

THE GUIDE TO APPLYING TO COLLEGE

For high school seniors

INTRODUCTION

Be honest in your applications. Enhancing stories, not writing your own essays, etc will never help you in the long-run. With every essay and interview, you are getting to know yourself more and more. In the end, it will be a very personal process that will help outline your transition into the future towards college and beyond. Be as honest as possible and don't be afraid to reveal some parts of yourself throughout the process.

Everyone says you should start working in the summer, and they're totally right. The Common App and many colleges release their essay prompts early in the summer, so look over some colleges that you may end up applying to and start thinking about the things you want to write about.

CHOOSING COLLEGES TO APPLY TO

What Colleges?

Do your research! Only you will know what college fits you most.

Just remember, the education should be the main reason you choose a college. Everything else is secondary.

Things to research about in a college:

- Look up the majors and minors: do they have your major, or one you'd be interested in? Can you double major if you plan to?
- Look up the difference between liberal arts colleges and research universities. They both have different feels, personalities, and values. You might fit into one more than the other.
- What kind of curriculum is there? Open curriculum like Brown? Core Curriculum at Columbia?
- Would you apply straight to a specific major or do you only want to declare your major after freshman year?
- Search for classes offered and maybe even specific professors that may interest you.
- Do you want to do research, and what year in college? Does that school allow freshmen to start research if they want to?
- Find programs available, opportunities for internships, and clubs that match your interests.
- Would you be comfortable in a school with about 2,000 students or in a school with 27,000? (again, liberal arts vs. research)
- Is the location comfortable for you? Do you prefer the city, suburbs, or rural areas?
- Watch videos. Take virtual tours of each school you consider. Can you see yourself fitting in with the environment?

- It's also good to see if you have completed any their class requirements already, like test scores, completed classes, etc.
- Try to visit the college. A good amount of schools offer fly ins so even low income students can go visit. If not, try to visit some local colleges just to have a sense of different atmospheres.

<http://www.globalmi.org/blog/2016/college-fly-in-programs-for-2016-2017>

Things we suggest to pick a college based on:

- Field of Study: If you already know what you want to do, choose colleges that offer your major of interest. The college's site can help you decide, along with an internet search about student experiences with that specific major. *Don't be afraid* to look up a teacher or two on the school's site and contact them to get an idea about how classes are taught, many people have done it before and some colleges encourage it!
- Classes: Aside from major-specific classes, see if the college you're looking into has other classes that interest you. You might want to pick up a new instrument, learn a new language, study the art of public speaking, learn to ski, or dance while on campus. Look into what classes your school has to offer and you might find something you didn't even know you were interested in.
- Extracurriculars: That dance class you wanted to take but didn't end up taking may be stuck in the back of your mind. Behold, dance clubs! Marching band, cooking clubs, recreational sports clubs... Most colleges have an array of activities, ranging from the obscure (dragon boat clubs) to the more common (language clubs). Seeing what extracurricular activities your colleges have to offer can help your search.
- Size of Campus We strongly advise that you consider whether you prefer a large campus in which you meet new people daily, but may feel somewhat isolated or a small campus in which there's a stronger sense of community, although faces are familiar. If you're into smaller campuses, look into liberal arts colleges too.
- Location Again, do you prefer the city, suburbs, or rural areas? Do you prefer to have family living nearby? How often can you visit home? And if you like the heat, consider whether you can still see yourself at a school that snows for 8 out of 12 months (but then again, weather is secondary to everything as a deciding factor).
- Surrounding Area Try checking out the area around your prospective school on Maps or looking up "things to do at <city of school>" to get an idea of what's nearby and to see if the area around your school is one that you would enjoy being in on your occasional excursions. Some surrounding neighborhoods are safer than others. Before visiting/attending a school, please keep in mind what the environment may be like there.
- Financial Aid When we say financial aid, we don't mean the sticker price. Don't ever look at a school and see it costs \$60,000 a year and disregard it. Instead, look how much need they are willing to pay. If you are someone who is well off and can afford any school, this isn't an issue, but if you are someone that is middle class and/or low income, really check how much need they cover. If they cost \$30,000, but usually only pay 40% of the student's need, it would be a better deal to attend to a school that is \$60,000, but covers 90% of need.

Things we suggest **not** to pick a college based on:

- DON'T EVER USE RANKING SITES. These are solely estimates. A number compared to others doesn't always do a college justice. If anything, look up how well your *major* is ranked compared to similar programs from different colleges.
- Dorms
- Greek life
- Weather (most definitely something you can AND will adjust to)
- Food on/off campus (don't expect college to offer 5-Star food ALL the time)
- Parking (if you plan on driving)
- Student demographics
- How large of an emphasis the school places on sports spirit

Remember: education should always be the first deciding factor, otherwise why are you really going to college?

Making a College Spreadsheet

This is optional and for the organized. When making a spreadsheet, include whatever information is important to you, but here are some *suggested* topics:

- School name
- Location
- Major/Minor (Do they have your intended major or any minors you're interested in?)
- Common App/Universal App/Other? (most schools use the CA, but for example, MIT has their own application)
- ACT/SAT range (their average scores)
- Additional Scholarships (do they have any *outside* of their application process and when are they due? ex. Vanderbilt has three due by Nov/Dec)
- Early Decision/Admission (do they have any of these and which. Do you plan to apply early? *See below in "types of applications" to learn more about these*)
- Interviews (Are they offered? Optional or mandatory? Do you have to apply for one or will they contact you?)
- Cost (How much to apply? How much to attend?)
- Deadlines (For both admissions and financial aid forms)

APPLICATION MATERIALS

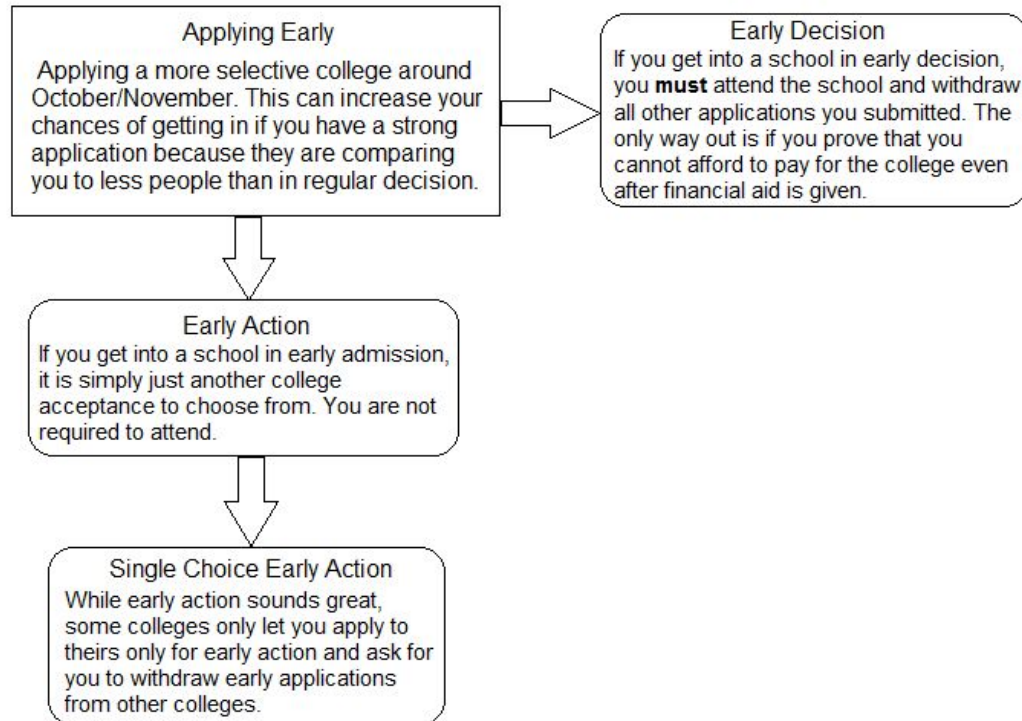
Know your timing! It's less stressful to submit applications long before the due date. This way, you'll have time to resolve any missing parts before it's too late. If anything, we suggest at latest, starting applications about a month before the due date (end of September for early, end of November for regular).

Types of Applications

To find out what kind of application(s) each college offers and their due dates, you can check their website or find them on the Common App/Universal App.

Early Applications

Most schools offer early applications, however there are different kinds of them depending on each college.



Regular Decision

Most people apply to colleges through regular decision. Some in-state college may make their deadline in as early as October or November (I know, almost like early admissions), but a majority of other colleges make their application due by early January.

If you want to apply for a college, regular decision is usually your last chance to apply.

Rolling Admissions

These are common for local or in-state colleges. They accept student on a rolling basis, meaning you can apply and be accepted at anytime before their final deadline.

ACT/SAT Scores

Sending your scores officially

Many schools *require* that you send ACT/SAT scores officially to them. Sending them will take about a week to arrive at the school, so you must plan accordingly and send them about a week *before* the submission date, unless otherwise stated by the schools. This must be done through your College Board (SAT) or your ACT account.

[Click here to send ACT scores](#)

[Click here to send SAT scores](#)

Sending your scores unofficially

If you are financially unable to pay to send scores, you can contact schools to find out if they offer alternative ways to send scores. *If you plan on doing this, contact the school first to tell them.*

Examples:

- By PDF in an email from your counselor,
- By PDF in an email from you
- On your official transcript (but not all schools put scores on transcripts)

Some wonderful person out there contacted many schools and made this spreadsheet that has different accepted methods for schools. (Note that not all schools offer alternative methods, therefore you must pay to send scores officially for those schools):

[Check if a college accepts informally-sent test scores](#)

Cost/Waivers

If colleges require that you send scores formally, the SAT gives about 4 waivers to send scores if you qualify for free/reduced lunch. The ACT doesn't give anything :/ (although we highly encourage that you find out more about that).

SAT: \$11.25 per college sent to (with as many SAT scores at once per school)

ACT: \$12 per score per school (you have to pay for each score you send to each school :/)

**Rush shipping for both ACT and SAT will cost you extra. To avoid having to pay this, just plan accordingly and send your scores at least a week before it's due!*

Transcripts

If the college is on the Common App, you simply need to have your guidance counselor attach your transcript to your profile online. This is the same process for when your final transcript comes out after you've chosen your college.

In some cases, students may need to attach it as a PDF somewhere, email it, or mail a physical copy.

Resumes and Portfolios

Some colleges give you the option to share your resume or portfolio in their application. If they don't but you still wanna, you can always email an admissions officer to ask if you can share it (you can usually email it). Don't be afraid to contact anyone!

If you're applying for Art or Architecture, look up special instructions on sending portfolios because they are usually required.

When do I send AP Scores?

A few schools do require your AP scores, either informally or formally depending on the school. If they don't, however, and you feel that your scores will strengthen your college application, you

can send it to schools during the application process. (We suggest you check if the school will accept your scores as part of your application)

After you commit to a college in May, you must remember to send AP scores (as well as your final transcript) to that college.

Postage

Some colleges will require you to mail things to them. Some schools, including Georgetown, only offer their application on paper that you will have to mail. Always make sure that you send forms in before the due date in order to avoid missing a deadline. Remember, it can take a few days for things to be delivered!

It's suggested that when you mail important documents, you pay for tracking to ensure that the forms arrive promptly and successfully at the expected location. If not, make sure to call their respective office after a few days to ensure that your package was received.

QuestBridge finalists: schools will ask that you mail them your parent's tax return forms to them with a cover sheet found in your QuestBridge account. Make sure to send them in time!

APPLYING FOR FINANCIAL AID?

Every college has a financial aid section in their website. You must follow each of the instructions and deadlines if you plan to get financial aid from each school.

*Also, consider applying to become a QuestBridge finalist (applications are usually due around September) as they give **many** benefits for financial aid.*

THE CSS PROFILE

When does a college require it?

This application comes out October 1st. Many schools require the CSS for financial aid; make sure to check the university's financial aid requirements page to know when to send them by. QuestBridge finalists: schools require these as part of your application for each school.

Filling it out

This (super-long but worth it) video explains how to fill out the CSS, as well as differences between the CSS and FAFSA. Make sure you have all your necessary financial info ready when you start it, for the sake of saving time.

[Explaining the CSS Profile](#)

Whatever you do, **don't** purposely lie about your financial information!

Cost/Waivers

There's a \$9 initial fee and \$16 per school you send the Profile to.

Based on your information in the CSS, the application will determine if you qualify for 10 school waivers as well as the initial payment.

Questbridge applicants: There is a form where you can apply for 2 more CSS waivers. If selected as a finalist, they will inform you if you got the waivers or not.

Alternatives/Other Required Forms

Schools like Princeton and University of Pennsylvania have their own version of the CSS. These are usually free. Yes, they still need the FAFSA and maybe even the CSS (depending on the school), but make sure that you also fill out their specific financial aid form. If you are not sure which schools have their own form, check their financial aid requirements page.

The FAFSA

When does a college require it?

This application usually comes out on January 1st (although we hear it may come out earlier). The earlier you fill it out, the earlier schools get your financial aid, the better. ALL schools will require the FAFSA, so you best be filling it out and sending it everywhere if you want that FinAid.

Cost

The FAFSA is FREEEEEEEEEE. Yay government, amirite.

Filling it out

The FAFSA is a simpler process from the CSS, but nonetheless, it is still lengthy and requires you to have all your financial information readily available to plug in. You must create an account to start. Here's a link to their website if you still have questions:

[Filling out the FAFSA](#)

Sending the FAFSA

You can only send it to 10 schools at a time.

If you need to send it to more schools: wait for your FAFSA to process and be delivered. Then, go back, click "Make FAFSA Corrections", create a save key, then click the "School Selection" tab. Remove all previous schools and add the remaining schools. Wait the next few days for it to send to those schools and repeat this as necessary until you've sent it to all schools.

ESSAYS



"I read your college application essay. First of all, the word 'COLLEGE' has two 'L's'."

What **to** write about

You can pretty much write about anything as long as you answer the prompt and it is mainly appropriate. But whatever you do, make it related to you. People have written about crazy things: Costco, subways, underwear, Kpop, etc. and have gotten into amazing colleges. That's simply because they were able to successfully write a reflection of themselves using those topics as channels. As long as you can make sure you really show yourself in your essays, you're golden.

What **not to** write about

If you write about a story involving facing challenges, **ALWAYS make it sound positive**. Don't use negativity, and if so, keep it very light and don't allow it to encompass the embodiment of your essay. Show that you have learned something, and especially how. You want to show the positive parts of yourself.

Also, try to avoid talking about mental illnesses. While it maybe a large part of you, some colleges may not look past it and instead decide that you might be a liability so they reject you (unfair, but you know, that's life). If you do talk about it, talk about it as briefly as possible and don't make it a main focus. Also, make sure it ends positively.

"Why Our School?" Essays

These can sometimes be the most difficult to write. First, don't waste your precious limited word count talking about things the college has. Yes, they have cool clubs and yes, it's beautiful and there are wonderful classes. But they already know what they have. So instead, talk about how you can fit into those things. It gives them away to learn more about you that wasn't shown in other parts of the application and how good of a fit you'd be there.

Also, don't go overly specific. Sometimes, knowing the name of the professors or courses isn't that impressive. They know google exists. You need to learn to balance. This is probably the

hardest essay to make stand out because everyone writes the same reasons. As long as you really connect it to yourself or really put a little extra something that is unique, it will stand out.

Sometimes this essay is a deciding factor for yourself. If you find yourself struggling to write this essay because you can't picture yourself attending that school, chances are you might not truly want to attend that school.

Word/Character Limits

Try to avoid going over the word limit, although if you do they will probably still read it anyway. If you see you are reaching it, find places to cut around while maintaining the quality of your essay. However, if you feel that there's no way you can shorten it, going over about 10% is still acceptable.

And don't struggle to *reach* the word limit either. If it's a well written essay, it doesn't matter how short it is. But if it's really choppy and sounds unfinished, the readers will wonder why you didn't write more and so your application won't look as strong.

Editing

- Make sure to **always** get other people to read it over. Sometimes you might feel it's the masterpiece of the century, but there may still be a lot of issues hidden in it.
- Grammar is a big thing! You don't want to check your essay after submitting and see that there are a lot of spelling/grammar mistakes. It'll seem like you didn't even care to look it over in the eyes of the admission officers.
- Keep in mind that everyone has their own opinion. Because of this, try to have each essay checked by no more than 3 people to avoid dealing with too many opinions.
- We suggest you have someone who knows you well, and have someone who knows the admissions process well to read each essay. Maybe like a sibling/parent, a guidance counselor, and a recently graduated student.
- Keep an open mind when accepting edit suggestions. Sometimes you won't agree but you'll realize it is the better decision. At the same time, don't *always* accept a suggestion if you personally don't agree with it.
- Keep updated original versions of your essay and send *copies* to people to edit them! Sometimes the original may sound better and you'll want it back.
- No matter what, don't let others change *your* voice in your essay. If you are reading it as if it's another person's essay or if you personally can't feel a connection to it, then fix it.

tl;dr... Don't over-edit. Listen to the changes others suggest and decide if it's better for your essay or not. And don't ever change your own voice in the essay!

Copying & Pasting

Yes, if you don't watch out, you might only send half of the effort you put into your essay. Make sure the entire thing pastes when you're submitting an essay, especially in the Common App!

INTERVIEWS

Interviews are usually done by an alumni of the university you're applying to. They are also usually only offered in locations where there *are* alumni, so not everyone in every place can get an interview. If anything, you could get a video chat or phone call interview.

Some schools offer these optionally, some require them. Some contact you first, some have you request one on your own. Some allow interviews before submitting applications, some only after. And some have closing dates for interviews.

Check the university's website to find out how each college works!

*Do your research for each school! Make sure you have enough reasons to back yourself up on why the school is good for **you** and why you're good for the **school**.*

What **to** talk about

- The school in question.
- And secretly every person's favorite topic: yourself.

Yes, a half or whole hour or so of you talking about yourself while someone listens, interested and continuously asking more questions. It's easy if you have stuff you take pride in. Which honestly, everyone should. No matter your school performance, your interests, your adversities, etc, every person should have *something* to talk about. And if you don't think there is, then review all your college essays, because surely there is stuff there.

Colleges in general only want to see the good things about you, so end all negative topics with a strong positive ending.

What **not** to talk about

- Don't constantly mention other schools (It's like being that person on dates who always talks about their ex)
- Don't lie about why you want to attend (If you're struggling to sound interested in the school, you either didn't do enough research or you should ask yourself why you're really applying. If there really are reasons, it shouldn't be hard to remember)
- Don't lie about yourself (Whatever info you say must be parallel to or add onto your application. It's your chance to elaborate on and explain those things, not make up new things)
- Stay consistent with your plans for that school (if you chose one major, don't talk about a different one unless you plan on changing it).
- Don't lag through the conversation (If you find yourself repeating things, then it's probably time to move on to a different topic/end the interview)

Attitude

Arrive early.

Know who your interviewer is, or if you arrive earlier than them, email/message them where you are sitting.

Shake their hand and look them in the eye when you greet them.

Don't sound braggy or be condescending. Stay positive and SMILE. And especially be kind to the person you are talking to.

Don't stress. Or treat yourself to some Starbucks before the interview.

Be honest. Be natural. Be *yourself*.

Attire

If they say it's casual

- yes, you can dress casually BUT
- still show effort in your appearance, like brush your hair and stuff
- don't show unnecessary skin (mwear pants over shorts and stay safe with a nice top or one with sleeves)

If they don't mention it being casual /say it's (business) formal

- wear slacks or a business skirt
- wear a simple dress shirt
- a business sweater optional
- tie unnecessary but optional if you like giving your outfit a taste of your spunk/attitude
- wear simple flats or dress shoes, or short business heels

tl;dr.... Don't stress the way you dress. If it's casual, it's casual. If it's formal, it can be business casual. And brush your hair.

Suggested Questions to Ask

Here's some things that you might wanna ask (Of course only ask things that you're truly interested in):

- how does the school help you shape your career path and prepare you for life after college?
- how involved are people in extracurricular activities? sports?
- do you mainly interact within your one college? or freely with others?
- did you do any dual degree programs? and which?
- what's something about the school you wish you knew about before attending?
- What is a unique aspect about the school you feel can't be found at others?
- do you suggest living on or off campus?
- what activities are there to do around the campus area?
- do you know anything about ____ program? what can you share about it?

HAVE QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOLS?

Have a specific question for a school?

In this case, asking the school a question directly will help the most. Of course, *only* do this if your question can't be found in their FAQs (you don't want to waste your time and especially theirs.) Also, make sure you *always sound formal* when contacting a school.

To find contact info, simply Google the school name and “contact”. You should almost always find a page of phone numbers and emails.

Don’t expect to get an email the next day every time. We’ve gotten responses from within a half hour to over a week. If it’s urgent, we suggest you call.

Guidance Counselors

You all have these. Or at least you should.

Everyone has a different guidance counselor experience, but if you can get their help, go for it. In fact, just start off your senior year already waiting at their door to introduce yourself. Just kidding. But if they prove to be a good counselor, have them read your essays, answer any questions you have, and let them just give you some plain good advice about colleges. It’ll help, we promise.

Talk to Your Friends or Make Friends

If your question is general, try asking any friends doing the same application, friends who have gone through the process before, or even better, friends who attend the school you’re applying to. Depending on what it is, maybe they can answer the question.

If you have a friend of a friend or a friend’s family member or even a friend’s family friend who you know attends the school, make a friend and see if you can contact them.

This is college. This is important. Use whatever resources you can find!

We hope this document has helped you understand the college admissions process a lot better. We hope to continue adding more information. Please let us know if there is any way we can improve this document! -Emily Chen

ARE WE MISSING SOMETHING?

Found a mistake? Think we missed anything important on this page?

Shoot any of us an e-mail at:

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