

College Admission Handbook

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Introduction

The challenge of getting into the college of one's choice can seem daunting. As a result of the "Baby Boomlet" (Baby Boomer offspring), more students are applying to more schools, allowing colleges and universities to raise their requirements and turn away highly qualified students in record numbers. Yesterday's "safety schools" are "iffy" today. The high school class of 2009 will likely be the largest in our nation's history.

Colleges are now looking for a complete package – students who will add skills and talent, thereby enhancing the vitality of the campus, while also demonstrating a high level of academic achievement. As colleges attempt to find these students, the pattern of acceptances and rejections is often unclear. Indeed, it can appear somewhat random. But in reality, there is some method to the madness!

What can you do to beat the system? There is no way to guarantee your acceptance to a particular school. But with planning and strategy, you can greatly improve your odds. It's time to start putting together your "case" - your absolute best possible presentation of your academic record and other strengths.

Most students possess more potential than they realize. Many have a unique "hook" or "ACE" (*Additional Contribution Extraordinaire*) that they can use to their advantage. But it needs to be identified, developed, and presented properly. It also needs to be combined with an overall package of abilities, experiences and academic accomplishments that will catch the eye of the admissions staff. The recommendations contained in this handbook will help you to do that.

Our materials are geared toward students who plan to attend a four-year college or university. (In this handbook we will use the term "college" to represent any four-year institution.) While we make no guarantee that you will obtain admission to your top choice(s), we believe that following our advice will give you the best possible chance. There is an excellent school out there for everyone (more than 3,700 in the U.S. alone) and a high percentage of students are accepted at their first or second choice college. So "think positive" and let the adventure begin!

A Note to Parents

The period during which your child is considering college options and making future decisions is one of tremendous excitement. However, it is equally often characterized as stressful and overwhelming. It generates feelings of empowerment, yet also anxiety and helplessness. Like all the major milestones in your child's life, it is a time for parental involvement and support. Parents can ensure that the student allows time to plan and complete the many application tasks. Parents can, and should, encourage students to talk about their decisions and help them analyze the vast amount of information they will amass. Most of all, you can ease the stress for them by keeping them on track and helping them learn to manage their time efficiently. Never forget that you are probably the most influential factor in your child's life. As such, here are some specific things that you can do for them:

- *Be sure that your child takes all high school years, including senior year, very seriously. Keep an eye on study time, progress reports and other indicators that your student is still engaged. They can't afford to slip. Get in touch with school counselors if you have any doubts.*
- *Keep a file of all honors, awards, articles, leadership accolades, volunteer work certificates, etc. relating to your child. This saves a lot of time when preparing applications.*

- *Discuss college choices with your student. Help them articulate what is important to them and why. Encourage them to talk about majors and careers. Talk openly, but tactfully, about your student's strengths and weaknesses.*
- *Emphasize the value of a college education as opposed to the prestige associated with certain school names.*
- *Be sure to remember that this is your child's future and not yours. Students who take ownership of this process and make their own decisions will have a greater stake in their own success. It's easier to rationalize failure if someone else made their decisions.*
- *Parents should be sure to guide, not steer. Guiding implies support, whereas steering implies control. Constantly ask yourself if you are guiding or steering. Remember, this is not about you. Guard against over-involvement.*
- *Participate when and where appropriate. Attend college visits with your child and join in parent programs there. Read this entire handbook, help them with research, and keep them focused and organized.*
- *Talk openly and honestly with your child about finances, although be sure they don't eliminate schools on that basis initially. Financial aid is available at a surprising level for more families than you might think. Still, your child should have some idea of what the family can afford to contribute.*
- *Reassure them throughout the process that you are proud of them and encourage them when things seem overwhelming. Let them know that you will be pleased no matter where they ultimately decide to go. Then be true to that statement!*

Now About You

Well, you're finally here. It's time to engage in the college admission process. For some of you, it's something you've been dreading. For others, it's the moment you've been waiting for. In either case, approach it with optimism and an open mind. It's not really about college at all.... this process is about YOU.

Who are you? It seems like a silly question, doesn't it. But by stepping back having a candid dialog with yourself and those who know you best, you may better prepare yourself for a successful college application process. What do you love? What do you despise? What are your strengths and weaknesses? Above all, why do you want to go to college? You are making decisions now that will have a significant impact on your future. And your own unique characteristics need to be accurately reflected in your choices. An honest assessment of your aptitude, interests, values, goals and personality will assist you as you navigate college admissions. Select colleges that are compatible with your traits. Be true to yourself and celebrate what makes you YOU.

What Colleges are Looking For

Sometimes it seems like a mystery. Every college has its own criteria and defines a set of parameters used to evaluate applicants. But what we can tell you is that it will almost certainly be some mix of the following, weighted a bit differently from college to college:

- *Academic Record – GPA, class rank, consistency, improvement, difficulty of classes, reputation of high school. In short, a strong level of performance in a challenging curriculum represents the ideal mix.*
- *Testing – Standardized tests will be a part of the application at almost every college.*
- *Extracurricular Activities – These seem to be weighted more heavily at private schools but are probably important almost everywhere. There is some bias toward academically-based activities versus social, such as yearbook versus spirit club.*

- *Letters of Recommendation – These serve to paint a broader, more subjective picture of the student and are important when colleges ask for them. Some public schools will not take them, so do your research. Don't send them if the colleges don't want them.*
- *Honors and Awards - Special recognition for some skill or talent is desirable and you will want to showcase any that you receive.*
- *Essays – Most applications will have an essay section, and it is becoming increasingly important as more and more students look alike in other ways. The essay seems to be getting more attention as a differentiator, especially as interviews become less common.*
- *Interviews – While not always offered, they are just another way to gain insight into the applicant, and you should obtain them whenever possible.*

It is important to remember that admissions committees are not only admitting qualified individuals, but are also building dynamic and diverse classes. This explains why a seemingly less qualified student might occasionally be accepted over another.

Curriculum Planning

Let's start with the basics. You will spend four years in high school, so you may as well make them count. A good rule of thumb is to take the most difficult courses you can handle, with a goal of obtaining A's or B's. Most advisors would probably agree that a B in an honors or AP (or IB) class is better than an A in an easier one. It is unlikely that any college will even accept a class with a D grade or worse.

Generally colleges like to see a consistent progression in English, Math, Lab Sciences and Social Studies plus a non-English (LOTE) language. It is generally better to take several years of one language, rather than to try a year each of several.

Maximize your grade potential by taking easy steps such as minimizing absences, sitting near the front of the class, doing all homework, participating, taking good notes and getting to know your teachers. Be sure teachers know you care about your grades.

Courses to take in High School

So what should you take? When you look at a college website, you will usually be able to find their specific requirements. So if you have some colleges in mind, or at least some that would represent your type of college, it pays to do research up front.

As a general example, you will often see requirements by subject, such as:

- *History/Social Science – 2 years required/3 preferred*
- *English – 4 years required*
- *Math – 3 years required/4 preferred*
- *Laboratory Sciences – 2 years required/3 preferred*
- *Language (other than English) – 2 years required/3 recommended (of same language)*
- *Visual and Performing Arts – 1 year required*
- *Electives – 1 year required (extra classes in the above categories also fulfill the elective category unless otherwise specified)*

(Note: the above curriculum is a sample only. Your high school may offer different guidelines.)

A student heading for an Ivy League or top tier college would likely have taken a language (other than English) and first year Algebra class in 8th grade, then would have taken 4 more years of Math, Language and Lab Sciences. In addition, many of those would be honors or AP (or IB) classes. Highly selective colleges will see applicants with an average of 18-20 honors/AP semesters and well more than the minimum number of core academic classes shown above.

AP and IB Classes

Your high school probably offers classes categorized in several ways. Some identify classes as “college prep”, “honors”, “AP” (advanced placement) or “IB” (International Baccalaureate). These designations are generally an indicator as to whether the grade in that class will be assigned additional “weight” when the GPA is calculated. College prep classes usually do not receive extra weight. AP and IB classes almost always do. Doing well on AP exams has become a proven indicator of college success, hence impresses college admissions staff. Honors classes vary greatly in terms of weighting applied, but it is certainly worth taking them when you can. Try to show a positive progression - either better grades as you go from year to year or harder classes or, preferably, both.

GPA Weighting

This is an area that tends to frustrate almost everyone. Some high schools apply weighting factors generously, while some do not. For example, at one high school an Honors Chemistry class might be weighted such that an A counts as a 5.0 instead of a 4.0. At another high school, Honors Chemistry might not be weighted. Some high schools take a weighted average when computing class rank. Others don't. However, one thing that seems to be consistent is that colleges and universities DO count the more difficult classes and factor them in somehow. So you are always better off taking honors and AP (or IB) classes – of that there is little doubt. If you are focused on particular colleges, you can often find their specific weighting rules on their websites.

What Years Count Most

You will hear many myths about which high school years count and which don't. The truth is simple – they ALL count. Sophomore and junior year are the most significant, but your freshman year obviously affects your overall GPA. (Some colleges DO count all four years, some don't.) Senior year is becoming increasingly important, too. We've heard of “tragedies” where a student qualified for acceptance but was turned down after the college looked at first semester senior grades. (the mid-year report) Seniors should not take easy schedules, nor can they afford to drop their grades. You can't afford to catch “Senioritis”!

Class and School Ranking

Class rank seems to be counting less and less, perhaps due to the weighting inconsistencies mentioned earlier. However, many colleges still ask for your class rank or at least what percent of your class you fall in. (top 10%, 20%). This is particularly frustrating for students who have pushed themselves with harder classes, gotten B's, then found themselves ranked below their friends who took the easiest classes the school offered. But rest assured, the colleges see through this and will always prefer a more challenging schedule.

Not everyone is aware that many colleges also have a way to rank your high school. A very difficult private high school, for example, might carry a higher weight factor than a public school with a not-so-great academic standing. At the same time, students who excel at a school in an underprivileged area may be looked upon favorably for making the most of what they had to work with. Colleges will often excuse the fact that AP classes weren't offered in these situations, and a lower SAT or ACT score might be acceptable. We have not been able to find any way to research this to determine the high school ranking methodology, but it does seem to occur. The ranking seems more common when you are applying close to home, and is less of a factor if you are applying out of state. In any case, there isn't much you can do about it so just be aware of it.

Research Pays

We've said it already but it bears repeating: Research early and research often. There's an old saying “Begin with the end in mind.” and you will see that as a theme in our

materials. The “end” is acceptance to the college(s) of your choice. We’re sure you’ve heard about the “big” or “fat” letters arriving in your mailbox. That’s the goal. For that reason many of the things you do, beginning as early as 9th grade, need to have that ultimate objective in mind. (By the way, acceptance letters aren’t always thick these days!)

We are fortunate to have the internet today, which is an incredible tool for digging into your target colleges and becoming what they are looking for. You don’t have to have made up your mind for sure, but look on the websites of some colleges that appeal to you. Click on their Admissions section. Look at the information regarding classes required, average GPA of accepted freshmen, average SAT/ACT scores and so on. That will give you a really good idea of where you need to be. A good rule of thumb is to figure you’d better have the averages *or better* if you really want to get in. Otherwise you are leaving a lot to chance. We will provide you with some even easier ways to determine colleges’ admissions requirements later in the handbook.

The Resume

The resume is a valuable tool that many students aren’t aware of and don’t use. For that reason, it can become a “secret weapon” that will set you apart. But in addition to that, it also makes it easier to fill out the actual applications.

You may have heard of resumes being used when applying for jobs, and this isn’t very different. But the sections on this resume are geared toward the “buckets” of information that the applications generally ask for. Your goal is to fill up all the buckets, having at least five or so items in each area. You will also list them best first, down to the least significant. (See sample resume in Appendix) It probably goes without saying, but your resume is a reflection of you and who you are. Be sure it is neat, error free and printed on nice paper. Have a parent or counselor check it for you.

Resume Outline

Here is a model to follow as a guide:

Full Name
Address
Phone Email
Social Security Number
High School Name

Academic Honors and Awards
Other Awards and Distinctions
High School Leadership Activities
Community Service and Leadership
Summer Programs and Internships
Paid Employment Experience
Other Activities and Hobbies
College and Career Goals

Strengthen Each Area

Under each of the above headings, try to list five or so items. You can combine two of the above into one if you are short, or rework the headings to fit your situation. But remember, the colleges expect you to have this type of broad experience. It’s a little intimidating, isn’t it? But don’t worry - you probably have more to put on your resume than you realize. This is the time to dig into all you’ve done in high school and fit it on the resume. If you are still in 9th, 10th, or even 11th grade, you still have time to shore up some weak areas. It is when you actually get the resume down on paper that you start to see where you can improve.

Use Your Summers

Don't waste your summers. They are the perfect time for activities that will strengthen your resume. Explore your interests and find out or confirm what you are passionate about. Many summer programs have application processes and some require letters of recommendation, so start looking in January. Princeton Review publishes a book called "The 500 Best Ways for Teens to Spend the Summer", and here are some of our suggestions:

- *Take a summer school class at a college*
- *Take a summer program related to your major*
- *Take an educational trip, such as a language immersion program overseas*
- *Do some community service – there are some excellent summer community service opportunities that combine travel, education and community service. Here are a few examples:*
 - Rustic Pathways: www.rusticpath.com
 - Global Routes: www.globalroutes.org
- *Volunteer at a company that might be a career interest for you or something like:*
 - Special Olympics - www.specialolympics.org/
 - Points of Light - www.pointsoflight.org/
- *Take a unique teen adventure trip with students from all over the world, such as:*
 - Action Quest: www.actionquest.com
 - Odyssey Expeditions: www.OdysseyExpeditions.org
 - Broadreach: www.gobroadreach.com
- *At least get a paying job – there is usually a place for paid employment on applications.*

Leadership Counts

Keep in mind one very important point as you try to develop your resume. Colleges are more interested in "quality" than "quantity" as a general rule. That means that instead of joining half a dozen clubs and playing a minor role in each, it would be better to try to assume a leadership position in at least one. Demonstrated commitment and leadership in even a single activity is worth a great deal to admissions staff. Try to shine in some club, project, sport, activity or endeavor. What about starting a club? Church involvement is certainly well received also, and is particularly important when applying to colleges with a church affiliation. Sadly, simply volunteering a few hours at your local hospital has become trite and is not enough to set you apart from other students.

Academic Record and the Resume

You'll notice that the resume does not include academic information such as GPA, SAT scores, etc. This is because those are sent to the colleges via transcripts and test reporting services, so it isn't necessary to repeat them here. However, for interviews or special situations, or to fill the page if you're really having trouble, you can insert basic academic statistics (assuming they are a positive attribute) in a section at the top. Put it under your name and address and call it Academic Record.

When the Resume is Used

The resume helps to organize your information in a convenient format that is similar to the activities page on most applications. But it serves more purposes than that:

- *Enclose the resume with the packets you use to ask for letters of recommendation.*
- *Bring the resume with you on interviews.*
- *Mail the resume to private colleges along with a small picture, unless you are specifically told not to by the college.*

In the Appendix (back of the handbook) is a sample resume. This imaginary student is very strong, but not a superstar. Our imaginary student is making the most of what he or she has done, and putting together a very strong "package" to present.

Take a look at the sample and try to fit your own activities and awards into a similar format. Remember to list the items putting the strongest first in each category, down to the least significant.

Your “ACE”

With a little luck, something else will emerge as you put your resume together. Ask yourself what is different about YOU. What talent, experience, hobby or passion makes you unique. You are looking for an “ACE” (Additional Contribution Extraordinaire) that you can build up and use to set yourself apart from the many students that, unfortunately, may look a lot like you on paper. If you can find your “ACE”, it often leads to an exceptional essay on the application. These sorts of things, believe it or not, are often tie-breakers in cases where the student is borderline for admission.

At first you'll think, “I don't have one.” But you do.... a stamp-collecting hobby that started as a child, building computers from scratch, playing the piano at a retirement home. Think! You have one, and can build a theme around it that can tell a story. Where do you shine or show passion? What have you thrown your heart and soul into? Once you identify your “ACE”, try to do things that support it such as clubs, volunteer work, contests or summer programs. That way your applications will show a consistent theme that will make them more credible. We can't overemphasize how critical this is.

Standardized Testing

The standardized testing process causes different reactions among students. Some are petrified; some view it as a mild annoyance. Others are a little shocked when they don't do quite as well as expected. But like it or not, they're here to stay - at least for a while.

Most colleges require the SAT or ACT tests. Originally the ACT was preferred or required in the mid-west, while the SAT was preferred in the northeast and on the coasts. Now it is common for colleges to take either, which is a nice advantage. Some students take both in order to see if they do better on one style than another. This is certainly a valid idea, but can be costly if you are trying to prep for both. Some students report a significant difference in results between the SAT and ACT, while others perform about the same on both. This is a decision that is yours alone, and you should do the necessary research to make an informed choice. Again, the college websites will almost certainly indicate what they accept and/or prefer.

The Tests

PLAN

A series of achievement tests in core subjects with an emphasis on career exploration and preparation for the ACT test. It is generally offered to sophomores in the fall.

PSAT/NMSQT

This test is designed for juniors to give them an estimate of how they will score on the real SAT Reasoning Test. It is shorter, but similar in content and approach. It is generally offered once per year in October. This test is also used to award National Merit Scholarships, so it's very important. Some high schools offer practice PSATs and SATs as early as freshman or sophomore year. This is a good idea for high achievers or students looking to prepare ahead of time. The PSAT resembles the new SAT Reasoning Test, except that it does not include an essay. You can roughly multiply your PSAT scores by 10 and use that to guess what you might receive on the Critical Reading and Math sections of the SAT if you were to take it then.

The SAT Reasoning Test

The SAT Reasoning Test is used to measure certain abilities that are believed to be predictors of success. It changed for the high school class of 2006. The test now includes an essay and a somewhat different 3-part structure. Here are some highlights of the SAT Reasoning Test:

WRITING: (60 minutes)

- *The new SAT includes a student-written essay – you will need to take a position on some issue and you must support it with examples (25 minutes). This will be the first section.*
- *This section replaces what used to be the SAT II Writing Test*

CRITICAL READING: (70 minutes) (This section may be compared to the old Verbal section)

- *Analogies have been eliminated*
- *Grammar and usage multiple choice are added*
- *Short and long reading passages as well as sentence completion remain*

MATH: (70 minutes) (This section may be compared to the Math section on the old SAT)

- *New content from third-year college preparatory math - some Algebra II questions such as absolute value, exponential growth, negative and fractional exponents, linear functions, scatter plots*
- *Quantitative comparisons have been eliminated*

The bottom line – it's LONG! Be sure to get plenty of sleep the night before and bring snacks and water. Concentrate on staying focused and watch your pacing.

Scoring and Comparing the SAT Reasoning Test

Each section uses the familiar 200-800 scale. So the new “perfect score” is 2400. You also receive two writing sub-scores: a score of 20-80 for the multiple choices and 2-12 for your essay. You are able to access your score report on-line along with a copy of your essay. Sometimes you are offered a QAS (Question and Answer Service) for a fee (certain dates only). This gives you the questions, correct answers, and your answers. For others, the SAS (Student Answer Service) is available, which provides less detail but gives summaries by difficulty levels and how you fared in each. So check as you register to see if your dates offer QAS or SAS.

To compare old (pre class of 2006) SAT scores to new, you can roughly equate the Math sections, and you can equate the Critical Reading section to the old Verbal. To convert a total old SAT score to a total NEW Sat score, multiply the old times 1.5 and that will approximate it. Some colleges are still not using the new Writing Section for admission decisions.

Visit the College Board website www.collegeboard.com for more detailed information.

The SAT Subject Tests

These are subject tests that measure knowledge or skills in a particular subject. Each test is one hour, and many subjects are offered. With the new SAT Reasoning Test, the Writing SAT II is eliminated and many colleges will no longer accept the Math IC. (The Math IIC is generally still be accepted.) Not all colleges require the SAT Subject Tests, and some don't even consider the scores. Those that do will generally want two or three in different subject areas and will probably weight them equally to the SAT Reasoning Test. So once again, research pays. Find out what your prospective colleges require or recommend, and watch for changes. Take the SAT Subject Tests whenever you peak in that particular subject. For instance, if you've taken AP Biology, take the Biology test that May or June. The College Board is building a list of colleges and their Sat Subject Test requirements, which is found at www.collegeboard.com/prof/counselors/apply/12.html

The ACT Test

The American College Testing (ACT) Assessment is designed to test your skill levels in English, Math, Reading, and Science reasoning. On the test, you will have 2 hours and 55 minutes to complete a variety of multiple choice questions divided into four sections – one for each tested subject area. The English, reading, and science sections each include several reading passages with anywhere from 5 to 15 questions per passage. The Math section includes 60 questions – each with 5 possible answer choices.

ACT has an optional 30-minute Writing Test as a component to the ACT Assessment. Prompts used for the ACT Writing Test describe an issue relevant to high school students and ask students to write about their perspective on the issue. As a starting place, two different perspectives on the issue are provided. Examinees may choose to support one of these perspectives or to develop a response based on their own perspective. They will need to clearly state their position and provide reasons and examples. The ACT Writing Test will be required by some colleges and adds \$14 to the \$29 fee for a total of \$43 if you take both. (as of this printing – fees may change at any time)

You will actually receive 12 separate scores on the ACT: 1 composite, 4 subject scores, and 7 sub-scores. However the composite – or scaled – score is the most important. It ranges from 1-36. Nearly half of those who take it fall in the 17-23 range.

The ACT test has traditionally been more content-based than the SAT, which focuses more on critical thinking and problem solving skills. The ACT more closely reflects core curriculum taught in high school classes, although the new SAT does more of the same. Some other significant differences are that the ACT has a science reasoning section while the SAT does not. The ACT has trigonometry while the SAT does not. The SAT penalizes you for incorrect answers; the ACT does not. Finally, the SAT is not entirely multiple choice – the ACT is. Visit www.actstudent.org for more information.

AP Exams

Advanced Placement exams are taken in order to earn college credit in a particular course. AP tests are administered in early May and scored on a point system, 1-5. Obtaining a 3, 4 or 5 may earn you college credit at some colleges, but you will need to confirm this. AP tests taken junior year or earlier may be reported on applications but are not required as are the SAT Reasoning or ACT tests. Each AP test has a registration fee of \$82, with fee reductions of \$22 available based on need. There are 35 classes and tests across 20 subject areas. Over a million students per year take these exams, and there is little doubt that they bolster your admission package. Find out more at: www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/ap/about.html

TOEFL (test of English as a Foreign Language) - visit www.ets.org/toefl/ to learn more if English is not your primary language. (*TOEFL may be taken on line in the US.*)

The Best Testing Schedule

There is no one test plan or schedule that is best for everyone. It depends on your schedule, your ability to prep, the classes you're taking, and many other factors. But since we are always pressed for an answer, we will tell you one schedule that works well for many students. Consider taking the SAT Reasoning test in March and June of your junior year. Reserve May for AP tests and SAT Subject tests in the same subjects. If you are taking the ACT, consider April and June. The advantage of this plan is that if you are satisfied with your scores, and have "peaked" in terms of prepping effort, you might be able to consider yourself "done". This reserves the fall of senior year for getting your applications in early. However, if you aren't satisfied and have additional time to prep, you still have the fall to give it another try. We don't recommend taking the SAT or ACT more than three times, but the testing strategy is obviously your decision.

Prepping and Registering for the Tests

The sad reality is that prepping for the SAT Reasoning, ACT and SAT Subject tests has become the rule, not the exception. You must face the fact that students competing with you are probably prepping for these tests in some way.

Our advice is to prep for the test one way or another, by the best method you can afford. At least purchase a book of real practice SATs and take them at home. Time yourself. Check your answers and go over ones you answered incorrectly. A good book will have explanations along with the answers. Don't pay too much attention to "guarantees" of raising your SAT score 300+ points (or ACT equivalent). However, prepping probably will raise your score by some amount and it is reasonable to TRY for a 200+ point SAT improvement. Here are the ways to prep in order of least expensive to most:

- *Internet resources at no cost (sample tests, practice questions, etc)*
- *Books and CDs (go to amazon.com or other on-line book stores and search on SAT Prep or Test Prep)*
- *On-line courses*
- *Classes*
- *Private Tutors*

Here are some resources for test prep at all levels:

www.testprep.com - by Stanford Testing Systems
www.actstudent.org - online registration and prep for ACT
www.Number2.com - free SAT coaching
www.cavhs.org and www.uccp.org (free prep)
www.revolutionprep.com – a relatively new class program
www.princetonreview.com - a popular service
www.kaplan.com – another popular service
www.ivywest.com – another popular service
www.collegeboard.com (this is also where you register)
www.testu.com - free coaching for SAT
www.ets.org - Sample questions
www.EurekaReview.com – a newer service
www.freevocabulary.com - 5000 vocabulary words that may be on SAT

Registering on-line at the College Board website www.collegeboard.com has several advantages. You can get your scores on-line sooner, can check back to review your scores later, and can send copies to colleges more conveniently. Be careful to keep an eye on the registration deadlines for the test(s) you plan to take. The website also has the current SAT calendar: www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/calenfees.html

Sending Your Test Scores

You are able to send your scores to some schools free each time you take the test. Keep track of which ones you've sent to! After the LAST time you take a test, be sure you've reported your scores to every school you are applying to. In the case of the SATs, all your history will go. You cannot select one test to send and omit the "bad ones". With ACT, you can choose which to send. Some colleges take your best single sitting. Others take your best from each section. None average them. For SAT Subject Tests, colleges use your highest scores from each test. Call SAT Services at (609) 771-7600 if a college indicates that they did not receive your SAT tests, to verify where your scores have been sent, or for any other problems with the sending of SAT scores.

Information for Athletes

High School athletics can be a huge advantage both in gaining admissions to colleges that might otherwise be out of reach, and in obtaining funding for college. However, there are

minimum requirements for consideration for an athletic scholarship, and they can change over time. It is becoming harder to qualify, not easier. For an updated list of athletic requirements, visit the NCAA website at www.ncaa.org. Note that the rules will change again for the class of 2008. There are 14 core classes required now, and a GPA+SAT or ACT score combination that determines a student's eligibility. (For example, a 2.5 GPA plus some SAT Reasoning or ACT score). As of this printing, the NCAA is keeping their eligibility scale the same by simply not using the ACT Writing Test or the new SAT Writing section - they will only use the Math and Critical Reading sections. However, this could change at any time so visit their website for the most current information. Although the NCAA sets minimum requirements, many colleges will have their own, more stringent, standards for admitting athletes. The NCAA Guide may be downloaded off of https://www.ncaaclearinghouse.net/ncaa/NCAA/student/index_student.html (as of this printing) or visit the eligibility and recruiting page.

Every recruited athlete must have a Student Release form on file with the NCAA Clearinghouse. This form is available using www.ncaaclearinghouse.net. It should be completed *after* your junior year (and fall of senior year at the latest). The Clearinghouse must also get copies of your SAT (use school code 9999) or ACT scores. You can register on-line if you have a social security number and Visa or MasterCard. You may also contact them at 1-877-262-1492.

Here are some helpful websites for athletes:

- www.CampusChamps.org - This is a free, interactive website for student athletes. This website has information about athletic scholarships, NCAA rules, advice from coaches, and career selection and financial aid.
- www.athleticaid.com/ - Scholarship, aid, college search and other information

If you're an athlete, the best advice we can give you is to keep up your grades. Gone are the days when athletic ability alone will get you accepted.

Students with Disabilities

More and more students are being diagnosed with some sort of disability. Some colleges have programs especially designed for these students and often special admission criteria and procedures apply. The Princeton Review publishes a guide called "*The K & W Guide to Colleges for Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorder*". This is an excellent resource and can be purchased at www.amazon.com. In addition, here are some websites that can assist you in researching your particular situation:

www.act.org/aap/disab/index.html - special ACT assessment testing

www.collegeboard.com/ssd/student/index.html - SAT services for students with disabilities

www.ahead.org - Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)

www.add.org - Attention Deficit Disorder Association

www.chadd.org - Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorders

www.lदानatl.org - Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA)

www.nclد.org - National Center for Learning Disabilities

Finding your Target Colleges

Choosing Your Schools Strategically

There are many factors that go into choosing colleges that will be right for you. But here are some general guidelines that are helpful as starters:

- *Be realistic – there are some schools that you just won't qualify for so don't waste your time. Why set yourself up for failure at a college that will be way too competitive for you?*

- Choose an “RRR” spread – some schools that are **realistic (safe)**, some that are **reasonable (good fit)** and some that are **reaches (long shots)**. You should have 2-3 of each, at least at first, in order to give yourself every possible opportunity. You can narrow the list before you actually apply. We hesitate to call any school a “safety school” these days, but your **realistic** schools are those where you are significantly over the averages quoted for admitted students. (both GPA and test scores). Your **reasonable** schools are those where you fall close to the averages of GPAs and test scores quoted. These are “good fits” for you academically. Your **reach** schools are those where you are below the range and/or below those schools’ average admit levels, but you believe you have other attributes (such as your “ACE”) that might give you a chance. Don’t be intimidated - try for a couple of these. Why not?
- More isn’t necessarily better. There is generally no point in applying to 10-15 colleges. Narrow your list intelligently and save yourself and others a lot of time.
- Don’t limit yourself to only the well-known institutions. There are some wonderful colleges whose names you might not recognize, but where you might have a better experience. Check out www.ctcl.com (Colleges That Change Lives) for starters and talk to your high school counselor for ideas.
- Seek help from your parents, counselors or others who know you. Talk to older students who are at colleges you might be interested in.
- Do your homework. Research a variety of colleges on the internet and look at the admission process and requirements. Look at the averages of admitted students.
- At this stage, don’t eliminate a college based on cost. If you truly like the school, explore all the opportunities for aid before deciding you can’t afford to go there.
- Do your own work! This is your process, so take ownership of it. Don’t delegate something this important to anyone else, even your parents.

Impacted Majors

As if things aren’t difficult enough, some colleges are labeling certain majors as impacted, and applying a different set of admissions standards to those majors. Most of the time, you can’t transfer into that major later. So if you are adamant about a particular major, and it’s impacted, you will have to try for it. But if you’re not sure, you might want to try for a non-impacted major. It may help somewhat to apply to the less popular or more unusual majors. You can generally find out from the college’s website which majors are the most popular, and may want to stay away from those. It may also be an advantage to be a female applying to a male-dominated major or vice versa. The bottom line is, if the major is the most important thing to you, then you should try for admission in that major at several schools. If the school itself is more important than the major, then it might be wise to list “Undecided” as at least a second choice.

How to Find Schools

As you start to find colleges that will be good fits for you, here are some factors to consider:

- *Cost – what will my cost limitations be, if any? Will I need financial aid?*
- *Size – do I want large, medium or small? Ratio of males to females?*
- *Rural or Urban – do I like the city scene, or a more suburban setting?*
- *Location – do I want to travel out of state, or stay close?*
- *Campus – what do I want in a campus? How are the dorms? Food?*
- *Social aspects – will I be likely to join a sorority or fraternity? Do the kids stay on campus over the weekend or do most commute? Is it politically liberal or conservative?*

- *Academics – do they have majors I would be interested in? What is their reputation in those majors? (note that the same school can be rated highly in one major, while not in others) What about class size?*
- *Church – does the college have a religious affiliation?*
- *Sports – do they have the sport(s) I am interested in? What Division?*
- *Honors programs – strong students may want to check into special honors programs at the various colleges*
- *Are there other special programs involving research, internships or study abroad?*

These are just a few criteria that a student might consider. You need to develop your own list of what's important to you. (see detailed questions in the Appendix Section)

There is a wealth of information to help you research colleges. U.S. News & World Report publishes a book called "America's Best Colleges" (see link below), and it includes valuable admissions statistics as well as rankings in several categories. Be aware, however, that many published lists take money from the colleges that want to be in them. Others require specific permissions or contracts if the college wants to be included, and some excellent schools may decline. So don't take these as absolute truths. Visit www.usnews.com (then click on rankings on the left) The University of Texas maintains a list of colleges by state, with links to their websites. www.utexas.edu/world/univ/state/ Yahoo also maintains a list by category and alphabetically. So there are plenty of places to start. The best way to evaluate colleges is to use several sources along with a visit. That way you eliminate some of the biases.

Here is Yahoo's: <http://education.yahoo.com/college/essentials/>

Once you have a rough list to start with, remember the "RRR" guidelines. Before you get your heart set on any place in particular, take a look at its admissions averages (GPA, SATs, ACT) and place it on the scale of Realistic to Reach. (See guidelines earlier in the handbook.)

The Princeton Review is another good source. You can search for a college by name, then review a wealth of information about it. They include what students say about the college, and whether it has any rankings among the best or worst in a particular category. Most importantly, you can click on the Admissions Tab and see the average GPA and test scores. If you register (free), it will let you fill out your information and then rate your chances for acceptance. However, we caution you to take this as a guess or guideline only, as there may be inherent biases. Remember, no one can accurately predict your results at any competitive college. www.princetonreview.com

College Visits

Over and over again we hear stories about college visits that totally changed a student's opinion about the college. There is simply no better way to get a true feel for the atmosphere, student body, campus and general environment. Almost every college has a program for visitation, and their website will tell you how to go about it. Some are impersonal group tours, which are very valuable. Other colleges take appointments for more personal tours. Try to visit when school is in session. Sophomore and junior year are excellent times to start visiting different campuses. What a great use of your Spring Break!

To set up a visit, check on-line to see what is available. Some colleges allow you to reserve tours or visits on-line. Otherwise call the admissions office and make an appointment. See if there are options to visit your areas of interest, talk to professors, stay overnight in a dorm, etc. When you visit, evaluate these among other criteria:

- *atmosphere and culture*
- *school spirit, pride, involvement*

- *student union and other facilities*
- *library and research areas*
- *dorms and eating areas (sample the food!)*
- *extra-curricular activities*
- *transportation and parking*

Don't skip the college visits. They can make all the difference in your decision. However, to save cost, it might make sense to visit top choice colleges before applying but save some visits at your lower choices for after acceptances. After all, with luck they may not be necessary! If all else fails, there are virtual visits using websites such as www.ecampustours.com or www.campustours.com.

College Fairs

Ask your high school about college fairs. This is an efficient way to get information from lots of colleges at once. College representatives will answer questions and provide information about their school. They don't replace visits, but they're a good first step in sifting through the wealth of colleges available. A partial list of large, registered fairs can be found at www.nacac.com/exhibit/fair.cfm. Your high school may be aware of more local opportunities.

Preparing for the College Fair

Prior to attending the fair, have some questions in mind that are important to you and that will help you determine which colleges to target. Think about topics such as admissions criteria – are you likely to get in based on GPA and SAT statistics? Ask about location, is it public or private, total enrollment, cost, majors and/or honors programs offered and strength thereof, the makeup and style of the student body, etc. (*see detailed questions in the Appendix Section*)

Bring a pencil or pen. You will often be given cards to fill out so that the college can send you additional information. Jot down notes as well. For the efficiency-minded, type up your own "card" and print multiple copies so that you can leave them with the colleges you are interested in. This will save you a LOT of time and make a positive impression (neat, organized, error-free). You should be able to fit 2 or 3 of these "cards" on a normal piece of paper. Set it up to look something like this, but with your information filled in:

Name _____	Current Classes:
Address _____	1. _____
City _____	2. _____
State _____ Zip _____ Date of Birth ___/___/___	3. _____
Telephone () _____	4. _____
GPA _____ Rank _____ out of _____	5. _____
PSAT/SAT/ACT Scores: M _____ CR _____ W _____	6. _____
Graduation Year _____ School CEEB Code _____	
School Name _____ Academic Interest _____	
Extracurricular Activities _____	
Email _____	

More Helpful Links for Finding Colleges and/or Careers

www.usnews.com rates colleges and grad programs in specific fields

www.collegenet.com list of colleges that meet certain criteria
www.mapping-your-future.org what to do and when to prepare for college
www.petersons.com - college search
www.collegeboard.com - college search
www.princetonreview.com - college search
www.kaplan.com/TestPreparation/CollegeAdmission/ - tips, planning, test prep

Get in Their Database

As you identify colleges that might be of interest to you, there is something you should always do. Fill out their on-line form to be included on their mailing list. Generally each college will have an Admissions or Prospective Students link off their home page. The form to register to receive future mailings is generally found somewhere in this section. Dig a little and you'll find it. If you cannot find this on-line, call the Admissions Office. Doing this does not obligate you in any way, but does serve to ensure that you'll be advised of critical dates, open houses and other admission-related announcements. It is also a demonstration of interest, something that is gaining importance these days. More on this later...

Sample Inquiry Letter

If you can't find an on-line method for getting on a college's mailing list or for requesting their materials, a plain old-fashioned letter works just fine and may even end up in your file reflecting positively on you. Here is a sample of a properly formatted letter. Note that this general format works for any college inquiry - just change the content appropriately.

*1000 Main Street (your return address)
Bestofall, OK 99999*

*Ms. Uwanna Gohere (the person and address you are mailing to)
Dean of Admissions
1234 Easy Way
Showcase College
Showcase, OK 99999*

Dear Dean Gohere,

October 5, 2006

I am currently a junior at Bestofall Academy in Bestofall, OK. I am inquiring at colleges that may fit my needs and profile, and Showcase College has caught my attention. Because Showcase offers an excellent engineering program, it is on my list of possible target schools.

Please send me any relevant information regarding admissions, financial aid, housing and anything else you would like me to know about Showcase College that will help with my decision making process.

*Yours truly,
(your signature)*

Justafine Kidd (your printed name)

Getting Ready to Apply

Be sure you have your Social Security Number and your high school's CEEB code handy. They will go on all applications. My school's CEEB code is _____.

Your Application - Written

Your application is one of the few things that is seen by an admissions officer directly. The appearance of your application is a reflection on you. Start working on your applications early, as rush jobs are easy to spot. Practice by downloading a copy of the

application and filling it out. Use a black pen and avoid errors. Think carefully about your answers and review them. Ideally, have a parent check them. Be truthful, be specific, and be accurate; but don't hesitate to put your best foot forward.

Your Application – On-Line

Fortunately, most colleges are now accepting, or even requiring, on-line applications. If offered, the schools generally prefer them. This solves the neatness issue, but can cause other problems. It is easier to make and miss mistakes on an on-line application. You should still download or request a paper copy of the application and fill it out before doing the on-line form. Pay attention to the on-line instructions. If your browser blocks pop-ups, you will need to disable that feature for on-line applications. As the deadlines draw near, the websites begin to slow down tremendously and this dramatically affects your time spent filing them out. Sluggish websites are simply overloaded with applicants, so it pays not to be one of the late ones. Applying on-line early saves time in the end and reflects on your time management skills as well. Procrastinators are easy to identify in the application process; they're the ones on-line at midnight on the deadline day!

Transcripts

Many applications will ask for your classes and grades as part of the form. Be accurate and truthful, because they will still obtain an official transcript in the end. Falsifying anything on the application is a sure way to be rejected.

Often the application will include a form for requesting a transcript, but pay attention to the individual instructions for each college's application. Many colleges do not want the transcript initially, but instead will ask for it from accepted students only. Obviously that would be much later in the process. Other colleges, especially privates, may want it initially. Don't send things that the school doesn't want. Pay attention to their instructions.

Additional Requirements for Some Majors

Pay special attention to whether your intended major has additional requirements, such as portfolios, tapes, or additional letters of recommendation. This is not uncommon.

Make Copies

In all cases, make a copy of the application (paper or on-line) before sending it. The on-line ones can generally be printed. But one way or another, save a copy for your files.

Certificate of Mailing

For anything important that you mail, obtain a certificate of mailing (95 cents) from the post office. This gives you proof of the day the item was mailed. Use this for applications, secondary school reports (from your counselor), transcripts, and anything else you consider critical. When close to deadlines, this is can be valuable insurance.

On-Line Receipt

Most, if not all, on-line applications finish with a receipt or confirmation page as you submit the application. Print and save this receipt page. It will often indicate that you have paid the application fee by credit card (or whatever) as well. There are generally other ways to pay the fee if you prefer.

Fees

Application fees generally range from \$35 to \$65. Four fee waivers are generally issued to applicants who qualified under the SAT and ACT Fee Waiver programs. The Fee Waiver program is available to juniors and seniors based on economic need. See www.collegeboard.com for information about the Fee Waiver.

The Common Application

Colleges and universities have worked together to develop and distribute a Common Application. Colleges “join” this effort, and their membership means that they accept the Common Application and commit to considering it equally to their own specific application form. The advantages to students are obvious, in that you fill out the common application and simply submit it multiple times to any member schools you are applying to. What’s the downside? Only that not all colleges accept it. Some counselors advise against using the common application for your top choice school(s), believing that colleges still “secretly” prefer their own application. There is no evidence of this that we are aware of, so we are comfortable recommending the use of the common application. You can visit www.commonapp.org for more information and a list of member institutions (almost 300). The form can be downloaded or completed on-line and submitted electronically to your colleges. Even if you’re a freshman, print out the common app and take a look at it. In a few years, you will be filling out applications that will be quite similar to it, and you’d better have a lot to say. Pay special attention to the activities section.

Types of Admission

As if the process isn’t already confusing enough, there are several types of admission. Not all colleges offer all types. But it is important to understand them, then to research what your prospective colleges offer.

Regular Admission

This is the standard admission, whereby students submit applications by the college’s regular deadline. Students applying under regular admission will generally be notified of the decision in March or April.

Early Decision - Binding

Have you found a college that is overwhelmingly your first choice? Are you prepared to commit that if accepted you will attend? Then if that school offers early decision, it may be right for you. Early decision is binding; that means if the college accepts you, you **MUST** attend. Obviously you can only apply under early decision to one college. Usually you will sign a contract stating that you understand the binding nature of this admission process. Failure to abide by the restrictions can jeopardize your acceptance to that college and others. Some believe that applying ED can give you an edge at that school, but be very cautious when using that option.

Early Action – Not Binding

Often confused with Early Decision, Early Action is an opportunity to apply early (usually by some November date) and to be notified by around mid-December or January. Under this plan, you can be accepted early, rejected, or deferred to the regular admission pool. Deferred means they were undecided, but odds of getting in later are generally lower. If accepted under Early Action, you are **NOT** obligated to attend and you still have until May 1 to make a decision. You may generally apply for Early Action to more than one college; however some colleges specify that theirs is a “single school Early Action program”. This has been true, for example, at Stanford and Harvard. So be sure to research the options carefully as you may be making some sort of promise.

Early Action – Single Selection

If you select this plan, you cannot file any other early action or early decision applications. However, you can apply to as many colleges as you wish for regular admission.

Admission Spring Semester

Some colleges are accepting qualified students, but for a semester other than fall. This represents their attempt to remain at full capacity, knowing they will lose some students

after first semester. These students are most likely ones that almost made the “cut” but had to be denied fall admission. However, it’s still an acceptance, so be grateful!

Delayed or Deferred Acceptance

If you have been accepted at a college, you can sometimes arrange to delay your matriculation (attendance) for a year. This is often referred to as a “gap year”. The school will look at your reasons, and they will need to have some merit. Acceptable reasons might be to work to earn tuition money, to travel, or to pursue some particular special internship or program. Any such arrangement must be explicitly set up with the college.

Rolling Admission

Under this plan, applications are considered as they are received and the student is notified of the decision as soon as it is made. A student applying to a college that offers rolling admission is not committing to that college if accepted. There is almost no reason NOT to submit your application early to these schools, as it can only serve to give you an early answer. If accepted, you can relax knowing that you are in but can still wait to see what your additional options may be.

Open Admission

Open admission colleges, such as community colleges or trade schools, generally admit all interested students with a high school diploma. However, some community colleges are no longer open admission. Sometimes admission to particular programs is also more selective and not truly “open”.

Transferring from a Community College

For some, transferring from a community college (CC) to a 4-year college (generally as a junior) might be advantageous and is becoming an increasingly popular option. In fact, 45% of all first-year college students start at CCs. You can better prepare, cut costs, save money or even work while attending, live at home, think more about majors and careers before committing, or graduate from the four year college that turned you down for freshman admission. SATs and ACTs aren’t required. CCs generally offer small classes and many at night and/or on weekends. Often, CCs have transfer or “feeder” programs with four year institutions. There may be “articulation agreements” which outline transfer policies and make it easier to transfer smoothly. If this option is of interest to you, you need to research exactly how to make it happen. Connect with an advisor at your local CC(s). There may be lists showing what each CC class equates to at four year colleges. Check to be sure your credits will transfer and that you are preparing correctly for your intended major. You could also take a summer class at a CC – one that you’re dreading in college. But check to be sure that it will transfer and fulfill the requirement(s). There is excellent information available so be sure to do your research up front. Try www.collegeboard.com/student/csearch/where-to-start/36.html for starters, and this website of 2 year colleges: cset.sp.utoledo.edu/twoyrcol.html

The Truth about Legacies

So, you’re relaxed because fortunately mom and dad graduated from your first choice school? Don’t be! The more competitive the school, the less likely that your being a legacy will get you in. While it is true that a greater percentage of legacy students are admitted versus the general population, there is no guarantee. In addition, legacy status matters a great deal more to some colleges than to others. So un-relax and get busy!

Applying Out of State

If you are applying to one or more colleges outside your home state, be aware that it may be more difficult to get in. Look on their website and you may be able to see the

percentage of out of state students they accept. If it's small, as it well may be, then you should assume that you will need to be on the higher end of their admission statistics.

Letters of Recommendation

Not all colleges require or even take letters of recommendation. If required or accepted, take them seriously. The more competitive the admission process at your target school, the more a letter can make a difference and set you apart from other applicants. Some colleges might even specify that a recommendation come from a teacher in a specific subject, though this is not common. Equally important, if the college doesn't want letters of recommendation, don't provide them.

Who to Ask

Plan to select teachers from 11th or 12th grade who have gotten to know you. Obviously they should be ones from whom you obtained a strong grade. Do not use a 9th or 10th grade teacher unless you have a compelling reason to do so. In addition, it might be ideal to obtain one letter from a humanities subject and one from a math/science discipline.

Sometimes the colleges will differentiate between an academic recommendation and a personal one. Academic recommendations are clear-cut (teacher or counselor), but a personal recommendation could come from a coach, employer, friend, church pastor or someone associated with your community service work for example. Think carefully and try to select a person who knows you, thinks highly of you, and will make the effort to do a good job for you. Always remember that people are doing these on their own time, so be considerate and gracious when asking.

How to Ask

If your high school publishes a specific process for asking for letters of recommendation, by all means follow it. In the absence of specific instructions, use the following guidelines:

- *Allow plenty of time for the person to complete the letters. Two weeks is an absolute minimum. Remember that most people have to do these letters on their own time, and giving them a "rush assignment" is hardly fair and reflects poorly on you.*
- *Ask the teacher first (in person) if he/she would be willing to write on your behalf. Don't assume that the teacher will be comfortable doing a recommendation for you.*
- *Do your homework! Some colleges are requesting recommendations on-line while others want letters. Still others want a specific form filled out. It is YOUR responsibility to provide your letter writers with the form, the on-line link and instructions, or whatever it is that they need to do.*
- *Provide your resume! Give them some material to work with, so their letter can be detailed and list specific accomplishments. This is where all that hard work on your resume pays off. It works perfectly for this purpose.*
- *Include a picture if the person might not recall having you in class or might appreciate a visual reminder of who you are. However, if that is the case, should you use them?*
- *Include pre-addressed, stamped envelopes for each college you are asking them to mail to. The idea is to enable them to use one letter, and just modify it for each college. Then all they should have to do is insert it in the envelope and mail it. You are trying to make this as easy as possible on the letter writer.*
- *Assemble all this neatly in a large envelope. Appearing organized is just one more positive trait that your letter writers will take notice of.*

- *On the outside of the envelope, or on a cover letter, politely ask for their assistance and list all the colleges with their deadlines. List them in order of due date, so the teacher can easily see when they need to be completed and won't risk missing a date.*
- *Deliver the packets to your letter-writers in person if at all possible. This is not the time to be lazy and mail it. The personal touch sets the process off in the right direction. You need these people to think of you in the best possible light.*

Secondary School Report

Many colleges require a specific form to be completed by your college advisor. Follow the same general guidelines above, but research to see if there is a special form for the Secondary School Report. Often the transcript is included with this form. Your high school will know what to do in this area. Always fill out as much of the form as you can yourself first. (name, address, social security number etc.)

Thank You Notes and Follow-up

A couple of weeks after handing out your requests for letters of recommendation, follow up with a hand-written thank you note to each person. This serves two purposes. First, you owe them a thank you and you are providing it. That's simple etiquette. Secondly, in the unlikely event that they forgot about it or haven't gotten to it, it serves as a gentle reminder.

When you are ultimately accepted to some or all of your colleges, be sure to provide these positive results to the people who wrote recommendations for you. They truly want to know and appreciate hearing the good news.

Essays

What Essays Are

Colleges will almost always require an essay or personal statement as part of the application. These will range anywhere from 200 words to 1000. The essays will consist of anything from responding to a quote to the most general "tell us about yourself" type. Regardless of which it is, the essay is important. It is a chance for the college to gain insight into you as an individual. The rest of the application is mostly factual. This is your one opportunity to tell a story about YOU and try to make yourself stand out. We have seen stories about a community service project that are so moving as to make the reader cry. We have seen stories about an unusual hobby, such as building sculptures out of computer parts. We have seen stories about students who formed their own businesses on the internet at age 13. Maybe your story isn't quite that extraordinary, but you can find something to tell about. Go back to the resume and look for your "ACE". Remember that? Now, work a story around it. Ideally, your story might show a progression from younger years into the present. How did you grow? How did you change? How did you make a difference? What did you learn? Did you overcome adversity or some hardship? Do you have any gaps or lapses in your academic record that need explaining? Above all, be truthful. Admissions staff will see through a greatly exaggerated or fabricated hardship or story.

What Essays Are Not

Equally important, there are some things that essays are NOT. They should not be used to restate accomplishments that are covered elsewhere in the application. They should not be used to talk about someone else. If someone else is involved, such as a role model or mentor, that may work just fine. But remember that the essay has to be about YOU. What did you learn? What did the person or experience mean to YOU? As you write, pretend you are a college admissions officer and keep asking yourself "So what?" How does your story tell them who you are and what you will bring to their campus?

Essay Format

We have some general steps to follow in preparing your essay or personal statement.

1. Brainstorm first! Take a blank sheet of paper and let your mind roam freely through your past up to the present and jot down anything that comes to mind. A person, and experience, a hardship, an accomplishment (not already covered), a life lesson learned, etc. The more freely you brainstorm the better.
2. After brainstorming, go back over your list and try to envision a story around each. Pull out the ones that offer you the most "story telling potential".
3. Remember to reread the essay question. Before you get too excited over the great story you came up with, remember that some of your colleges may have worded a very specific question or used a quote. Can your story address that quote? You may be lucky enough to be able to modify one essay to work for several schools. But you may need to develop several separate ones to use for different questions.
4. Use this model. Try to format your essays to roughly follow this pattern:
 - *The introduction – Use one to three sentences to catch the reader’s attention. Make them want to read more.*
 - *The theme – What is the main idea (about YOU) that you are trying to get across. Try to state it as part of the introduction.*
 - *Supporting paragraphs (generally three to five depending on the length requirements) - Tell your story in an organized progression that flows and connects well.*
 - *Concluding paragraph – Circle back to your theme or main idea. Wrap up with a strong finish that sums it all up. Don’t repeat yourself, but leave the writer with no doubt that you learned, you grew, you changed, you conquered, etc. (Whatever it was!)*

Help With Brainstorming

Are you having a mental block when trying to find topics? If so, try answering these questions and that should lead to some ideas:

- *What is my greatest accomplishment?*
- *Do I have a talent? Think – you probably do.*
- *Did I do a study program abroad or some other special summer program?*
- *Did I take a trip that taught me something?*
- *What am I passionate about?*
- *Did I receive any special awards not already covered?*
- *Was there a major community service project I could expand on?*
- *Am I involved with church in a meaningful way? Some other organization?*
- *Did I overcome a hardship?*
- *Have I stood up for something I believe in?*
- *What is different about me versus someone else with my same GPA and test scores?*
- *Have I shown leadership? When and how?*
- *What do I struggle with and how do/did I overcome it?*
- *Is there something about my record that I had better explain? (a poor grade?)*

Grammar Errors

It probably goes without saying, but your essay needs to be correct in spelling and grammar. With word processors, reviewers will expect to see near-perfect essays. Be sure to do your essays in a word processor so they can be spell-checked. However, spell

check will miss some things so don't rely on it. Don't get carried away with trying to use impressive vocabulary words. Express yourself as YOU, not someone you think they are looking for. Extensive use of synonyms will be obvious to the reader. Double space the essay and have teachers, counselors, parents – anyone available – read it over to see if your message comes across.

Other Checks

Read your essay out loud. Does it flow? Did you use "I" too much? Do you convey passion? Does the essay sound sincere? Is there depth? Does it show something about you that will add value to the college? Does it pass the "So what?" test? Does the essay demonstrate your character? Your intelligence? If there was a question to answer or a quote to respond to, do you answer it or respond to it? Does the real YOU come through?

Word Count

Don't forget to be mindful of the length requirement, though not necessarily at first. Sometimes it is better to let the essay evolve to its own natural length initially. Then edit it or expand it to meet the exact requirement. Most word processors have word count features (in Word, pull down the Tools menu, Word Count), which makes this easy. Don't worry about getting an exact word count match. Being over or under by a few words is not a problem. If they give a page length, assume they mean double spaced.

Putting the Essay onto the Application

We have seen several methods by which your essay gets onto your on-line application. Some applications tell you to mail it. Some instruct you to cut and paste it into a particular box on the application. When this is done, we have found that it forces single spacing and sometimes removes paragraph indentations. If this is a problem, try saving your document as a text file (.txt) rather than .doc. But in any case, check to be sure that the entire essay made it onto the application. A third method we've seen is where you "browse" to find your essay on your computer drive, then press an upload button that converts the essay into Adobe .pdf. This is the nicest method, as it preserves all your nice formatting and presents your essay the way you intended it to look.

Whatever method is offered, just check the result to be sure you got it all, and that nothing was corrupted or mangled in the process.

Final Tips for Essays

- *Don't use exclamation points*
- *Generally don't try humor – it often doesn't have the intended effect*
- *Write in a strong, active voice – not passive (use words like led, organized, founded, etc)*
- *Write out numbers and avoid contractions*
- *Be specific and focus on details to make your story believable*
- *Don't use quotes unless they are a personal part of the story*
- *If using the essay for multiple applications, make adjustments so it doesn't appear that way*
- *Write about something that is of interest to YOU, not your parents or someone else*
- *Avoid topics that could be controversial or offensive (drugs, politics, sex, drinking, gangs, partying, etc. – and don't write about your relationship with your girl/boyfriend!)*
- *Avoid topics that could appear trite (how you will save the world or achieve world peace; the value of education, etc.)*
- *Don't reveal things about yourself that are negative. (We want you to be truthful, but that doesn't mean you have to write an essay about all your weaknesses!)*
- *Don't let others write your essays. Help with proofing them is one thing, but if you didn't write them it will show.*

Here is a sample essay that works. Note that the student didn't have some incredible hardship or rare personal experience. We are intentionally showing you an example of a

“normal” student who told an everyday story and made it compelling. This essay was used to specifically address the prompt below, but was then altered to become a general personal statement. This same essay was used on four applications with minor length and other adjustments. (Names have been changed for anonymity.)

Sample Essays

Prompt: Tell us about an external influence (a person, an event, etc.) that affected you and how it caused you to change direction.

When I first met Millie Anderson, all I saw was an overweight woman who could barely fit in a chair. She was almost immobile, and I thought to myself, “How could she let herself get that way?” The last thing that occurred to me was that she would make a profound difference in my life. I had a lot to learn.

I was introduced to the Help for Children program in fifth grade, and learned that Millie Anderson was its founder. It is a local charity that helps terminally ill and underprivileged children throughout the year. There I met a little boy named José who looked about age three and breathed through tubes in his nose. I was shocked to learn that he was actually ten, but suffered from a terminal growth-inhibiting disease. I helped him with arts and crafts projects, and he soon became my friend. For the first time in my life I felt what it was like to make a difference.

From that point on I decided to expand my role in the Help for Children organization. I had come to appreciate the important work that Millie Anderson and her group were doing. My mom and I joined the organization officially and began participating in their meetings. We help organize the Halloween and Christmas events and make favors for the kids who attended. Each December, we wrap huge cardboard boxes for toy donations, which are then distributed to local businesses. After the toys are collected, we attend a wrapping event and spend hours sorting the gifts by age and gender.

Every year, Help for Children hosts their huge Christmas party at St. Margaret’s hospital, with food, arts and crafts, and activities. Even Santa makes an appearance and distributes the toys that we have collected, with every child getting at least one present. I remember Millie telling me that for many, this would be their only gift. And for some, it would also be their last Christmas ever. This was a real wake-up call. I had never been confronted with such sadness. One year, because of my experience and dedication to the program, Millie assigned me to work with a small group of children upstairs. I learned that they were the terminally ill, bed-ridden children who were not permitted to leave their hospital room. I will never forget that experience. We painted their faces, gave them gifts and, for a short time, gave them something to smile about. As sad as it was, it was also very gratifying, bringing a bit of happiness into their lives.

The closer I became to Help for Children, the more I wanted to do. I convinced my family to participate in the “Adopt a Family” program, through which we would put together a gift basket with the specific items a particular family needed. At one point, Millie explained to me that our adopted family had shared a toothbrush, and now they wouldn’t have to. “Adopt a Family” has become a family tradition, and I am always happy imagining what the family feels when they open our baskets.

As I grew older, I realized that the Help for Children program was having another more subtle effect on me. I had watched Millie all these years, giving one hundred percent of herself to these children. I was ashamed to remember how quick I was to judge Millie by her appearance. Her compassion and incredible dedication overshadowed all else, and I came to admire her immensely.

Millie Anderson died on Thanksgiving Day, 2001, a victim of the chronic disease that caused her obesity. Although she is no longer here, she will remain with me through the life lessons she taught me. She opened my heart and mind to looking at others in a whole new way. One thing I do know, I will no longer judge people superficially. And if I ever find myself lacking motivation, thinking that nothing I do really matters or that one person can’t make a difference, I’ll just think of Millie.

(end of sample essay)

In the sample essay, notice the use of the essay model. The first paragraph catches the reader’s attention by alluding to a very large woman who somehow taught the student something. The theme of “change” or “growth” is introduced, as we see that the student

learned something valuable from this unlikely mentor. We are curious what role this overweight woman could possibly have played in the life of our student. What happened? We want to know. The story then goes back to fifth grade, and shows a progression of increasing involvement in this charity organization. It alludes to growth and change, as the student learns about life situations very different than her own and begins to realize the power of helping others. Finally, the essay wraps up with a recap of the life lessons this mentor taught our student, resulting in her becoming a more compassionate person.

Here is a second sample. Can you see the use of the essay model in this very different example? What do we know about the author after reading this essay?

The pain was excruciating and I could barely walk. Mosquitoes found their way in, penetrating the netting surrounding my thin mattress. The air was motionless, exaggerating the oppressive heat and humidity in our open-air shack. As I watched the sun go down, I knew it would soon be time to make a decision about my last night in Costa Rica.

My passion for creatures that can't help themselves has led me in many directions. I volunteer countless hours at a local animal hospital, and belong to several activist organizations that help pass legislation to protect endangered species. The number of abandoned cats I've adopted has now reached five. But this past summer, I found a way to channel my energy into making a difference in the fate of some less common friends: helping to save the nearly extinct Lora Sea Turtles in Costa Rica. As it turned out, the experience was much more than that.

The PROVCO Turtle Conservation Project is located on the Pacific side of Costa Rica. During the day, we helped the local community with various projects and worked in the turtle hatchery. My favorite day job was painting a small, rundown schoolhouse a bright shade of green. The children ran over to us, clearly thrilled to have the most colorful building in town. I used my limited Spanish to greet my new friends. But our real work began between the hours of 11pm and 3:30am. We patrolled three miles of black sand beach, crossing a small chest-deep river in full clothing. We needed shoes on our feet because the beach was covered with crabs, twigs and sharp pebbles. Our goal was to locate the mother turtle, collect her eggs and protect them from predators. After several nights of patrol, my group had not seen any turtles or nests. Somehow in the process, from sand inside my shoes, I had managed to develop large, quarter-size, oozing blisters all over my feet. The counselor refused to let me go on patrol the following two nights, as my feet looked as if they could become infected.

Now here it was, our last night in Costa Rica and I felt a certain emptiness. I hadn't actually rescued any turtles, so it was hard to see that I'd truly helped the species. So, despite my counselor's concern, and the fact the last night's patrol was optional, I bandaged my feet and put on layers of socks. I was going out one last time. My tenacity and dedication paid off, for the few of us that went were rewarded with an incredible experience. We watched a turtle lay the largest nest of eggs ever seen there. I was selected to hold each egg in my hand as we counted them, and prepared them for transport to the hatchery. My blisters are long gone, but the memory of that surreal night will stay with me forever. In some small way, I made a difference. (end of sample #2)

Interviews

Obtaining the Interview

Fewer and fewer colleges and universities are offering private on-campus interviews. However, if they do, take advantage of this opportunity to make a positive impression. You may have to pursue the interview, because it most likely won't be offered to you. We saw a case where the interview reservation system was put on the internet but with no announcement. If you were lucky enough to find it (it wasn't obvious), the ID number you had been given didn't work properly to reserve the interview. It was almost as if it was a tenacity test! Successful applicants had to call the office and be given yet another ID number that worked. We never determined if it was truly a test, but the persistent students were rewarded with coveted personal interviews.

If there are no on-campus interviews, the next best thing is one offered at your high school or in your area. Sometimes alumni will interview in your area for the colleges they represent. These opportunities should be on the college website, but call if they aren't.

Some colleges will not offer any individual interview opportunity at all; typically the public schools do not. The important thing is to take advantage of those that do.

Preparing for the Interview

Below is a list of actual questions that were asked on interviews. Go over them, and think about an answer for each. Many are similar, as the same concept can be covered in many ways. Design your answers to be 2-3 sentences. One-word answers are too short, but rambling on about a single question is equally poor. The interviewer will dig for more detail if they want it, so be moderate in your response length. Practice answering these questions out loud, either to a parent or to yourself. Better yet, have a parent or counselor conduct a mock interview with you.

Sample Interview Questions

Why do you want to attend our school?
What is your strongest/weakest point?
What have you done to prepare for college?
What has been your most awful experience/moment you can think of?
What has been your greatest experience in high school?
What do you want to do in the future?
Tell me about yourself. (You should focus on about three things.)
Tell me about your interests.
Tell me about your involvement in extracurricular activities.
What do you think about the election? Did you watch the debates?
What is your favorite book? Who is your favorite author?
Which of your accomplishments are you the most proud of?
If you could meet any important figure in the past or present, who would it be and what would you talk about?
If you could be any animal what would you be? Why?
Why are you considering this college?
How did you come to include us among your choices?
What makes you think this college and you are right for each other?
Where else are you applying and why?
Which is your first choice? Why?
What do you hope to major in? Why?
What are your plans for the future? What do you expect to be doing years from now?
What have you liked or disliked about your high school?
If you were the principal of your school, what would you change?
What would you like to tell us about yourself?
What newspapers and magazines do you read? How often?
What books (not required by your courses) have you read recently?
What television shows do you watch?
Tell us about your family.
How do you spend a typical afternoon after school? Evening? Weekend?
How do you spend your vacations?
What extracurricular activities have you found most satisfying?
Do you have any heroes, contemporary or historical?
How would your best friend describe you?
If you could talk with any one living person, who would it be and why?
What events have been crucial in your life?
What is the most significant contribution you have made to your school or community?
What is the most important thing you have learned in high school?
What historical event do you feel has had the most impact on the 20th century?
Tell us about your innermost fears.
What do you want to get out of your college experience?

Why should we accept you?

What would you say to an admissions officer if one were standing right here, as to why they should admit you?

What are the three most important possessions in your room?

Questions for You to Ask

Generally the interviewer will allow time for you to ask questions. Even if you don't really have any, find three to ask. Use this opportunity to demonstrate that you know something about the college. Do your research first! Here are some ideas:

How are fraternities or sororities perceived on this campus?

I've heard _____ about your _____. Could you comment on that?

Are there ways to become involved with sports?

Do most kids leave the campus on the weekends?

How is campus security?

Are students allowed to live off campus?

How is dorm preference determined?

How are roommates selected?

Tell me about the _____ program. (your major) Is there an honors program?

I notice that you offer _____. Could you tell me a little more about that program?

How large are most classes?

Are classes taught by professors or teaching assistants? What percent TA's?

Are there research opportunities available?

Are there internship opportunities available?

Are there opportunities to study abroad?

What percentage of the student body returns after freshman year?

What percent graduate in four years?

Etc.

Try to make your questions specific enough such that the interviewer knows they relate to that college alone. Demonstrate that you've done your homework.

How to Dress

The proper term for interview attire would be "nicer casual." Avoid old jeans, T-shirts, sandals, short skirts, fancy outfits, gaudy attire, torn or ripped clothing, clothing with slogans (or worse) written on it, etc. Females should wear nice pants or moderate skirts with a conservative sweater or blouse. Males should wear nice pants with a collared shirt; even sporty golf-type shirts with collars are acceptable.

Be on Time

Always allow extra time to get to your interview, because something will inevitably go wrong. Traffic will be horrible, you'll get lost, or you'll have trouble parking. Double the expected amount of time and you should be okay. Aim to arrive about twenty minutes early, because often you are given a form to fill out first. You can also relax a bit!

Bring Your Resume

Remember all that work you did on your resume? Well, here's another chance to use it. Print it on professional, quality paper. (no borders or cute colors). Have it with you, and when you are greeted simply hand it to the interviewer saying "I brought a resume in case it would be helpful to you." (or something to that effect). Don't be concerned if they don't use it. You scored your points by being so well prepared and organized.

Get the Name or Card of the Interviewer

As you depart, the interviewer may hand you a business card. Don't lose it! If they don't offer one, ask if they have one. If they don't, confirm the name and address of the interviewer with correct spelling. This is for the thank you note that you will send next.

Send a Thank You Note

Soon after your interview (one or two days), write a thank you note to your interviewer letting him/her know that you appreciate their taking the time to meet with you. Add a couple of sentences regarding how it helped you, and perhaps hoping that they learned a little more about you. If that college is your first choice, say so in closing. Sign the note with a closing such as Sincerely, Thanks Again or Yours Truly and your full name. If you have a small picture that reflects positively on you, enclose it with the note. It can't hurt!

Demonstration of Interest

Competitive colleges pay attention to whether applicants have demonstrated genuine interest in their college. Did you ask to be on their mailing list? Did you attend their open house? Did you have an interview? Did you indicate anywhere that you truly want to attend their school? While probably not as important as other factors, demonstration of interest could at least be a tie-breaker between you and another similar student. So be sure to take note of this. Sometimes there is an open-ended area on the application where you could indicate that the college is your first choice. If it isn't, you could still express that you are very interested in attending.

Paying for College

There are many ways to ease the pain of college tuition. Don't ever assume that you can't afford to go. With a little effort, there are lots of ways to make it happen.

Section 529 Plans

Saving for college, starting very early, is always the best bet. 529 savings plans allow parents, grandparent or anyone to put away large sums of money that will grow tax free. You can use these plans regardless of where you live. Have your parents consult with their financial advisor about using a section 529 plan. There is also an independent 529 plan that enables families to lock in today's tuition costs at even less than today's price with no market risk. Member colleges guarantee to protect the tuition agreed upon, so they effectively absorb the risk. Learn more by visiting www.independent529plan.org If it's too late now to help your tuition situation, it may still be valuable for a younger sibling or grandchild.

Tax Breaks

Sometimes there are tax benefits to ease the burden on students repaying loans. The new student loan interest deduction (since 1997) is an example of this. Visit www.ed.gov/updates/97918tax.html for more information, see IRS regulation 970 at <http://www.irs.gov/publications/p970/index.html> or call 1-800-4FED-AID.

Financial Aid

Many people don't believe they will qualify for financial aid, so they never apply. Remarkably, there is financial aid available for a large percentage of families – even some with six-figure incomes. But it is important to understand the source of the aid and the conditions and limitations under which it is offered. The two broad categories are “need-based” and “merit-based”. The information below relates primarily to need-based aid.

Sources of Aid

Students generally have five sources of aid available to them:

- *The federal government – offers grants and low interest loans to students and/or parents*
- *The state government – offers grants based on need and/or merit for in-state schools*
- *Institutional funds (from the college or university) – aid may be based on need and/or merit*
- *Foundations, community, businesses, organizations etc. – research this!*
- *Bonds, savings and loans, credit unions (parent/student loans)*

There are also types of aid available outside the above “system”, such as benefits for veterans, vocational rehabilitation assistance, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, and other military programs.

Types of Aid Granted

There are two basic types of financial assistance: That which is given and is not repaid, and that which is a loan. The first type includes grants and scholarships. The second type includes work-study and loans. Very often a qualified student is offered a combination of these types. Both full-time and part-time students can apply, but part-time students generally receive less aid.

Loans and Grants

There are many federal resources available to assist parents and students in paying for their education. There are low interest loans such as federal PLUS loans (for parents and not need-based), Stafford loans (for students), and Perkins loans. Subsidized loans are ones on which the federal government pays the interest while the student is in school. There are need-based Pell and FSEOG Grants that are renewed annually, and also Work-Study programs where students hold a job during college.

Looking for Scholarships

Most won't come to you. To find scholarships, you need to look! We will provide numerous internet resources that make this easier for you.

The Forms

FAFSA Form

The FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form is required by all institutions if you are applying for any type of financial aid. It is available at www.fafsa.ed.gov. On this form, always list your most expensive college FIRST. It is easier to adjust grants down than up. Mail this form in January. Do not wait until the March deadline. Applying late can cost you funds. Also visit www.pin.ed.gov to get your personal PIN number so you can interact with US Department of Education websites and sign your FAFSA form electronically. Obtaining your PIN can take a few days. After your FAFSA form is submitted, you will receive a SAR (Student Aid Report) that advises you of your aid status for the year. You will see an EFC, or Expected Family Contribution, which represents that amount you are deemed capable of contributing to your child's education for *that year*. Check the SAR for accuracy in terms of the information it was based on. Your SAR will be used to advise colleges or other organizations of your aid status. Colleges that accept you will develop financial aid packages (if applicable) based on this information. The FAFSA must be re-filed each year, so you receive a SAR and an EFC each year. Note that parents are expected to contribute about 5% of income, whereas students are assessed at more like 35%. So it may be unwise to shift income from parents to students.

Note: Male students who will be 18 at the time they complete the FAFSA are required to register with Selective Service to be eligible for federal and state aid. Students can register for Selective Service at the post office or through the FAFSA form. Call 1-888-655-1825 for more information.

GPA Verification Form

Often your state will require some sort of form when awarding state grants. See your high school guidance counselor for advice. This form, if required, is probably due in February or early March so watch your dates.

CSS Profile

Some private colleges require this form when awarding institutional aid. These are available at www.collegeboard.org. Fill this out early, between September and October.

Financial Aid Estimator

To obtain a free estimate of your eligibility for federal aid, fill out the estimator forms on www.finaid.org/calculators, www.collegeboard.com/parents or www.act.org.

Beware of Scams

Some services claim they will search out scholarships for you for a fee of anywhere from \$40 - \$200. They may make other promises as well, such as a refund if no scholarships are found. You can do these searches very effectively on your own, so the safest path is to never pay anything for searches. While some may be legitimate, it's not worth the risk in our opinion. Here are some slogans that should tip you off to scams:

- *Guaranteed or your money back!* *You can't get this anywhere else!*
- *You've been selected by...* *We'll do all the work for you...*
- *Hold this scholarship with your credit card....* *You're a finalist!*

Visit www.finaid.org/finaid/scams.html for more information on scams.

Financial Aid Links

Here are some helpful links relating specifically to financial aid.

www.studentaid.ed.gov -Federal Student Aid Site or call 1-800-433-3243

www.finaid.org Financial Aid Information Page

www.salliemae.com - scholarship search and "estimated family contribution"

www.fastweb.com - Financial Aid and Scholarship Search

www.collegeboard.com - College, Career, Scholarship Search

www.petersons.com/resources/finance.html - Petersons Education Center Financing Education

www.ed.gov – find and pay for colleges

www.fafsa.ed.gov - online FAFSA application

Merit-Based Scholarships

Not all aid is need-based. If a college is very interested in you, you may receive a scholarship offer even though you aren't applying for aid. These scholarships can range anywhere from full tuition for all four years to partial tuition for one year only. These generally come in the mail and are a wonderful surprise. If you receive one or more of these, congratulations! You will want to compute and compare the actual four year value of any different scholarships you are offered and factor this into your decision.

Negotiating Your Aid Package

Hopefully you will receive an aid letter from each of the colleges that accept you, and it may consist of a combination of different forms of aid. Compare these offers carefully and, believe it or not, you might be able to appeal and/or negotiate. If your first choice school's offer was surpassed by another's, contact the aid office and let them know this. Send a copy of the better offer. Are there other special circumstances that weren't reflected on the forms? It can't hurt to try! Be sure you are clear on all aspects of your aid package, such as whether it is renewed each year; are there GPA qualifications? Ask, ask, ask!

Once You're Accepted

Often your colleges will offer on-line notification websites with passwords. If offered, this is usually the fastest way to find out the college's decision. Keep track of these websites and passwords so you can check frequently during notification time. If accepted to a college, you will receive the coveted letter or packet informing you of this. Pay special attention to the information in these letters, as it will contain deadlines and often housing forms. If you are accepted at multiple schools, congratulations! Weigh your decision carefully by talking to your parents, counselors, and anyone else with insight that might be helpful. Another visit might help the decision process as well.

May 1 Deadline

This is the absolute deadline by which to send your SIR (Statement of Intent to Register) to inform the college of your decision. You will lose your acceptance if you do not respond by May 1. Be sure you accept **ONLY ONE** college. You could be disqualified from all your schools if you fail to follow this rule.

Waiting List

If you are placed on a waiting list at a top choice, you must go ahead and respond to a school that has accepted you for sure by May 1. Later, if you are notified that you are admitted from the wait list of a school that you prefer, the college that you already accepted will release you from your agreement. However, you will probably forfeit your deposit. Colleges are tending to put more students on wait lists these days, because the increasing number of applicants makes it harder for them to predict how many will actually enroll. The wait list gives them the flexibility to scale their classes more accurately. Mid year senior grades are often used to determine acceptances off wait lists. It is appropriate to ask the college what its wait list statistics are, meaning how many waitlisted students are ultimately accepted on average. Generally it will be between 5% and 10%.

Notify Schools You Are Turning Down

When you make your final decision, notify ALL colleges so that your spot may be offered to others. Often your acceptance packets include withdrawal cards for this purpose. Sometimes you can decline the offer on the website where you obtained your acceptance notification. Inform your school guidance office of your plans – after all, that’s the fun part!

Appealing a Rejection

Many colleges offer an appeal process. If you are heartbroken at having been rejected from a top choice, an appeal may be worth the effort. There may be a specific appeals process for your college. But in general, they want additional *compelling* information that will give them a reason to reconsider you. It may be appropriate to submit additional letter(s) of recommendation from different people than before. Has anything changed that would affect their decision? If so, tell them - if it's positive. Express your interest. Explain to them that theirs was your first choice school. It can't hurt, and students are occasionally accepted on appeal. Remember, though, you must have a positive acceptance *somewhere* by May 1.

Get Organized and Get Busy

If you are self-motivated and relatively organized, you may have almost everything you need in this handbook. We also recommend purchasing a portable file container and setting up a folder for each of your target colleges. Then set up folders for testing information, essays, interviews, transcripts, resumes, financial aid forms and other subjects of interest. Keep this container in a handy location so things are placed in it promptly and aren't lost. Keep your research in the appropriate folders, including news clippings, and correspondence. Keep your certificates of mailing and application copies as well. Staying organized will ensure that you don't miss deadlines and/or let something slip through the cracks. This could cost you your edge.

We hope you find our handbook to be helpful. Additional resources are available on our subscriber website at www.getin2college.com/private.htm including checklists, worksheets and over 600 helpful links. We do our very best to keep our information absolutely current. If you have any suggestions, or if you find any errors or invalid internet addresses, we'd appreciate hearing from you at info@getin2college.com.

Best of luck on your college quest!

Sample Resume

Taylor A. Student

1000 Main Street
Anywhere, CA 99999
(999) 999-9999

SSN: 999-99-9999 email: anyone@internet.com
Coopersville High School

Academic Honors and Awards

- **Academic Honor Roll** - all semesters
- **National Honor Society** - 2005
- **Scholar Athlete Award** - all semesters – Volleyball
- **Golden State Exam Honors and Recognition** – Biology

Other Awards and Distinctions

- **Junior Olympics:** Silver Medalist - Volleyball 2003
- **Youth National Volleyball Team:** 2003-4

High School Leadership Activities

- **Varsity Letter:** Volleyball 2002-2005
- **Team Captain:** Volleyball - 2005
- **Producer and Director:** Coopersville High School morning news
- **Leader:** Link Crew 2004-2005 - Selected by Administration for mentor program.
- **Educational Advisor Team:** Nominated by principal to select and interview advisors 2003
- **Chairperson:** Spring Canned Foods Drive 2004
- **Active Member:** Chess Club 2002-2005, World Wildlife Club 2003-2005
- **Founder:** Teens Against Tobacco and Drug Use 2002

Community Service and Leadership

- **President:** Light of Life Philanthropic Organization 2003-4
- **Volunteer:** Coast Animal Hospital: 2003 (32 hours)
- **Volunteer:** Help for Children - activities for terminally ill, underprivileged area children: 1994 -present (56 hours)
- **Volunteer:** Teens Against Tobacco and Drug Use (30 hours) 2002-2004
- **Certified Junior Lifeguard:** Anywhere Beach, 2002-4
- **Coach:** Summer Volleyball Camp 2003-4
- **Church:** Confirmed, active member of ABC Church Youth Program 1998-2004

Summer Programs and Internships

- **Academic:** Journalism Workshop at Boston University: Summer 2004 – 3 week program
- **Community Service:** Rustic Pathways – Costa Rica Community Service 2004
- **Personal Achievement:** Adventure Quest – British Virgin Islands – 3 week program
* *ASA/US Sailing and PADI Scuba Diving Certifications: Summer 2003*

Paid Employment Experience

- **Camp Counselor:** Explorers Beach Camp, Anywhere, CA Summer 2003
- **Website Administrator:** www.somebusiness.com 2003-2004

Other Activities and Hobbies

I enjoy recreational sports such as volleyball, scuba diving, surfing, and snowboarding. I also enjoy writing and producing as well as website development.

College and Career Goals

I have a passion for writing which has resulted in my interest in journalism and communication as possible majors. I hope to pursue a career in broadcasting, and am interested in politics and debate as well. My non-career mission is to work with animals and to donate time and money to the prevention of animal extinction.

(end of sample resume)

Test Averages for Admitted Students from Sample Colleges

(A more complete table is found on our subscriber website at www.getin2college.com/private.htm)

College or University	SAT Math	SAT Critical Reading	Projected SAT Writing Range	ACT
Amherst College	721	722	680-740	31
Arizona State University	559	547	550-630	23
Boston College	667	650	640-700	N/A
Bowdoin College	690	690	660-720	N/A
Brigham Young University (UT)	592	587	600-670	27
Brown University	700	690	670-740	29
Claremont McKenna College	700	690	670-720	30
Clemson University	617	587	590-660	26
College of William and Mary	661	674	650-720	29
Cornell College	623	616	600-670	26
Dartmouth College	719	713	680-740	30
Davidson College	656	659	650-720	28
Florida State University	584	580	580-650	25
Georgia Institute of Technology	690	644	630-690	28
Gettysburg College	630	630	630-680	28
Harvey Mudd College	750	700	640-720	N/A
Indiana University - Bloomington	560	544	550-630	24
Iowa State University	620	590	580-670	24
Ithaca College	596	594	590-660	N/A
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	755	712	680-740	32
Miami University	610	590	600-660	26
Michigan State University	579	556	550-650	24
Middlebury College	710	720	690-730	30
New York University	660	658	640-700	29
North Carolina State University	613	580	580-650	25
Northwestern University	702	687	670-720	30
Ohio State University - Columbus	604	581	570-650	26
Smith College	620	640	620-700	27
Swarthmore College	711	719	680-740	N/A
Texas A&M University-College Station	605	578	570-660	25
The University of Texas at Austin	627	603	590-670	26
United States Naval Academy	670	648	620-680	N/A
University of Arizona	563	552	550-640	23
University of California, Berkeley	671	629	620-700	N/A
University of California-Los Angeles	660	629	610-690	27
University of California-Santa Barbara	603	579	310-660	25
University of Colorado, Boulder	596	579	580-650	25
University of Kentucky	570	564	570-650	24
University of Montana - Missoula	540	547	N/A	23
University of New Mexico	529	536	540-630	22
University of Notre Dame	693	676	650-720	31
University of Pennsylvania	718	694	670-720	30
University of South Florida	545	540	550-620	23
University of Southern California	685	665	650-700	29
University of Virginia	671	659	640-700	28
Virginia Tech	611	587	590-650	25
Wellesley College	678	689	660-720	29

Questions to Ask Your Prospective Colleges

A sampling of these questions would be appropriate to ask at college fairs, interviews, campus visits or any other opportunities you have to talk to college representatives. Select the questions that are most relevant to your situation.

Questions About Admission Policies

What high school courses do you require?
What tests are required? What range of scores typifies your admitted students?
What grade point average and class rank are typical of your admitted students?
What emphasis is placed on extracurricular activities?
Do you offer Early Decision or Early Action?
If yes, what are the deadlines and what is the commitment?
Do you accept Letters of Recommendation?
Are personal interviews offered? How do you obtain them?
Are any majors impacted such that they have additional admission requirements?
What percent of applicants do you accept? Is there a waitlist? An appeals process?

Questions About the College or University

Where is the college located? Is the setting rural, urban, suburban, beach, etc.
What is the community like? College town? Relationship with the community?
Is the college public or private? Does it have a religious affiliation?
What is the current enrollment? Of that, what percent live on campus?
Are there any special programs offered?
Does the college have a particular program it is known for or ranked in?
If considering transferring, ask about transfer opportunities and requirements.

Questions About The Student Body

Where do the majority of students come from?
How is the Greek System (sororities and fraternities) perceived? (if applicable)
What percent of students join?
What role does athletics play in campus life? Are there NCAA sports? Intramural?
How would you characterize the student body? Diverse? Affluent? Cliquish? Relaxed?
How would you characterize the school in terms of school spirit?
Politically would the school be characterized as liberal or conservative?
Degree of emphasis on social life vs. academic?

Questions About Academics

What is the average class size? Ratio of professors to students?
What percent of classes are taught by TAs vs. professors?
What percent of students return sophomore year? What percent graduate in four years?
How difficult is it to get your classes? How does registration work?
Does each student have a counselor?
Is the campus networked? What internet access is provided and where? In each room?
What are the most popular majors? Which of those have special requirements or are impacted?
Is there an honors program?
Are there special exchange programs or opportunities to study abroad?
Are students recruited aggressively? Are they offered internships?
What percent of the students are accepted to graduate schools?

Questions About Financial Aid

What percent of students receive financial aid? What are the filing date deadlines?
Are jobs available on campus? Work-study programs?
Are there other grants and loans available? How does one qualify or apply?
What is a typical financial aid package for freshmen?
When is a student notified about financial aid?
Are there other special scholarships for athletics? Arts? Leadership? Academics?

Junior Calendar

SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Register for PSAT. - Continue refining your list of target schools. - Research schools on the internet or via books and visits. - Update your resume with any new information. - Plan next two years' extra-curricular and community service activities. - Think about when to take the SAT or ACT tests – develop your tentative “test plan” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take PSAT to be eligible for national Merit Scholarship competition. - Study hard! Aim for A or B grade point average. Do extra credit whenever you can. - Start a personal file updating information for your resume. - Locate and organize all awards, articles, prizes etc. earned. - Acquaint yourself with resources at your school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keep grades up. Improvement counts. - Get to know your junior year teachers, as these may be the best ones for letters of recommendation. - Take SAT Subject Tests, such as Language Tests With Listening, if appropriate. - Continue research on specific colleges. - Improve your vocabulary! Learn 20 new words a week. - Think about college majors. -READ! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Study Hard! - Take SAT Subject Tests if appropriate. - Register for SAT if you would like to take it in January. - Receive results of PSAT/NMSQT. Use results to develop a prepping strategy to improve your SAT scores as needed. - READ over break! - Fill up your spare time with as much community service, volunteer work, club or sport activity etc. as you can. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue college research. - Compare PSAT and projected SAT results to the averages at your target schools- - First chance to take the SAT. - Be sure to have your Social Security Number and your school CEEB code number. - Consider SAT prepping for the March or May tests.
FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Register for SAT if you would like to take it in March. Begin to prepare for SAT or ACT. - Remember how important junior grades are for your class rank and college apps. - Plan a challenging Senior curriculum. <i>(An easy schedule can cost you an acceptance.)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SAT testing - Research interesting and challenging summer courses, jobs or volunteer activities. - Have your target list down to 10-12 schools. - Plan college visits to nearby colleges. - Register for SAT, ACT or SAT Subject Tests if you plan to take any in May. - Sign up for AP tests in your AP class subjects. - Plan a challenging Senior schedule – no Senioritis! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ACT testing - Plan an interesting and challenging summer. - Get into the databases (mailing lists) of your target schools (via internet) - Attend college fairs. - Write letters of intent to the service academies if applicable. (military) - Prep for AP exams if applicable - College visits during Spring Break? - Think about financing college – will you need aid? - READ! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SAT testing <i>(many counselors think it is best to reserve May and June for SAT Subject exams in the subjects you will be finishing this year)</i> - Students who will be applying Early Decision or Early Action should try to complete all testing during junior year. - Take your AP exams. - Don't forget to study for your high school finals!! - Use Scholarship Search programs to investigate scholarships that might be available to you. <i>(no need to pay for this)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SAT and ACT tests as desired. - Arrange college tours for summer. Call Admissions office of schools to set up tours and interviews. - Visit colleges. Take tours and do interviews if offered. - Do something extra with your resume in mind. Develop your “ACE”! - Prep for SAT's and work on vocabulary – READ! - Keep extra curricular activity and community service efforts going. - Refine your college list. - Athletes, register with NCAA Clearinghouse if applicable.

Senior Calendar

<p>SEPTEMBER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Get a file "bin" and set up a file for each target school. - Attend all high school college-related meetings. - Meet with counselor and ask questions. - Identify all the application deadlines for your schools and fill out checklist. - Get your school's CEEB code and have it handy along with your SS#. - Finalize your resume. - Prep for final SAT/ACT testing and register. - Ask teachers for letters of recommendation if your colleges want them. - Request interviews at privates whenever they are available. - Get a good senior picture, formal or informal. - Print practice apps for all your schools even if you will be doing them on-line. 	<p>OCTOBER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take SAT/ACT as needed (register for Nov/Dec). - Work on applications - See if college applications are on the internet yet (<i>be sure they are for the right admission term</i>) Download & print them for practice and/or get the essays. - Think about essay topics. Brainstorm. - Keep grades up! Many schools will request your senior grades in their decision process. - Are you taking the SAT again? - Did you obtain all letters of recommendation needed? - Decide about applying early decision – you can only do one! - If you're an athlete, talk to coach(es). - Polish your resume for the last time! - Are any of your target schools visiting your high school? 	<p>NOVEMBER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attend any workshops/ meetings offered by your high school. - think about financial aid needs. - Work on essays and applications. (<i>many early applications are due in November! </i>) - Watch deadlines! - Don't procrastinate with your apps! The earlier the better. - Want to take the SAT one more time? - Have your high school send transcripts to colleges that want them. - Send thank you notes to anyone who helped you (letters of recommendation etc). - Be sure your SAT/ACT scores have been sent to all your colleges after your last test. Send AP scores as well if they are strong. 	<p>DECEMBER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Last chance at the standardized tests – use it if you need it. - Study Hard! You can't afford to let your grades slip. - Be sure to report your test scores to all your colleges. - Use the internet to research scholarships. - Finish any remaining applications! Proof them over and over. - Have others read your essays to be sure they demonstrate something unique about you. - Send your final resume, picture and cover letter to your private schools. - Think about financial aid needs and familiarize yourself with the forms. - Keep copies of everything you send. - If accepted Early Decision, inform other schools. 	<p>JANUARY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The last of the applications should be due this month for fall admission. - Are your test scores sent? - Transcripts sent as required? - Letters of recommendation in? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Obtain FAFSA forms and file by March 1! Everyone should do this regardless of need. - Consider using CSS/PROFILE for aid if your college(s) takes it. (College Board website) - You may need a GPA verification form for some state grants (research this). - Attend financial aid workshops at your school or elsewhere. - Research private scholarships via internet
<p>FEBRUARY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finish financial aid forms. Timing matters! Being late can literally cost you. - Tell your parents you will need their 1040 tax information (as current as possible, last years at least) - You can estimate the financial aid you will receive. - Have school send updated transcripts or mid year reports if needed. - Pay attention to correspondence from colleges. - Keep your grades up! Offers can be rescinded! 	<p>MARCH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - FAFSA form due 1st! (<i>Review the SAR you will receive to be sure it is using the right data</i>) - Register for AP tests. - Wait for acceptance letters! (<i>Pay attention to housing forms in acceptance letters. There may be deadlines and preference options</i>) - Consider appealing a rejection. (<i>if it was your first choice and you have a compelling reason for them to reconsider you</i>) - Notify your counselor when you receive college decisions and write waitlist letters if appropriate. 	<p>APRIL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Congrats on all your acceptances! You must select a school by May 1. - Final campus visits if needed to help make your decision. - Talk to people who can help you decide: alumni, older friends who are there, parents, and your counselor. - Prepare for AP tests and finals. - Review and discuss financial aid offers as part of your decision making process. These can be appealed also. 	<p>MAY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most of your schools must be notified by May 1 with an SIR form. - Plan summer employment. - Pay attention to housing and meal plan information contained in your acceptance letter(s). - Inform the schools you will NOT be attending as well. - If needed, research loans (PLUS, Stafford etc) to make up for any financial gap after aid results are known. - Study for finals and APs! (do you want to use prep books?) 	<p>JUNE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Order final transcript and anything else to be sent to your college. - Consider computer needs for next fall (notebooks, wireless connections, etc) - Attend all orientations at your college. - Do some extra research on your college to think about what activities you will pursue. - Respond to any financial aid offers you received. - Keep READING! - Have a great summer and look forward to the amazing adventure that awaits you!

Special Information about the University of Missouri (UM)

The University of Missouri System: <http://www.umsystem.edu/>

Campuses (visit each campus for specific admission requirements)

UM-Columbia:	230 Jesse Hall, Columbia, MO 65211. Phone: 1-800-225-6075 Home: http://www.missouri.edu/ E-mail: mu4u@missouri.edu Web: http://prospectivestudents.missouri.edu/ Apply: http://admissions.missouri.edu/howtoapply/
UM-Kansas City :	120 Admin. Center, Kansas City, MO 64110-2499. Phone: (816) 235-1111 Home: http://www.umkc.edu/ E-mail: admit@umkc.edu Web: http://www.umkc.edu/admit Apply: http://web1.umkc.edu/admissions/decision.asp
UM-Rolla:	106 Parker Hall, Rolla, MO 65409. Phone: 1-800-522-0938 Home: http://www.umn.edu/ E-mail: umROLLA@umr.edu Web: http://admissions.umn.edu Apply: http://www.umn.edu/admsns/undergraduates/index.html
UM-St. Louis:	351 Millennium Student Center, St. Louis, MO 63121. Phone: (314) 516-5451 Home: http://www.umsl.edu/ E-mail: admissions@umsl.edu Web: http://www.umsl.edu/admission/ Apply: http://www.umsl.edu/admission/apply/index.html

Columbia Campus (2005-6 admitted averages)

About 11,524 applied, About 10,217 accepted

Middle 50% ACT scores: 23-28 SAT (Math and Critical Reading): 1080-1310

27% were in the top 10% of their high school class

Instate tuition: About \$7,858 Room & Board: About \$6,540

Kansas City Campus (2005-6 admitted averages)

About 3,018 applied, About 2,254 accepted

Middle 50% ACT scores: 21-27

30% were in the top 10% of their high school class; Avg. GPA 3.3

Instate tuition: About \$7,591 Room & Board: About \$6,823

Rolla Campus (2005-6 admitted averages)

About 1,864 applied, About 1,742 accepted

Middle 50% ACT scores: 24-30 SAT (Math + Critical Reading): 1150-1350

38% were in the top 10% of their high school class; Avg GPA 3.6

Instate tuition: About \$7,889 Room & Board: About \$6,255

St. Louis Campus (2005-6 admitted averages)

About 2,207 applied, About 1,151 accepted

Middle 50% ACT scores: 21-26 SAT: 940-1250 (Math + Critical Reading)

21% were in the top 10% of their high school class

Instate tuition: About \$7,948 Room & Board: About \$7,178

Special Information about the Missouri State University - Springfield

Useful Websites

Home: <http://www.missouristate.edu/>
Apply On-line: <http://www.missouristate.edu/apply.asp>
Check Status: <https://www.secure.missouristate.edu/admstatus/adm5010.asp>
Request Info: <https://www.missouristate.edu/secure/admissions/request.htm>
Email admissions: admissions@missouristate.edu

2005-6 Admission Statistics

Applications Received: 6,866 Accepted: 5,257 Enrolled: 2,621
Average GPA: 3.6 (22% of admitted students were in the top 10% of their class)
Average ACT score: 24 (middle 50% range = 21 to 26)

Core Curriculum Minimum Requirements

English: Four units, two of which must emphasize composition or writing. One unit may be speech or debate.

Mathematics: Three units (algebra I or higher, including algebra II)

Social Studies: Three units (must include American history and at least one semester of government).

Science: Two units, not including general science. One unit must be a laboratory course.

Visual and Performing Arts: One unit (graduates of accredited Missouri high schools meet this through completion of the fine arts requirement for graduation)

Additional Core Courses: Three additional units of core electives selected from any combination of two or more of the above subject areas and/or foreign language. Computer science may also be used if it has a prerequisite of algebra I or higher.

Deadline (for fall admission): July 20

Tuition (in state): About \$5,738 Room & Board: About \$5,078

Selection Index

If you meet the core curriculum requirement, you will automatically qualify for admission if you **either** rank in the top quarter of your class **or** have a grade point average (GPA) of 3.50 or higher on a 4.00 scale **or** have an ACT composite score of 24 (or SAT critical reading plus math score of 1110) or higher **or** meet the following scale. To use the scale, follow the steps below:

STEP 1: Using your class rank percentile and GPA, determine which will place you higher on this scale. For example, if your class rank percentile is 60 and your GPA is 3.30, you would use the line based on your GPA. If your school does not rank, your GPA will be used to determine your eligibility.

STEP 2: Follow the line you identified in Step 1 across the scale to determine the minimum ACT or SAT score you must have. Using the same example from Step 1, a student with a class rank percentile of 60 and a GPA of 3.30 would need **either** an ACT composite of 19 or higher **or** an SAT total of 910 or higher.

Class Rank Percentile	or	GPA on a 4.0 scale	ACT Composite	or	SAT Total**
75 or higher		3.50 or higher	<i>No minimum test score required for admission purposes.</i>		
73 to 74		3.45 to 3.49	18		870
64 to 72		3.20 to 3.44	19		910
56 to 63		2.99 to 3.19	20		950
48 to 55		2.80 to 2.98	21		990
40 to 47		2.58 to 2.79	22		1030
34 to 39		2.43 to 2.57	23		1070
Below 34		Below 2.43	24		1110

**sum of critical reading and math scores