

COLLEGE BOUND

A Guide for Seniors





Dear Senior,

Congratulations! You've made it to your final year of high school—and you have wisely decided to continue your education after you graduate.

As a college-bound senior, you're going to have a very busy year. Besides your classes and everything else going on at school, you will have applications to complete, forms to fill out, colleges to visit, and decisions to make. But not to worry, this booklet will tell you what you need to do every step of the way.

This is an exciting time for you, so turn the page and let's get started!

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Get ORGANIZED



There's a lot to keep track of your senior year! Being organized will help you stay on top of everything you need to do. It will also help make the year run a lot more smoothly.

Check your class schedule

Make sure that you're taking the courses you need to graduate and the courses you should take for college. If you have questions about your schedule, see your counselor right away.

Set up a master calendar

A master calendar will help you stay on top of everything. Use this calendar to record test dates, application deadlines, college visits, and college events at your school.

Set up a college file

Use this file to keep copies of essays, written correspondence, and completed applications. Also use it to keep notes on college visits, college events, and conversations with your counselor, college representatives, and others.

Meet with your counselor

Meet with your counselor to talk about your college choices, possible majors, and financial aid. Your counselor can answer your questions and provide you with personal advice.

Make getting good grades a priority

Contrary to what you may have heard, your senior grades do count and they can be very important. Colleges often ask to see first semester senior grades, and at the end of the year, your final transcript will be sent to the college you plan to attend. *Don't let anything get in the way of your schoolwork this year.*

Your Senior TO-DO LIST



Maybe you've done some of these things already. Maybe not. Either way, go through this to-do list and think about each of the questions asked.



Be aware of testing requirements

Have you taken the ACT or SAT? If not, are you certain the college(s) you are applying to don't require test scores? If the answer to either of these questions is *no*, register for a fall ACT or SAT.



Decide where to apply

Have you discussed your college options with your parents and your counselor? Do you know where you want to apply?



Complete applications

What are the deadlines for the colleges you're applying to? Are you interested in applying early action or early decision? (See page 11 for definitions of these terms.)



Go on college visits

Are there colleges you want or need to visit? If so, which ones? How will these visits get scheduled? *Going on a college visit is the best way to find out if a college will be right for you.*



Discuss college costs

Have you talked to your parents about how your college education will be paid for? Do you need financial aid? Will you look for scholarships?

Take Admission TESTS



While some four-year colleges now have a test-optional policy and no longer require ACT/SAT scores as part of their application process, many colleges still do. (Two-year colleges generally do not require ACT or SAT scores.)

If you've already taken the ACT and/or SAT...

If you are happy with your scores and feel that they're high enough, that's great. You can move on to other things. If you want to try to improve your scores, register for one of the fall tests.

If you're wondering if you should retake the ACT or SAT, check to see how your scores compare to the test scores of the students at the colleges you're considering. If you're interested in a competitive college or program, or trying to get a scholarship, know that having high test scores can be very helpful.

If you haven't taken the ACT or SAT, and test scores are required at any of the colleges you plan to apply to, register for one of these tests as soon as possible.

Fall ACT/SAT registration information

- ▶ The ACT is offered in September, October, and December. To register for the ACT, go to act.org.
- ▶ The SAT is offered in August, October, November, and December. To register for the SAT, go to collegeboard.org.
- ▶ Register 6–8 weeks before the test.

For personal advice on whether you should take (or retake) the ACT or SAT, talk to your counselor or call the college admissions office.

Here are a few frequently asked questions regarding the ACT and SAT.

How do schools use these scores?

Colleges that require test scores use them to assess a student's readiness for college level work. Some colleges use test scores to help them decide whether to accept an applicant; others use them more for course placement.

Which test should I take?

While many students take both the ACT and SAT, a number of college admissions counselors recommend that you take a practice test for both and then spend all of your time and energy preparing for the test you're likely to do better on.

For advice on whether you should take the ACT or SAT, talk to your counselor or contact the admissions offices of the colleges you're considering.

How do I prepare for these tests?

Free test prep resources and practice tests are available at act.org and collegeboard.org. Test prep materials can also be found in bookstores, guidance/counseling offices, and libraries. *Be sure to take at least one practice test and go over the items you answered incorrectly.*

How do colleges get my scores?

Many colleges require that scores be sent to them directly from the scoring service. When you register, you will have the option to select the colleges you want your scores sent to. *Make sure that your scores are sent to the colleges you plan to apply to.*



**For more on the ACT and SAT,
watch this short video.**



VIDEO

Go on College VISITS



Going on a college visit is the best way to find out if a college will be a good fit for you.

Plan your visit

Learn about the college

Visit the college's website to learn about their campus, majors, programs, and facilities.

Decide when to visit

Be sure to visit when classes are in session so that you can talk to students and get a feel for what the campus is like when it's in full swing.

Check out all visitation options

Many colleges have open houses and visitation days for high school students and their parents.

Schedule your visit

Contact the admissions office directly or schedule your visit online. If there's a specific major or program you're interested in, be sure to let the admissions office know.

If you can't visit in person, you may be able to take a virtual tour on the college's website or at campustours.com.

College visit tips

1. Take a campus tour

A group tour is a great way to learn about a college. During the tour, your guide (usually a student) will provide you with facts and information. As you walk around the campus, try to visualize yourself as a student there.

2. Attend an information session

Most colleges have information sessions for prospective students and parents. These sessions can be very helpful.

3. Talk to an admissions counselor

Admissions counselors are available to discuss admissions requirements and to answer questions. If you would like to discuss your academic record or your chances of being admitted, take an unofficial transcript with you.

4. Check out the area

Explore the city or town the college is located in. Remember, you won't just go to school there—you will also be living in that community.

5. Take notes and pictures

Make a note of anything you want to remember. After your visit, write down your impressions and list the college's positive and negative aspects.

Questions to ask

General information

- ▶ What makes this college unique?
- ▶ How safe is the campus?
- ▶ What percentage of first-year students return?
- ▶ Which admissions criteria do you consider most important?

Academics

- ▶ What are your strongest majors?
- ▶ How large are most of the classes?
- ▶ Is it difficult for students to get into the classes they need?
- ▶ Are there specific requirements for my major?

Student life

- ▶ Where do students live?
- ▶ How do students get around campus?
- ▶ What activities are available for students?



Decide Where TO APPLY



If you're still deciding where you want to apply, remember, you are looking for a college that will be a good match for you.

Knowing what's important to you will help you find a college that will be a good fit. Which of the following are the most important?

Size

Do you want to go to a large college with lots of majors and activities, or to a small college with fewer students and a more personal atmosphere?

Location

Where do you want to go to college? Close to home? In your home state? Out of state? Near a big city? Close to nature?

Academic programs/other criteria

Do you have a specific subject that you want to study? If so, you need to find the colleges that offer that major. Are there other things that are important to you, such as a study abroad program, specific sport, or campus diversity?

Cost

How important is cost to you? In order to save money, many students choose to go to a public college in their home state or they start at a two-year college.

Admissions requirements

Which colleges seem to be a good academic fit? Look for schools that accept students with academic records similar to yours.

To find colleges that have what you're looking for, go to bigfuture.collegeboard.org.

Know Admission TERMS



Here are some common college admission terms you should know.

Early action/early decision

Students who apply early action or early decision submit their application for admission early in their senior year. These students then receive early notification of the college's decision. Students applying early decision make a commitment to enroll if they're accepted. Unlike early decision, early action is not binding.

Deferred acceptance

Deferred acceptance means the college is postponing the admissions decision. Deferred students can sometimes improve their chances for admission by providing additional information, such as evidence of improved grades and/or higher test scores.

Open admission

Colleges with an open admission policy accept virtually all high school graduates until spaces are filled.

Rolling admission

Colleges with rolling admission make decisions on applications as they receive them. Applicants are usually notified of the college's decision in 4–8 weeks.

Waitlisted

Waitlisted students may be reconsidered if enough accepted students don't enroll. Like deferred students, waitlisted students may improve their chances of acceptance by providing additional information, such as a letter of recommendation.

Complete APPLICATIONS



Fall is the time to start completing applications. Remember, your college application is a representation of you, and it's important that you present yourself in the best possible light.

Complete an impressive application

- ▶ Follow the directions and answer every question.
- ▶ Include all achievements, activities, honors, and awards.
- ▶ Use correct spelling and punctuation.
- ▶ Have someone else proofread your application before you submit it.

Consider completing a Common Application

The Common App is accepted at 1,000+ colleges. If you're applying to two or more of these colleges, you could save yourself hours of work by completing the Common App. Visit commonapp.org.

If you need a recommendation...

Tell the person writing the recommendation: 1) when it needs to be completed; 2) what information should be included; 3) what to do with the recommendation once it's written. *Be sure to give anyone writing a recommendation plenty of time.*

Work with your counselor

All applications require a high school transcript, and most have sections for your counselor to complete. Follow your school's procedures, and give your counselor plenty of time to complete the required documents.

For more college application tips,
watch this short video.



VIDEO

If you need to write an essay

If you are asked to write an essay or personal statement, think of it as an opportunity to tell an admissions or scholarship committee something about who you are.

Admissions officers read a lot of essays, so it's important that you take the time to write an essay that stands out.

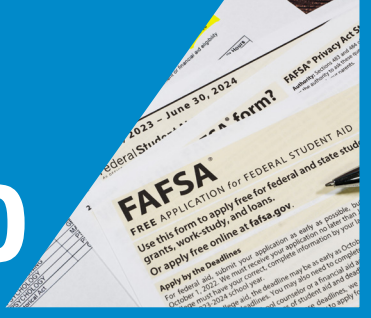


- ▶ Start early. Give yourself enough time to put your essay away and come back to it several times. Each time you take it out and read it again, you'll notice things you didn't see before.
- ▶ Tell the reader something new—something that can't be learned from your application or transcript.
- ▶ Keep your essay focused and use concise, clear sentences. Your essay is also an example of your writing ability.
- ▶ Write an essay that could only be written by you. It should offer insight into who you are and what makes you unique. This is an opportunity for you to share your dreams and passions, talk about an obstacle you've overcome, or show how an event has helped shape who you are.
- ▶ Have at least two other people read your essay to check for readability, grammar, and punctuation.

You've submitted your application. What happens next?

All information regarding your application is put into a file. When all of the required documents have been received (test scores, transcript, essay, recommendations), your application is evaluated by an admissions committee. The college then notifies you of their decision.

Apply for FINANCIAL AID



Financial aid is money that is given, earned, and/or lent to help students pay for their education. To receive financial aid, you must submit the necessary forms. If you're eligible for aid, the college's financial aid office will put together a financial aid package for you.

If you want help paying for college, you need to do the following.

1. Complete applications

In the fall of your senior year, complete college admission and scholarships applications.

2. Complete the FAFSA – this is very important!

For information and instructions on completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), go to fafsa.gov.

3. Complete the CSS Profile, if necessary

Some colleges (generally smaller, private colleges) require this financial aid application in addition to the FAFSA.

4. Apply for scholarships

Search for scholarships online at scholarships.com and fastweb.com. Also, ask your counselor for information on local scholarships.

While the financial aid process can be confusing, there are people who can help you. School counselors can provide information and advice, and all colleges have financial aid counselors available to assist students and parents.

For information and tips on how to get money for college, watch this short video.



VIDEO

Make the DECISION



At some point in the spring, you must decide which college to attend. Here's what you need to do.

As a general rule, students are notified of admissions decisions by April 1 and colleges require an applicant's decision by May 1.

If you're considering more than one college and have applied for financial aid, make sure that you compare all financial aid offers very carefully. Don't just look at the amount of aid being offered—also look at the kinds of aid. Are they offering grants and scholarships, or mostly loans?

After you've made the decision...

1. Read the college's instructions carefully

Colleges often have forms that you need to complete and a deposit may be required to hold your spot.

2. Contact the colleges you will not attend

Inform these colleges that you will not be accepting their offer of admission. This should be done in writing.

3. Tell your counselor where to send your final transcript

The college you plan to attend will need your final high school transcript.

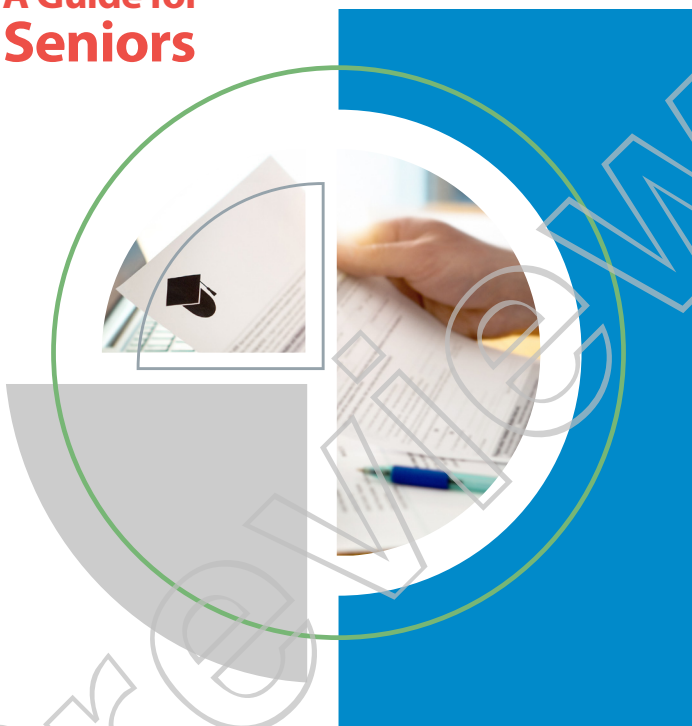
For more on how to plan and prepare for college your senior year, watch this short video.



**Congratulations! You are on your way to a great future!
You've worked hard, and you should be very proud of yourself!**

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**A Guide for
Seniors**



**This booklet is filled with expert advice on
how to make your college dreams a reality.**

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