

## 2-3 Reach

Low chance — 11%-25%

- The average GPA and test scores for this school are above yours
- Admission is possible, but less likely
- Highly selective schools and colleges with low acceptance rates often fall into this category for most applicants

## 1 Wild Card

1%-10% chance

- Very low acceptance rates (usually below 10%)
- Even very strong students have a low chance of admission

# Before You Finalize, Check...

- Academic fit — majors, programs, class sizes
- Campus culture & student life
- Cost & aid — run each school's net price calculator
- Every application's requirements & deadlines are logged
- Location, size, and setting that fit how you'll thrive
- You've visited (in person or virtually) if possible

# The FAFSA Opens October 1

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid determines eligibility for grants, work-study, and loans. File as early as you can — some aid is first-come, first-served.

1

### Create an FSA ID

Both student and a parent create their own account at studentaid.gov, ahead of time

2

### Gather documents

Tax returns, income records, and bank/investment statements for student and parent

3

### Complete & submit

File online at studentaid.gov as soon as it opens in October

4

### List your schools

Add every college on your list, even ones you're still deciding on

Some states and schools also have their own aid deadlines — check each one separately.

# Scholarships & CFNC

## Scholarship search sites

- CFNC.org — free NC scholarship search & applications
- BigFuture Scholarship Search (College Board)
- Fastweb
- Scholarships.com
- Local sources: your school counseling office, community foundations, employers
- **Scholarships are sent weekly to your GCS Student email!**

## CFNC (College Foundation of NC)

North Carolina's free, state-run portal for college planning:

- Apply to all NC public universities & many community colleges
- Search and apply for NC-specific scholarships
- Complete FAFSA prep and connect financial aid info
- Complete the Residency Determination Service (RDS) — confirms NC residency for in-state tuition at any NC public college
- Request official transcripts to in-state schools directly through CFNC



# Your Fall Timeline

SEPT – OCT

Finalize your list, request recommendations, draft your personal statement

OCT - NOV

Submit Early Decision & Early Action applications

DEC

Finish supplements for Regular Decision schools

JAN

Submit remaining Regular Decision applications

Questions? Meet with your counselor anytime.