



Step 2 - Do an Online Search

Before you start your online search, check the boxes and fill in the blanks below to indicate what's important to you in a college.

What are you looking for?

Type of college: 2-year college
 4-year college

Size of College: small
 medium
 large

Location: close to home
 in my home state
 other _____

Major: _____

Programs and Activities: _____

Other: _____

Once you've determined what you're looking for in a college, do an online search for the colleges that meet your criteria. These two websites will help you get started:
bigfuture.collegeboard.org
collegescorecard.ed.gov

Step 3 - Investigate Colleges

After you've come up with a list of colleges that meet your criteria, choose several to investigate further. List them below.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Learn as much as you can about these colleges. Explore their websites, talk to your counselor and parents about the colleges you're interested in, and make college visits.

Choosing a college is not about finding the highest ranked college; it's about finding a college that's a good match for you!

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Choosing a COLLEGE



Plan & Prepare for College



Choosing a COLLEGE

To find a college that's going to be a good fit for you, go through the following three steps:

STEP 1. Determine your criteria

The first step in choosing a college is to determine what's important to you.

Think about what you want with regards to:

- ▶ type of college
- ▶ size
- ▶ majors offered
- ▶ location
- ▶ cost
- ▶ admissions requirements

STEP 2. Do an online search

Once you've figured out what you're looking for in a college, do an online search for the colleges that meet your criteria.

STEP 3. Investigate colleges of interest

Create a list of the colleges you want to consider. Then gather information, make college visits, and narrow your list of choices.

Step 1 – Determine Your Criteria

Knowing what you are looking for in a college will help you find a college that's a good fit.

Type of College

Two-year colleges (community and technical colleges)

- ▶ An increasingly popular choice, two-year colleges offer affordable one- and two-year career programs.
- ▶ Two-year colleges accept all high school graduates.
- ▶ Students can start at a two-year college and then transfer to a four-year college.

Four-year colleges

- ▶ A four-year college education can open doors and prepare students for a wide variety of careers.
- ▶ Four-year colleges vary greatly in size, costs, and admission requirements.
- ▶ Public four-year colleges are generally larger and offer more majors and programs; private colleges are usually smaller and have a more personal atmosphere.



Size

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

Majors Offered

All colleges have a variety of majors. While most colleges have popular majors like Business, not every college has every major. If there's a specific subject you want to study, you need to find the colleges that offer that major.



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?
- ▶ In a specific area or part of the country?

Cost

Talk to your parents about how your education will be paid for. If cost is a concern, consider the following:

- ▶ Over half of all college students receive financial aid.
- ▶ Public colleges usually cost less than private colleges, but private colleges often offer more financial aid.
- ▶ When calculating colleges costs, include tuition and fees, room and board, books, and personal expenses.
- ▶ Going to a public college in your home state generally costs much less than attending a public college in a different state.
- ▶ To cut college costs, consider starting at a community college or living at home and commuting.

Admissions Requirements

Some colleges accept all high school graduates. Others are very selective. Look for colleges that accept students with academic records (grades, test scores, etc.) similar to yours.

Be sure to apply to one "safety school." This is a college you feel certain will accept you.



Other College Tests

PSAT/NMSQT

A practice test for the SAT, the PSAT/NMSQT is given at your high school, or a high school nearby, in October. The PSAT/NMSQT is good practice for the SAT (and also the ACT). When you get your scores back, you can see what areas you need to work on. The PSAT/NMSQT is also used to determine National Merit semifinalists.

The PSAT/NMSQT is primarily a test for juniors, but many sophomores take it also.

PreACT and PSAT 10

These are practice tests for the ACT and SAT. Some high schools make these tests available to their sophomores.

AP (Advanced Placement) and IB (International Baccalaureate) Tests

Many high schools offer AP and/or IB courses. These courses are equivalent in content and difficulty to college level courses.

Students can take an exam at the end of an AP or IB course, and if their score is high enough, they may be awarded college credit.

For additional information on any of these tests, see your counselor.

Set Yourself Up for Success

These tips will help ensure that you are able to perform your best on the ACT and/or SAT.

Be well rested. Cramming the night before the test won't do any good. Get a good night's sleep.

Dress in layers. Testing centers can be too hot or too cold. Dress in layers so that you'll be comfortable no matter what the temperature of the room is.

Arrive early. Give yourself plenty of time to get to the testing center so that you aren't hurried or rushed.

Have what you need. Be sure to bring a photo ID and your admission ticket. Also bring a fully-charged device for digital tests, several #2 pencils, a calculator, and a high-energy snack (if permitted).

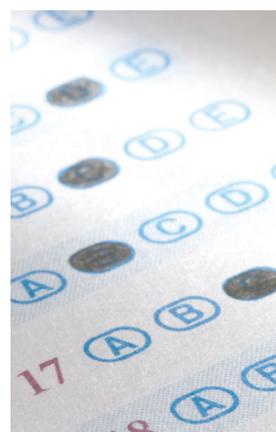
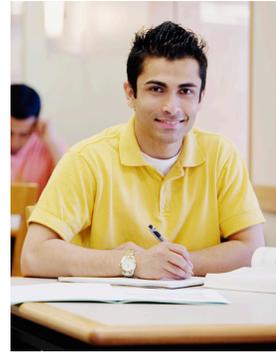
Relax, be confident, and do your best!

Should you take the ACT or the SAT?

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 are 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 are considering.

College TESTS



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College TESTS

Some four-year colleges now have a test-optional policy; however, ACT or SAT scores are still required by many colleges.

- ▶ ACT/SAT test scores are just one of the many factors some colleges use to decide whether or not to accept an applicant.
- ▶ Colleges accept both ACT and SAT scores.
- ▶ Unless you are certain you will not be required to submit test scores, you should take the ACT and/or SAT in the spring of your junior year. If you want to improve your scores, you will then have time to retake one or more tests in the fall.
- ▶ If you're applying for a scholarship, or to a competitive program or college, having high test scores may be important.
- ▶ You can retake the ACT and SAT multiple times.
- ▶ The best way to prepare for the ACT and SAT is to take college prep courses in high school.

The ACT

About the ACT

The ACT can be taken digitally or on paper and has four multiple-choice tests: English, Math, Reading, and Science. There is also an optional Writing Test.

The ACT is offered nationally in September, October, December, February, April, June, and July. It's given on Saturday mornings, and it takes three to four hours.



Registering for the ACT

To register, go to act.org.

Students should register 4–5 weeks before the test date.

Once registered, students receive instructions and an admission ticket to get into the test.

Preparing for the ACT

Information and practice tests are available at act.org. *Be sure to take at least one practice test!*

The ACT website offers many resources students can use to prepare for the test and improve their scores. It provides practice tests, test prep guides, subject guides, and more. Go to act.org for more information and to access test prep resources, including the free study guide *Preparing for the ACT Test*.

ACT Scores

Students receive a score (1–36) for each of the four tests, and an overall composite score (an average of the four test scores). The Writing Test score does not affect a student's composite score.

Score reports are released 2–8 weeks after the test date.

The SAT



About the SAT

The SAT is fully digital and has two main sections: 1) Reading and Writing, and 2) Math.

The SAT is offered nationally in August, October, November, December, March, May, and June. It's given on Saturday mornings and takes about two hours.

Registering for the SAT

To register, go to collegeboard.org. Students should register 3–4 weeks before the test date. Once registered, students receive instructions and an admission ticket to get into the test.

Preparing for the SAT

A full-length practice test is available on the Bluebook app (this is also the app you will use to take the test). *Take at least one practice test!*

To help students prepare for the SAT, College Board has partnered with Khan Academy. On Khan Academy's website, you can get a personalized practice plan, answer practice questions, and watch video lessons. Visit khanacademy.org/digital-sat.

SAT Scores

Students receive a total score (400–1600) and two section scores: one for Reading and Writing, and one for Math. Section scores range from 200–800.

Scores are released about 2 weeks after the test date.



The College Essay

If you're asked to write an essay, think of it as an opportunity to provide the admissions committee with insight into who you are and what makes you unique.

Here are a few tips to help you write an outstanding college essay.

- ▶ Be sure to follow the instructions with regards to length and subject matter.
- ▶ Tell the reader something new—something that can't be learned from your application or transcript.
- ▶ Use concise, clear sentences, and be yourself. Write an essay that could only be written by you.
- ▶ If given the option, you might want to write in detail about the impact or effect an event (or person) has had on you.
Instead of "I learned a lot from volunteering for Habitat for Humanity," write "Seeing the gratitude in Mr. Smith's eyes made a lasting impression on me. Never again will I take having a house to come home to for granted."
- ▶ Have at least two other people read your essay.

Admissions officers read lots of essays. Take the time to write an essay that stands out!

Application Tips

Submit an application that's accurate and complete.

- ▶ Follow the instructions and answer every question.
- ▶ Use correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
- ▶ Have someone else look over your application before you submit it.

Be aware of deadlines.

All applications require a high school transcript, and most have sections for your counselor to complete. Give your counselor plenty of time to complete forms, prepare transcripts, and write recommendations.

Make copies of all applications and follow up.

Before you submit an application, make a copy and note the date it was submitted. If you don't receive confirmation from the college that your application is complete, contact the college's admissions office to make sure they have everything they need.

Early Decision and Early Action Plans

A number of colleges offer Early Decision and Early Action plans. Under these plans, students receive early notification of their admissions status.

Early Decision plans are binding and should only be considered by students who are absolutely sure of where they want to go to college. Early Action plans are not binding.

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College ADMISSIONS



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College ADMISSIONS

Start the college application process early in your senior year. If you have questions, see your counselor.

The Application Process

STEP 1 – Submission

All colleges have admissions information and applications on their website. Be sure to submit everything that's required before the deadline.

STEP 2 – Review

The college admissions office will put all of the information regarding your application into a file. When all of the required documents have been received (e.g., transcript, recommendations), your application is evaluated by an admissions committee.

STEP 3 – Notification

Once your application has been evaluated, the college will let you know whether you have been accepted, rejected, or put on a waiting list. Most acceptance letters are sent out by mid-April.

STEP 4 – Your Decision

After comparing all college and financial aid offers, you decide which college you want to attend. This decision generally needs to be made by May 1.

College Admissions Policies

Colleges have varying admissions policies. Some colleges accept all high school graduates. Others are more selective.

Open Admissions

Colleges with open admissions accept all students with a high school diploma until spaces are filled. Virtually all two-year colleges have open admissions.

Less Selective

A high school diploma and acceptable grades are usually all that are required for admission to a less selective college. ACT/SAT scores may be required, but they are often used more for course placement than admission.

Somewhat Selective

These colleges accept students based on their GPA, the strength of their high school courses, school and community activities, recommendations, and possibly test scores.

Very Selective

The students who are admitted to very selective colleges generally have outstanding academic records and impressive activities, honors, and recommendations.



In addition to having requirements for admission, colleges often have additional requirements for specific majors. For example, a student may be accepted at College X, but not be able to get into that college's School of Business.

Admissions Criteria



Colleges use some, if not all, of the information listed below when determining whether or not to accept an applicant. Individual colleges, however, differ in how they evaluate this information.

Grade Point Average / Class Rank

Colleges know that students who do well in high school are more likely to succeed in college. Colleges therefore consider a student's grades in college prep courses to be the most important admissions criteria.

Strength of Subjects

Colleges examine high school transcripts carefully. They check to see if students have taken the recommended college prep courses, and whether or not they've taken any advanced or honors courses.

Test Scores

Some four-year colleges now have a test-optional policy; however, ACT/SAT scores are required by many colleges. Unless students are certain they will not be required to submit test scores, they should take the ACT or SAT.

Extracurricular Activities

With regards to activities, colleges look for meaningful involvement, commitment, dedication, and evidence of leadership. *Quality is more important than quantity.* Colleges also look for students with unique talents and interests.

Recommendations

Colleges often ask for letters of recommendation from counselors and/or teachers.



Questions to Ask

A college admissions officer or tour guide should be able to answer the following questions, as well as any other questions you may have.

General Information

- ▶ What percentage of first-year students return?
- ▶ What makes this college unique?
- ▶ How much does it cost to attend?
- ▶ What is this school best known for?
- ▶ How safe is the campus?

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?

Admissions

- ▶ Which admissions criteria do you consider most important (GPA, ACT/SAT scores, class rank)?
- ▶ 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?
- ▶ Do most students stay or leave on weekends?

College Visit Notes

College _____
Date _____

Location	
Size	
Admission Information	
Academics	
Costs and Financial Aid	
Campus Impressions	
Positives	
Negatives	

College VISITS



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College Visits

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College VISITS

Making a college visit is the best way to find out if a college is going to be a good fit for you.

Plan Your Visit

► Learn about the college

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

► Decide when to make your visit

The spring of your junior year is an excellent time to make a college visit.

► Check out all visitation options

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

► Schedule your visit

Contact the admissions office and let them know when you would like to visit.

► Be prepared

Make a list of the things you want to see and learn about. Also list any questions you have.

How to Make the Most of Your Visit

Take a walking tour

A group tour is a great way to see the campus and learn about the college. During the tour, your guide (usually a student) will provide you with facts and valuable information. Your tour guide will also make sure that you see what's most important on campus.

On your tour, you're likely to see the following:

libraries	residence halls
classrooms	dining halls
athletic facilities	student union
recreation centers	computer labs



Explore on your own

In addition to a formal tour, walk around the campus on your own. Note the cleanliness and atmosphere of the campus, and how the students look and act.

Eat in the Student Union and talk to students. Ask what they like (and don't like) about the college, how much they study, and what they do on weekends.

Check out the surrounding area

Learn about 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.

Visualize yourself as a student

As you walk around the college, imagine being a student there. Do you feel comfortable on campus? Does the college feel like a good fit?

Attend an information session

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



Talk to an admissions counselor

Admissions counselors can answer questions about the admissions process and discuss admissions requirements.

If you'd like to discuss your academic record or your chances of being admitted, take an unofficial transcript with you.

Talk to someone in your major

If there's a specific major or program you're interested in, let the admissions office know ahead of time. They can then arrange for you to speak with someone knowledgeable about that major or program.

Make notes

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. To help you remember the campus, take some pictures.

Talk to a financial aid counselor

Many students need help paying for college. If you have questions about financial aid, make an appointment with a financial aid counselor.

If you can't visit a college, visit their website to see if you can take a virtual tour online. To take a virtual tour of a number of campuses, go to campustours.com.



Jason's Story

Jason needed help paying for college so he and his parents completed a FAFSA.

When Jason received his FAFSA Submission Summary (FSS), he saw that his Student Aid Index (SAI) was \$8,000. Jason and his parents knew that their financial need would primarily be determined by comparing their SAI to the cost of attendance (COA) at the colleges he was considering.

To get an idea of how much financial need he will have at each college, his family created the following table.

	Private U	State College
Cost of the college	\$38,000	\$20,000
Minus SAI amount	<u>\$8,000</u>	<u>\$8,000</u>
Financial Need	\$30,000	\$12,000

In March, Jason received award letters from both colleges. These letters explained the financial aid package each college was offering him.

	Private U Package	State College Package
Scholarship	\$5,000	0
Grant	\$7,000	\$7,000
Loan	<u>\$18,000</u>	<u>\$5,000</u>
	\$30,000	\$12,000

Not wanting to borrow \$18,000 for his first year of college, Jason decided to go to State College.

Financial aid can be confusing, but high school counselors and college financial aid administrators can help you figure it out. There is also great information online at studentaid.gov and finaid.org.

College is an investment in your future!

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Paying for COLLEGE



How to Get Financial Aid

1. Complete college applications

In the fall of your senior year, complete applications for admission and financial aid.

2. Complete a FAFSA – this is very important

For information and instructions on how to complete a FAFSA either electronically or via a paper application, go to fafsa.gov.

3. Complete the CSS Profile, if necessary

Some colleges (generally smaller, private colleges) require the completion of this application also.

4. Apply for scholarships

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

Ways to Cut College Costs

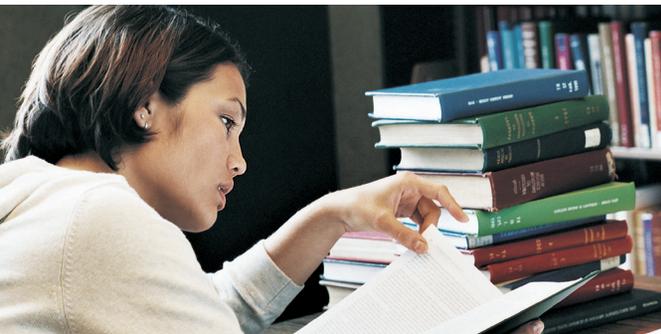
1. Live at home and commute

Living in a dorm on campus can add a significant amount of money to the cost of a college education. Students who want to save money can live at home and commute to a local college.

2. Start at a two-year college

Students who want to earn a bachelor's degree can save money by starting at a two-year college and transferring to a four-year college after a year or two.

Plan & Prepare for College



Paying for COLLEGE

With college costs continuing to rise, most families are concerned about how to pay for college—and everyone is looking for ways to make college more affordable.

Attending college can be expensive. The average cost of attendance (tuition, fees, books, room and board) at an in-state four-year public college is approximately \$27,300. But don't let that figure scare you.

There is a great deal of financial aid available, and there are a number of ways to cut college costs.

Never let financial concerns stop you from furthering your education! There are lots of ways to make college affordable.

How to Pay for College

Use savings

Students and their parents are expected to use their income and savings to pay for as much as they can. For information on ways that families can stretch their college dollars, go to collegesavings.org.

Take out a loan

Students who need additional money to pay for college often take out a loan. The government has some excellent low-interest loan programs for college students and their parents.

College students can get a subsidized or unsubsidized Direct Loan. Repayment doesn't begin until after a student graduates or leaves college. Parents of college students can also get a PLUS Loan. For information on these loans, go to finaid.org.

Work to earn money

Many college students get a part-time job on campus or in the surrounding community to help pay for their education. Students who qualify for financial aid may be offered a job through a work-study program as part of their financial aid package.



Apply for financial aid

Financial aid is money that is given, earned, or lent to help students pay for college. There is a great deal of financial aid available for students who qualify. Most of this aid comes from the federal government.

Types of Financial Aid

- ▶ **Grants** – money given, usually because of financial need
- ▶ **Scholarships** – money awarded for academic achievement or an outstanding talent or skill
- ▶ **Work-study** – money earned at a part-time job
- ▶ **Loans** – borrowed money that must be repaid

Financial aid is most often awarded in the form of a “package.” Packages, which consist of grants, scholarships, work-study, and/or loans, are put together by the college's financial aid office.

Financial aid is usually awarded on the basis of **financial need**. (Scholarships are the exception.) Financial need is the difference between the cost of attending a college (tuition, fees, books, room and board) and the amount a family can afford.

For example, if a family can afford \$7,000 and the cost of attending a college is \$22,000, the student has a financial need of \$15,000.

To apply for financial aid, families must complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).



High School Year by Year

12th Grade

Fall/Winter

- ▶ Revisit the colleges you're seriously considering.
- ▶ Retake the ACT and/or SAT, if necessary.
- ▶ Complete college applications. Be aware of requirements and deadlines.
- ▶ Meet with your school counselor to discuss your college choices, possible majors, and financial aid. Also find out what your GPA is.
- ▶ If you are applying for financial aid, be sure to complete a FAFSA. This is very important! For information and instructions on how to complete a FAFSA, visit fafsa.gov.

Spring

- ▶ Consider your college options and compare financial aid packages.
- ▶ Decide where you want to go to college and complete the required forms. Notify the other colleges you applied to of your decision. If you plan to live on campus, send in your housing deposit.
- ▶ Tell your counselor where to send your final transcript.

College Recommended Courses

The most important thing you can do to prepare for college is to follow a college preparatory program in high school.

Four-year colleges generally recommend that students take the following college prep courses in high school:

- 4 years of English
- 3–4 years of math (including Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II)
- 3 years of science
- 2–3 years of the same world language
- 3 years of social studies
- 1 year of fine or performing arts

Competitive schools and programs consider the above to be the minimum requirements. They recommend that students challenge themselves by taking advanced, honors, AP (Advanced Placement), and IB (International Baccalaureate) courses whenever possible.

As you plan and prepare for college, learn as much as you can about your college options, admissions, tests, and financial aid. These websites have excellent information for both students and parents.

- bigfuture.collegeboard.org
- act.org
- educationplanner.org
- studentaid.gov
- finaid.org
- collegesavings.org
- collegescorecard.ed.gov
- cappex.com

"Our best chance for happiness is education."

Mark Van Doren

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College TIMELINE



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College TIMELINE

Going to college gives you the opportunity to study new subjects, make new friends, and become more independent. Most importantly, college gives you the opportunity to become the person you want to be.

Make going to college your goal!

Doing the following in high school will help put you on the path to college.

- ▶ Take the recommended college prep courses and get the best grades you can.
- ▶ Pursue your personal interests and develop your skills and talents.
- ▶ Get involved in school and community activities.
- ▶ Gather information about your college choices and options.

High School Year by Year

To get into college, there are specific things you need to do each year. Doing the following will help keep you organized and on track.

9th Grade

- ▶ Get high school off to a good start by working hard in all your classes. Remember, all of your freshman grades will become part of your permanent record. Your freshman grades will also be used to calculate your high school grade point average (GPA).
- ▶ Develop a four-year high school plan. This plan should list all of the courses you intend to take each year. Make sure your four-year plan includes the recommended college prep courses.
- ▶ Talk to your parents and your high school counselor about your plans to attend college.



10th Grade

- ▶ Consider taking a college practice test. Your counselor will let you know which test (PSAT 10, PreACT, or PSAT/NMSQT) is offered at your school.
- ▶ Make informal visits to colleges to get a feel for what different college campuses are like.
- ▶ Start thinking about what you are looking for in a college with regards to size, location, cost, majors, and special interests.

11th Grade

- ▶ Research and evaluate your college options.
 - ▶ Visit college websites.
 - ▶ Attend college fairs.
 - ▶ Meet with college representatives.
 - ▶ Search online for colleges that meet your needs.
 - ▶ Talk to your parents about college costs.
- ▶ Take the PSAT/NMSQT in October.
- ▶ Think of your interests and abilities in terms of possible college majors.
- ▶ Take the ACT and/or SAT in the spring, if necessary.
- ▶ Meet with your counselor to discuss your college options and your senior schedule. Make sure your senior courses meet your high school's graduation requirements—and that you are taking all of the courses recommended for college.
- ▶ Make college visits in the spring.
- ▶ Look into scholarship opportunities.
- ▶ If you're thinking about playing a sport in college, register with the NCAA at eligibilitycenter.org.
- ▶ Narrow your list of college choices so that you'll be ready to fill out applications in the fall.

