

# COLLEGE SEARCH RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS



Resources are courtesy of College Board [ <https://www.collegeboard.org/> ]

**Naviance** is also a great resource for non-biased factual information about  
Colleges / Universities

<https://student.naviance.com/tuscarorahi>

# College Planning: How to Get Started

## STEP 1: GET STARTED

Assess your strengths, weaknesses, goals, passions, learning style, and social skills. What is most important to you in the college-search process? What do you hope to learn from the process?

## STEP 2: MAKE SOME BASIC DECISIONS

- Where do you want to live?  
a small liberal arts college, or a historically black or religiously affiliated college?
- Will you go to college full time? Part time?
- Do you want to attend a single-sex school, a technical college, a public or private college, a large university,  
• How important is the cultural/ideological diversity of the student body?

## STEP 3: ENLIST HELP

Who do you want to assist you in this process (family, teachers, siblings, relatives, friends)?

## STEP 4: CONSULT REFERENCES AND WEBSITES

Look at college directories (College Board's *College Handbook*, Barron's, Peterson's) and use college searches (<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/>). Visit the websites of the colleges that interest you.

## STEP 5: TALK

Discuss your goals and plans with your family, teachers, and school counselor. They can provide helpful advice.

## STEP 6: MEET WITH COLLEGE REPRESENTATIVES

Visit with college representatives when they come to your high school. Make a list of your important questions to ask the representatives. Also meet college personnel at area college fairs.

## STEP 7: VISIT CAMPUSES

Try to go to the college campus and take a tour, meet with admission and financial aid representatives, and ask students what they think about the college. Can't make the trip? Many colleges provide virtual tours on their websites.

Source: Amherst Regional High School, Massachusetts.

# 20 Questions to Ask Your School Counselor

Your school counselor is one of your best resources as you plan for college. Your counselor has information about admission tests, college preparation, and education and career options.

Here are some basic questions to start a conversation:

1. What courses do I need to take to be ready for college?
2. How should I schedule my courses so I'll complete them?
3. Which elective courses do you recommend?
4. Which AP courses should I consider taking?
5. When is the PSAT/NMSQT® going to be given?
6. How should I study for the SAT®? Is it given at school, or do I need to go somewhere nearby?
7. Do you have any college planning sessions scheduled?
8. What websites or resources can I use to begin my college search?
9. What activities can I do at home and over the summer to get ready for college?
10. What kinds of grades do different colleges require?
11. Are there any college fairs at this school or nearby?
12. What colleges do graduates of our school go to?
13. Can you put me in touch with recent grads at colleges on my wish list?
14. Which schools are test optional? Should I send my test scores to some schools?
15. Can you help me start exploring careers?
16. In case you're asked for a recommendation, can you meet with me to discuss things colleges should know about me, such as my interests and goals?
17. What special scholarships or awards can I work toward?
18. Can I look at my transcript to see if everything is as I think it should be?
19. What forms do I use to apply for financial aid? Where can I find them online?
20. How does our school compare to others in terms of test scores and reputation?

## REALITY CHECK

Depending on the size of your school, your school counselor's available time will vary. The person who has the biggest stake in your academics is you. It's up to you not to miss opportunities—or deadlines. Take charge of yourself.

# Types of Colleges: The Basics

Is a college the same thing as a university? What does “liberal arts” mean? Why are some colleges called public and others private? Here are the basic types of colleges.

## PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COLLEGES

**Public colleges** are funded by local and state governments and usually offer lower tuition rates than private colleges, especially for students who are residents of the same state.

**Private colleges** rely mainly on tuition, fees, and private sources of funding. Private donations can sometimes provide generous financial aid packages for students.

## FOR-PROFIT COLLEGES

These are businesses that offer degree programs that typically prepare students for a specific career. They tend to have higher costs, which could mean graduating with more debt. Credits earned may not transfer to other colleges.

## FOUR-YEAR AND TWO-YEAR COLLEGES

**Four-year colleges** offer four-year programs that lead to a bachelor’s degree. These include universities and liberal arts colleges.

**Two-year colleges** offer two-year programs leading to a certificate or an associate degree. They include community, vocational-technical, and career colleges.

## LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES

These colleges offer a broad base of courses in the liberal arts: literature, history, languages, mathematics, and life sciences. Most are private with four-year bachelor’s degree programs that can prepare you for a variety of careers or for graduate study.

## UNIVERSITIES

Universities often are larger and offer more majors and degree options—bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees—than colleges. Most universities consist of several smaller colleges, such as colleges of liberal arts, engineering, or health sciences. These colleges can prepare you for a variety of careers or for graduate study.

## COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Community colleges offer two-year associate degrees that prepare you to transfer to a four-year college to earn a bachelor’s degree. They also offer other associate degrees and certificates that focus on preparing you for a specific career. Community colleges are often an affordable option with relatively low tuition.

## VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL AND CAREER COLLEGES

Vocational-technical and career colleges offer specialized training for a particular industry or career. Possible programs of study include the culinary arts, firefighting, dental hygiene, and medical-records technology. These colleges usually offer certificates or associate degrees.

## ARTS COLLEGES

In addition to regular coursework, arts colleges and conservatories provide training in areas such as photography, music, theater, or fashion design. Most of these colleges offer associate or bachelor’s degrees in fine arts or a specialized field.

## SINGLE-SEX COLLEGES

All four-year public colleges, and most private colleges, are coed. But there are some private colleges that are specifically for men or for women.

## RELIGIOUSLY AFFILIATED COLLEGES

Some private colleges are connected to a religious faith. The connection may be historic only, or it may affect day-to-day student life.

## SPECIALIZED-MISSION COLLEGES

Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) focus on educating African American students. Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) are colleges where at least 25% of the full-time undergraduate students are Hispanic. HBCUs and HSIs may offer programs, services, and activities targeted to the underrepresented students they serve.

# 2 Paths to a Degree and a Career

## Liberal Arts Majors and Career-Oriented Majors

Some college majors focus on preparing students for very specific careers. For example, a nursing major gives you the technical skills and knowledge you need to work as a nurse and prepares you to pass the licensing exam for that career. We call majors like these career-oriented majors.

Another road to a career is a liberal arts major. “Liberal arts” is an umbrella term for many subjects of study, including literature, philosophy, history, and languages. Students who major in these subjects don’t build technical skills for a specific profession, but they still learn valuable career skills. An example of a skill acquired in a liberal arts environment would be the ability to communicate effectively and solve problems creatively.

### CAREER-ORIENTED MAJORS

**Range of subject matter.** If you choose a career-oriented major, you’ll probably take the majority of your courses in your major. That’s because you’ll have to take several required courses.

**Course requirements.** Career-oriented majors have more course requirements than liberal arts majors. For example, an engineering major would probably have to take several math, physics, chemistry, and other lab science courses from freshman year on.

**Career planning.** Once you choose a career-oriented major, your career path is well mapped out. Note that some careers, like engineering, require so much specific knowledge that students often start preparing in high school.

### LIBERAL ARTS MAJORS

**Range of subject matter.** If you choose a major in the liberal arts, you’ll probably take classes in a wide range of subject areas, which can include English literature, history, sociology, economics, and philosophy.

**Course requirements.** Your eventual major within the liberal arts curriculum will be the subject area you take the most classes in and eventually earn a degree in. For example, you may major in—and earn a bachelor’s degree in—history or English literature.

**Career planning.** Some liberal arts majors don’t have a specific career in mind when they choose their major, but some do. Many future lawyers, for example, choose a liberal arts education as undergraduates—majoring in subjects such as political science or English—and then go to law school for advanced study.

## Both Types of Majors Prepare Students for Careers

### CAREER OPTIONS

Here are a handful of popular liberal arts majors and a few careers they can lead to:

- English: editor, marketing executive, writer
- History: archivist, museum curator
- Foreign languages: foreign service officer, translator, interpreter
- Political science: community organizer or activist, lawyer, policy analyst
- Psychology: market researcher, social worker, therapist

Some career-oriented majors include:

- Radio and television broadcasting
- Culinary arts
- Paralegal studies
- Mechanical engineering

**WHERE TO LEARN MORE**

Read more about any college major in our Major and Career Search on <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org>. You can also search for colleges offering majors of interest in College Search.

# Sizing Up Colleges: Big vs. Small

## ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

As you begin your college search, one of the first decisions you need to make—and one that helps narrow your list—is what size college you want to attend. U.S. colleges offer many options, from small colleges with fewer than 1,000 students to large state universities with more than 35,000 students. What's best for you depends a large part on your personality and academic goals.

## THE BIG COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

Do you picture yourself at a Big Ten university that offers everything from televised sporting events to countless degree programs? Are you itching to break free of the high school fishbowl and enjoy the anonymity that comes with being one of thousands of students? Then a big college might be a good fit for you. Here are some of the benefits associated with big colleges.

- Wide variety of majors and courses
- Well-stocked libraries
- Variety of housing opportunities
- Well-funded sports programs
- Wide range of academic choices and student activities
- Distinguished or famous faculty
- State-of-the-art research facilities

### Things to Consider

- To succeed at a big college, it's best to go in knowing what subjects or general areas you're interested in. Students who do best at large colleges tend to be go-getters who take advantage of the many opportunities available.
- Introductory classes at a large college may contain hundreds of students. Some students find this environment exciting. Others feel overwhelmed.
- Another point: If you're attracted to a college because of its famous faculty, find out how many classes are actually taught by the professors, not by their teaching assistants.

## THE SMALL COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

Do you enjoy personal attention from teachers and advisers? Then a small college may be just what you need. Some students find that a smaller setting is a better fit. There may be fewer facilities, but there are also fewer students to compete with. Here are some of the benefits associated with small colleges:

- Small class sizes
- Hands-on learning opportunities
- Individually designed majors
- Strong advising system; advisers know students well
- Strong sense of community
- Professors, not teaching assistants, teach most courses
- Opportunity to get to know professors well

### Things to Consider

- Small colleges don't offer as many majors as big colleges; however, some of them let you design your own.
- Courses at small colleges are usually taught by professors, not teaching assistants. The professors may even know your name and areas of interest.
- Be aware that small colleges don't have the research facilities of large universities. If you're hoping to be a research assistant, find out what kind of work and facilities are available before you apply.
- Although you'll find a robust social life at most small colleges, you'll find less in terms of big sporting events and the variety of events.

## START YOUR SEARCH

Whether you're considering a big university, a small college, or something in between, look carefully at the options and see what's most important to you. Keep in mind that college size is one of many factors to consider as you build your college list. Visit <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org> to begin a college search.

# Campus Setting: Rural, Suburban, Urban

One of the steps in finding a good college for you is deciding what type of campus setting you prefer. Rural, suburban, and urban campuses have different advantages. The key is to find which setting lets you make the most of your college experience.

## Which Is a Good Fit for You?

### RURAL CAMPUSES

Rural campuses are located in the country, often near farms and wilderness areas, and usually near a small town. Here are things to consider about rural campuses:

- Most rural campuses are self-contained, with a majority of the students living on campus. This can increase a college's sense of community.
- Rural campuses can provide access to outdoor learning opportunities, particularly in fields like agriculture or environmental science.
- Many rural colleges bring entertainment to their students and provide free events. Comedians and bands may perform on campus during college tours.
- Most rural colleges provide on-campus transportation options, such as buses, for students.
- The landscape of rural campuses can vary widely. A rural campus in Ohio, for example, will be much different from a rural campus in Alaska.

### SUBURBAN CAMPUSES

Suburban campuses are in small cities, large towns, or residential areas near cities. Here are things to consider about suburban campuses:

- Suburbs often combine some of the best features of urban and rural areas.
- Suburban campuses usually offer access to nearby cities and to outdoor activities.

- Suburban colleges are frequently self-contained, which can create a strong sense of community.
- Suburban colleges often have connections to the towns where they're located. This can provide opportunities such as jobs and entertainment.
- Public transportation may be available in addition to a college's transportation options.

### URBAN CAMPUSES

Urban campuses are located in cities. Here are things to consider about urban campuses:

- Some urban campuses are spread throughout a city while others are self-contained within a city.
- Many urban colleges offer off-campus learning experiences. This may mean a chance to explore the work world through cooperative classes and internships.
- Urban colleges tend to attract culturally diverse students.
- Students can find entertainment options—such as museums, concerts, and plays—on and off urban campuses.
- Cities usually offer substantial public transportation options.

# Finding the Perfect College

Most students want to find the “perfect” college. The truth is, there’s no such thing. You can find many colleges where you can be happy and get a great education. The college search is about exploring who you are and what you want and then finding colleges that will meet your goals.

## BEFORE SEARCHING, CONSIDER THESE

### 8 FACTORS

<b>Size</b>	<b>Location</b>
<b>Available majors and classes</b>	<b>Available extracurricular activities</b>
<b>Distance from home</b>	<b>Makeup of the student body</b>
<b>Housing options</b>	<b>Campus atmosphere</b>

### Questions to consider:

- Which of these aspects are things you feel you must have to be comfortable at a college?
- On which factors are you flexible?
- What do you want to accomplish in college?
- Do you want to train for a specific job or get a wide-ranging education?
- If you have a major in mind, do the colleges you are considering specialize in that major?

[Bigfuture.collegeboard.org](http://Bigfuture.collegeboard.org) is a great option to sort through the many options out there, based on your preferences.

## Here are steps you can take to find colleges where you will thrive.

### KEEP AN OPEN MIND

Although it’s good to have some ideas in mind about what sorts of colleges will be good for you, stay open to all the possibilities at the beginning of your search.

### TALK TO PEOPLE WHO KNOW YOU

Tell family, teachers, relatives, friends, and your school counselor about your goals, and ask if they can suggest colleges that may be a good fit for you.

### DON'T LIMIT YOUR SEARCH

At the start of this process, you may rule out colleges because you think that they are too expensive or too hard to get into, but this may not be the reality. Remember that financial aid can make college more affordable, and colleges look at more than just grades and test scores.

### DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Once you have a list of schools, it’s time to do some research. To learn more about the colleges you’re considering, check out college guidebooks and websites.

Jot down your questions and get answers by:

- Talking to your school counselor or teachers
- Checking out colleges’ student blogs, if available
- Contacting college admission officials
- Asking admission officials to recommend current students or recent graduates with whom you can have conversations
- Visiting college campuses or viewing virtual college tours, if possible



# Assessing Your List of Colleges

As you develop a list of colleges that interest you, be sure you can answer these questions about them.

## THE BASICS

- Where is the college? Can you locate it on a map?
- Have you taken the course work the college requires for admission?
- What size is the college? How many students are undergraduates?
- What is the college's selectivity ratio (what proportion of applicants were admitted last year)?
- Does the college offer majors that interest you?
- Is the college coed or single sex?
- What percentage of students live off campus?
- How many of the students graduate in four years? Five years? Six years?
- How many first-year students return for their sophomore year?
- How much does the program cost? What is the total per-year expense?
- What type of financial aid is available?

## WHERE WOULD YOU FIT IN?

- What are the admission test scores at the colleges of interest to you? Where does that place you?
- What were the high school GPAs of most of the freshmen last year?
- Are freshmen guaranteed on-campus housing? If not, where do they live?
- Are there extracurricular activities that interest you?

## VISIT THEIR WEBSITES AND READ COLLEGE GUIDEBOOKS

- What are their strong academic programs? (Ask a college representative, students, graduates, and teachers.)
- What courses are required for graduation?
- Are the courses you need/want available each semester? At convenient times?
- Are there special programs (study abroad, internships, etc.) of interest to you?
- What is the social life like? What percentage of students join fraternities or sororities?
- Do the pictures and the language the college uses to describe itself attract you?
- What is your general impression of the college?
- Is the school accredited?
- If professional certification is required for employment in the field that interests you, how many students enrolled in the school's program pass the certification exam?
- What does the U.S. Department of Education's **College Scorecard** tell you about the school?

## ADMISSION PROCESS

- When are applications due?
- What does the application contain? Are essays required?
- Is an interview suggested or required? Is an interview available from staff or alumni?
- When may you visit the college? What is its policy regarding campus visits?
- What are the financial aid deadlines? What financial aid forms are required?

## NOW ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS

- Am I a strong candidate for admission to this college?
- Do I want to visit this college?
- If I am not a strong candidate, what are my chances?
- What additional information do I need?

Source: Susan Stagers, Cary Academy, North Carolina.

# Campus Visit Checklist

Visiting a college campus helps you get a sense of what a college — and life at that college — is like. This can help you decide whether the college is a good fit for you.

## GATHER INFORMATION

Find out what you need to do to apply, and see if the college's class and major offerings are what you want:

- Take part in a group information session at the admission office.
- Interview with an admission officer.
- Pick up financial aid information.
- Sit in on a class that interests you. If classes aren't in session, just see what the classrooms are like.
- Meet a professor who teaches a subject that interests you.
- Talk to students about what they think of their classes and professors.
- Get the names and business cards of the people you meet so you can contact them later if you have questions.

## EXPLORE THE CAMPUS

Get a feel for student life, and see if this college is a place where you will do well:

- Take a campus tour.
- Talk to current students about the college and life on campus.
- Check out the freshman dorms, and stay overnight on campus if possible.
- Visit the dining hall, fitness center, library, career center, bookstore, and other campus facilities.
- Talk to the coaches of sports that you may want to play.
- Walk or drive around the community surrounding the campus.

## CHECK OUT CAMPUS MEDIA

Tune in to learn what's happening on campus and what's on students' minds:

- Listen to the college radio station.
- Read the student newspaper.
- Scan bulletin boards to see what daily student life is like.
- Go to the career center and learn what services it offers.
- Browse the school's website and any campus blogs.
- Read other student publications, such as department newsletters, and literary reviews.

# GET THE MOST OUT OF A CAMPUS VISIT IN 6 STEPS

## 1 DECIDE WHERE AND HOW

See if your school arranges group trips to colleges or if you could get a group of friends together and visit the campus. A family trip is another option and allows you to involve your family in the process.

## 2 PREPARE FOR YOUR VISIT

Before you set out, get a map of the college campus and pick out places of interest. Call the college's admission office to schedule a guided tour of the campus.

## 3 TAKE YOUR OWN TOUR

Just wandering around the campus on your own or with friends can be the best way to get a feel for what a college is like.

## 4 EXPLORE THE FACILITIES

Finding the spots on campus where students gather or asking a student where the best place to eat is can give you a feel for the character of the college. Visit the library and check out the gym or theater. Ask an admission officer if you can tour a dorm and a classroom.

## 5 MAKE CONNECTIONS

Talk to current students. Ask the students at the next table or sitting nearby what they like best about the college.

## 6 TAKE NOTES

During your visit, write down some notes about your experience. What did you see that excited you? Are there aspects of the college that you don't like? If so, what are they?

## Questions to Ask During Your Visit:

### ASK TOUR GUIDES/STUDENTS

- What are the best reasons to go to this college?
- What's it like to go from high school to college?
- What do you do in your free time? On the weekends?
- What do you love about this college?
- What do you wish you could change about this college?
- Why did you choose this college?
- What is it like to live here?
- What does the college do to promote student involvement in campus groups, extracurricular activities, or volunteerism?

### ASK PROFESSORS

- What are the best reasons to go to this college?
- Can a student be mentored by professors, graduate students, or upperclassmen?
- How are professors rated by the college? Does the college think mentoring and meetings for project guidance are important?
- How does the college help students have access to professors outside class? Do professors join students for lunch, help with community service groups, or guide student organizations?
- How many students do research or other kinds of projects for a semester or more?

### ASK FINANCIAL AID OFFICE

- How much has your total college cost for each student risen in the past year?
- How much do your students usually owe in loans when they graduate?
- What is the average income of graduates who had the same major that interests me?
- Will my costs go up when your tuition goes up, or can we use the same tuition rate I started with so I'll know the costs for four years? What should I expect in terms of increases in living expenses?
- How many students usually graduate in the major that interests me? How long do these students usually take to get their degrees? In what ways does the college help students graduate in four years?

# College Exploration Worksheet



**Audience:** Grades 9–11 **Purpose:** To develop college research and assessment skills **Materials:** Computer lab or college information books

**Name of College:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Location of College:**  Small town  Urban/city  
 Suburban  Rural  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Type of College:**  Two-year  Four-year  
 Public  Private

**Type of Classroom:**  Lecture  
 Small seminars  
 Independent study  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructors:**  Full-time faculty  
 Part-time faculty  
 Graduate student teaching assistants

**Financial assistance (type of financial aid, average financial aid package, average student graduation indebtedness):** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Size of the college:** \_\_\_\_\_  
*Total*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
*Undergraduate*      *Graduate*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
*Commuters*      *Residential*

**Benefits of the location (activities, etc.):** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Student body makeup:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Special academic programs:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Residential housing:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Academic support services:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Noteworthy alumni:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Special opportunities (internships, study abroad):** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Why might you recommend this college to a friend?** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Career services:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# College Planning: 11th Grade

Junior year marks a turning point. This is because for most students and families, it's when college planning activities kick into high gear. Here are some things you can do this year to stay on track for college.

## FALL

- Start with you:** Make lists of your abilities, social/cultural preferences, and personal qualities. List things you may want to study and do in college.
- Learn about colleges.** Look at their websites and find colleges at [bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search](http://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search). Talk to friends, family members, teachers, and recent grads of your school now in college. List the college features that interest you.
- Resource check:** Visit the counseling office and meet the counselors there. Is there a college night for students and families? When will college representatives visit your school? (Put the dates in your calendar.) Examine catalogs and guides.
- At school, speak to your counselor about taking the PSAT/NMSQT<sup>®</sup>,** which is given in October. If you plan to ask for testing accommodations (because of a disability), be sure College Board has approved your eligibility.
- Make a file to manage your college search, testing, and application data.** If appropriate (for example, if you're interested in drama, music, art, sports, etc.), start to gather material for a portfolio.
- Estimate your financial aid need.** Financial aid can help you afford college. Use College Board's *Getting Financial Aid* and the financial aid calculator at [bigfuture.org](http://bigfuture.org) to estimate how much aid you might receive.

## WINTER

- Sign up to take the SAT<sup>®</sup> in the spring.** You can register online or through your school. SAT fee waivers are available to eligible students. To prepare for the SAT, you can access free, personalized SAT practice tools at [satpractice.org](http://satpractice.org), including thousands of interactive questions, video lessons, practice tests, and more.
- Explore AP<sup>®</sup>.** Advanced Placement<sup>®</sup> Program helps hundreds of thousands of high school students achieve their college dreams each year. Get the facts at [apstudents.collegeboard.org](http://apstudents.collegeboard.org).
- Begin a search for financial aid sources.** National sources include BigFuture's Scholarship Search and electronic sources. Don't overlook local and state aid sources. (Ask a counselor for help or check your public library.)
- With your family, make an appointment with your counselor** to discuss ways to improve your college-preparation and selection processes.

## SPRING

- Contact your counselor** before leaving school for the summer if you are considering military academies or ROTC scholarships. If you want a four-year ROTC scholarship, you should begin the application process the summer before your senior year.
- Develop a list on BigFuture of 15 or 20 colleges that are of interest to you.** You can find many colleges at which you'll be happy and get a great education. The college search is about exploring who you are and what you want and then finding colleges that will meet your goals.
- Stay open to all the possibilities—don't limit your search.** To find the best college for you, you should apply to colleges of varying selectivity. Selective colleges admit a portion of students who apply. Some colleges are highly selective while others are less selective. Make sure to apply to public, private, in-state, and out-of-state schools so that you have plenty of options from which to choose.
- Take the SAT.** The test is typically offered in March, May, and June. Make sure you start preparing for the test several months in advance using the tools available at [satpractice.org](https://satpractice.org). And remember, if you're not happy with your scores when you get them, you might want to test again in the fall. Many students take the test a second time as seniors, and they usually do better.
- Start to gather documents for financial aid:** Be sure to keep a copy of your tax returns handy. You'll use these to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®), which opens on October 1.

## SUMMER

- Register with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Eligibility Center** if you are an athlete planning to continue playing a sport in college ([eligibilitycenter.org](https://eligibilitycenter.org)).
- Get your FSA ID:** Before you can fill out your FAFSA, you and your guardian need to get a username and password (also known as an FSA ID).
- Find a full-time or part-time job,** or participate in a summer camp or summer college program.
- Visit colleges.** When planning your campus visits, make sure to allow time to explore each college. While you're there, talk to as many people as possible. These can include college admission staff, professors, and students. Take campus tours and, at colleges you're serious about, make appointments to have interviews with admission counselors.
- Create a resume**—a record of your academic accomplishments, extracurricular activities, and work experiences since you started high school.
- Download applications.** Go to the website of each college's admission office and either complete the application online or request a paper application from colleges to which you'll apply. Check application dates—large universities may have early dates or rolling admission.
- Visit some local colleges**—large, small, public, and private. A visit to a college campus can help you decide if that college is good for you. Make a plan ahead of time to get the most from your visit. Attend college fairs and view virtual tours, too.
- Scan local newspapers** to see which civic, cultural, and service organizations in your area award financial aid to graduating seniors. Start a file.

# FAQ: College Entrance Exams

## GENERAL

**What are college entrance exams?** These tests are designed to measure students' skills and help colleges evaluate how ready you are for college-level work. The SAT® and ACT are both accepted by nearly all colleges and universities.

**Do all colleges require a college entrance exam as part of the application process?** Most four-year institutions accept a college entrance exam score. Those that do not require these scores will indicate that in their admission policies. Providing your

score gives you the opportunity to strengthen your application.

**How many times should a college entrance exam be taken?** Most students take a college entrance exam twice—once in the spring of the junior year and once at the beginning of the senior year.

## SCORES

**How do colleges use test scores?** They are used to apply a common standard for all students no matter where they went to high school. Colleges look at your test scores, along with your high school grades and courses, to see how well prepared you are for college-level work. Some colleges use these scores for scholarship eligibility and course placement. Check with your colleges to find out how test scores are used.

**Does a college receive all scores from every college entrance exam you've taken?** Some colleges will allow you to select which scores you would like considered for admission and others might have specific instructions about which scores get reported. This information, along with how they require them to be sent, will be included in their application guidelines.

## PREPARING

**What is the best way to prepare for a college entrance exam?** The best way to prepare is to work hard both inside and outside the classroom. Take challenging courses, study hard, and read and write as much as you can.

**What are other ways to prepare for the tests?**

- Know what to expect. Being familiar with the test's format is the single best way to prepare for that test. Go to the testing organization's website to get familiar with the various test sections and the instructions for each part.

- Take preliminary tests. These tests (such as the PSAT™ 8/9, PSAT™ 10, and PSAT/NMSQT®) have the same format and question types as the admission tests. You can use your score reports to help identify specific areas you need to focus on.
- Practice, practice, practice. Students can use Official SAT Practice to practice for the SAT for free with a world-class platform offering personalized and instructional content. Using free practice tests from the testing organizations' websites, you can discover your strengths and weaknesses and learn how to manage your time wisely during the test.