



**Test Prep
Seminars**

A Parent's Guide To College Admissions



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Introduction

Starting the college admissions process may seem like a daunting task for students and parents; because there are so many details to keep in mind, it is usually unclear in the beginning. This document provides the essential information guide that you and your child need to kick-start an organized and seamless college admissions process.

Top 4 Tips for the College Admissions Process

Tip 1 — Maintain a positive perspective on the admissions process.

The college admissions process can be a stressful experience for both students and parents. The tips outlined will help you and your child manage this process; notwithstanding, one of the best things that you can do for your child is to maintain a positive perspective. It is easy to get wrapped up in the frenzy of the admissions process, but your ultimate goal should be to help your child find the college that is most suitable for them. Always remember that your choices may not always align with that of your child, therefore it is important to make concessions as your child would make the ultimate college choice decision, your role as a parent is to guide and support.

Tip 2 — Start the college admissions process early.

Despite mentioning it previously, it is important to emphasize that the majority of students and parents will tell you that the last two years of high school are pretty stressful. Commencing the college admissions process early, including getting organized, following a timeline, and setting deadlines for the steps along the way will aid the process that ensues.

Use our "College Admissions Timeline" below to guide you through the process.

Tip 3 — Encourage your child to utilize the resources available through their school's college counseling office.

Don't feel like you and your child have to shoulder the burden of the college search and admissions process on your own. The individuals who work in your child's college counseling office are there to help you and your child along the path toward college, and they can be great resources and allies. Most college counseling offices have tons of information and materials available to help students' through every step of the process, including standardized test information, college brochures, advice on building a college list, tips for writing college essays, financial aid and scholarship information, college brochures, advice on building a college list, tips for writing college essays, financial aid and scholarship information, etc. Encourage your child to utilize the skills and resources that their college counselor has to offer.

For a list of helpful college admissions tools, guides, and books, see our "Recommended Resources" section below.

Tip 4 — Encourage your child to make the most of their high school experience.

The most important factor considered by college admissions officers is a student's high school record. Colleges want to see that potential students have maximized their high school experience and are prepared for the demands of college. Academic coursework and extracurricular activities both contribute to the strength of a student's high school record.

Academic Coursework

There is a common misconception that colleges only look at the grades of a student's last two years in high school; the reality is that all of a student's grades will appear on their transcript, despite the increased significance of a student's junior and senior year grades in the grand scheme of things. Colleges like to see that potential students have taken rigorous courses and are not scared to challenge themselves academically.

When your child selects their courses each year, encourage them to consider the AP and honors courses that their school offers. Your child should simultaneously consider courses that will allow them to explore specific interests, as these course will add depth to their transcript and will show that your child has pursued their passions.

As your child progresses through high school, they should keep a portfolio of their academic work, accomplishments, awards, and honor; with all of this information in one place, it will save your child time and effort in completing college applications. In addition, many colleges allow students to submit supplemental materials with their applications. Items from the portfolio could be great pieces to submit, as they will provide the college with a bigger picture of their skills, interests, and accomplishments. They also give a sense of what your child can contribute to their communities.

Extracurricular Activities

High school also provides an opportunity for students to become involved in their schools and communities-it is not solely about school work. When considering applicants, colleges seek well-rounded students who will make positive contributions in both the academic and extracurricular realms.

However, many students often make mistakes when it comes to extracurricular activities. They may try to be involved in too many activities or get involved in activities only at superficial levels. There are some tips to help you guide your child through selecting and participating in extra- curricular activities.



Your child should select one to three activities that are meaningful and important to them, as doing so will allow them to actively participate in those activities without feeling they are being pulled in too many directions.



The depth of your child's involvement is more important than the breadth of their involvement. Colleges can tell when a student has joined a club or organization just for the sake of adding that activity to their college application.



Encourage your child to get involved in clubs, teams, organizations, and activities early in high school. This shows commitment and may enable your child to take on leadership positions within the organizations, both of which are qualities colleges look out for in applicants.



Sports teams do count as extracurricular activities but it is also a great idea for your child to be involved in a few non-sports related activities.

For further information about the factors that college admissions officers consider, read the "What Are Colleges Looking for?" section below.

What Are Colleges Looking for?

Just as your child wants to find the college that is the right match for them, college admissions officers also want to ensure that the students they admit will be good matches for their schools. There are a number of factors admissions officers consider, including a student's academic record and achievements, standardized test scores, extracurricular activities, recommendations, and essays. The weight given to each of these factors varies from school to school, though most admissions officers agree that a student's high school record is the most important factor in their decision making process.

Beyond the high school record (courses taken, grades, GPA, class rank, etc.), there is a list of factors that admissions officers may consider when evaluating students' applications. Bear in mind that not all of these factors will apply to every college. For example, there are a growing number of schools that no longer require students to submit standardized test scores as part of the application process.

- Standardized test scores
- Essay and short-answer responses
- Employment experience
- Admissions or alumni interview
- Legacy status
- Skills and talents
- Teacher and counselor recommendations
- Extracurricular activities and level of involvement
- Race/Ethnicity
- Academic plans (which school within a university a student applies to)
- Financial need
- Interest in and knowledge of the college and its offerings

The following chart shows the admission factors and the weight accrued to each factor for ten popular colleges and universities. If the schools on your child's college list do not fall in theme, check with your child's college counselor to find out which specific factors those schools consider.

College	Very Important Factors	Important Factors	Considered Factors
American University	GPA High school record Interest in and knowledge of the school	Application essays Recommendations Standardized test scores Extracurricular activities and volunteer work Applicant's character	Employment experience Legacy status Geographic location Race/Ethnicity Skills and talents
Bard College	Application essays Applicant's character Recommendations High school record GPA Extracurricular activities Skills and talents	Employment experience Volunteer work	Interview Class rank Legacy status Geographic location/state residency Race/Ethnicity Standardized test scores Religious affiliation Interest in and knowledge of the school
Boston College	GPA High school record Standardized test scores	Applicant's character Legacy status Class rank Application Essays Recommendations Extracurricular activities and volunteer work Skills and talents Religious affiliation	Employment experience Race/Ethnicity
Bowdoin College	High school record GPA Class rank Applicant's character Application Essays Recommendations Extracurricular activities Skills and talents	Standardized test scores Legacy status	Geographic location/state residency Interview Race/Ethnicity
Brown University	High school record Applicant's character Application Essays Recommendations Extracurricular Activities Skills and	Standardized test scores Legacy status	Geographic location/state residency Interview Race/Ethnicity

College	Very Important Factors	Important Factors	Considered Factors
Claremont McKenna College	High school record Standardized test scores Extracurricular activities	Recommendations Application essays	Interview Legacy status Applicant's character Geographic location Skills and talents Race/Ethnicity GPA Employment experience Volunteer work
Emory University	Application essays High school record Recommendations Applicant's character Extracurricular activities Standardized test scores GPA Skills and talents	Interest in and knowledge of the school Legacy status Geographic location Employment Experience Volunteer Work Race/Ethnicity	Interview Class rank
Stanford University	High school record Applicant's character Class Rank Application Essays Recommendations Standardized test scores GPA Skills and talents Extracurricular activities		Employment experience Volunteer work Geographic location Legacy Status Race/Ethnicity
University of Pennsylvania	High school record Standardized test scores Applicant's character	Extracurricular activities Application essays GPA Employment experience	Class rank Geographic location Legacy Status Interview Recommendations Race/Ethnicity Skills and talents Volunteer work

College	Very Important Factors	Important Factors	Considered Factors
Washington University	High school record GPA Class rank Applicant's character Application essays Standardized test scores Extracurricular activities and volunteer work Recommendations Skills and talents Employment experience		Interview Legacy status Interest in and knowledge of the school Race/Ethnicity

College Admissions Timeline

The importance of doing the right thing at the right time can ease the college admissions process. We have designed the timeline below to help guide you and your child through the process from start to finish.

Summer Before Junior Year

- Explore summer jobs, volunteer opportunities, and summer internships.
- Consider PSAT prep (if applicable or visit our ACT Info center and SAT info center to learn more about applying for testing accommodations).
- Explore college websites and consider possible majors and areas of interest.

Junior Year

Fall

- Take the PSAT/NMSQT in mid-October (if applicable).
- Determine when to take the ACT, SAT, and SAT Subject Tests (if necessary), and mark the test registration deadlines on your college admissions calendar. Most students take the ACT and SAT for the first time during the spring of their junior year. However, some college counselors suggest that students take the tests as early as the fall or winter of junior year. Check with your college counselor to determine the best testing schedule.
- If you will take the December or February ACT or the December or January SAT, begin preparing for those test dates in September or October.
- Create a “need to have” and “nice to have” list of college qualities.

Winter

- Register for the appropriate SAT and ACT test dates.
- If you decide to take the April or June ACT, or the March, May, or June SAT, begin preparations for those test dates in January or February.
- Use the “need to have” and “nice to have” list to create a first draft college list.
- Visit college fairs and begin planning spring and summer college visits. Determine each college’s campus tour schedule and schedule interviews with admissions officers (if available).
- Determine whether or not to take the SAT subject tests and when to do so; mark the test registration deadlines on your college admissions calendar.

Spring

- Take the April or June ACT and/or the March, May, or June SAT. Once scores are available, determine whether or not to take the tests again and when to do so. Mark the test registration deadlines on your college admissions calendar. Many students take the ACT and SAT two to three times, typically one or two times during the spring of junior year and one or two times during the fall of senior year.

- Take AP exams in May (if applicable).
- Begin college visits; we suggest that students bring a camera and a journal with them so that they can capture their thoughts and impressions as they experience them. After visiting several colleges, it may become difficult to remember which college had a new science center versus which college had large first-year dorm rooms.
- Create a second draft college list.
- Plan for summer college visits.
- Explore college scholarship and grant opportunities.
- Explore summer jobs, volunteer opportunities, and summer internships.
- Select and ask teachers, coaches, and advisors to write letters of recommendation for college applications. They will appreciate the advance notice!

Summer Before Senior Year

- Visit more colleges.
- Finalize college list. Even though the number of colleges a student will apply to varies from student to student, most students apply to five to ten colleges. The list should include a few “reach” schools, a few “match” schools, and a few “safety” schools. A note of caution: apply to a manageable number of schools. Though many schools accept the Common Application, most schools that do so require additional short-answer and essay responses. It’s better to submit five superior applications than fifteen so-so applications.
- If you will take the September or October ACT, or the October or November SAT, continue to prepare for those test dates. Don’t forget to register!
- Request applications and brochures and organize college materials into separate folders by school. Determine application requirements and deadlines, and list them on the cover of each folder and on your college admissions calendar.
- Begin the Common Application and the Common Application essay.
- Determine to which schools, if any, you will make an early decision or take early action. Start working on those applications first, as the application deadlines typically fall sometime in October or November.

Senior year

September

- Meet with your college counselor to review your final college list, application requirements, etc.
- Provide those teachers, coaches, and advisors who will write letters of recommendation with the appropriate forms, addressed and stamped envelopes, and the specific deadlines.
- Finish the Common Application and the Common Application essay and continue working on early decision or early action applications.
- If registered to do so, take the September ACT.

October/November

- If registered to do so, take the October ACT, or the October or November SAT.
- Once all test scores are available, determine which scores to send to colleges. Be sure to send them in time to meet application deadlines.
- Finish early decision or early action applications and submit them by the required deadlines.
- Start working on other college applications, making note of specific deadlines.
- Confirm that those teachers, coaches, and advisors who are writing letters of recommendations are prepared to submit them by the required deadlines.

December/January

- Finish remaining college applications, and submit them by the required deadlines.
- Write and send thank you notes to those individuals who write letters of recommendation.
- Ask your college counselor to submit the mid-year grade report to relevant colleges.
- Early decision and early action responses will be sent during these two months.

March/April

- Most regular admission decisions will be sent during these two months.
- Make college choice by May 1st, submit the enrollment form and the deposit check to that school. Notify other schools of your decision. Write and send thank you notes to those individuals who assisted with college applications.

May

- Take AP exams (if applicable).

June

- Request your final transcript to be sent to your college of choice by your college counselor.

Finding a College Match for Your Child

Though your child may have a vague sense of the type of school they would like to attend, exploring and narrowing the options becomes much easier once they have a clear picture of the specific qualities they need and want in a college. One of the best ways to approach this process is by creating a “need to have” and “nice to have” list of qualities.

We have created the following worksheet to assist you and your child in creating this list. Once your child has worked through the options you can both begin to build a college list that matches your child's requirements.

Step 1: Your child should work through the list below to narrow down some of the broad categories of schools. Your child should circle the qualities that they feel would best fit their needs and wants under each category. For example, if your child is open to attending schools in New England and in the West, they should circle both options. If there are other qualities that your child would like to consider, they should add those to the list next to the appropriate category.

Type of School:	Public	Private					
Type of school:	Co-ed	Single sex					
Size of school:	Small	Medium	Large				
Setting:	Rural	Suburban	Urban				
Location:	New England	Mid-Atlantic	South	Midwest	Southwest	West	Abroad
Location:	Close to home	Somewhat close to home	Far from home				
Area of study:	Colleges with _____ major	Colleges with _____ major	Colleges with _____ major				
Finances:	Significant financial aid available	Some financial aid available	Limited financial aid available				
Selectivity:	Less selective	More selective	Highly selective				
Standardized Tests:	Required	Optional					
Athletics:	Division I	Division II	Division III	Club Sports			
Activities:	Music Groups	Drama	Dance	Film	Newspaper, magazine, yearbook	Student govt.	Radio/TV stations
Social Life:	Has fraternities and sororities	No fraternities and sororities					
Housing:	On-campus	Off-campus	Co-ed	Single sex	Quiet		
Academic Programs:	Honors program	Internships	Service learning	Indep. Study	Interdis. majors	ROTC	Study Abroad
Other Categories:	Level of Diversity	Religious affiliation	Quality of academic facilities	Quality of athletic facilities	Students-to-professor ratio	Retention rates	

Step 2: Now that your child has streamlined the qualities they need they should determine which qualities are “need to have” versus “nice to have”. In addition, if there are any qualities your child is certain they do not want in a college (e.g., your child knows they don’t want to attend a single sex school), they should list those qualities under the “don’t want” heading; we have provided a sample list of your reference.

Need to Have	Nice to Have	Don't want
Co-ed		Single Sex
	Small Medium	
Suburban, Urban		Rural
	South, Southwest	West
	Somewhat close to home	
Colleges with business majors		
	Some financial aid available	
	More selective, Highly selective	
	Standardized tests – optional	
	Club sports	
Music groups	Radio/TV stations	
No fraternities and sororities		
	Housing: On-campus, Off-campus, Co-ed	
Study Abroad	Honors program, internships	
	Diversity, low student-to-professor ratio, quality academic facilities	

Step 3: Now that your child has narrowed down their list of college qualities, they should have a good sense of the types of colleges they would like to explore. Based on their list from Step 2, they know which qualities are most important to consider when searching for colleges. For example, the sample student above first looks for co-ed, suburban or urban schools that do not have fraternities and sororities but that do offer business majors, music groups, and study abroad options.

Once your child has developed their own college qualities, they can begin the process of selecting specific schools to add to their college list. At the outset, your child's college list will likely be lengthy, but as they begin to research individual schools in depth and go on college visits, you will be able to narrow the list down to a workable number. Most students apply to anywhere from five to ten colleges, which usually includes a few "safety" schools, a few "match" schools, and a few "reach" schools. However, all the colleges on a student's selected list should be places where the student believes they could have a worthwhile college experience.

Online College Search Tools

The College Board's College Matchmaker: Allows students to enter specific criteria and generates a list of colleges based on those specifications.

The College Board's College Quick Finder: Allows students to search for specific colleges, thereafter providing information about a college's admission requirements, cost and financial aid offerings, academic programs, sports programs, application deadlines, SAT and ACT score-use policies, average SAT and ACT scores for first-year students, majors, and housing and campus life offerings.



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