



Learning at Your Fingertips
Applying To College



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Overview

Applying to college in the United States can be a stressful process, but planning ahead of time and doing your research makes things much easier. Depending on how high you set your sights, getting into college can be either easy, difficult, or somewhere in between.



Being Academically Prepared

1. Understand that there is a college for every student who wants to go. The USA has 4000 degree-granting institutions. Almost all of them accept the majority of applicants, only a small number of elite schools accept less than half the people who apply. Hundreds of colleges accept almost everyone who applies. So, you are definitely getting into college if you want to go.



Being Academically Prepared

- On the other hand, top schools like Harvard, Stanford, Duke, University of Chicago, etc., receive thousands of applications from top students for their freshman classes. It is important to have a realistic view of what your credentials are and what those schools require. Try to match your own grades and special abilities with the standards for the school you want to attend.



Being Academically Prepared

2. Move to finish any requirements needed to apply to certain colleges while in your junior year(s). Some colleges will want you to complete calculus and statistics before you apply; others will stress a broad range of humanities classes. Be sure that you have an idea of the colleges you might want to apply to, and start meeting their class requirements, if necessary.



Being Academically Prepared

- One of the first thing that colleges look at is your past school record. This helps determine how you do in an academic setting. Receiving high grades in school can only heighten your chances of being accepted by a university.



Being Academically Prepared

- Also, colleges look at your participation at school outside of the classroom. They want to know what the student does with the rest of their time while outside of the class. The more involved you are on your campus, the more likely you are to be involved on a school campus. This includes sports.



Being Academically Prepared

- Add the extra-curriculars you engage in outside of school. Perhaps a community club or sports team could be added to your application. Any positive activity that you partake in can help make your application for desirable.



Being Academically Prepared

3. Complete high school or an academic equivalent (such as a GED). People who move on to higher education have many different educational backgrounds. Among community college students in the United States, 43% are age 21 or younger, 42% are ages 22-39 and 16% are 40 or older. Your age should not be a negative factor in applying to college.



Being Academically Prepared

4. Take the SAT or ACT test because about 85% of colleges require one or the other for first-year students. Nearly all schools will take either one, but a few schools will only accept one or the other, so check the school website to see if they are picky or not.



Choosing a College

1. Use college and scholarship search sites to your advantage. Look at colleges that have features that interest you, such as ideal major, class size, location, and the like. Check out their websites, since many of them have application information. It is also worth checking out books about scholarships at your public and school libraries.



Choosing a College

When it comes to finding the right college for you, consider what you want to major in and your desired career path. Maybe you're aiming to play a particular sport and certain universities would thus be a better fit. It is important to pick a college in your range.



Choosing a College

Check out websites such as collegeboard.com to find out the students' average GPA and test scores, and compare them to yours. Many factors such as school size, location, and cost must be considered in finding the right college to apply to. Create a list and apply to several; don't limit your options to just one university.



Choosing a College

- Many companies nowadays will compile lists of colleges that you can browse through or buy. They break down how hard it is to get into, what kind of SAT/ACT score you need, what campus life and academics are like, and what kind of job prospects alumni have upon graduation.



Choosing a College

2. Contact schools for information. If you contact the schools that you are interested in by signing in on their admissions website, they will probably send you a pile of information about the school. Most schools now have information online.



Choosing a College

You should do this as early as possible if you are still in high school, because some colleges have unusual apply-by dates or a list of required high school classes. They will send out reminders of important due-dates and information.



Choosing a College

3. Narrow down your list of schools. By the time you are a Junior in high school, you should be narrowing down the list of schools you want to apply to. It would be a good idea to visit some schools during your Junior year. Decide what college(s) you want to apply to based on the information they sent you, the information you received from other people, and your own reconnaissance.



Choosing a College

- By October of your Senior year you should know who you are applying to and what they want in terms of references, test scores, etc. Do not leave this decision until several days before the due date for forms and paperwork. A lot of information may need to be obtained, including references for some colleges.



Choosing a College

- It is also important to be certain about your choice and not just apply "for the heck of it" or because everyone else is going to that college. It needs to suit you and what you want.



Choosing a College

4. Visit some colleges. Each school is different — some are huge with 30,000 or more students, and some have only a few hundred students. Do you want a city campus or a country campus? North or South? A particular religious group? Go there and look. If you have a friend, or another kid from your high school who goes there, get them to show you around.



Choosing a College

- Try to talk to students in various grade levels and ask them for their perspective of the school. Listen to what they have to say, but form your own opinion on what you like and dislike.
- Sit in on a class. Try to imagine what it would be like to be a student there. Can you imagine yourself being happy and living fruitfully there?



Choosing a College

- Oftentimes, a college will give a visiting student a fee waiver. These can save you \$50 or more, plus visiting beforehand can help you decide whether or not you even want to bother applying.



Applying

1. Apply if the college fits you and your interests. This sounds simple, but it is an important consideration. Your choice will affect you for many years down the road. If you feel like a square peg pushing yourself into a round hole, you must evaluate the importance of doing this against the possibility of going to somewhere else that may not be so prestigious or handy but offers you exactly what you want.



Applying

- As redundant as it may seem, you actually have to fill out an application! Many colleges and university use the Common Application, which asks a series of questions about personal information and school history. Be as thorough as you possibly can be. If you have any questions, don't guess, call the school and ask.



Applying

- Also consider issues related to residency, expenses, quality of final qualifications, scholarship/bursary availability and your own eligibility etc.



Applying

2. Fulfill specific requirements for the application. Middle to top tier schools usually require you to write essays. They expect these essays to be impeccable, thoughtful and creative. Be sure you are unique in expressing yourself, but avoid a level of eccentricity that would be detrimental. There is a lot of advice online about how to write these, so look around and see what other students have done.



Applying

- While the essay is the most dreaded part of the application, it can also be the most fun. Fitting yourself on a piece of paper is difficult but forces you to think about what your most admirable and important traits are.



Applying

- Try to pick an interesting topic; the readers do not spend a lot of time on each essay. The more intriguing the hook at the beginning, the more likely your essay will be read in its entirety. Also, the grammar must be impeccable. Have an English teacher or a good friend, or both, proofread your essay.



Applying

3. Figure out who can write your letters of recommendation. Give them plenty of time to write the letters and keep track of whether they have actually sent them out. You should be thinking well in advance about which teachers you want to write recommendations.



Applying

And, it isn't a bad idea to do a little extra schmoozing with those teachers to be sure they know you and have something nice to say about you.



Applying

- Most colleges and universities require teacher recommendations in order to complete the application process. This is where the importance of doing well in high school also comes into play. If there are particular teachers that you believe you have made a good impression on, ask them.



Applying

- Be sure to ask them well in advance. Since many teachers have several students, write them a list of your credentials and activities so that they can be sure to include everything.



Applying

4. Check thoroughly. Before finalizing your application, reread through everything and check for any mistakes. Submitting the application as early as possible will demonstrate your ability to complete assignments promptly and manage your time well.



Applying

- Admission officers at the school will only spend a brief amount of time on any given application, depending on how well your credentials and essay stand out to them. Test scores, GPA and length of extra-curriculars are points that easily stand out to the reader will help your application stay in the hands of the reader for a longer period of time.



Applying

5. Decide whether you want to apply with early action, early decision, or the equivalent.



Applying

- Early action is non-binding. If you feel that you have the credentials to gain admission after your junior year and do not feel it is necessary to wait for first semester senior year grades, then go for it. Early action only means if you meet a certain deadline, you are guaranteed to receive a decision by a certain date; usually admit, defer, or deny.



Applying

- It may be slightly easier to get in because you will be competing for more open seats. The terms of early action differ from school to school. Some schools will restrict you to applying only to one school early action, so be sure to note each individual school's terms.



Applying

- Early decision is binding. If you do apply early decision, you will have a slightly higher chance of getting in. School use early decision to gauge who *really* wants to go to their school.



Applying

- However, being admitted early decision means that if you get accepted, you have no flexibility. You have to go to that school, even if you got a scholarship to a different school, or your best friend was attending a different school. Be sure you are comfortable with the school if you decide to apply early decision.



Applying

6. Complete most applications by January. Most of the more respected schools require applications to be completed by January of your Senior year. By around April 1st they will tell you whether you are admitted, then you will have to decide by May 1st if you will go there.



Applying

- For many middle level schools or less selective schools, you can apply at any time and they will tell you in a few weeks whether you are accepted.



Applying

- There are also schools (but not famous ones) which have empty seats in their Freshman class right up to the start of school in September. So, if you don't get accepted in April, then you can still work on applications and find a school that will take you right up to the start of the Fall term.



Applying

7. Thank the individual(s) who wrote you letters of recommendation. You may have been asked to submit letters of recommendation along with your application. Never forget to thank the people who were willing to write those for you! Without their contribution, your application might not have been accepted.



Applying

8. Once you have been accepted, apply for financial aid (optional). Go directly through the school itself, or apply for FAFSA, a governmental body. Many top tier schools will waive the price of admission if your family's income falls below a certain mark. Talk with your high school guidance counselor if you believe this to be the case.



Summary

Selecting the right college is an important decision in your life. With so many choices, it can be a bit overwhelming. Like most things, following a systematic approach, can alleviate some of the stress. When you make the right decision, it will be the bright beginning of a new chapter in your life.

