TORCHLIGHT

Banish The Shade.

Version 1.o1

This is a very early release missing some key features that will be added in version 1.10:

1. A website to support this document
2. A detailed program of studies involving extracurriculars as well as courses
3. profiles of real students who have had successful high school careers
4. Improvements to the “important ideas” chapter

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**Anything with an \* is a critical, crucial section to read. Anything with \*\*!!!\*\*’s are an absolute necessity to read- and we have often marked large sections as important- making all the subsections important (such as the entire ‘fundamental college planning’ is marked important).**

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# 

# Foreword\*\*!!!\*\*

This document serves one main purpose. To educate students (and parents) about how the school system works so that everyone has an equal opportunity to get into the best colleges in the world. Normally, this valuable information is kept hidden from the majority of students and only a few elite students know how to get into colleges like Harvard. The point of this document TORCHLIGHT is to fight the shadiness. This concept of ‘shadiness’ or ‘shady’ behavior is best illustrated with examples: one student gets into MIT because of doing research with a professor that happens to be a family member. Another, student somehow appears in a multivariable calculus class in his or her sophomore year. Basically, shadiness is the behavior of getting something that puts one is great shape for college admissions by using some information or resource no one else either knew about or had access to. Hence, we named the document TORCHLIGHT to shine light on this hidden information.

In particular, this document is of great use to immigrant families or families that move into our school system and have no clue about how to do well. The primary founders of this document have also been disrespected by this system. This is not the school’s fault. It is simply the product of competitive college admissions and the immigrant’s lack of local information.

This is how the system has generally run. A few students with affluent parents, connections and valuable information have had great success. From before middle school, these students are put in advanced math courses, study very hard and are way ahead of other students in development. Plus because they are around each other, they learn about all the information in this document from the upperclassman some of who have gotten into very affluent schools. They also start lots of science and math competitions in middle school and take it to a whole other level in high school. Some even compete at the national or global level. This document should allow students who are intelligent but not part of this elite class to challenge themselves, compete fairly and succeed (get into great colleges they deserve to be in).

A final note about this document. It has a lot of material much of which will not apply to everyone. Use the table of contents to navigate to sections that apply to you. However, a lot important information is scattered (due to the nature of this complex topic) so though it is long, reading everything is unbelievably helpful- and critical if you are unfamiliar with the college system in America (which most students without parents or siblings who have gone through it are).

# General College Information

In this section we explain how one applies for college and things to know about when applying. This section has 6 subsections titled: College Process, Finding a List of Colleges You Apply to, What Colleges Look For, What Colleges Dislike, Financial Aid and College Essays/Supplementary Essays.

## College Process

At some point in your senior year, you will apply for college. At this point, you’ll hear about many important ways to apply: Early decision, Early action, Rolling decision and regular decision. You should look up what these mean. Deadlines and terms vary - some require you to attend if admitted while others may only inform you earlier. Colleges have their own definitions - some colleges are weird and you should know their process.

You either apply to the college as a whole or for a program. Programs (sometimes called schools) are more focused units within the college, for example a “Medical School” would be geared towards pre-med students. Programs can have slightly different criteria and application forms. These vary tremendously from college to college and research is the only way to be certain of what program (or even college) you would like to apply to.

After you apply, Colleges have three responses: acceptance, rejection and waitlisting (also deferral in some cases). Acceptance and rejection are obvious; but waitlisting is when, if they have a few open spots towards the end of their enrollment period, they may or may not accept you. Some colleges have a ranked waitlist where they tell you the order in which they will accept students when spots allow it. You may want to ask about this when waitlisted from a college, to know your probability of getting in.

Colleges require you to submit many things when you apply. Check with them to see the full list of what they require or will accept (the limit on the number of recommendations, scores etc.). This list would be in the “admissions” sections (usually in an “apply to” or “incoming freshmen” tab). Here are things you have to submit:

* SAT scores or ACT scores (most colleges require a writing portion for these tests - see their website’s “admissions for incoming freshman” page for their details).
* SAT Subject tests (may be required by some colleges - especially elite ones).
  + Usually, one science and one math or some variety are required - see their website (“admissions for incoming freshmen” page) for all the details.
* Transcript (some colleges do self-reporting, meaning that you will report your own grades. The high school you go to will send your grades (up to that point) to colleges you apply to- there will be some system for telling your school the list of colleges you apply to).
* Recommendations. Teachers, coaches or bosses will be required to write about you, recommending you to the college. Most schools require 2 teacher recommendations and some have requirements for subjects.
  + one note: your school will make you sign something called a ferpa waiver which you should sign otherwise colleges do not take your recommendations seriously- it just does not allow you to see your college recommendations before they are mailed
  + Many accept 3 or 4 recommendations from coaches, professors/ people you have done research or an internship with etc.
  + Also, most colleges require a guidance counselor recommendation - this is not that important at elite colleges but is important to smaller colleges- so be nice to your guidance counselor and check in and talk to him or her once in a while
  + Note, your school has a process for doing all of this and you may have to fill out some forms and such to get some teachers to write you a recommendation. Be sure to talk to these people well in advance - May of your junior year, sometimes way earlier (do not wait til your senior year) - as many have long lists of students to write for. THIS IS THE SAME FOR COACHES OR OTHERS. I put this in caps because many people forget to tell their non-teacher recommenders well in advance - at least 6 months before their first college application deadline.
  + You should also know some colleges need a specific type of recommendation- some need for ex: a foreign language teacher and a science teacher etc.
* Always send your high AP scores - they look good
* Some colleges and programs (basically applying to do a specific major in college - majors are the topic you focus on and earn a degree in) require you to have taken a specific number and type of courses
  + Most recommend 4 years of one foreign language (i.e. four years of Spanish)
  + some need 4 years of science and so on
  + This means you should look up this information from the top colleges- ivy leagues and up (if you are interested in the top colleges) your freshman year of high school or before! This way you can plan your courses better- but we will discuss all that later.
* College essay: most colleges require you to write a personal essay that explains who you are or just lets the admissions people know what kind of person you are. We explain how to write a good one in a later section.
  + there are also supplementary essays that have a variety of topics- we will explain all this in the college essay section
* Portfolio. Some programs (particularly art ones) require a portfolio. See your college’s website.
  + the same thing works for music programs - you may need to submit a recording of you singing or playing your instrument

Here is the list of optional information that colleges may accept:

* College interviews:
  + these are interviews students do with the admissions staff to communicate their personality and show the college that he or she is a great fit for the college (we will discuss what it means to be a great fit for the college later)
* Competition results / information about clubs
* Your general accolades- money you have earned in fundraisers, clubs you run, etc.
* Some people express personal circumstances that have limited them such as family illness and stuff
  + Note: we will discuss this later but if you tell a sob story for the purpose of getting sympathy and thereby getting accepted, colleges can usually smell this a mile away and will reject you. However, if your intentions are pure and you are not trying to elicit sympathy, go ahead and express a difficult limiting circumstance.
* Art supplements.
  + these are pieces of art you submit to the college that are looked at by professors who consider whether you are talented
  + it does not hurt your chances if you are bad- so always submit stuff rather than leaving it out

Here is how you submit the needed or optional information. *This is basically how you do the action of applying for college:*

There are two paths:

1. **The Common application**

This is a website that many colleges use (especially the top few) to simplify the process by requiring all the material one must submit to be in the same place. Generally all students make a common application account on the common application website. On this account, students will add colleges they want to apply to using the add college tab. Once this has been done, students have to do 2 things: fill out the common information tab that all your colleges need and fill out the specific tab that has the information the college needs - which just asks questions about you, your interests, and perhaps asks for a supplemental essay on why you are interested in that college. Basically just look up on the internet how the common app works. There are a plethora of YouTube videos about this. Also note, there is a special way to add teacher, coach and other recommendations. Some schools will connect a naviance account to your common app and do teacher recommendations that way- which is what our school district does. Note that you can do non-teacher recommendations by emailing a person via a process on the common app (look it up on the common app website or google- how to do non-teacher recommendations). But note, you should, like you do with other teacher recommendations, contact the coach or whoever well in advance- at least 6- 8 months before your actual application.

The questions of the common app are where you express all the needed and optional information. It is pretty obvious how to do so when you are on the site. Some notes though: be concise- especially with your optional essay in which you can say anything you could not say in other parts of the application (remember someone has to read everything in like 15 minutes). Another note: be careful in selecting what your interests are- don’t put down random topics. Select interests that you have done things with (i.e. if you are president of math club and have won many math competitions- mention your interest is math not psychology). Essentially, colleges like someone who is interested in majors he or she has demonstrated passion and success in. However, we will get to this topic later.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

All test scores (AP test, SAT, ACT, SAT subject tests) are simply reported through the collegeboard website (look this up online- search collegeboard on google) that mails the info to your applied colleges. This needs to be done at least 3 weeks in advance of your first college application submission deadline (the date by which you must submit your application to be considered- shown on the “Apply to <insert college name>” page on a college’s website).

These test scores must be reported this way regardless of whether the school uses the common app website or not.

1. **Using the college’s website**

Many colleges do not use the common app website to apply and require you to simply submit your information through their website. Their specific process will be explained on their website (you usually make an account and then fill out a few forms). It usually collects the same information that is given via the common app.

THE IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE is that all recommendations must be mailed (to a place the college’s website will specify) or done through some website (- SEE YOUR GUIDANCE COUNSELOR FOR SCHOOLS LIKE RUTGERS). This is usually the only way they will receive it. Also note, that you have to tell your teachers and coaches (through a method that your school will probably organize) which colleges use the common app- so the teacher can just submit the recommendation online through naviance and which need you the teacher/coach.. to mail their recommendation.

After the college applications, there is a separate process for financial aid. There are loans and scholarships offered by the state and the university. Usually, your and your parents’ tax information will be asked for in various applications (see the ‘Financial Aid’ section for specifics).

Once all the form-filling is done, around February of your senior year, decisions begin to come in. Early decision, early action and rolling decision application responses may have already come. At this point, you will chose the college that you would like to attend. Note that there is a deadline for your acceptance of the college’s offer. Accept an offer and then, if you like, reject the others (rejection is assumed if you don’t accept the offer by a deadline). Once you accept a college’s offer, that college will have its own process for enrollment (which is a word that means basically registering to go to the college). Immunizations, housing applications, meal plans and course selections are among the things usually determined here. This is not complicated, and by this time you are essentially done with the college process.

## Finding a List of Colleges You Apply to

There are many colleges that dot the USA. You would generally apply to 10 schools (this may be costly as colleges charge for applications). Knowing which ten to apply to seems challenging but is greatly simplified by knowing what you want.

First, you should find factors that you care about. Does location matter? Do you care about size (some colleges are no bigger than our high school while others may be 10x the size)? Where does academics fit in? Does cost matter?

To find out what affects you, visiting colleges is vital. You should visit colleges to learn about them and get an experience. Remember that you would live in that place over the next four years. Keep your comfort in mind. Note that not all factors require visitation: the academics of a college can be understood via rankings. Seeing what professors are employed in departments or interest would help you get a feel for this as well. Also keep the cost in mind. Here are a few questions you should ask yourself about the college, whether you are at the place or seeing the place’s website:

* Do I like how it looks?
* Do I feel comfortable?
* Can I live here?
* Will I study here?
* Will I reach my potential at this place?
* Can I make friends here (Will I find nerds like me?)?
* Will I like the people around me (teachers and students)?
* Would I be inconvenienced by travelling from home? (This may not be a concern.)

Note that all of these are personal. A part of your decision should be based on how you feel about a college. Academics are not all that you will do at college - you have to feel comfortable, at home - as if you ‘fit.’

Usually, college visits are used to solidify the list, not make it - it would be too inconvenient to visit every interesting college. On a college visit, there is usually a campus tour which would explain the basics of daily life - the meal plans, the security, the dorms and the physical layout of the campus. Also, colleges may offer specific information sessions for programs and related things. These give you vital statistics and an opportunity to talk to people involved the in program, letting you make connections or simply learn more. Some colleges will let you sit in on classes and maybe let you spend a night. These would help you get much more connected to the college and understand what your life in that institution would be like.

Visits should be done on weekdays when classes are running so that you can understand the true environment of the college. Bringing parents is advisable and bringing friends has potential use, but staying focused and learning about the college is why you are even there.

For other details, centered about academics, visits are not necessary. Naviance, US New Rankings, college noodle and many books and websites rank colleges based on such and many other factors. On Naviance (for which the high school has already provided an account), it is possible to search colleges based on scores, distances, majors and many other variables. You can then save searches, compare your GPA and SAT score to that of previous high school applicants and see where you stand. Note that average admitted scores and rankings are available on most search sites. Guides will also recommend similar colleges and have many similar useful details. These facts will help shorten the list before visits.

Once you have used the search engines, the guides and taken tours and information sessions make a list of colleges including 3 categories of schools:

* You should have 3-4 safety schools- school you will absolutely get into (do not be arrogant and think you don’t need safety schools or make your safety schools not an absolute sure thing).
* You should have 3ish target schools that are around your level of standardized test scores and competitiveness (this is hard to judge).
* Lastly, you should have 2-3 reach schools that are slightly/ reasonably above your competitiveness.

This way you have a nice range of colleges and do not accidentally not get into any colleges or only get into lower level colleges when you could have shot much higher.

Once you have a short list of colleges, there are a few important things to know. Colleges on this list are ranked by your likelihood of getting in. Safety schools will most probably accept you and offer perks such as merit-based scholarships. Having two or three of these would be nice to ensure that you do go to some college. Target schools are colleges that you would get into, but with competition and a chance of rejection. These should make the bulk of your list - around 4-5 colleges. That would leave space for a few reach schools. These colleges are ones where you are unsure about getting in.

At this point, you should also decide on what type of application you would submit. Each school has their own set of types, but early decision usually binds you to that college, so that if you’re accepted, you have to attend. You can only apply by early decision to one college. Early applications are also a good way to show the colleges your enthusiasm for attending.

## What Colleges Look For\*\*!!!\*\*

***You will hear these words a lot:***

“There is no special formula for what colleges like.”

*This is some actual, real-life, serious bs.*

The rest of this page has been left blank to commemorate all the lost souls who have eaten this nonsense or have had it shoved down their puny unsuspecting gullets. You should generally avoid taking college advice from anyone who says this. This is the biggest and worst lie about the college process there is.

First of all, here’s a disclaimer: this information is the the best of the knowledge of the founders and may have a few flaws or inaccuracies but is generally correct.

**The best way to explain it is that the *formula* depends on what level of colleges you are shooting for. Here we will discuss the two top general levels of colleges in order of increasing selectivity: the first level called “relatively good schools” and the second level called the “upper ivies and better.”**

**However, we recognize that not everyone is looking for such colleges. Thus we have a general list for the things one should have to just be in good shape (go to an alright college and do fine in life- be able to live in a district like ours) included at the very end of this section.**

THE FIRST LEVEL: relatively good schools

First, we start with things looked for by the relatively good schools. Some would argue that places like Rutgers and Penn state are good schools (schools is another term for colleges). In reality they are but our school system prepares students relatively well for these schools- so long as you maintain a B average and maybe a few honors classes. Thus, here when we talk about good schools we reference a rather broad range of schools from schools that fall under a category called Hidden ivies (which includes the subcategory of mini ivies) to the lower level ivy league colleges itself. I will explain these two categories of good schools:

The Hidden ivies has levels in itself. The top few hidden ivies are called mini ivies.

Mini ivies are colleges that are not part of the Ivy League but are a tier below the Ivy League. These are pretty good colleges that set students on great paths. Here is a list of almost all of them:

Here are the best few (that actually rival the Ivy League :)

Amherst, Bowdoin, Middlebury, Swarthmore, Wesleyan, University of Chicago and Williams

(Note: colleges like Williams, University Of Chicago and Swarthmore are seriously up there in the ivy league- like perhaps above Cornell and Dartmouth... and Williams is about equivalent to University of Pennsylvania- point is, these are seriously good colleges!)

Here are the rest of the hidden ivies by area- later referred to as ‘mid and low hidden ivies’ with the top hidden ivies known as the mini ivies: (this material was copy pasted from Wikipedia)

### 

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Northeast**  Barnard College  Bates College  Boston College  Bryn Mawr College  Bucknell University  Colby College  Colgate University  Hamilton College  Haverford College  Lafayette College  Lehigh University  Mount Holyoke College  Smith College  Trinity College  Tufts University  University of Rochester  Vassar College  Wellesley College  Wesleyan University | **South**  Davidson College  Duke University  Emory University  Georgetown University  Johns Hopkins University  Rice University  Tulane University  University of Richmond  Vanderbilt University  Wake Forest University  Washington and Lee University |
| **Midwest**  Carleton College  Grinnell College  Kenyon College  Macalester College  Northwestern University  University of Notre Dame  Oberlin College  Washington University in St. Louis | **West**  Claremont McKenna College  Colorado College  Pomona College  Reed College  University of Southern California |

The next category of relatively good schools is low ivies. Since it is easier to explain the whole Ivy League at once that is what we will do:

Here is the list of colleges that are generally thought of as great- the ivy league- in relative order of greatness- it does depend on our intended major a lot (best first):

1. Harvard
2. Yale
3. Princeton (the first three are tied for first place)
4. Columbia
5. University of Pennsylvania
6. Brown
7. Dartmouth
8. Cornell (Dartmouth and Cornell are tied)

The section of the ivies that fall into our definition of relatively good schools are numbers 6, 7 and 8. These are the low ivies. (The mid ivies are 4, 5, and 6- I know 6 overlaps, and the top ivies are 1-4 and yes I know number 4 overlaps.)

Now that we have defined this first group of schools we call relatively good schools (the low ivies and all of the hidden ivies including the mini ivies) - we will give you the list of things that these colleges like to see you have.

Before I start with the lists, it is very important to note you do not need everything on these lists - several options will be marked compensable- meaning you can find other things that compensate for them. Further, just getting random items from this list will not make colleges like you- see the “what colleges dislike” section of this document. One last important point: you need to know that although this is a challenging list of items one needs to complete, it is doable and we explain how it is doable if you have not yet started high school (or how you can still do things even if you are half way through high school).

**Let’s begin: the list of things a serious hidden ivy / low ivy applicant has:**

Items will be marked on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being absolutely necessary and anything below or equal to a 6 being compensable

1. All A’s in STEM classes and perhaps one or at most 2 B’s in liberal arts courses (anything non-STEM- look up the term STEM if you don’t know what it means).
   1. **marked as 10**
2. 2 AP science courses one of which is AP Physics (there are 3 AP sciences in our school - Physics, Chemistry and Biology)
   1. we will explain how to achieve this later
   2. **marked as 8 - you could take 1 ap science- even if it is not physics if you are shooting for low hidden ivies**
3. Having taken Multivariable calculus
   1. again, we will explain how to do this later
   2. **marked as 8- important if shooting for the low ivies or mini ivies**
4. Having taken 8 or so AP courses (2 of which we’ve already said are sciences- meaning the rest are either foreign language AP courses, courses such as AP Statistics, AP calculus AB, AP Calculus BC, AP US history, AP European History, AP Government and studies, AP Language and composition etc.- see the program of studies of your school- call the main office to get help finding it on the website because it is usually hidden)
   1. you should score a 5 on all stem AP courses and mostly 5s on the rest - one or maybe 2 4s won’t hurt
   2. **marked as 9**
5. Having self-studied for 1 - preferably 2- AP tests that you have not taken (and scoring a 5 on both)
   1. **marked as 6 - only for those shooting for low ivies or upper hidden ivies/ mini ivies**
6. Having taken 4 years of one language. This does not mean 4 years of different languages- four years of progressing through the levels of one language- they want you to speak one language fluently.
   1. **marked as 6 (you can skip it but it is highly discouraged and suggested that you stick with four years of a language)**
7. Very high standardized test scores including SAT or ACT and SAT subject tests ( AND AP Tests!!)
   1. **marked as 10**
      1. this is marked as 10 because colleges do use numbers to define you- but it is important to know that high scores are relevant to where you are shooting for- if it is a low ivy, high scores means having an sat score above 2280 or above 2300 or an ACT score 35 and up (with near perfect sat subject tests- again we explain how to achieve all of this in later sections). If you are shooting for any of the other hidden ivies (the mid to lower sections) look up what the average sat score/ act score is at your favorite school and shoot for something 100- 150 points higher than that on your sat or 1-2 points higher on your act. Note this could be as low as having an SAT score like 2080 or an ACT of 31. We don’t know- it depends on the colleges you are looking at. To find what a college’s average sat scores are- just google it or google ‘<college name> admissions statistics SAT score”.
      2. Also note, since after the year 2016, sat scores are out of 1600 points, the high scores we mention are relative to a new scale- look up the average sat score of your college and try to be significantly above it.
8. Club participation and leadership
   1. This is tricky to explain because it really depends on what club. Generally, don’t try to make your own club unless you have the time to support it vigorously and make it succeed (success meaning you get many people involved and go to or make popular events).
   2. We suggest you stick with one of the following clubs: debate club, mun (model united nations) club, academic decathlon, chess club, math club, science Olympiad club, future problem solvers etc.
   3. You don’t have to be a leader in these clubs but having some leadership/officership (officer is the term for a club leader) in a club is very helpful. We will explain how to do this in later sections.
   4. Being on music council is helpful- not needed (but it has a serious impact if you are president of orchestra council or band council )
   5. **marked as 10- you need club participation but leadership is needed only for going to the low ivies or high hidden ivies/mini ivies**
9. Sports/ Athletics
   1. For most of these colleges athletics are important but it all depends on who you are. If you are say a computer science nerd who does not like to exercise, don’t try sports. Just excel at computer science (take college courses about it, try to get an internship, go to hackathons etc.)
   2. If however, you are athletic or would like to try this- a being on a varsity sports team is a HUGE boost to any application- especially at the upper hidden ivies and low ivies. More than that, if you are good enough that your coach would write you a great recommendation- have them do that. Also ask them to talk to the coach of whatever sport you do at a few of your favorite colleges you are applying to to tell them that you are a great athlete- this goes a long way to the admissions department (I know the system is screwed up- but it is what it is).
   3. **marked as 6- not needed but a huge boost if you can get on a varsity athletic team**
10. Awards and accolades from competitions
    1. This is a VERY tricky thing to talk about because it varies along two spectrums- the prestige and value of some competitions and the ones best suited to you (based what range of colleges you are shooting for- not just the selectivity of the college, but the types of awards they appreciate- like a liberal arts college will appreciate a national historical research paper contest award more than a technical school like Georgia tech).
    2. Here’s the process to determining how important awards are to you and which awards you should go after (or if it is early enough that you can try out many different types of competitions and see the ones you end up liking):
       1. First, determine what range of colleges you are shooting for (not applying you- you can have high goals but not accomplish them: “Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you'll land among the stars.” - Norman Vincent Peale)
          1. If your range is the low/ mid hidden ivies you might want to get one or two competition awards
          2. If you are shooting for the high hidden ivies and the low ivies, you will need at least 1 or 2 but 3-5 is preferable.
       2. Second, determine or identify your serious interests. Now serious just means it is more than ‘oh I like this subject.’ A good indicator is anything you have spent time on that was completely unneeded by school and required a bit of effort- the amount of effort you would not normally exert on a non-required activity. However, if you think you may like something, go right ahead and join competitions for it (with the full intention of working your butt off to do really well).
       3. Then, trim these serious interests to the 3-4 that are both relevant to the college you are going to. There is a critical note here: do not dismiss something like a love of history simply because you are applying to a technical school. Still compete in some historical competition, but don’t try to shoot for something at a national level (unless it comes easy for you) and instead spend your time on competitions more relevant to the colleges you are interested in (not applying to- again, shoot for the stars).
       4. Now, based on these trimmed topics, use the information we provide and your own research to see what competitions you can attend- you should look first in your county or state area. If you are shooting for an ivy league, one or two national competitions are important. In the end, you should have awards in one or two general area- we will explain this later in a large section called specific routes. However, this information should tell you approximately how many competitions you need to do well in and the nature or general subject area of these competitions.
    3. **marked as 10- you absolutely need competitions for colleges classified as upper/ top hidden ivies (also called mini ivies) and the low ivies but it is optional for mid to low ivies**
11. Research/ Internships
    1. we discuss how to get these much later- they should be on the topic of one of your major interests and something your range of colleges would appreciate
    2. **marked as 7 - it is very important for the upper hidden ivies and low ivies but not essential for the other hidden ivies**

THE SECOND LEVEL: upper ivies and better

Now, here is the list of things needed to get into the upper ivies and better. Here is the list of schools to which we are referring in relative order of selectivity: Stanford, Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Columbia, University of Pennsylvania (also called Upenn), California University of Technology (Caltech), and University of Chicago.

Critical Note: This list is very challenging and often not attainable for those of you who are already in your sophomore year of high school- do not worry! If you are reading this document and you have not already applied to colleges, you are in good shape and will get into a great college-look at the previous list too!!

Again as before, we explain in later sections on how to actually build and get a list of accomplishments like this. Also note, many of these items are explained in depth in the previous list (read that before you read this!). With that, here’s the list of things a top/ elite student shooting for the top ivies and beyond has **(same rating system of 1-10 as previous list)**:

1. All A’s except for perhaps one B in a non-STEM course like LA
   1. **rated as 10**
2. 2 , usually - 3 AP science courses (including physics) and the course multivariable calculus on his/her transcript
   1. **rated as 10**
3. 10 ap courses taken in school and 1-3 (preferably 2 or 3) AP courses self-studied for (self-studied means you learn the material for the ap test on your own and then take the ap test)
   1. **rated as 9 - maybe 9 aps will slide**
4. usually AP computer science and AT computer science (this is an advanced computer science course offered by the school that is at a level above the ap course) are taken
   1. **rated as 6- not essential, but recommended**
5. 4 years of one language (not 4 years of different foreign languages)
   1. **rated as 10**
6. Perfect or near perfect standardized test scores (for the top 4 schools -Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Stanford--> 2370 + on the sat or 36 on the ACT- though these schools prefer the sat)
   1. this at the bare minimum is 2300 + on the SAT (or when the SAT changes to be out of 1600- above 1550) and a 35 or 36 on the ACT
   2. this includes perfect sat subject test scores (as a side note- a perfect score means the score on the test is the highest possible)
   3. **rated as 10**
7. Club leadership:
   1. it is critical to be an officer in one or more of the following clubs:
   2. debate, MUN, academic decathlon, (maybe chess club), math club, science Olympiad, science bowl, quiz bowl, being an officer in the math honors society,
      1. if you don’t know what these things are, call the school and find out when the next meeting is and show up to learn more (don’t back down if some of the kids there discourage you or are at first not friendly- they simply do not want competition!)
   3. some notes: the best clubs to be an officer on are MUN, math club, science Olympiad, science bowl and debate
   4. **rated as 10- 10 for any club leadership, does not have to be one of the best clubs**
8. Competition awards- CRITICAL!!
   1. some state competition awards are good but national ones are pretty important for the top 4 colleges
   2. If you are going for the top, you may need some national stem awards. It is important- and almost essential you have gotten into a global science Olympiad
      1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Science_Olympiad>
   3. here about 2-4 good awards (maybe 1 national) will do well for the mid ivies like Upenn
      1. when we say good awards that is very subjective and will be explained later in the section ‘Competitions’ (see table of contents)
   4. All in all, these are essential. This information is what puts these students above others and gets them into these elite colleges.
   5. **rated as 100000000000000 - competitions at this level are a necessity**
9. A lot of these students go to Princeton math, a program at our school that lets advanced math students take math courses at Princeton (it is being shut down however- so this information is dated)
   1. **rated as 8 - recommended but not essential unless you have other math/STEM awards**
10. Sports
    1. This is tricky. It is not essential to have some sports but it is very helpful. IF you do not have a lot of good competitions, and could be on a varsity sport, it is highly recommended. Many great students have gotten into these colleges without sports and some have used a varsity sport to help get themselves in.
    2. **rated as 5 - depends on your situation (sorry, it’s very hard to know if it is needed or not- colleges are tricky!)**
11. Creating a program that helps people
    1. This is not essential and somewhat uncommon but looks very good on an application to a college that has altruistic values.
    2. Examples of this would be fundraising thousands of dollars for a good cause or for some school group
    3. Another example would be creating a non-profit organization (look up online how to do this should you want to) to help some people in need.
    4. **rated as 6 - not needed but a pretty good boost if done**
12. Internships/ Research
    1. **rated as 7- as before it is important to have this in a subject area that you are interested in and caters to your range of colleges but it can be substituted by national or global awards in a subject area- sophisticated research with a professor is very important if you lack awards in an area (we discuss this in the internships’ section later)**

Those are the two lists for getting into relatively good colleges and the best few in the world. These are the things colleges look for. There are some optional areas but most of this information gives you a pretty concrete picture of what is required to get into a certain college. This is why the answer “there is no set formula” is total nonsense. *There is a set formula- stellar grades, taking major stem ap courses, having club leadership, a little volunteering, taking 4 years of one language and most important- doing well in competitions*. The specifics of which competition, which language, which stem courses and which clubs to lead have some variety- but that does not mean “there is no set formula.” It simply means you need to fill in the specifics based on your personality. Thus, you can be competitive for colleges but still develop your personality and interests. In the large section titled ‘fundamentals of college planning’ (see table of contents), we explain how to achieve such lists of accomplishments (or if it is not possible because you are not young- what you can do at the age/grade you are currently at).

Also, we promised a general list to basically coast through school and go to an okay college and be able to live in a district like ours:

1. Good grades- get all A’s or B’s with the maybe one C
2. Take 3-5 honors courses (at least 3)
3. Take 2-4 AP courses with at least 2 your junior year (and perhaps 2 your senior year)
4. Be involved in either sports or some extracurricular activity that you do for 4 years and get better at as time goes on- maybe get some club leadership or win some award
5. Keep your record clean- don’t get in trouble for misbehaving
6. Choose some stem courses to develop skills in and demonstrate serious proficiency - many people do a lot of computer science without getting to the AT computer science course and do fine in college majoring in computer science
   1. we are not suggesting you must do STEM to be well off- but if you choose to do something else, it takes much more hard work to earn a decent living
7. Go to college with the intention to work very hard to get a well paying job
   1. as a CRITICAL note here: apply to a good range of colleges- some that are a stretch, you never know if you’ll get in! With two AP courses, you can get into some very good colleges! Apply to selective colleges- around 30-40 percent acceptance rates!
   2. “the intention to work very hard to get a well paying job” simply means: in college you should try to get all A’s with maybe one to three (max) B’s and lots of internships that actually give you good experience and connections ( as in allow you to meet people who may employ you or meet people who can tell other people -who can employ you- about you).
   3. also if possible try to go for a STEM major- again, not a necessity, but really helps your job chances

## What Colleges Dislike\*\*!!!\*\*

Colleges are known to dislike a few specific things about applicants. Note that these are tendencies observed by the founders, not necessarily hard facts but close enough through experience.

Colleges do not like robots. Of all things, you should show that you have a heart. You should show that you care, and not just about the college, but about your field or the world. Your application should not be a replica of the requirements or a soulless list of activities. It should be a wonderful story of somebody enjoying high school and their studies of their interests.

Colleges want you to fit as much as you want to. Colleges will not let you come in if you’re incompatible. You should be competitive within your class. Academically, your scores should match and your interests should be catered to by the college. That noted, your personality should also match. A Hindu would face difficulty entering a Catholic college. An artist would not fit into an engineering school. Use your judgement.

Colleges dislike people who dabble and do not focus. You should not find yourself at a math tournament for one weekend and at National History Day the next and an art competition the one after. Instead, you should focus on math, history or art - whichever is the strongest interest. Of course, this does not bind you to one field - it merely limits you from 20. Keep a few interests alive and focus on them. If you’re interested in math and history, take advanced courses in both. Competing in both would do no harm, but keep one stronger. The idea is to go far and deep, not wide and shallow.

Colleges (rightfully) hate lies. Do not lie (obviously) to the college. Everybody recommends against lying everywhere. The college application is one place where such advice is doubly necessary. Lies on essays can be caught quickly and set you up for failure. You should not force yourself into a college. Through hard work and careful planning, acceptance should come naturally. Even on the interview, fake personalities should be dropped. The point of the process is not competition - sometimes the right answer is not the most elitist or competitive one. The point here is to be yourself and find where you belong. Lies ruin this system and open you or the college up for future mishaps.

Another thing colleges don’t like is false or over-abundant praise. Colleges should not be given the impression that they’re unimportant - of course - but, they are not Gods either. The fundamental issue here is that the application that praises moves away from the applicant. If you spend most of your essay and application lauding the college, there will be no space left for you. Colleges don’t need to be told how great they are, they need to know how great you are.

Here is an example of what not to do. Let’s say we have a typical student, Herman, who is interested in art and likes math and chemistry. Herman applies to NJIT (New Jersey Institute of Technology) for art. His application notes his various test scores - 7 AP tests and a good SAT. It notes that Herman was in the MUN (Model United Nations) club and debate club where he won a few awards. Herman also took part in a math Olympiad and was nationally ranked and has researched chemistry. Besides leading in orchestra, Herman also founded an art club. Herman’s work is known to fit all the requirements well, matching the rubric to the letter, but did not participate much in class and gave the teachers the impression he only took the class for a grade. On one essay, Herman wrote about his father’s traumatic car crash, which was an exaggeration (his dad hit a cat once), and on the other he lauded the NJIT art department. At an interview, he talked about solving world hunger and how he planned to help.

There is a strong possibility Herman would not have gotten in. He wandered about the spectrum of studies and did not seem to care about art. He did not mention any art tournaments while he seemingly did everything else. He did not appear to further his studies of art, seeming to lack passion for it - which could have been reflected in his teacher recommendations. He lied on his essay, which could have been revealed and would have jeopardized the process. His second essay was useless as it only talked about NJIT. The interview was not only off-topic but an evident fake. Herman may have done MUN, but there was no indication of his altruistic passion. The admission staff would know that he’s a phoney and dismiss him quite quickly. Also, Herman would not have fit. He was going for art, nothing technologically involved. He didn’t need NJIT - in fact, he probably would not have fit.

Caveat on the above example: though Herman’s application itself is feasible, rejection from NJIT specifically is unlikely - it was merely an example of an engineering institute. Of course, you should not go there for art. [A clearer example will be given in version 1.10.]

## Financial Aid

After applying to colleges (and before receiving their replies), you can (and should) apply for financial aid. There are a few types of aid based on who offers the money and what the terms tend to be:

* Merit-based scholarships (or grants).
* College Loans or need-based aid.
* State Loans, Federal Loans or need-based aid from the State or Federal Government.

Merit-based scholarships apply to almost every talented student. There are scholarships for art, academics, test scores and sports. Some of these require separate applications through the college. Naviance offers many similar scholarships with their own application. Few of these are automatic, depending on the college. Many will require a minimum college GPA among other things. Sports scholarships will require participation in the sport and arts scholarships may require similar participation. Note that such requirements only apply to merit-based scholarships - none of the other types of aid would require these. Such scholarships do not need repayment.

Colleges offer loans and need-based aid. These loans may be back-breaking burdens later in life (interest does accrue), but they can also be used to good effect. Colleges will offer these loans and need-based aid if you fill out their application. The application will be on their website and generally requires various accounts. Usually this requires the completion of a CSS profile or a similar application (look up online what the CSS profile is). The CSS profile is connected to the college via the college’s CEEB code which can be found online or searched for when completing the CSS profile. Tax information is required, including your parent’s W2 forms and many other tax figures, so do consult them at this stage. Sometimes, the college may give need-based aid which does not need to be repaid, but loans will have to be.

The state and federal governments also offer loans. The FAFSA is used for federal financial aid. The HESAA is state aid for New Jersey students attending public universities. Fortunately, the FAFSA links directly to the IRS (the tax bureau of the USA), making the form-filling much easier. Again, some of the offers may be loans which will need to be repaid while others would be aid - essentially free money. One caveat is that filing the FAFSA makes you eligible for the draft, if you’re male.

Note that as an 18-year-old with a Social Security Number, you are liable for any fraud you partake in. Lying on forms like the FAFSA and the CSS profile can have serious consequences. Any such crimes will go on permanent record, resulting in employment problems or even jail time. Also, these are among your first major transactions, so know the fine print - pay attention to the details and know what you have been offered.

Finding these applications can be difficult but colleges will keep you posted on deadlines via email. We keep this section brief since it is pretty easy to figure out how the financial aid process works if you research how financial aid works online or buy some books about financial aid that have good reviews.

## College Essays/ Supplementary Essays

You are almost guaranteed to have to write a college essay. This will be more or less the first time you will have to write about yourself for a position. Resumes and cover letters will replace these later on. The college essay is unique, though, as you are given a prompt and there is a special system involved.

The purpose of a college essay is for the college to learn more about the applicant - to hear them and get a feel for their voice. The essay must be written by you, for you and of you. You should craft it in your best English, edit it laboriously and make sure that it’s about you while still answering the prompt. It is common to hear that “if your essay was found on the floor without your name on it, people should still return it to you” - few words from the guidance department are truer. The essay should also reflect you honestly, in a positive light. It should work in your favor - highlighting positives - while staying genuine and honest. Remember that colleges can see through most facades. Also remember that admissions officers will not read your work thoroughly - they cannot because they usually lack the time. The essay is your space to reveal something new about yourself within the bounds of the prompt - make it your best impression.

Note that negativity is never good in an essay. Even if you have a sad story to tell, the ending should always be happy. This is rooted mostly in psychology as you do not want to depress the admissions officer as they sweep through their gigantic pile of essays. Focus on overcoming, improving and growing. That way, you will sound like a better person and have a happy ending to your very short story.

The English language (already an enemy thanks to grammar) works against you here as you must condense 17 years of yourself into 650 (or fewer) focussed words. This is difficult. Furthermore, your English must be perfect or close. Mistakes would make your essay seem rushed, giving colleges the impression that you don’t care. Keeping the essay cohesive and well-organized helps you and the reader understand the essay. This would help you get your message across. Avoid slang, though prudent usage would let you make certain points. In terms of the average essay you write for Language Arts, the college essay has slightly more relaxed rules and flexible prompts. Still, much of the Language Arts rubric applies as grammar, organization and response to the prompt are vital. Also note that writing significantly below the word limit gives the impression of a rushed essay or wastes your opportunity to shine. Better grammar and organization will help the admissions officer understand you and your essay and is an important part of your writing.

Teachers, parents, friends and guidance counselors can help tremendously here. They will offer an unbiased view and recommend various good edits. Note that the essay, in its essence, should always be yours. It should not get lost under other people’s ideas. Also, remember that while the advice from others is excellent, it may not be complete. People who know you will have a much easier time understanding your essay than the strangers who will read it will.

A major essay you would write would be the common app essay. This essay, submitted on the common application, will be sent to all your common app schools. For this essay, prompts will ask about you - whether you have something special to share, have faced a unique challenge or accomplished something. Remember that whatever you write must be somewhat new. Even if you write about a competition that you’ve already talked about, discuss it in a new light and let those extra, personal details shine through. Bear in mind that the word limit is 650 words.

To help you understand the size of 650 words, this section (excluding the title “College essays/ supplementary essays”), until the end of the previous paragraph is 650 words.

Most schools also require supplementary essays. These vary in length from 150 to 750 words. Some have character limits instead. Schools outside the common application will also require essays with similarly varied word limits. Prompts here vary a lot more as well. You are asked personal things or questioned on why you selected the program or college that you are applying to. Some colleges will ask strange questions, such as what your favorite month is and why. Treat these as usual questions and answer naturally.

There are many resources that help you write a college essay. Some Language Arts (Language Arts, shortened to LA, is the English course you would take, equivalent to IRLA from middle school) teachers make this a part of their curriculum during your junior year. Either way, various books offer advice on how to make the 650 words work in your favor and provide examples of successful essays with copious feedback. Many websites do the same.

Good essays tend to have a few key characteristics. These are not requirements (you’ll have too many of those), but recommendations from experience.

* They talk about the writer, in detail, revealing a new way to look at them.
* They are not written by someone else like an online service that writes essays for you!
* They focus on a theme, leaving the reader with a crystal-clear image to associate with the applicant. The “podium hammer” (or whatever strange metaphor you fit in) would be more memorable than “debater number 345.”
* The essay answers the prompt, but not too directly. While everything caters to the prompt, the essay is not the repetition of one sentence that answers everything. each point brings in a new idea.
* They are in good English.
* They have been thoroughly edited.
* This is an *essential* point:
  + REALLY GOOD ESSAYS demonstrate that you and some of your core characteristics fit well with the types of colleges you are applying to
    - this will happen naturally if you choose colleges that fit you- just reveal parts of you- characteristics- that the colleges you are applying to share. To know what these characteristics are, read some reviews about the college- I recommend reading reviews of colleges from this big book called “Fiske’s College Guide.”

One last idea. Writing such introspective material is hard. We suggest you pick a prompt that you feel better suits you and try this: get out lots of paper, a pencil and some sort of timer. For 30 minutes, force yourself to re write the prompt in your own words at the top and write whatever comes to your mind to answer the prompt on the paper even if it is just scribbles and nonsense somehow relevant to the prompt for 30 minutes straight. Eventually some good ideas will come out. From there you refine your ideas, add new ones and begin the long process of writing and rewriting and rewriting (having other people read it) until you think it is good enough- which takes about a month. We suggest you also read lots of the many sources online that can help you do this (just look up how to write a good college essay on google.

# Fundamentals of College Planning\*\*!!!\*\*

This is perhaps the most important section of this document and it covers all the core aspects of being in shape for college. It has these sub sections: Middle School, Courses / Grades in High School, Competitions, Internships / Research, Standardized Tests, and Extracurriculars.

## Middle School

Note: for most of this document, we have talked to the student but since it is unlikely a middle schooler is reading this, we will talk to the parent in this section. (So the first person pronouns are directed at the parent in this section only.)

There are three general topics or areas in which you should nudge your child to explore:

* Math
  + You should deeply and thouroughly explore the aops website (<http://www.artofproblemsolving.com/> ) to research math competitions and buy several books to get your child not only passionate about math but also highly skilled
  + Get your kid into A&E if possible
    - If you are reading this before your child has entered middle school, you can also require the school to put your child in a very advanced math course- A&E is what the program is called, when he or she enters middle school
      * This is done through some form- explore the ww-p.org website to find the section on A&E and this form is filled out in 5th grade by parents trying to opt in their child in advanced math courses
    - You could also take the tests to try and get in each year in middle school but the tests are very hard unless you study the first few aops books (Intro to prealgebra, into to algebra)
  + If you explored the aops website you will know about the important middle school math competitions: mathcounts and AMC8 – look them up, help your child study for them and try to do well in them when our child takes them (you have to register and stuff- look it up or call the school)
* Science Olympiad
  + The founders are unsure about how this works- so call the school and ask how your child can get into science olympiad
    - This is a club in which students break up into groups, study science topics and go to competitions
* PRISM
  + This is an afterschool club that your child should attend to make connections with other competitive kids and learn important skills – you really, really should have your kid in this club
    - These middle schoolers in prism end up being the high school seniors going to the Ivy League colleges…

## Courses / Grades in High School

Because this is complicated, we’ve broken this part about Courses/Grades into sections: ‘The GPA’, ‘Main Courses’, ‘Option ii/ how to skip courses’, ‘Course Requirements/ Graduation Requirements’, and ‘Getting an A in a class’.

### The GPA

All of your grades in high school impact this very important thing called your GPA. It is an abbreviation for **G**rade **P**oint **A**verage. It is essentially one number that measures your average level of academic grades. There are two types of GPA: weighted GPA and unweighted GPA. Weighted GPA has no clear cap or limit on how high it can go. Unweighted GPA has a cap at 4.0. Unweighted gpa simply measures how many A’s, B’s or C’s you have gotten in courses on average while weighted GPA takes into consideration the difficulty of the course in assigning you a number.

**How Your GPA Is Formed**

Over the course of high school, the overall grade you get in your classes as well as the classes themselves determine your weighted and unweighted GPA.

Unweighted GPA is calculated as follows:

You assign each of the grades you have gotten a number (A= 4, B= 3, C = 2 D = 1, F = 0) and find the average number rounded to the second decimal place (so a 3.45 is a 3.5). On naviance, the online helpful college tool that your high school provides you with, you can compare this GPA (or you can compare weighted GPA, which is actually much more useful) with the average of those who have gotten into a college. You do this by searching for a college and clicking on the ‘your school stats’ link. To know how naviance works, pester your guidance counselor and ask him or her to explain everything.

Weighted GPA:

This is very confusing so we've attached the school district’s worksheet:

------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

**Calculating Grade Point Average**:

1. For each graded (non-pass/fail) course the student completes, with the exception of **Physical Education** for the weighted GPA, multiply the numeric equivalent of the grade received times the number of credits earned to determine the number of quality points awarded.

2. Determine the sum of quality points earned for all courses each year.

3. Divide the quality point total for one year by the total number of credits attempted for that year.

4. Use this same method for calculating both the WGPA and the GPA.

(Above are the official confusing instructions: here are the real ones :)

1. Using the below map, convert all your non PE/Health letter grades

2. Multiply each converted letter grade by the amount of credits you get for the class

a. Find the credits you earn per course by looking at the program of studies

b. Note that not getting an A does not impact the number of credits you earn

3. Find the sum of these products

4. Divide that sum by the total number of credits to get your GPA

Note: If this fails (which it might because we ourselves cannot decipher this nonsense- go to your guidance counselor and demand that he or she calculate your current GPA by hand in front of you so that you understand it.

Grade Weighted (AP, AT, Honors ) Unweighted – Anything NOT AP or AT or Honors

A 5 4

B 4 3

C 3 2

D 2 1

F 0 0

Course: Final Grade: Level Weight for the course: X Final Credit(s) =Quality PTS.

Example:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| French I | A |  |  | 4 (unweighted class) | | | | X | 5.00 = 20 | | | |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |  |  |  |  | \_\_\_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |  |  |  |  | \_\_\_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |  |  |  |  | \_\_\_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |  |  |  |  | \_\_\_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |  |  |  |  | \_\_\_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |  |  |  |  | \_\_\_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |  |  |  |  | \_\_\_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |  |  |  |  | \_\_\_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |  |  |  |  | \_\_\_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |  |  |  |  | \_\_\_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |  |  |  |  | \_\_\_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |  |  |  |  | \_\_\_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |  |  |  |  | \_\_\_\_ |  |  | \_\_ |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | Total Credits: | | | \_\_\_\_ | Total Q.Pts: | | \_\_ |
|  |  | Divide the Total Quality Points by Total Credits | | | | | | | = | G.P.A.: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | | |

---------------------------------End of worksheet.--------------------------------------------------------------------

**How You Get a Letter Grade (Such as ‘A’ or ‘B’ or ‘C’) For Your Course**

Each marking period grade counts as 20 % of your final grade. The midterm and final **each** count for 10% of your final grade.

Of course, often told to you on the first day of school, the grade in the class is weighted such as 40% is homework and 60% is tests. That just means your average test grade (total points earned/ total points possible) is 60% of your marking period grade that marking period. This weighting that is told to you usually on the first day just helps you determine your marking period grade. If this is confusing, go ask your guidance counselor how it works.

**GPA And College**

GPA is very important for college. Look at what people who have gotten into your target colleges have for their weighted gpas and try to match or exceed that. There’s nothing more to it. It’s like scores, you should try to keep it high.

### Main Courses

In this section we discuss what the important courses are for you to take based on your interests. Then, we describe the prerequisites of these main courses and some paths to get to take them as well as describing the courses themselves (the difficulty, behavior of teachers who teach the course etc.).

We break up the groups of main courses as follows: a math/science group, a computer science/math group, a history/writing group, and an art group.

(Note: AP courses prepare you for the AP test with AP standing for Advanced PLacement while AT courses- Advanced Topics often also prepare you for AP tests but not always)

Important math/ science courses:

1. AP Calculus AB
   1. This is the first calculus course and you learn the basic processes.
   2. This is taught by Ashton and Brienza. Both are experts, but Ashton is the nicer and easier grader. Brienza assigns more work, but Ashton’s students are not underprepared.
2. AP Calculus BC
   1. This is the second calculus course that builds on the first with some more advanced topics.
   2. This is taught by Reichmann and Krause. Reichmann is infamous for her long tests and harsh grading. She is also known to neglect certain explanations, but not to a hugely detrimental effect.
3. Multivariable Calculus\*\*\*
   1. This covers the basics of multi-variable calculus and replicates a third-semester college course.
   2. There are two teachers: Reichmann and Ashton
      1. Ashton is relatively easy if you work hard
      2. Reichmann is very challenging and will require a lot of effort on your part - to basically teach yourself the material and at the same time do the homework correctly. Note that her tests are hard.
4. AP Chemistry
5. AP Biology
   1. There are two main teachers: Foret and battacharia (probably spelled her name wrong). Foret is easier but overall both courses are not too hard to earn an A in with hard work and lots of time spent on understanding and doing lab write ups
   2. Again, if you seriously study the material a few days before the test and read the textbook and take notes on the sections- you will do fine.
6. AT Physics\*\*\*
   1. This is critical if your interest lies here- it is however a very hard course to get an ‘A’ in.
   2. (The founders are uncertain of this.) This is taught by Bugge and Sierzga. Both lead the course well and with self-study and their help, you can be prepared for the AP Physics tests.
      1. Bugge gives very enigmatic help which occasionally will lead you to the right answer (if you decipher her words correctly). She firmly believes that you should teach yourself through experimentation and has designed the course along this principal. To keep ahead of this, self-study is recommended. She may make mistakes, but is polite about corrections and very helpful.
      2. Sierzga has the same teaching style as Bugge but a more aggressive, patronizing attitude that may create the impression that you are smarter than him. Just focus, study and get the A - he may help you occasionally, but do not rely on him. He is not only more prone to mistakes than Bugge, but is much less accepting.
      3. Both of the above teachers tend to work as a team, so you will encounter both regardless of your schedule. They are usually on the same page and will offer similar cryptic help.
7. (If it exists) Princeton Math
   1. this is taking math courses at Princeton university
   2. it is pretty hard (obviously) but requires you to get above a 60 % to pass - since it is taken as a pass-fail course on your high school transcript
   3. NOTE: to take a math course at Princeton, you must have completed all the math courses offered by the school along one chain and had all A’s in math. This means that you will have to have credit for Multi-variable Calculus and Calculus BC by the April of your junior year. You can be in AP statistics during your senior year, if you haven’t already taken it. AP tests will not exempt you from this.
   4. During the April of your junior year, you must fill out a form to apply for this.

Important Computer Science/Math Courses:

1. AP Calculus AB
2. AP Calculus BC
3. Multivariable Calculus
4. AP Statistics
   1. the two teachers are robles and Brienza
   2. Brienza is much more thorough and teaches a little better but if you read the textbook and review your notes before a test- you’ll do fine
   3. Robles knows her material, but can easily seem stupider than you. Do not worry as she will prepare you for a 5/5 on the AP test.
5. AP Computer Science
6. AT Computer Science
   1. there is no AP test associated with this course and it is a level about the AP course

Important History/ Writing Courses: **THESE ARE VERY IMPORTANT FOR ART AS WELL!**:

1. AP US History
   1. If you have Ms. Kearns, it is pretty easy so long as you actually study, read the textbook and try
   2. If you have Galizin- the course is ridiculously challenging and will require you to try to get on her good side (note she’s a republican- your essays can’t be liberal) and read the textbook thoroughly for each test. It is a lot of work, but it pays off with an A.
2. AP European History
3. AP US Government and Comparative Government
   1. Regardless of Garzio or Schomberg, the course is pretty easy- just read the textbook and review notes
4. AP Language and Composition
   1. Mrs. Duchossois is one of the 3 teachers for this course. She does employ a form of scare tactics over the first month, but is a nice grader and a better teacher after this point. She tries actively to cater to the class’ needs and make the AP Lang experience very enjoyable. An A here is easy and with attention, a 5 on the AP test is also within easy reach.
5. AP Literature and Composition
   1. If you have Scaturo she is easy and you can easily get an A. Note that she is often sarcastic, but very kind. Do not anger her.
   2. If you have Gray- just work very hard, act afraid of her- get on her good side and never disagree with her, often answer up in class with something slightly thoughtful and turn in well read, focused essays that have a pile of evidence to support the claim/ thesis statement. She really likes concise, clear writing.

Important Art Courses: (the founders are unfamiliar with this- use the program of studies to find the best art courses)

**But, back to the main point: how you can take each of these advanced courses we have listed above is by looking them up in the program of studies and seeing what the prerequisites (a fancy word for the courses you need to take before you take the desired advanced one) are. Then, you can look at the prerequisites for those prerequisites so you know the path you follow.**

Here’s the link to download it and other useful info: (<http://www.west-windsor-plainsboro.k12.nj.us/cms/One.aspx?portalId=3592907&pageId=4446832> )

*(Again- thouroughly READ ALL OF THIS :* [*http://www.west-windsor-plainsboro.k12.nj.us/common/pages/DisplayFile.aspx?itemId=19688015*](http://www.west-windsor-plainsboro.k12.nj.us/common/pages/DisplayFile.aspx?itemId=19688015) *)*

***Here are a few common paths:***

1. geometry honors > algebra II honors > precalc honors > Calculus AB > multivariable calculus (you don’t have to take calc BC before multivariable calculus)
2. Bio honors (requires you to be taking or have taken geometry) > AP Bio
3. Chem honors (requires you to be taking or have taken algebra II) > AP Chem
4. Physics Honors (requires you to be taking pre calculus- which practically means you need to skp math courses to take this course early) > AT Physics

As a note, here is the fastest way into multivariable calculus (note that it requires Honors and Accelerated placement in eighth grade):

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 8th Grade | Summer | 9th Grade | 10th Grade | 11th Grade |
| Algebra 2 honors | Geometry H+A | Precalculus H&A | Calculus BC | Multi-variable calculus |

Also, here are some common ways to fulfill credit requirements (details on these later as well):

* Consumer Economics (for the finance requirement): this course is easy to skip through option ii and often a waste of time if taken through the school.
* Graphic Computer Applications (for the arts requirement): this course is a simple one used often to fulfill the arts graduation requirement. It may also be done via option ii - see that section for details.
* Speech and Drama (for arts): though not possible via option ii, this course is also commonly used to fill the art requirement.
* International Business and Culture (for career): this course cannot be taken through option ii, but can be an easy course to finish the requirement. Mr Borsuk is also a notably amusing teacher and a very kind grader.

However, as you will find if you use these two website links above- you will see you need to take courses in the summer or maybe outside of school during the school year. This next section called option ii explains this process.

Also see: <http://wwphs.sharpschool.com/-_resources_-/option_ii/>

**(explore this link above thoroughly to understand the process of option ii - and read the next section !!!!!)**

### Option ii / The Way You Skip Courses

Private programs around the school district offer courses to help enrich your learning during the summers or the school year. Taking these courses and then getting high school credit is called option ii. This allows you to take more advanced courses sooner or fulfill odd credit requirements.

Note that you can only take one option ii course per subject area per year. You cannot skip two courses in one school year if they are in the same field of study. This requirement may (or hopefully will) change. Note also that the school must be informed about your taking these courses if you would like the courses to appear on your high school transcript. Courses used to fulfill prerequisites must appear on your transcript. **These will not count towards your GPA, but do earn you potentially useful credits.** Here are the details of these and other restrictions: <http://wwphs.sharpschool.com/-_resources_-/option_ii/>

The process begins by you finding your course. You must research this by yourself as there are many courses offered online and at physical institutions. You can ask your guidance counsellor for a list of accredited course offerings. An accredited course has been validated by the state, allowing credit to transfer directly from wherever you take the course to high school. You will have to sign up for this at both the institution and the high school - the high school must know that you are taking the course as you will be signed up for the district’s test. Other courses can be used for credit, but through a longer process - ask your counselor as they will have the best information. **Do this all well in advance - by March before a summer course - as deadlines are near and certain courses fill up very quickly.**

Then, you must talk to your teacher in the field you plan to study, if the course requires a teacher recommendation. In either case, you will have to fill out a form detailing your identity, which school you go to and why you have chosen the course. Some programs will have other requirements including SAT scores. Always check their website.

Once you have signed up for a course, all you must do is attend. The attendance requirements here will be much more stringent than the high school requirements. Also, these courses are condensed and may be harder or way easier than the high school course they fill in for. Teachers are usually high school teachers and homework is at the average high school level. Grading works very similarly to that of normal high school courses except that there are no marking periods - the entire course is one big marking period.

In the course you must have a C or better. After taking the course, you must take an option ii test with the school district. On this test, you must score a C or better- 70% or higher. Once both of these are done, you will be notified of your success by the school.

If you are taking the course over the summer, you can sign up for the course after it during the school year. However, since scheduling is done by May, the courses you have signed up for as inputted as if you did not take the course. Do not worry. When you pass the course, your schedule will be updated.

This process may cost upwards of $750, going above $1000 often. There are many popular course providers:

* Peddie: a local private school that offers many math courses. You must physically attend for 7-hour days. Lunch will be provided for an extra charge.
* KPLC (Kendall Park Learning Center): Physical attendance required.
* JHU CTY (Johns Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth): Offers online courses but may require an SAT score for certain ones.
* Here’s the **full list with the courses that have been pre approved by the school** (“site-based” means that physical attendance is required): <http://www.west-windsor-plainsboro.k12.nj.us/common/pages/DisplayFile.aspx?itemId=25193470>

Some courses are offered during the school year, though this may fill up your weekly schedule too much. They have similar regulations to the courses offered over the summer, though they do not affect the schedule in the same way as credit from them can be accounted for.

There are three seasons of option ii usage and their deadlines are very early -note the summer deadline is usually **MAY 1ST.** The first is the first half of the school year, the second is the second half of the school year and the last is in the summer. Most people use the summer.

**We will talk about how to use option ii to get to these high level courses by giving you specific examples of courses to take from freshman year onward in the section “Specific Routes”- see table of contents**

### Course Requirements/ Graduation Requirements

To graduate high school, the state requires you to have taken certain courses. These can be found in the program of studies and in your agenda (a small booklet given to each student that outlines policies and can help organize your homework).

We will suggest a few ways to fill annoying requirements that get in the way of important courses.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Course type | Number / courses Required |
| LA (English) | 4 |
| Social Studies (History) | World history and 2 US history courses |
| Math | 3 including geometry or algebra 1 or equivalent. |
| Health | 1 every year |
| Arts | 1 |
| Career (the definition is arbitrary, see the program of studies for details). | 1 |
| World Language (foreign language) | 2 if you’ve been in the school for 3 or more years, otherwise 1. You must have proficiency in one of these languages. |
| Finance | ½ (a semester course) |
| Total credits | 120 credits (approximately 20 courses - you will have at least 28 if you completely fill your schedule each year). |

Commonly, people use option ii (see that section for details) to fulfill these requirements. Here are the courses used within and outside the school to fill the requirements:

* Consumer Economics (for the finance requirement): this course is easy to skip through option ii and often a waste of time if taken through the school.
* Graphic Computer Applications (for the arts requirement): this course is a simple one used often to fulfill the arts graduation requirement. It may also be done via option ii - see that section for details.
* Speech and Drama (for arts): though not possible via option ii, this course is also commonly used to fill the art requirement.
* International Business and Culture (for career): this course cannot be taken through option ii, but can be an easy course to finish the requirement. Mr Borsuk is also a notably amusing teacher and a very kind grader.

### Getting an ‘A’ In a Class

Your teacher will have told you how the course is graded. Usually, this happens on the first day with the teachers writing a few numbers on the board. An example is 70% essays and 30% homework (this is for an advanced English course). These numbers are vital. These numbers tell you what assignments will most heavily impact your grade. Remember that if you have any questions about this, ask your teacher.

To get an A, you need to have an 89.45% or above in your course. There is, to put it too simply, only one way to do this: work. Where you apply the work is essential, though, as you do not need to put in as much effort for the less important sections.

The more important sections tend to be essays, tests or projects. You will know about these well in advance - teachers give you a week or more of warning for these. Here, standard studying is the safest route. If you are familiar with how you study, stick to these familiar tactics. That said, always remember to study in advance and stay relaxed and calm. If you study early enough, you may find that you do not understand something, you will have ample time to contact your teacher. If, instead, you study the night before, you had better hope for a helpful friend or an unlikely postponement.

We can’t emphasize this enough. Studying is the only way to do well on tests. And it usually is pretty easy. Just study and do well- there are a million websites that help you study.

Projects are slightly different as you are given much more time and may even be assigned homework. Projects vary greatly, but always put in your best effort to assure your A. Also, start early here as well. Time is of the essence.

Note that even the most important grades are not created equal. Some tests can be worth more than others - quizzes are valued under 50 points while tests may go upwards of 100. The bigger the test, the bigger its impact on your grade.

Also note that small grades do count. Homework may be limiting you from getting an A. Never slip up here as even these minor sections do add up. If a section is worth more than 10%, it can stop you from getting an A.

Many teachers also offer extra-credit and bumping up. Remember that this is done by their choice. A mean teacher will usually never ever bump you. Extra-credit is as if you got extra points on a test. This may even make your score over 100% as extra-credit may be offered on a test directly or afterwards. Bumping requires you to talk to your teacher. Most will announce a policy at the beginning of the year. Politely asking, however, can never hurt - just remember not to pester as this would reduce your likelihood of being ‘bumped up.’ The concept of bumping is that the teacher will give you extra points to change a letter grade at the end of a marking period. Note that this commonly happens at the end of a marking period if you are close to the letter grade above. This also should be avoided during earlier marking periods as you can then work hard to bring your grade up.

If you feel that you will not get an A for that course and need not take the course, you can drop out of it. This would have to be done in the ***first two full weeks of school***. Colleges do not see this, but note that switching depends on spaces in the course you would switch to (you always need to be in a certain number of courses, so dropping out is more like swapping) and you may miss course content wherever you switch in. Conversation with your guidance counselor is required for this.

**How To Study (generally critical methods)**

1. Read the relevant chapters in the textbook and take thoughtful, not- just copying things down verbatim, notes of the chapter (emphasizing key ideas, making connections between sections and summarizing the sections of the chapter)
2. review ALL the worksheets and notes taken in class
   1. teachers give you worksheets on topics they want to emphasize and often quiz you on those topics more than other topics
3. Review anything that the teacher spent a significant amount of time on in class- again, usually on the test
4. Review important homework problems or problems you got wrong
5. FOR MIDTERMS OR FINALS: Review all your previous tests closely- especially the material you got wrong
   1. if you see your scores are high for a few sections, briefly review those areas and do a few problems on those areas
   2. spend a lot of time on chapters of the textbook in which your test scores were low

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## Competitions

To show yourself as exceptionally talented in a particular field, you would partake in competitions. This will bolster your college application as you would stand out as more committed and high-achieving within your field. All competitions offer awards. They will rank you and higher rankings are universally better. Winning in a competition over a larger area is also better regardless of field. Note that it is valuable to be highly ranked, not have merely participated in various competitions - it is quality not quantity, it is better being within the top ten once instead of in the top 100 five times. Also, be very focused here and only compete where it is relevant to your interests. College would prefer this and you will have a higher chance of success. Look for the details of competitions within your field of interest as prestige also matters - the competition should have a notable name and be a trustworthy one, not a smaller unknown one.

List of competitions by subject area:

* Competitions
  + Math (some mix with physics)
    - AMC competitions
      * <http://www.maa.org/math-competitions>
      * ranges through 8th grade to 12th
    - AMTNJ
      * A state wide math contest with state ranking (and NJ is a highly competitive state)
    - IMO
      * this is the highest math competition in the world for high schoolers
      * It is obviously very hard to qualify for
    - See the full list here : <http://www.artofproblemsolving.com/community/c3158_usa_contests>
      * NOTE: if you are into math- this website (if you explore it well) explains EVERYTHING about like all math contests and gives you wonderful resources - some books that you can buy- and should buy!!! for doing amazing at these contests. Here it is: <http://artofproblemsolving.com/>
  + Computer Science
    - There are many hack-a-thons offered all over the country. Unfortunately, a lot of travel may be required, but this would lead to worthy accolades.
    - <Anurag fill in!>
  + Science
    - Science Bowl
    - Science Olympiad
    - Quiz Bowl
    - These are run by clubs and we will explain them later
    - International science olympiads... that start with national tests
      * such as: USABO (see: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Science_Olympiad> and look up how each one you are interested in works!)
  + MUN
    - ILMUNC
    - PMUNC
    - WAMUNC
    - These are all MUN conferences where international MUN teams meet up and compete. Trips to these and participation are handled by our school’s MUN club. Go to a meeting there for details. You will have to try out at a “mock” and be selected for good speaking/ writing- well they explain it at their interest meeting- just listen to the announcements at the end of the day or check the schools calendar to know when the informational meeting is.
  + History
    - Look up national history day or go to the ‘National History Day’ club
  + Art/Writing
    - We nothing about these- but there are many competitions out there- do look them up!!
  + Debate
    - Princeton Classic
    - Princeton Moot court
    - UPenn Classic
    - CVC (may not allow for individual registration)
    - These are handled by the school’s debate club, but can be signed up for separately. Note that they are not free. Also, remember that debate club will help you prepare for these competitions but is a very competitive club.

**Resources:**

For Math:

1. Use the aops website: <http://artofproblemsolving.com/>
   1. use the books on that site and the community
   2. you can also pay for online courses
2. Go to math club and inquire about the competitions they support/ help you train for

For Science:

1. Go to science olympiad club, science bowl club and quiz bowl club
2. for physics look at the aops website’s competitions: http://www.artofproblemsolving.com/community/c3158\_usa\_contests

The Rest:

1. For MUN go to the MUN club meeting and mocks (ask someone involved in MUN what this is)
2. for debate go to Debate club (find out which days they meet after school and go there)
3. Everything else: just look it up online and see what you can find

## Internships / Research

Though rare, internships and pure research are a great way to show interest in a field and boost your college application. These show initiative - they show that you have tried harder and found the hidden treasure. But because these treasures are so difficult to encounter, search within your primary field of interest. Make it something you may actually do later in life - some research you may further or job you may end up in.

These gems are purely work experience. Internships are a diluted form of work - of an adult’s daily job. You will experience a workplace, a boss and infamous meetings. Some are paid and others are not. The specific terms vary tremendously. Research is a subset of this, allowing you to work on a professor’s team (or something similar) as you dive into new aspects of a field of your choosing. It is common to hear of hazing, but people are generally nicer and will help you understand the job or research you are trying out.

The simplest way to enter at internship or research program is through a family or friend connection. High school students are not offered internships and such personal links are the only easy way for them to be found. If you are interested in your parents’ field of work or want to know more, stay attuned to their daily life. That way, you can spring on an opportunity if it comes your way.

Online searching may provide a few answers. Having a linkedIn profile is vital here as it will make you appear prepared to take on your posting. linkedIn is primarily for adults and having a profile is a good way to start to claim that title. Research online through other means: find local companies and do some digging. You never know what you may find.

You may also be able to research with professors. Find what they are doing and know it. Do not waste a professor’s valuable time through to your ignorance. Be polite and knowing. Most of this information will be available online or through scholarly publications online.

Remember that these opportunities are very rare. Because of this, they can aid your application tremendously. Not only can you have the internship or research itself - maybe even a full publication with your name - but, you can have recommenders and a brilliant essay topic at the least. Keep your eyes open and be ready. Also be mature and at your best.

Note that if you do not come by either of these chances, but still desire to work, many fast food chains and stores hire high schoolers. This may not bolster your college application, but does provide valuable experiences in adult life.

## Standardized Tests

**In this section we will first explain the basic standardized tests, the logistics (where you take them, how you send them etc.), what the scores mean and finally how to actually get high scores.**

One of the simpler things colleges consider are your scores. The process is mathematical: if your score is less than that of the average applicant, you may be rejected if you don’t have some compensating factors. With details - such as extracurriculars and competitions - come ways to be a little below the average scores, but scores are important to colleges as they are one of the only things you submit that offer a concrete-ish value.

There are various requirements involved. Checking the college’s website, under admissions, within the “incoming freshman” tab, would give you the most accurate information. Most schools mandate an SAT or ACT with writing. Many also require SAT Subject tests. Almost all allow the submission of AP tests. Note that some schools require you to submit all your test scores while others let you submit only your best - look up the term “superscore” and look up what your selected colleges “superscore”.

First, here are a few general definitions of each test (except for the PSAT, see below):

* SAT and ACT: These are the broadest tests, designed to measure your overall performance in college. In reality they measure nothing and have no value other than to help you get into a college. They do not require any extra education as the school’s curriculum (at any level) will suffice. Scores on these tests are known to correlate directly with your college GPA. Many colleges require at least one score from these tests.
* The SAT Subject Tests: These are narrower tests which look for a basic understanding of topics- which is somewhat true. An honors-level course is usually good preparation for these tests. Colleges may require two or more scores from these.
* AP Tests: These tests are a declaration that you are prepared to earn college credits for a high-level high school course. Unlike the SAT or ACT, these tests seriously test your understanding of the topics. Most high schools like ours have AP courses designated to prepare you for these tests, but few tests must be “self-studied” - studied for without official schooling. Note that while courses relate to AP tests, the courses and tests are independent. You do not need to take an AP test if you’re in that AP course and you do not need to be in an AP course to take an AP test.
* PARCC tests: You may have heard of these. You do not need to register for these. These state-ordained tests are an annual pain required for graduation. There are two rounds of testing on a computer and tests last two hours. The founders graduated before this test’s implementation and are not well informed. **They are not sent to colleges- you just need to pass- which is super easy.**
* TOEFL tests: These tests are rare and not required by US colleges. Ask your guidance counselor about these tests as you most likely do not need to take them. Unfortunately, the founders do not know much about these so this section does not include any more information. It may be asked of you if you are not super familiar with English ( as in you need a translator to carry on a conversation or listen to a lecture by a teacher)- if this applies to you- look up these tests and perhaps take them and send them to your colleges.
* IB test: These are alternative AP tests. Courses can be designated to prepare you for this test. High School South does not offer any IB courses or tests though you may be able to enroll independently. The founders know nothing more about these and this section has no more IB-related information.

Note on the PSAT: it is a required test that you will take with the school as a sophomore and as a junior and none of the below are fully relevant to this test. Reading what happens at an SAT test center (the first six paragraphs under “The Tests”) may help with what to expect and what to carry, but you will have a full school day directly after these tests as they are taken during the week. Colleges will usually not see your PSAT, but the test is useful as an SAT score predictor and for qualification for the NMSQT (this is a scholarship like thing- look it up if you want to). The latter is difficult - requiring almost a 100% on the test (or so we think) - but is a valuable accolade to show colleges.

Here are more specific details. They are separated by the details, not the test type since the details are very similar.

**The Logistics: Registration, Receiving Scores and Sending Scores to Colleges**

Here we explain the process you would go through before and after taking standardized tests. Registration and the sending of your scores is best done *well in advance of the deadlines as seats fill up rather quickly.* This is organized in the order that you would do each thing. SATs and SAT subject tests have exactly the same processes, so anything referred to as an SAT also refers to the SAT Subject tests.

To register for the SATs and ACTs, you should make an account with collegeboard.org and ACT Inc. The website has a registration link where a form will ask about your school, age and the time and place you would like to take the test. You can only register for three SAT Subject Tests or the SAT at one time. Many local high schools are in this list: Princeton High School, Hightstown High, Robbinsville and others. It is notable that High School South has a reputation for being loud and somewhat distracting due to its lack of walls. Tests are offered fairly regularly with SATs being offered on the first weekend of most months that have school and the ACT being offered on the weekend after. It is rumored that September and October tests are easier, but there is little credibility to this. Remember to check online for all the dates and details. You will be given a registration ticket after registering. Do not lose this ticket. Note that you will need a photo identification at your testing location and there is a fee for these tests. Also pay careful attention to all the instructions as there are many strict policies about electronics, calculators and cheating.

Even though writing sections may be optional, many colleges mandate it. Check with the colleges you will send your scores to and register accordingly.

The AP tests have a separate registration process. By March sixth (or a date near that), you will have to fill out a form on the school district’s website. The guidance department will email you the details for registration. The form will ask about the classes you have taken and who your teacher is (more on why later) and you will be made to pay a $97 fee (or more) per test. Most of these tests will be taken in the new theatre at High School South during the first two full weeks in May. Note that two weeks prior to testing, there is a mandatory pre-gridding session which makes test-taking much more convenient and will help you understand the process and give you the times for the tests. In pre-gridding, you will fill out much of the personal information required to give you your AP scores. You will do so on an answer sheet - the one you will use for your first test two or three weeks later. It’s quite self-explanatory, but follow the instructions carefully to guarantee getting your scores.

After taking the SAT, ACT or SAT Subject tests, your scores will be available within 4 to 6 weeks. More on interpreting your score later. The AP test will give you your scores in July (dates will be posted online and you will be emailed). You will have an AP number from pre-gridding that you will need to access these scores. Your collegeboard account can be used as well.

To send scores to your colleges, you will have to use the account you would have made. This is also the most convenient way to get analysis of your scores. Collegeboard.org and ACT Inc. provide services to send all your scores to colleges. Note that AP tests must be sent separately via collegeboard and ACT scores can only be sent via ACT Inc. Using all three services is the only way to be certain that colleges have all your scores. In the form you will have to fill out, the websites (Collegeboard.org and the ACT website) will provide a search feature. Also, these services charge between $10 and $20 for regular shipping. Scores generally get to colleges within two or three weeks. Faster shipping is available, but at a higher price.

AP tests have a special way to be sent in addition to the above. This option is conventionally for seniors who know what college they will attend (which they do by May). Putting in a school’s CEEB code in a designated area on the answer form you pre-grid will make collegeboard send the scores directly to that school or program. CEEB codes can be found online and are provided in the student booklet (the booklet is provided during pre-gridding). This method is free and colleges tend to see your scores before you can.

**The Tests- Logistics of Taking Them**

Here we explain the tests themselves and include details on testing environments. Again, SAT will refer to both the SAT and the SAT Subject Tests unless otherwise specified.

All of the tests are taken at high schools or similar institutions in our local area. As mentioned in the section above, High School South is disreputable as a testing center due to its lack of walls. Noises from other rooms can cause distractions.

For any test you should pack some food and water, but not too much since you’ll usually finish in time for lunch (except when taking an AP test, where you will be given time for lunch). Carry a calculator if your test allows one - this makes everything much more convenient. Make sure your calculator is charged. Carry multiple - 4 or more - number two pencils. Mechanical pencils are not allowed and pens are usually not needed (unless you’re taking an AP test, at which point a pen is required). Remember an eraser - a good, clean one; maybe two. Keep the pencils sharp (and your mind sharper) and carry a sharpener. If your watch makes any noise (a brief bleep on the hour, for instance) turn the sound off or don’t carry the watch. Do not worry about time-keeping, you can expect a working clock in every testing room. That clock has to be visible to you by mandate of the collegeboard and ACT Inc. You should carry your phone, especially if dropped off by parents, but leave it off throughout testing. Do not touch it, even during breaks. You need not carry anything else (unless you have classes afterwards which may happen while taking AP tests). Be sure to dress in layers as you will never know what climate your testing room will have - some are Arctic while others are sub-Saharan, regardless of the season. Also use the bathroom beforehand or you may end up running to the bathroom and perhaps (we don’t know) getting into trouble of leaving the test in a non-break time period.

Upon entering the testing center for an SAT or ACT - usually on a Saturday morning by 7:45 AM at the latest - you will be asked for a photo identification and your registration ticket. You will then be pointed to a room. Each center has a slightly different process for this, but rooms and seats are assigned and arranged alphabetically by last name. Note that SATs and SAT Subject Tests are taken in different rooms. You will then see your proctor, usually a teacher at the high school. They will take your phone and check your calculator. Eventually, once the room is filled or it is past 8 AM (the time the test usually starts), the proctor will begin to read instructions and hand out materials. Pay attention and follow these.

After a few sections (sections vary by test), you will have a break. This is valuable time to stretch, go to the bathroom (going to the bathroom is highly recommended!) and eat. Talking is permitted as long as you are quiet. Do not touch your phone! Note that these breaks happen at different times as some proctors are slower than others. Due to this, you may be on break while others are testing. Respect the testing environment and do not make too much noise. Also, return to your testing room on time as proctors will not wait for you and you will lose testing time.

There is nothing to be said about leaving. Be sure to have all your belongings and leave quietly. Departure times vary because of proctors’ paces and different testing options. SAT Subject Tests leave every hour (depending on the number of tests taken - details will follow) while ACT tests last 3 hours without writing and 3 and a half with it.

AP tests have a very similar process to the above except that you miss classes to take the tests. Your absences are excused and well-used. You will always be given sometime for lunch if a morning test deprives you of it.

Among all the tests, SAT Subject tests are unique in the way they are taken. You will be given an answer sheet with spaces for three tests and a booklet with every test. Obviously, do not read the tests that you are not taking. A table of contents will give you the correct page numbers to turn to for everything. Each test is an hour long. You can sit through three tests - even if you did not register for all of them (though you will always be billed for these tests later). Indicate the correct test and take it. Each test has its own rules, so pay attention to the instructions.

The SAT and ACT are similar in terms of materials used: calculators are allowed and pencils are required. You will have a test booklet and answer sheet. Reading ahead is cheating. Unfortunately (or maybe fortunately for you), the SAT has changed and the founders do not know about its organization and timings. It has become notably easier as there is no negative marking, the essay is optional, there is no writing section and the vocabulary is much simpler.

The ACT, however, has stayed the same. The ACT has 5 sections. First is the English section. In this, you are given five passages and must correct grammatical and spelling-related issue. You will also be asked about modifications to the passage’s structure. Note that this is a multiple choice section and each of the 75 questions has 4 possible answers. This section takes 45 minutes. After this comes an hour long math section with 60 questions that have 5 choices each. Usually, there is a break here. Next comes a reading section (reading comprehension), with four passages: one fictional, one biographical and two non-fiction (usually one on the humanities and one on a hard science). They generally appear in the order above and decrease in length as you proceed through the section. This section takes 35 minutes and each of the 40 questions has 4 answer choices. The science section follows. Here you are given data from 7 different sources and must analyze it or create experiments to test claims for six of these. The seventh passage (not always the last one in the test booklet) is a set of passages that disagree on a scientific topic and you are asked questions about their disagreement and any specific information from any of these mini-passages. This section lasts 35 minutes and has 40 questions. Finally, after another break, you may take the essay. This is an optional 30 minute written piece that you have to register for when registering for the rest of the test. You are asked to argue a point on the simple topic, such as “why uniforms are good for schools” or something equally mundane. Organization and clarity are key. The graders are looking for you to make well-reasoned and clearly conveyed points (we’ll explain how to do this later). You do not need a pen here as the essay will be written in pencil.

The AP tests are somewhat different. Instead of one test booklet, you are given two: one for the multiple choice and another for a free-response. The nature of each varies by subject and it is up to you to know. Collegeboard.org has a lot of useful information on this. Usually, there is a short break between the multiple-choice and free-response portions and each section takes around 90 minutes. A pen is needed for the beginning of the free-response and may also be used within the section.

**Scores- How They’re Obtained and Used**

Here we explain how tests are scored and what the scores mean.

Every test has a concept of a raw score and a scaled score. The raw score is directly how many questions you got right. This score is usually hidden and quite irrelevant. This raw score is then scaled. Sometimes, it is merely multiplied by some factor to change the denominator. Other times, the scores are ‘standardized,’ meaning that only a certain percentile gets each score. The latter makes getting higher scores harder as you will be in direct competition with all the test takers, all around the world. Knowing past testing curves (or the scaling - scalings are called ‘curves’ by most people) is useful and all these curves can be found online. You will see and send your scaled score.

The SAT will be scaled out of 1600 points. The nature of the scoring is unknown to the founders.

The ACT is out of 36 points. Each section is out of 36 and the average of your sections scores (usually the mathematical mean) is called your ACT composite. The essay is out of 12 and your writing composite usually is (3 \* (essay score) + (English section score) / 36). If you don’t take the essay, those last two scores will only be omitted.

SAT Subject Tests are all out of 800 points. Scalings vary tremendously. Some, such as physics may award 800s despite up to 10 incorrect answers. Others, may take off a lot for just one wrong answer. These vary over time as well.

AP tests are out of 5. AP scores translate directly to grades: a 5 is an A, a 4 a B etc. While scalings vary, the meaning is the same: the AP score is a prediction of what you would have gotten in an equivalent college course. Colleges may accept these predictions and give you credit for these courses. Details are posted on the college website. It is notable that teachers know their students’ average score. This reflects on their ability as well.

If you want to know what a good score is see the “What colleges look for” section easily accessible through the table of contents.

**How to Get the Score**

It is important to first explain that these standardized tests (except for AP tests) do not test your intelligence or academic knowledge. Do not be upset if your score at first is not as high as you want it to be (or as high as some of your friends). Almost everyone who earns very high scores puts in months of daily effort- though he or she may not show it (and annoyingly act like he or she does not study that much and just magically does well- I seriously hate this kind of person).

With that out of the way, here is the central idea: if you do not have awards from competitions or some varsity sport with a coach that will seriously vouch for you or some other compensating factor, you should aim to be well above (SAT: 150 points above, ACT: 2-4 points above) the average SAT score or ACT score of the ideal college you are shooting/aiming for- and remember if you are not a junior yet, you can aim pretty high (AP scores should basically all be 5’s).

**CENTRAL IDEA:**

**“ ” ”**

Now that you can determine where you are aiming, here is the only (that the founders are aware of) method to getting that high standardized test score: *intelligent, thoughtful* practice -with practice tests from the official SAT or ACT book as well as practice tests from Kaplan, The Princeton Review and Barrons (look up these books online- or see the resources section of this document)- with over 10 (at least) practice tests with lots of other practice over a period of a month or two *where you practice several times a week so that your skill level builds for a long period of a time instead of just practicing once in a while.*

**“ ” ”** (python reference anyone?)

This emphasized paragraph above explains the central idea of how to earn a high score is through practice- using practice tests. But the manner in which one practices must have these two characteristics (as briefly mentioned above):

1. Intelligence:
   1. when you take a practice test and you grade it, you carefully look at all the answers you got wrong and make sure you understand each one and why you got it wrong and WHY the correct answer is correct according to the SAT’s method. Then, you need to TAKE NOTES on each practice test noting why you got each problem wrong. Then, you need to see if there is a pattern- are you getting reading questions that deal with ‘tone’ wrong? Are you messing up math questions with trigonometry? Classify the groups or areas of problems you get wrong and work on those BEFORE taking another practice test. This is a long process of looking at what is wrong and may take more than half the time you spend on the test itself- but believe us it is the fastest way to learn.
   2. You should be methodical with the notes of each practice test, organizing them by date and so on. You should also make it easy to read so you can quickly see the patterns of what TYPES of problems you are getting wrong and thus need to improve on.
   3. You should understand the tests you’re taking. If you are taking Barron’s SAT or ACT practice tests, the practice tests will be much harder than the actual test (and sometimes a little confusing)
2. Continual and long term-ness; over a month of preparation before the date of the test!
   1. This means that you should take at least 2 ( I would say like 3) practice SAT or ACT tests per week- with all the notes and understanding of what you got wrong we discussed earlier
   2. Lots of test prep books- get the official test prep books for the test you are taking as well as the next ones
   3. Do not think you are finished until you have scored above or at your goal score for the last 3 practice tests you have taken (if you are using hard practice tests from barrons you can add about 80- 110 points to your sat score (note: this range of 80-110 will change to 40-70 in the year 2016)
   4. Many test prep books will tell you to do a lot of reading before these tests to prepare for the reading section. That is spot on. You should do a lot of reading- like 20-30 pages a day of a book for a month before the date of the test (and don’t choose an easy read- read a book that you would read in school like the scarlet letter, or Great Gatsby etc.).

Now before I mention the last few key tips on helping you earn a good score, I would like to mention that although this process looks intimidating, do not worry. Complete idiots have gone through it and done very well. Why? Well, because these tests do not measure intelligence. They measure how much effort you put into studying- whether or not you actually study with like 3 practice tests a week for 5-6 weeks (of course being *intelligent* and understanding what *types* of problems you get wrong while studying) determines your score.

I am presuming that most people who read this are not complete idiots so that leaves it up to your determination and willpower. We discuss this idea of the significance of willpower in the critical section at the end called “What Real Intelligence Is and How to Obtain It”. Just know, your score is up to you and how much you are willing to work for it.

One more thing, it is possible to prep much earlier than a month before the test. If one is shooting for a perfect score, this is obviously recommended and it is suggested you start your sophomore year the summer before your junior year with 3 months of hard studying and practice leading into the first test. Some crazy students (and their forceful parents) start preparing as early as middle school but that’s not really needed.

Now, here’s the list of our most important tips:

* Tips
  + Tips to help while taking the actual test (or a practice test)
    - Be well fed, slept and calm (not sleepy, still be alert, just calm)
    - Be focused- not bending-over-the-paper-and-straining-yourself focused, but maintain a relaxed, in control and confident focus
      * this means you should not panic during the test if you do poorly on a section before or if you are having difficulty with a certain question- stay calm and try to find a solution with a calm relaxed and focused mind
        + this is good advice for any challenging situation
    - Make educated guesses- this just means to guess based on what has evidence to support it's the correct answer-
      * when there is no penalty for guessing and you have no clue what the answer is- BEFORE the test, have picked a guess letter ( A B C D or E) and use that letter as your guess- answer on each question you have no clue how to answer
      * if there is a penalty for guessing, if you have eliminated half or more choices, guess...
    - **THIS IS IMPORTANT:** There is always a concrete, unarguable, indisputable right answer
      * if there wasn’t, these test would get sued!!
      * the implication is, that these test will use whatever they can to trick you into not selecting this answer on multiple choice questions
        + this means having answer choices with answers very similar to the right answer or almost right answers
      * The way you counter this is by asking yourself, like a strict scientist wary of being duped by tricky answer choices, “**what answer choice has some serious evidence to support it is correct (for reading questions- does something in the passage confirm this answer choice- regardless of how general, vague or weirdly phrased it is)?”**
        + **it is very helpful to explicitly think in your head on many questions: which answer choice is indisputable, and has concrete evidence to support it must be true**
        + This above note is one of the key methods to resolve problems you are stuck on
    - **Basic Critical Skill:**
      * You need to know how to effectively use the process of elimination (look this up online) to narrow down the answer choices of multiple choice questions so it is visually easier to work through
        + Princeton review gives a good method for this, where you put an X on the answer choices that are clearly wrong, a ? on ones you do not understand, a check mark on ones you think are probably correct and an ~ on ones you think MIGHT be correct

Then, just understand the ? ones and select the only one with a check mark on it

if two answer choices have check marks, see the previous bullet point (the asking yourself about which choice has the most concrete, indisputable evidence to support it..)

Often times you will eliminate all answer choices except one which you were originally unsure about, meaning that must be true

* + Tips for studying at home
    - Buy a test prep book
      * ( I suggest Princeton review) for the SAT or ACT - though colleges do prefer the SAT since more people take it,
      * read AND TAKE NOTES on all the strategies for different sections of the SAT or ACT
        + I suggest working through the book “Manual for the SAT” : search Princeton review manual for the SAT on amazon and a few links pop up
    - Buy the official book for the SAT or ACT from the collegeboard or whatever company runs the ACT
    - Buy other books (from Kaplan, the Princeton Review or Barrons) with many practice tests- like there are a lot of book with like 10 practice tests and so on
      * I can tell you, if you take around 20 practice tests before your last test date (so long as you do it *intelligently* and over a *month and a half,* you will be in wonderful shape!!!
    - Improvement won’t happen overnight
      * You might need a week and a half to see some serious improvement-
        + again, this means you need to practice a) *intelligently* and b) continuously over a long period of time OR you may not improve significantly
    - Don’t Give Up! You should laugh in the face of repeated failure (even if you take 3 tests and see little to no improvement)! This is all about guts and hard work. Remember, we said a complete idiot can do it. It all depends on whether you are willing to spend countless hours practicing (again with these two conditions- intelligent and over a long period of time)
      * This takes a month for a very good reason, these tests are a pain
      * DON’T LET THEM WIN!
    - You may find contradictory advice on the reading sections,
      * the best advice is find what works for you in terms of whether you should read the questions first or after you read the passage
      * however, this works for everyone and helps everyone:
        + Reading a lot for a month leading up to the test with 20 - 30 pages a day!
        + Lots of continual practice leading up to the test
    - You don’t have to take the whole test in a day to practice. You can come home from school every day for a week and just take one reading section to just work on your reading section score. ( Of course other section’s scores might drop a little, but practice can fix those section scores pretty easily)
      * this is highly recommended to work on a certain section
        + for the last week, every day except perhaps the day before the actual test, you should take at least one or two sections that you would like to do some last minute brushing up on
    - Set a calendar with deadlines of things you want to practice- this stuff should all be planned at the start of summer before your junior year so that your junior year can be managed without stress (if not, just try to plan it now)
      * you should:
        + find the dates you will take standardized tests
        + determine when you will start studying
        + buy all the important books way before hand
        + set deadlines for the number of practice tests you need to take by a certain date and perhaps even set aside several Saturdays for when you will take complete practice tests
        + Stick to the schedule you make and make sure your schedule is not ridiculous and takes into account how much work you can seriously do considering school work, clubs, athletics etc.
    - Find a strategy that works for you
      * People are different, find a method of organizing everything, deadlines and so on that works best for you!

Important Reminder: look up what super scoring is, how it works and if it applies to colleges you are shooting for. Also, once you know what it is, do not rely on super scoring for getting into a college- try to have high scores in all sections when you take a test.

Important resources:

* College Board’s Big Blue SAT Book. This is by the makers of the SAT and is the most accurate book. It has 10 practice tests and is useful for these. There are strategies, but not too much focus is given on them.
* ACT Inc.’s Big Red ACT Book. This is the blue SAT book’s cousin. It has only 6 practice tests.
* Test prep books from:
  + Barron’s
  + The Princeton Review
  + Kaplan

Final Reminder

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A “good” score depends on what you want. It depends on the colleges you are shooting/aiming for. We gave advice here for people who may be shooting for some low hidden ivies- schools similar to Boston university all the way up to people shooting for MIT trying to get a perfect score. Do not be intimidated by some advice- just practice *intelligently* and *continuously for around a month* and earn your personal “good” score. Recall, a total idiot can do it- all it takes is determination (never giving up) and hard work.

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## Extracurriculars

This section has four subsections: After School Clubs, Sports, Volunteering, and Jobs. We explain how important each is depending on your specific college goals and the nature of each activity itself.

### After School Clubs

**Why Is It Important? - Colleges Want Leadership**

Most colleges like to see some form of leadership and club leadership is the primary way to show this. It is especially important if you are a leader of a prominent club.

Here’s how clubs work. The club meets at some regular time- say mondays after school in some specified room that usually stays the same. You get there, attendance is taken and the club’s officers (another word for leaders- these are fellow high school students usually a year older than you, many of them seniors) run the club meeting preparing you for the next competition or event the club will host or attend.

The rest is self-explanatory.

**How to Become a Leader While In a Club**

Clubs hold some sort of electoral process that allows people who have attended the club often to vote for their officers. Usually, when the senior officers are leaving a few spots open up allowing juniors and sophomores to earn officership.

So when a club is holding an election, it will usually a lot a few minutes for you to give a speech- make it reasonable and something that connections with your audience. If you are giving one: make inside jokes and just keep it brief and honest.

Club members usually select a club member who is really into the club or very good at the club’s competitions or activities as well as a regular member (good attendance)-someone who scored very highly on competitions or led the club and the school’s name to victory in competitions usually wins. So, to become an officer, the simplest path is to get really into the club, talk to the officers a lot on how to improve at whatever activity you are doing, put the time and effort in to become very skilled at the club’s activities/ competitions. Leadership will follow suit. Note: you should do this hard work during your freshman and sophomore years especially since having leadership for your junior and senior year in a club looks very strong (in short, start trying for leadership and working hard at a club very early).

**How to Make Your Own Club**

It is possible to make your own club. Colleges love it if you can make a successful club that goes to competitions and attracts a lot of members. However, this is very hard to do and most new clubs fail horribly because the founders don’t have enough time or willpower to make the club thrive.

Here is how to do so. Call the school or ask your guidance counselor for club starting form well before the first week of school ends. Fill out the form and keep a copy of the form for yourself before you hand it in (for your own records). To really make things good, type your form up instead of hand writing answers to the questions on the form and get a lot of followers to sign your form. Keep your form clean, neat, and filled with very reasonable, concise answers that don’t put the school at risk and instead brighten the character of the school.

Once you submit the form before the deadline, keep going to the vice principle around December (since clubs start in January) and pester him or her about meeting with you (and any other co-founders if there are some) about the club. Once you set a meeting, be sure to not miss it. At this meeting, the vice principal will assess your club and how viable it is. Have a clear message for the value for the club and be nice, respectful and know how the day- to day operations of the club will run. Also have a plan for club officership and how it passes on - how you vote etc.

Once you get a club, you will be given a room and a time you meet as well as a folder in which you need to keep track of what you do at each club meeting and get it signed by some advisor. If you are able to keep great track of this paperwork and keep the club active, meetings full of interesting material, the people who show up engaged and fulfilled- you can have a successful club that will perhaps live on after you have left high school. This is very hard to do though and usually never happens.

**Notable Clubs**

Here is a list of notable clubs and a brief explanation of each:

* Debate Club
  + You learn how to speak publicly, convince people of your point of view and go to competitions
* MUN Club
  + kind of like debate but much more about people skills and getting people to listen to you
* Science Olympiad Club
  + Study topics, take tests to be selected on competition teams that go to competitions
* Science Bowl and Quiz Bowl
  + similar to science olympiad called scioli in short
* Academic Decathlon
  + the founders are unsure of how this works
* Math Club
  + the founders are unaware of how this works but think it is similar to scioli
* Chess Club
  + I presume, member play chess or discuss chess strategy
* Echoes
  + founders not sure how this club (about literature and art which publishes a literary magazine of student work) works
* Yearbook Club
  + This club takes pictures and writes about events and designs the yearbook- it is a lot of work but pays off usually

### Sports

This section will offer some details on the many sports offered at the school. We will delve into why sports are of use, how the sports are structured, when the sports are offered and where to partake in the sports.

**Why Partake in Sports**

Sports can be very useful additions to your college application. They can, in fact make up the bulk of your application. It depends on your own performance.

Colleges care about skill, not variety. Being the best at one sport is more important than mediocrity in five. Skill will be measured by your performance at games and your record with the coaches. You coach may recommend you to colleges if not their coaches themselves. This is notably important, especially in liberal arts schools.

Colleges can see sports as club-like activities, but also a valuable part of your application as you can be nationally ranked here, making sports more like competitions. Also, note that your other accolades can always be added to by sports are colleges welcome this dynamism.

Furthermore, you can be offered a scholarship based on skills in a sport. Look at the college website to know how to apply. Contact relevant coaches and stay polite. Remember that you are a mere applicant and they have no reason to help you unless your skill provides them any reason. Remember that these grants have various terms and may bind you to the college’s team.

Also, the NCAA provides many standardizations for collegiate athletics. If a college is in the NCAA division 1, it is extremely competitive and likely to offer you athletic scholarships. The higher the division, the less likely such grants become. Note that in many places within the NCAA gender matters. Details are here: <http://www.ncaa.org/>

**How Sports Work**

In sports there are generally two classes of player: junior varsity and varsity. Below this, you are merely a trainee and do not partake in games.

Games and victory are the primary objectives of a sports team. The team must play and the team must win. You must play well, occasionally in front of spectators, if you want to be a part of the team. Usually, varsity members are seniors or juniors with the junior varsity players are younger. Skill can cause exceptions as policies vary. Varsity matters more as just the term “varsity” can add to your college application.

You will have a coach assigned to your team. Larger teams get more coaches. They will lead you and help you improve. Eventually, they may even recommend you.

Sports teams have regular practices between games. These expend a lot of time and energy but are valuable preparation for the games. Here instruction will pervade as you will grow as a player with and within your team.

Due to the USA’s climate, the following are the sports seasons with a few of the sports commonly played during them (the months are estimates are vary from sport to sport and these months are the heights of activity, not all of it):

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Season | Fall | Winter | Spring | Summer | All-year |
| Months | Sept - Jan | Jan-Mar | Apr-Jun | Jul-Aug | (all year) |
| Examples (not all, just a few classics) | * American football * Track | * Swimming * Basketball * Volleyball * Wrestling | * Lacrosse * Baseball * Tennis | * Rowing | * Taekwondo * Cross-country |

To sign up for a team, you must complete a form before the start of its season (or during the preceding school year). Ask your gym teacher for details. The nurse’s office will also require many health-related documents. You need not be tested to join a team, but may be tested to be able to move up or stay on.

**Where to Go For Sports**

The school offers many sports teams. Here, talking to your gym teacher would give you access to the relevant forms or contacts required to join a team. You will be required to fill forms and submit them to coaches and the nurse’s office. There will be ample indication of where and when your first meeting will be.

Outside the school, there are various institutions that offer over sports. Taekwondo, rowing and boxing are among examples of these. Online research can help find these. Usually, coaches for such teams require identification, a waiver so that you don’t sue them and your health records.

Note that participation in both types of teams are very good for college applications. Just remember that you would be more likely to see familiar faces in school teams.

### Volunteering

This is sort of important- and just another one of those things you kind of need to do for college (like standardized tests) and everyone should have some volunteering. We recommend that you accumulate about a 100 hours over the course of 3 years of high school (usually during times like the summer, etc.). It is sort of meaningless your volunteering doesn't have some theme like say working with animals and volunteering at different shelters or maybe some theme like helping educate underprivileged children through a variety of tutoring programs or non-profits.

Essentially, as we explained in the “What Colleges Look For” and “What Colleges Dislike” sections, colleges want to see a long term commitment to some type of volunteering rather than a soulless scattering of activities that are only related by the detail that all the various volunteering opportunities were convenient for you.

Here’s a list of volunteering opportunities:

* Red cross club in high school is pretty good
* SAVE (look up SAVE a shelter for homeless animals in Princeton)
* Plainsboro library or Mercer Counter library
* Check out this if you live in Plainsboro: <http://www.plainsboronj.com/content/volunteer-opportunities>
* A 2 Z mentoring: <http://www.a2zmentoring.org/>
* This is one of those rare places where your guidance counselor can actually help!

### Jobs

Getting a job during high school can have a few uses, though there are better ways to demonstrate what a job would.

Here we mean actual jobs, with real bosses, a true pay and the prospect of being fired. Jobs are usually minimum wage placements in local businesses. You would probably work as a waiter or behind a store’s counter. You will have to be over 16 to be allowed to earn money and a lot of paperwork will be required.

Jobs offer a few things - character building, a show of your responsibility, some money and contacts, but are not the best means for these things. Character and responsibility could be better shown through the leadership of a club - where relevance to your future field would help, unless a fast food chain was more relevant - but jobs can show this if needed. Money from a job is useful if you have a way to use it. Talk over this with your parents as your income would add to their taxes and your form filling when applying for financial aid and your parents may prefer you to work or may hate the prospect. This would also establish contacts, especially with bosses who may write your recommendations, but unless your job is relevant to your field of interest, a professor or teacher may be a more useful recommender.

A few common workplaces are Mrs. Green’s and Yogo Factory (just look them up). This is only to be pursued if you are interested. The brevity of this section should reflect jobs’ relative importance in the college application.

## 

## Timing\*\*!!!\*\*

Because it is very hard to accomplish all the items on the lists in the section ‘what colleges look for’ without proper timing, we discuss that here. We will be creating a website that does this in much more detail but for now a few key tips should be sufficient if you also use common sense and plan out big events in a school year before the school year starts.

**Key Tips:**

1. Balancing competitions and clubs with courses
   1. It depends on which competitions you are going for- for major competition times, you can focus on those a little more than school work
   2. Usually, working hard in clubs early on is helpful in trying to attain club leadership / officership
   3. Most people shoot for the international science Olympiads by first taking the national test and studying very hard for it.
2. General Time Management
   1. If you are not lazy on Friday or the weekend, you can get a lot of the upcoming week’s school work done and have more time to devote to extracurriculars
      1. this method is very useful around competition times when you need to study hard for some competition
   2. Using study hall
      1. many people waste study hall but if you focus, sit far away from the loud talkative people and get some serious work done, it will help you to no end
   3. Sleeping
      1. if you are well rested, it allows you to get more work done than if you are not- because you will get tired easily and feel the strong need to take a nap (well, at least that’s what I feel)
3. Standardized Tests
   1. After an honors science course or precalc, you can take SAT subject tests such as physics, chemistry, math level II
      1. after taking a course that is of the same topic as the SAT subject test, you should try to take the SAT subject test (if you think you will do well)
      2. this way, you do not have to study a lot of the material and know most of it- meaning you just have to take a lot of practice tests to practice
   2. For the major tests like the SAT or ACT
      1. we’ve already talked about when you need to study- a month continuously or more up to the test date
      2. Usually people take these tests their Junior year which is a very busy year already (the major competitions, most challenging courses etc.) so it is best to
         1. The summer before the school year starts plan out which months you will focus on the SAT, which months you will focus on competitions and which months you will focus on the AP tests...
      3. A good time to start doing serious SAT or ACT studying is the summer before your junior year
4. College Applications and Activities
   1. You should have picked out a good idea of a few colleges you are aiming for by the end of your sophomore year (have a few safety schools, target schools and reach schools- see section titled “Finding a list of colleges you apply to”)
      1. visit colleges the summer before junior year
   2. try to do college interviews the very early start of your junior year (remember interviews are very important for small schools)
   3. Try to write most of your essays - the major and supplementary ones, the summer before senior year starts- and through the next few months, edit and revise your essays
   4. Do most of your common app sections the summer before senior year and edit your responses there as well- see the section “College Process” to know what the common app is
      1. it is also very helpful to look up what the common app is online
      2. you can also go to private guidance counselors (like admissions navigator: <http://admissionsnavigator.com/>) to help you write your common app (or called common application) and a few applications to a college (this is pretty helpful- but will cost you some money obviously)
5. Always fill up your summers- you should be quite busy in the summers of your high school years:
   1. Mainly fill your summers with option ii courses,
   2. But many people do test prep, college essay writing or college application writing, college visits, lots of volunteering (see the sections in the table of contents on each of these topics) and maybe if they can, an internship or research.

*\*\*\* Note: This is very vague information because the timing of activities really depends on the specific person. The best way to really get a feel for the timing is by looking at example of real people and how they have managed courses, standardized tests, clubs, athletics and, competitions over the years.* ***See the section: “Case Studies” to get specific examples.*** *\*\*\**

[The section ‘case studies’ will be added in version 1.10]

# General Resources

In this section we have three subsections: textbooks, Finding Opportunities (internships/ research), and Real Guidance (because the school’s guidance system is just trash).

Note there is a New SAT: <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat>

## Textbooks / Books

* Course textbooks
  + Stewart’s Calculus
  + Campbell biology textbook
  + other main school textbooks
* Standardized Test Books
  + Official books from SAT or ACT companies
    - google it
  + Test books with lots of practice tests
    - from companies:
      * Kaplan
      * Barron's’
      * The Princeton Review
  + Dr Chung’s Math - for SAT Math 2.
  + Barron’s ACT 36
* Competition Books
  + look at the aops bookstore: <http://www.artofproblemsolving.com/store>
  + look up “<insert biology, chemistry or physics> olympiad “ on amazon.com and you will usually find something
  + also helpful: asking leaders of sci-oly (also called science olympiad club) for textbooks they recommend

## Finding Opportunities (internships / research)

Remember that you are in the 21st century. There is more information at your fingertips than even existed 200 years ago. Put it to use and use google copiously. That way, you will never miss anything in any way.

Companies post internships regularly. Research and links to professors are everywhere. The internet is there for you.

Also, talk to people. Your friends, family, counsellors and teachers may provide even more information.

## Real Guidance\*

We shorten Guidance Counselor to GC in this section.

**The Value of High School Guidance Counselors**

Within any government, there are very low positions to be held. The clerks at immigration desks or behind the windows at over-crowded social-security offices come to mind. These people exist for service but do not have much knowledge and, being public workers, are not at the forefront of their field. These workers are Band-Aids used to patch together the gash of massive public demand. The high school guidance counsellor is a prime example of this. They do not exist to serve you but exist to serve the system and act as grease in its large, grinding cogs. Because of this purpose, they cannot be expected to fully aid students. They have too general a purpose and too big a job. They simply cannot care too much. They simply cannot suggest certain things. We must note, however, that not all guidance counselors are created equal.

**The Role of a Guidance Counselor**

The role a gc should play in a student's life is to explain all the information in this document and give personalized advice on what helps the most for someone’s specific situation. This role is basically never fulfilled. Hence, we (the founders) created this document.

However, for those who would like personalize guidance on getting ready for colleges and don’t mind paying thousands for very informed, extremely helpful guidance, contact private guidance counselors such as admissions navigator: <http://admissionsnavigator.com/> or ivywise: <http://www.ivywise.com/> for ‘real guidance’. These people are very expensive, but have a high reliability in delivering results. Don’t worry if you can’t afford it, with hard work and close reading of this document, you can do absolutely great!

**Discouragement**

High school gc’s have a tendency to discourage students from taking challenging courses and many who have listened have ended up taking courses that are way too easy for them. We do not understand why this happens, but must warn against it: do not be fooled by your counsellor. If you think that you are capable, take the challenge. Do not stop because of a stranger. They may know the system, but they do not know you. And, if you pay attention in class, you will know the system as well. Enforce your will when scheduling. There is little the GC can do to stop you. Then, the only person stopping you would be yourself. Please never listen to their “advice” on not taking honors or AP courses!

## 

# Important Ideas\*\*!!!\*\*

[We will expand on this section in version 1.10]

## Gender Differences

For a variety of reasons, colleges compare male applicants with other male applicants and female ones with other females. As a result, females competing for good schools need only be better than their female peers and vice versa. For some reason, it happens that males tend to have stronger resumes making it more challenging for a male to get into a good school than a females. Simply put, compare yourself with other students of your gender in your school aiming for the same colleges as you. This also means females can do less (not a whole lot less, but a little) of the items on the lists in the ‘what colleges look for’ section and achieve the same result.

## Race Differences

Statistically, most Asians apply to schools with a reasonable stem focus and good scores. As a result, because schools compare students of similar ethnicities (to get a good mix or diverse student body), Asians need to be more competitive than non- Asians to get into great schools. However, we have accounted for this on the lists in the “what colleges look for” section so if you follow that reasonable you are fine. For non-Asians, you have it easier at low hidden ivies but your race actually make very little difference at the top level- the Ivy League and up.

## Pursuit of Passion / Vanity of College Competitiveness

We included this section mainly to say that we don’t want you to use this document as a forceful checklist to just accomplish things to get into a good college. That seems soulless and disturbing- we, the founders have met these people in person and have seen how hollow they are, how they only care about getting into a college that will land them a high paying job. It’s like their entire life revolves around money and they have few meaningful human relationships.

Anyway, the point is, develop who you are as a person and go after your interests (colleges want depth not breadth- or a variety of things you have done for like a week). Find the subjects, clubs, competitions you like and go all-out (try exceedingly hard) on those- trying to obtain officership, win awards etc. That and trying to get most of the things on the lists in the “what colleges look for” section will do fine.

## What Real Intelligence Is and How to Obtain It

Here, we just want to point out that though much of this stuff looks intimidating, it is really not hard. People seem to think that there are ‘smart’ people and not smart people when in reality there are only people who try after they fail (again and again until they get better- which does happen) and people who doubt themselves and out of anxiety, don’t challenge themselves and don’t grow and become smart. Essentially, if you become passionate about a topic, put yourself out there and take a risk by trying really hard at that passion/interest, taking challenging courses in that area, you will develop. It is all about working hard at something despite how intimidating it looks. Tip you get over the intimidation if you really solidify the concept **that if you work hard and never give up at something despite failure, you will eventually get better- develop critical thinking skills and BECOME smarter,** you will be much more confident in facing challenges and chasing after your dreams/passions.

In short, you become smart by working hard. NO ONE IS BORN SMART OR TALENTED, EVERYONE WHO YOU THINK IS SMART WORKED VERY HARD TO GET THERE.

## No Stress Involved- based on One’s Mentality

Here we just want to mention that the college process is not really a stressful one. Students just get upset feeing like they **have to** do something critical to their entire life, and something serious is happening in their life that puts great responsibility on them making a large fear set in of getting into a bad college and going nowhere in life while people around you get into ivy leagues and so on. First of all, there are thousands of people who don’t get into Rutgers and there are so many Rutgers grads that have done so well. Know that 80% our school gets into Rutgers- you can coast if you want to.

Know that, yes, the process is a little stressful and impacts your life deeply but so do other mandatory things that an adult does like buying a car, choosing a life insurance policy or accepting a job. Just because it is a big deal, it doesn’t mean you should stress over it.

Moreover, in this document we explain almost everything you need to know about getting into good colleges. If you take 4 hours a day for 3 days and try to plan out the courses you should take in the next few years, the standardized tests you should take-often based on the courses and so on ( make a general timeline for yourself) you can easily accomplish many things that will seriously help you for college. You don’t have to be the best in the entire world- just being in the top 35-45% of our high school’s students (which you can easily do with this document) is great and will lead to a happy life. Believe me, when you go to a college far away from high school, you will feel so much smarter.

In brief, just dive into the process of thoroughly planning out the things you need to do for college- the timing, what courses, what clubs, volunteering, and maybe sports without anxiety because you have all the information at your fingertips with this document. The only way you will feel stressed is if you keep scaring yourself and thinking that nothing good comes out of this entire process- that all this hard work is so confusing and you are drowning in some chaos. Just use this document to get organized and then once you have a plan, trust yourself and fearlessly chase your goals.

Moreover, as you will soon discover so many of these things are incredibly fun: clubs are a great place to make friends, competitions are very fun- getting passionate about a topic is fun and real learning- learning on your own, complete separate from school because you like a topic, is incredibly fun!

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