



Corona del Mar Middle and High School College Planning Guide

2024-25 Version Prepared By:

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Section I: Overview and Timelines



How to use this Guide

The Corona del Mar High School and Middle School College Planning Guide is a comprehensive resource to assist students (and their parents) in:

- Planning their four years of high school to develop and maximize their personal growth and college opportunities.
- Researching and developing an individualized target list of best-fit colleges based on learning style, future goals, and personal preferences.
- Developing timelines for testing and applying to students' target schools.
- Simplifying the college application process to make it an enjoyable journey of self-exploration.

Keep an open mind

There are more than 4,000 2- and 4-year colleges nationwide, and the majority accept most applicants. We recommend students and parents set aside preconceived ideas of the need to attend specific colleges and use this opportunity to explore all options and find the best possible college fit.

Students take the lead

While this is an educational and planning guide for both students and parents, we encourage parents to let their students take the lead in developing their high school career and in researching and applying to colleges. By taking charge of their future, students learn more about themselves and their preferences, take greater responsibility, and ultimately identify the colleges that are right for them.

One step at a time

Don't let the volume of information in this guide overwhelm you. Take a step-by-step approach, focusing on the grade-appropriate timelines to see what you need to accomplish each year. If you want to get a jump-start, you can look ahead and see what is coming.

Guideline, not gospel

This guide represents our best thinking, experience, and research at this time. We encourage you to use the information that works for you and your student and customize it to your needs. We hope it helps you in your journey!

Watch for updates—Information changes frequently!

This planner is written with an eye for usefulness for multiple years. Information is up-to-date at the time of publication, but specifics such as course offerings and standardized testing dates change from year to year. This guide is available online through the link on the [CdM College and Career](#) website. In addition, we encourage you to check specific details on relevant websites.

College Planning Timelines by Grade

The following year-by-year suggestions are intended as guidelines to help keep students on track. Bear in mind, the needs of each student varies.

9th Grade Timeline

9th graders' primary focus should be on exploring and developing high school opportunities. If you are interested in investigating colleges, keep your efforts light and broad.

- Freshmen typically take math, English, a world language, a lab science, an arts course, and physical education or a team sport. The UC "A-G Requirements" are a good course planning guideline that will keep you on track for most colleges.
- Consider taking honors classes if the subject interests you and you can do well in the class. Consider the time commitment and the need to maintain a personal balance.
- If you are considering playing Division I or II college sports, become familiar with the NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse requirements. Plan your courses accordingly.
- Introduce yourself to your CdM College and Career Specialist.
- Strengthen your vocabulary by increasing your reading.
- Explore and engage in extracurricular activities that reflect your authentic interests, *not* solely to "look good" for college. Find out about school clubs and organizations that your school has to offer.
- Keep track of your community service and volunteer opportunities. You will need easy access to this information when you apply to college!
- For summer, consider taking courses where you can explore your interests. Hold a job or volunteer for an organization you care about. Consider incorporating college tours into your vacations.

10th Grade Timeline

10th graders should begin to focus on a few extracurricular activities and look for interesting leadership opportunities. 10th graders' primary focus is still on cultivating a rich high school life. Low key, broad college exploration should begin.

- Most sophomores take math, English, a world language, a lab science, world history, and physical education or a sport.
- Consider taking honors or Advanced Placement (AP/IB) courses if the subject interests you and you can do well in the class.
- Take on greater leadership positions in the extracurricular activities you enjoy most. Focus on increasing the depth of your participation in a few activities rather than participating in many activities on a superficial level.
- Continue to engage in community service, aiming for a total of 20-30 completed hours by year's end. When applying to college, the application will ask you about your community service!
- Start to surf the web and browse college guidebooks to investigate colleges that interest you.
- Take a mock PSAT and PACT to see which test you like better. These practice tests are not used for college admissions but will give you a sense of where your strengths lie and which areas you'll need to practice.
- Consider preparing for the real SAT or ACT over the summer after sophomore year. Investigate prep courses, online programs, and print options.
- Keep track of your grades, transcripts, and updated community service & activities in a convenient place.
- Plan your summer activities: Consider taking summer ROP courses to satisfy a graduation requirement. Alternatively, take a college course. Work on your community service hours. Sign up for athletic summer camps for high school sports you plan to try out for. Investigate and apply for summer jobs. Consider incorporating college tours into your vacations.
- If you are considering playing college sports, begin contacting college coaches.

11th Grade Timeline

11th grade is a demanding year. We encourage students to seek a balance between their academic and extracurricular commitments and their personal lives. Get enough sleep and proper nutrition. Enjoy time with friends. At the same time, ramp up your search for colleges you may want to attend and think about your future.

Summer Before 11th Grade

- Continue prepping for the SAT or ACT.
- Start thinking about what type of college you want to attend: Big vs. small, rural vs. urban, private vs. public, close vs. far, cold vs. warm climate.
- Begin researching colleges. Develop a preliminary list you would like to investigate further. Use your school's college and career online platform or the Internet and guidebooks to begin gathering college-specific information.
- Consider visiting colleges as part of your summer vacation plans. Or start locally to gauge the difference between large schools like UCLA and USC; medium-sized schools like Chapman University; and smaller schools like Pomona College or Occidental College.

In General

- Take college preparatory classes to meet college admission standards. Most juniors take math, English, a world language, a lab science, U.S. History, and a sport or elective.
- Take one or more Honors, AP/IB or IB courses if the subject's interest you and you can do well in the class.
- Junior year grades are extremely important. Study hard and do your best.
- Talk to your parents about financial resources for college. If you will require financial aid, begin researching sources of aid, including grants and loans. Research colleges that meet full need and/or that offer merit scholarships to students with your credentials.
- Visit colleges on weekends, holidays and vacations.

Fall

- Develop a plan for standardized testing. Many juniors will take the ACT or SAT in the fall, but some wait until winter or spring. SAT test dates may be found at collegeboard.org; ACT test dates are at act.org. **Note registration dates and make sure you sign up in advance.**
- If needed, meet with your counselor to review your test plan/calendar.
- Take a mock PSAT or PACT. See the counseling office for dates the tests are being offered.

- Consider taking the PSAT in October. For juniors, the PSAT automatically serves as the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (NMQT). For more information on the National Merit Scholarship Program and how to qualify, visit nationalmerit.org.
- Learn the college and career online platform tools your school uses through your counselor training in class. Familiarize yourself with this website that will significantly help you with your college search and application process.

Spring

- Research and visit colleges.
- Take (or re-take) SAT or ACT tests.
- Take your AP/IB exam(s) in May.
- Learn about how to write a college essay from your English teacher.
- Cultivate relationships with teachers who might write college letters of recommendation on your behalf. Consider asking them to do so before the end of the school year, so they can write them over the summer if they want to. Note specific teacher letter of recommendation timelines and deadlines.
- Develop a list of colleges you are considering applying to.
- Sign up for challenging senior courses that interest you, and in which you will be successful.
- Keep your grades, transcripts, and updated community service and activity records in a convenient location.
- Plan your summer activities. Consider taking a summer school or college course. Volunteer in a meaningful way for community service hours. apply for summer jobs and internships. Continue visiting colleges.

12th Grade Timeline

Fall semester is full and demanding with high school courses, testing, and college applications. Reduce your stress load by getting a jump-start on college applications in the summer.

Summer Before 12th Grade

- Visit colleges. Set up tours and interviews with admissions officers (if offered).
- If you have a special talent, assemble portfolios and audition to AP/IBs.
- If you are an athlete, continue contact with college coaches.
- Review college websites, create online accounts for college applications, and financial aid applications, request catalogs.
- Register online with all colleges you are interested in and/or plan on applying to.
- Check your email regularly. Open all emails from colleges you are considering and click through to relevant information as your clicks are tracked as demonstrated interest.
- Figure out how many teacher recommendations you will need, and which teachers you would like to ask to write your recommendations. Put together teacher recommendation packets.
- Narrow your list to 8-15 colleges, with a balance of reach, target and sure bet colleges.
- Identify which application each college uses: Common Application, Coalition Application, their own application, or other.
- Work on your personal statement and other college essays.
- Set up a file system with a folder for each college, as well as test results, current transcript and financial aid.

Fall

- **Senior Year Courses and Grades Matter!** Take college preparatory classes to meet college admission standards. Most seniors take math, English, a world language or other academic elective, a lab science, government/economics, and a sport or elective.
- Finalize your list of 8-15 target colleges.
- Meet with your counselor to make sure your target list includes colleges that are appropriate to your academic record and personal needs.
- Consider if Early Action or Early Decision is right for you.
- Visit colleges that interest you.

- Develop a personalized application calendar for your schools. Include due dates for:
 - Regular, Early Action, and Early Decision applications.
 - Financial aid applications (FAFSA, CSS Profile, as well as college, national and community scholarships).
 - Recommendations & transcripts.
- Make sure you meet all requirements and deadlines along with completed forms for a counselor letter of recommendation.
- Make sure you meet all requirements and deadlines along with completed forms for teacher letter of recommendations.
- Attend college visits and/or regional meetings by college admissions representatives from colleges on your list.
- Attend college application workshops as provided by your school.
- Complete your essays and applications, prioritizing those that are due first.
- Begin FAFSA online application for federal financial aid and submit after October 1.
- Complete CSS Profile application if required, typically for private colleges and certain scholarships.
- Last chance to take standardized tests – revise your test plan/calendar and register early. Confirm score delivery dates to ensure they will arrive in time for colleges to consider the results.
- Send your test scores to all colleges you are applying to as well as the NCAA Clearinghouse, if applicable. This may be done online at www.collegeboard.com or www.actstudent.org.

Winter

- Complete Regular Decision applications.
- If required, make sure your counselor has all the materials needed to send your mid-year report (1st semester senior grade transcript) to your colleges.
- Check online to see if your colleges have received all of your application materials.
- Look for Early Decision and Early Action application results in December or January.
- Look for scholarship opportunities online, school newsletter, or in the counseling office.
- Mail financial aid forms no later than the first week of February.

Spring

- For those planning on attending one of the community colleges apply early and pay attention to registration deadlines, especially for financial aid.
- Look for scholarship opportunities online and in the counseling office.
- Consider visiting colleges to make a final choice.
- Notify the college you plan to attend by May 1st (National College Decision Day) and send in an enrollment deposit.
- Also, notify all colleges you will NOT be attending by May 1st or earlier. Do not “double deposit,” i.e., deposit to two colleges, even if you are undecided.
- Send in your housing application and deposit. Be aware of deadlines.
- Send additional information to colleges where you are waitlisted or have chosen to AP/IBpeal a denial of admission. Be sure to enroll elsewhere by May 1st while awaiting results!
- Complete your graduation survey.

Summer

- Request your final official transcript be sent to your college.

Section II: Make the Most of High School

II

High School Planning Overview

Admission to college shouldn't be your primary focus during high school. Rather, it should be the natural next step after a full, enriching high school experience. Decisions on courses, extracurricular activities, and summer activities should be based on a student's personal interests and abilities, and not on what will "look good" on a college application. It is nevertheless helpful to backwards plan your four-year course schedule to ensure you will not only meet graduation requirements, but also be well-positioned for admission to college. The information that follows will help you do just that. As a general guideline:

- Strive for the best grades you can. Take courses that challenge and interest you and that you can be successful in.
- If you need academic help, request individual appointment times with teachers to get further advice and assistance.
- Become involved in campus life through clubs, activities, the arts, and sports.
- Select community service activities that provide personal satisfaction and meaning.
- Pursue personal interests outside of school.
- Develop positive relationships with teachers, counselors and advisors.

To plan your schedule:

- Complete a Four-Year Course Plan with your counselor.
- Use the UC and Cal State eligibility requirements on the pages that follow to guide your decisions. If you follow these eligibility requirements, you will meet the requirements for most any four-year college in the United States.

TIP!

Take time to get to know your teachers and counselors. The better you know them, the more capable they will be of guiding you through your high school experience and writing letters of recommendation for you when you apply to college.

SAMPLE of a 4-Year Plan to Fulfill Graduation Requirements & Eligibility for UC/CSU and Other 4-Year Institutions

Comp Lit 1 CP	Comp Lit 2 CP	Comp Lit 3 CP, AP/IB	Comp Lit 4 CP, AP/IB
Math CP, Enhanced	Math CP, Enhanced	Math CP, Enhanced, AP/IB	Math CP, Enhanced, AP/IB
Science Elective: Earth Science , CP or Biology , CP, H	Lab Science Biology , CP, H Chemistry , CP, H Physics , CP	Lab Science Biology , CP, H, AP/IB Chemistry , CP, H, AP/IB Physics , CP, AP/IB Marine Biology , CP Physiology/Anat. , CP Environ. Sci. , AP/IB	Various Lab Science , CP, H, AP/IB or College-Prep Elective
World Language American Sign, CP French, CP Spanish, CP Mandarin Chinese	World Language American Sign, CP French, CP Spanish, CP Mandarin Chinese	World Language CP, AP/IB or College-Prep Elective	World Language CP, AP/IB or College-Prep Elective
Visual/Performing Art or AP/IB Human Geography	World History , CP, AP/IB	US History , CP, AP/IB	Government/Economics CP, AP/IB
PE/Sport or Dance Yoga	PE/Sport or Dance Yoga	Sport, Dance or College-Prep Elective Yoga	Sport, Dance or College-Prep Elective Yoga

CP = College Prep H = Honors AP/IB = Advanced Placement/ International Baccalaureate

CSU-UC Comparison of Minimum Freshman Admission Requirements

		California State University (CSU)	University of California (UC)
HIGH SCHOOL GPA			
	Calculate GPA using only “a-g” Approved courses taken after 9 th grade		
SUBJECT REQUIREMENTS			
For UC: For fall 2022 freshman applicants 11 UC-required College Prep (“a-g”) courses must be completed prior to senior year (including summer courses)..	15 year long college preparatory courses from approved “a-g” list are required:		
“a” History/Social Science	2 years of history/social science, including one year of U.S. history OR one semester of U.S. history and one semester of American government, AND...		
	1 year of history/social science from either the “a” or “g” subject area	1 year of world history, cultures, and geography from the “a” subject area	
“b” English	4 years of English (including no more than one year of ESL/ELD courses)		
“c” Mathematics	3 years of math (Math I, Math II, Math III); 4 years recommended		
“d” Laboratory Science	At least 1 year of physical science and 1 year of biological science, one from the “d” subject area and the other from the “d” or “g” area *	Both courses must be from the “d” subject area: 3 years recommended	
“e” Language Other Than English	2 years of language other than English (must be the same language)		
		3 years recommended	
“f” Visual and Performing Arts	1 yearlong course in visual and performing arts (selected from dance, music, theater/drama, visual arts and digital media arts ROP classes)		
“g” College Preparatory Elective	1 year of an elective chosen from any area on approved “a-g” course list		
		Psychology, Sociology, AP/IB Psychology, Journalism 1, 2, 3 and Earth Science, AP/IB Art History, AP/IB Human Geography	
HONORS POINTS and TESTING			
	Maximum of 8 extra grade points awarded for approved honors, AP/IB, or IB courses and transferable community college courses. No more than two year long courses taken in 10th grade can earn honors points. NOTE: SAT/ACT test scores are no longer accepted for admissions.		

Honors Courses

Honors courses have enriched content and additional workload and require significantly higher performance levels than college preparatory classes in the same subject. All honors courses include a comprehensive final exam. In deciding to take an honors course, students should consider:

- **Workload** – Students should carefully evaluate their ability to meet the extra workload requirements. What other classes are you taking? What other time-consumers do you have in your schedule, such as athletics, clubs, social, outside work?
- **Subject Interest** – Are you innately interested in the subject? You will do better in Honors courses where you have a genuine passion for the subject.

Grade weighting should not be the deciding factor in choosing an honors course. Every college has its own weighting policy for calculating GPAs. Some colleges only consider unweighted GPAs for all courses, including AP/IB and honors. The UC's and CSU's do not weight any honors courses taken freshman year but do weight some 10-12th grade Honors courses. Colleges consider rigor of course load even when GPA is not weighted. Note: UC's do not weight grades of D or F.

Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) Courses

General Description

AP/IB courses are rigorous college-level courses. All AP/IB students take national AP/IB exams in May. Depending on their score and the college they attend, they may receive college credit for their high school AP/IB course.

Things to Consider When Signing Up for an AP/IB Course

AP/IB courses are not necessary for getting into most colleges. AP/IB courses provide extra challenges and can demonstrate motivation and intellectual curiosity in students applying to more selective colleges. Carefully consider the following before you sign up:

1. **Subject Interest** — First and foremost, you should take AP/IB courses in subjects that interest you. You will enjoy the class more and do better when you have a genuine passion for the subject.
2. **Match Number of AP/IB's with College Targets** — The most selective colleges expect students to take advantage of the challenges their high school offers, and that includes AP/IB classes. Many colleges, however, are satisfied with a few or even no AP/IBs.
3. **Ability to Succeed** — Colleges are looking for you to not only embrace the challenge of AP/IB courses, but to do well in them. If you can't get an "A" or a "B" in an AP/IB class, you **may** be better off not taking it. Review the syllabus and class contract, as well as your academic history in the subject to **predict your ability to succeed** in the course. Talk to your teachers and counselors, as well as other students who have previously taken the course, for another perspective.
4. **Workload** — AP/IB courses require significantly more time than college preparatory high school courses. The workload can be daunting, and students should carefully evaluate their ability to meet the extra workload requirements. Ultimately, stacking your schedule with a full load of AP/IB courses will not help you get into college if that load turns out to be too heavy for you

Criteria for Enrollment in an AP/IB Class

- An AP/IB contract must be signed by student, parent and specific teachers.
- Individual classes have unique criteria

TIP!

If you are passionate about enrolling in an honors or AP/IB class but do not meet the criteria, speak with your counselor for details.

Every college has its own weighting policy for calculating AP/IB GPAs. Some colleges utilize a 5-point calculation when calculating GPAs (known as a weighted average). Others use a standard 4-point grading system for both college preparatory and AP/IB courses. Without weighting, there is no bump in GPA, from a college perspective. Colleges do consider rigor of course load even when GPA is not weighted. Note: UC's do not weight D's and F's.

Required AP/IB Exams

All students enrolled in an AP/IB course are encouraged to take the AP/IB exam in May. This is a standardized test that is given to all AP/IB students across the nation on a designated day for each course. Students typically take the exam here on campus. AP exams are graded on a 5-point scale. A grade of 3 or higher is considered passing. IB exams are graded on a 7-point scale. A grade of 4 or higher is considered passing.

AP/IB College Credit

Some colleges, particularly UCs and CSUs, give college credit for AP courses passed with a score of 3, 4 or 5 on the AP exam. For IB exams scores of 5, 6, or 7 are accepted. At some universities, students who have taken a heavy load of AP/IB's may earn up to a full year of college credit, so they enter as sophomores, rather than freshman. **Credit policies and minimum score requirements vary by school and by major. Please check the requirements of your specific college on their website.**

Cost

There is no cost to take an AP/IB course; however, you may be required to purchase your AP/IB books and there is a fee for taking the AP/IB exams. Students with financial needs may qualify for a fee reduction.

Regional Occupational Program (ROP) Courses

What is ROP?

State-funded public education, providing career technical education and guidance to meet identified educational standards and industry needs. www.coastlinerop.net

- Accredited by the **Western Association of Schools and Colleges**.
- Part of the Huntington Beach Union, Irvine, Newport-Mesa, Saddleback Valley, and Tustin Unified School Districts.
- Sequential learning designed to improve academic skills.
- A course of study that combines classroom instruction with hands-on learning.
- Taught by fully credentialed teachers, experienced in their related industries.

Who can take ROP classes?

- ROP classes are available to high school students enrolled in one of our five participating districts. Adults may enroll in fee-based classes.

Why take an ROP class? ROP students can:

- Earn grades and credits toward high school graduation.
- Enroll in classes that satisfy a-g requirement for UC and CSU.
- Gain experience required for immediate employment.
- Participate in courses that offer internships if they are at least 16 years of age.
- Earn certificates of achievement.
- Experience careers that may assist in choosing college majors and enhance college admission applications.
- Upgrade skills, change careers, or prepare for re-entry into the workforce.
- Prepare for post-secondary education.

When and where are classes offered?

- Classes are held in businesses and on high school campuses located within the five participating districts, during and after school, evenings and Saturdays.
- The school year is divided into two 18-week semesters, fall and spring. Classes may be one or two semesters in length. See **[schedule of classes](#)** for start dates.

How can you register for classes?

- High school students register with the ROP **[Career Specialist](#)** and through this link: <https://coastlinerop.coursetorm.com>
- Students attending alternative high school programs may register with the career specialist or at the Coastline ROP office.
- Adults may register in person at the Coastline ROP office.

What is the cost?

- Classes are free to high school students.
- Some courses charge a fee for fabricated or other items that will be taken home. Check the Coastline ROP website the most up to date class schedule for Fall, Spring & Summer.

What about job placement?

- Job seeking assistance is available at [Orange County Workforce Solutions](#).
- High school students can access employment information in their high school career centers.

“I can think of very few experiences that will better round out a college application than an ROP experience. ROP – possibly the most misunderstood and underused college admission advantage.”

— Paul Kanarek, President and Founder of the Princeton Review of Orange County

College Course Options

Another way for motivated students to seek additional challenges and distinguish themselves in their college applications is to take a college course. An added advantage of taking a college course is that admission officers may weight college courses on a 5-point rather than 4-point scale when calculating your GPA. So taking a college course can provide you with a boost in your college-calculated GPA if you do well in the course. Note: taking a college course will not boost your High School-calculated GPA.

Options for taking college courses include dual enrollment community college courses or college courses offered on your high school campus. Check out these local community colleges for details:

Community Colleges in Our Area

- [Orange Coast College](#)
- [Golden West College](#)
- [Coastline Community College](#)
- [Santa Ana Community College](#)
- [Irvine Valley College](#)
- [Saddleback College](#)

Summer Course Work

Students can take summer college courses at local community colleges, CSUs, UCs or private universities. Check college websites for course offerings and registration dates.

Online Courses

Online educational opportunities are constantly expanding. With a little resourcefulness, you can find many options for enriched learning online.

Approval of College Courses for High School Credit

Approval is required if you want to receive high school credit for a college course. Not all college courses can be taken for credit. See the counseling secretary for an approval form and meet with your school counselor. Eligibility for credit must be approved by your counselor first and then by the principal. The form must be delivered to the college prior to registration. Be sure to allow time for processing prior to registration and course start date. This could range from five days up to a couple of weeks.

California Scholarship Federation (CSF)

The California Scholarship Federation (CSF) exists to promote and recognize high standards of scholarship, service and citizenship on the part of students in California schools.

- In order to become a CSF member, you must submit an application each semester you are eligible. Second semester 9th grade is the earliest you can apply. Membership during the 9th grade year is known as “Associate Member,” and those semesters are not counted toward qualifying for Gold Sealbearer Status.
- Applications are available in the counseling office and include the calculation for CSF eligibility and a list of courses approved for CSF.
- Applications are submitted along with an unofficial transcript. Deadlines are printed on the applications and announced frequently, usually three weeks after the start of a new semester.
- Absolutely **NO LATE** applications are accepted. **No exceptions are made.**
- Students who have qualified for CSF for a minimum of four semesters in the last three years of high school (must include one semester in senior year) are eligible to become Lifetime members or Gold Sealbearers.
- Gold Sealbearers receive a gold honor tassel and gold honor cord with CSF medallions to wear at graduation. A gold CSF seal is on their diploma.

Grade/Point Requirements

- A point system specified in the CSF by-laws establishes the membership requirements.
- Membership in CSF is based on semester grades and requirements are explained on the application form. (Examples of applications are on the Coastline ROP website).
- If you have questions, please contact the counseling office or visit <http://csf-cjsf.org>.

TIP!

Make a note to yourself to check on the CSF deadline about three weeks into each new semester. If you miss the deadline, you are out of luck. CSF is a nice way to be recognized for a track record of great grades. It also gives you an award to list on your college applications and resume.

NCAA Information for the College-Bound Athlete

Many outstanding athletes continue to play their sport in college, whether at the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) or club level. Students who would like to play on an NCAA Division I or II athletic team must register and be certified by the NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse.

Eligibility Requirements

Some of the initial-eligibility requirements have changed. Students must earn at least a 2.300 GPA in NCAA core courses to be eligible to compete in Division I athletics during their first year of college. The motto is: “2.3 or take a knee.” For details on eligibility, including a list of the 16 required core courses, visit www.eligibilitycenter.org.

Registration Information

- Students should register with the NCAA Eligibility Center online at www.eligibilitycenter.org by the beginning of their junior year. There is a registration fee.
- Students should keep their PIN in a safe place and remember to identify themselves exactly the same way on all forms (no nicknames.)
- Only courses that appear on your high school’s list of NCAA courses will be used to calculate your GPA for NCAA eligibility purposes.
- Once ten core courses are “locked in” prior to the start of your seventh semester, you can’t take those classes over again to improve your GPA.
- Earn a combined SAT or ACT score that matches your core-course GPA on the sliding scale. Visit the eligibility center online for specific details.
- Student NCAA registration link: [Register for the NCAA](http://fs.ncaa.org/Docs/register_for_ncaa)
- Student registration checklist: http://fs.ncaa.org/Docs/eligibility_center/Student_Resources/Registration_Checklist.pdf

Recruitment Information

The recruitment process and rules vary significantly by sport and by level. Your coach is likely the best resource for learning how to be recruited in your sport of choice. College athletics websites also have information about NCAA rules, recruitment questionnaires, camp opportunities, and other helpful information.

Section III: Standardized Testing

III

Standardized Testing

Most colleges require standardized testing as part of your application. However, most care more about grades—which represent a student’s day-in, day-out effort—than performance on the tests. In addition, a growing number of colleges are becoming test-optional, which means students can decide whether or not to submit standardized test scores. This list is updated regularly at fairtest.org. **NOTE: The University of California and the Cal State System are test-blind, which means they will not consider your test scores even if you submit them.**

When to Test

Timing for standardized testing is a personal decision and varies from student to student. For most college bound students, the testing timeline goes as follows:

9th Grade: PSAT/PACT encouraged to take these tests

10th Grade: PSAT/NMSQT in October; also PACT is encouraged

11th Grade: PSAT/NMSQT in October
SAT or ACT one to three times during the school year

12th Grade: SAT or ACT in the early fall if needed

TIP!

Seniors planning to apply Early Action or Early Decision will need to check individual colleges’ deadlines for receiving scores. Some fall tests may not deliver scores in time to be considered.

Following is an overview of the main standardized college admission tests.

PSAT/NMSQT

The PSAT is administered by the College Board and the National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC). Primarily designed to help students prepare for the SAT, the PSAT also serves as a qualifying test for juniors for National Merit Scholarships. In October, the PSAT test will be offered to any junior who is interested in taking it. The test will be offered on a Saturday morning.

The PSAT is a 2 hour and 45-minute test of reading, writing and math. The highest possible score is 1520. Perhaps the greatest value in the PSAT is helping students identify their strengths and weaknesses so they can better prepare for the SAT or ACT.

National Merit Scholarships

The other great value of the PSAT is the \$180 million in scholarships awarded to students with high scores. Only scores from junior year are considered. To receive the prestigious honor of being a National Merit Semifinalist, a student must score in the top 0.5% of students in his or her state. The actual qualifying score varies year by year. Semifinalists then must apply to become finalists by submitting an essay, recommendations, and other elements of the application. Finalists are eligible to receive scholarships from the NMSC. In addition, many colleges offer scholarships to admitted students who are National Merit Semifinalists or Finalists. For more information, visit nationalmerit.org.

SAT and ACT

The SAT and ACT are two different standardized tests that serve the same purpose. Colleges will accept *either* the SAT or the ACT. Unlike years ago, when many parents applied to college, college admissions offices do not prefer one test over the other. NOTE: Many schools are now test-optional and don't require a test score with your college application.

In March 2016, the College Board, which administers the SAT, modified the content and scoring scale of the exam. According to the College Board, the SAT was redesigned to “focus on the knowledge, skills and understandings that research has identified as most important for college and career readiness and success.” The scoring scale was switched from a maximum of 2400 total from three sections including the essay, to 1600 total from two sections with a separate optional essay score. The SAT also eliminated the penalty for an incorrect answer. In short, the new SAT is much more like the ACT, which has become the more popular college admission exam.

Students will also have the option of online or paper testing on national test days at ACT test centers (selected test centers initially, eventually expanding to all). The test is currently administered only on paper on national test dates.

ACT will report a superscore for students who have taken the ACT test more than once, giving colleges the option to use the student's best scores from all test administrations, rather than scores from just one sitting, in their admission and scholarship decisions. New ACT research suggests that superscoring is actually more predictive of how students will perform in their college courses than other scoring methods. Colleges often already superscore students' ACT results, but this development will make it that much easier for colleges to do so.

The best way to decide which test to take is by taking practice tests to see which yields the best results for you. Practice tests are available in most test-prep books and by searching online. Your high school may offer both practice SAT or ACT during the school year. Check with your counseling office for details. The following comparison chart may further help students decide which test to take.

Comparison Chart

	SAT	ACT
Length:	3 hours, plus 50 minutes for optional essay	3 hours, 35 minutes (with optional essay)
Structure:	Evidence-based Reading and Writing Math with and without calculator Optional Essay	English, Math, Reading, Science, Optional Essay
Wrong Answer Penalty:	None	None
Highest score:	Maximum 1600 total, 800 per section. Optional essay receives a separate score of 2–8.	Maximum 36 composite based on average score for the four test sections. Maximum section score is 36. High score on the essay is 12.
Sending Scores:	You may request the sending of 4 free reports at time of registration or pay \$12 per report later. You decide which scores are sent.	You may request the sending of 4 free reports at time of registration or pay \$13 per report later. You decide which scores are sent.
Where to register:	collegeboard.org	actstudent.org
CEEB Code	see counseling department	see counseling department

Test Preparation

Preparing for your standardized tests will help you achieve your best possible score. There are myriad test-prep booklets available for purchase. Khan Academy (khanacademy.org) has teamed up with the SAT to offer online test prep at no cost. Many other options exist, including online courses, classroom courses, and private and group tutors, all for a fee. Some community colleges offer short-term courses at a relatively low fee. Coastline ROP does not endorse any one method or company. We do, however, recommend that you prepare in the manner that best suits your learning style and budget.

Registering for Tests

Keep a close watch on test registration dates. Many testing sites fill up quickly, if you do not register early, you will pay a late fee past designated deadlines. Check test dates and register online at:

collegeboard.org for the SAT

act.org for the ACT

Should You Take the Essay Test?

Some colleges require or recommend the essay, but for others, it is optional. Some require the SAT essay and not the ACT essay. It is the student's responsibility to check requirements at the colleges to which you plan to apply. Compass Education Group posts an updated list online each year at <http://www.compassprep.com/act-writing-and-sat-essay-requirements>. However, you should always confirm this information with each college's own website.

Sending Scores

It is the student's responsibility to arrange to have scores sent to colleges. The testing agencies will not send scores to colleges automatically. This may be arranged at the time of registration (but before you know your scores) or after testing. **Seniors: Be sure to check whether fall test scores will arrive in time to be considered by admissions.**

Super Scoring

Some colleges allow what is called “super scoring” of standardized test scores. In this practice, the college considers only your best score from each section of a test. For example, let’s say you took the SAT and scored 700 in Evidence-Based Reading and Writing and 600 in Math the first time. The second time, you scored 600 in Evidence-Based Reading and Writing and 700 in Math. Your super score—the highest two combined scores—would be 1400. Some colleges do not superscore, and in fact some request that you send all your scores for consideration.

When to Re-test

Students’ scores often improve when the SAT or ACT is taken more than once. In part, this is because students become more familiar with the tests. They may also have more preparation and practice, and more of the material may have been covered in school (particularly in math). Generally, students are not advised to take the ACT or SAT more than three times. Statistically, students’ scores tend not to improve significantly after the third sitting.

How to Compare ACT and SAT Scores

The Internet is filled with concordance charts to help you compare ACT and SAT scores. These are meant as a guideline and are best used to help students decide which test is better for them.

Section IV: The College Search

IV

The College Search

“College is a match to be made, not a prize to be won.”

Frank Sachs, Past President, National Association of College Admission Counselors

First and foremost, find YOUR best match!

Your college search should be an exciting journey of self-discovery. Think about who you are, what you enjoy and how you will reach your future goals. Seek out a college environment in which you can flourish. There are more than 4,000 colleges and universities in the United States. And you can be happy and successful at many of them! Here are our best tips for making the search enjoyable and effective:

- **Keep an open mind.** Don't restrict yourself to the idea that you must go to a certain college to be successful. Brand names are for jeans, not for finding a personal college match.
- **Don't choose based on rankings.** Focus on what is best for you. Rankings are based on flawed methodologies and subjective assessments. Look for colleges that have the resources and programs interest you, and that fit you personally and socially.
- **If you have no idea what kind of school you want to attend, visit some local colleges.** Compare size, setting, student body, areas of study, extracurricular activities, and anything else that may be important for you.
- **Look for 6-10 schools you would be happy attending.** Two to three should be **likely** schools you are very qualified to attend. Three to seven of your applications should be to **target** schools you are well qualified for, but less sure you will be accepted to. One to three can reach schools you would like to attend, but your admission is not assured, either due to high numbers of qualified applicants and low acceptance rate, or because your qualifications are on the lower end of their standards.
- **Admission at highly competitive schools is very unpredictable.** Be prepared to be turned down by schools you are well qualified for if you are applying to the more competitive schools. Colleges routinely turn down highly qualified students due to the sheer number of applications they receive. The right college is still out there.

Recommended Reading:

Where you go is not who you'll be, by Frank Bruni (Book)

Your annual reminder to Ignore the U.S. News & World Report College Rankings, by John Tierney

<http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2013/09/your-annual-reminder-to-ignore-the-em-us-news-world-report-em-college-rankings/279103/>

Applying Sideways, by Chris Peterson http://mitadmissions.org/blogs/entry/applying_sideways

Choosing the Right College for You

Step 1: Identifying Factors That Are Important to You

This comprehensive list includes many factors to consider in choosing a college. Chances are, you have not thought about most of these factors. Read this list thoroughly, think honestly about your priorities, and write notes to help guide your decision-making process.

Admission Requirements

- What high school courses are required?
- Which entrance tests are required?
- What GPA range do they accept? What did last year's profile look like?
- What test score range do they accept? What did last year's student profile look like?
- Will my activities and school involvement be considered?
- Does the school need my special talent?
- Is there an essay requirement?
- Is there Early Decision, Early Action, or Rolling Admissions?
- Are personal interviews or letters of recommendations accepted or required?
- Do some majors have special requirements?
- What percentage of applicants are accepted? What percentage of acceptances attend?

College Characteristics

- Where is the college located?
- How will you fare in that geographical location?
- Is the college in an urban or rural setting?
- Is the surrounding community desirable?
- Is the college public, private or religion-affiliated?
- What is student body size? Number of undergraduates? Number of graduate students?
- What special or unique programs are offered?
- Does the college have general education or course distribution requirements?
- Does college have well developed career planning and internship programs?
- What types of support services are provided to the students with no additional charge?
- What is the academic calendar?

- What percentage of last year's freshmen returned for their sophomore year?
- What are their 4-year, 5-year and 6-year graduation rates? See www.collegeresults.org to research your specific college. A low graduation rate could be a red flag!

Academics

- What is the average class size? Largest? Smallest?
- What was the average GPA for last year's freshmen class?
- What is the college's procedure for orientation, class placement and scheduling?
- Is there a special freshman orientation program? First-year experiences? Freshman special-interest seminar courses?
- How hard is it for freshmen to get the classes they want?
- How is the faculty assigned to students? Is each student assigned a faculty advisor?
- What services does school offer for students who are undecided in their major?
- What are the most popular majors?
- Are students taught by full-time faculty, graduate students or a combination of both?
- Does the college offer classes and majors that interest you? Check out the course offerings!
- Is there an Honors program? What are the requirements for admission?
- Do they have a well-developed study abroad program? In what cities?
- What are the undergraduate opportunities for research?
- Do undergraduates have an opportunity to write a thesis?

Financial Aid

- What percentage of students receive financial aid based on need?
- What percentage of students receive financial aid based on merit?
- Does the college guarantee to meet full need?
- Is financial need considered in admission decisions?
- What are the financial aid application procedures and deadlines?
- When are financial aid applicants notified of their awards?
- How long do recipients have to respond?
- What kind of work-study or on-campus jobs are available and what are the requirements?

Student Life

- What is the average age of the student body?
- What is the male to female ratio?
- What percentage of students reside on campus?

- Is housing guaranteed for freshmen? For all four years?
- What types of dorms are offered to freshmen? To upperclassmen?
- Are dorms coed or single sex?
- Do most students stay on campus on weekends?
- What are the procedures for securing a roommate?
- What are some of the campus rules and regulations governing campus life?
- What kind of mental health resources are available for students?
- Does the campus offer resources for the LGBTQ community?

Other

- Where do students come from? What is the geographic profile of students?
- Is the school ethnically and socially diverse?
- Do most students commute or live on-campus?
- What types of student activities are provided?
- What are the opportunities for community service?
- Is there a Greek system?
- What athletic programs and facilities are there for non-athletes?

Step 2: Do Your Research

- **Buy a Guidebook.** One of the best ways to research colleges is to use a college guidebook. Use Post-It notes to mark schools you are interested in. Highlight what is interesting to you and write notes in the margin. Refer back to the factors you identified as important and see if the colleges that sound interesting meet your criteria. Here are some recommended guidebooks:
 - **Fiske Guide to Colleges**, by Edward Fiske – Comprehensive guide that includes information from current students about academics, social and quality of college life.
 - **The Best 386 Colleges**, by Princeton Review – Based on surveys of over 100,000 students, this guide ranks schools according to a variety of “bests” including: the best professors, the best dorms, the best food, most politically active, etc.
 - **Colleges that Change Lives**, by Loren Pope – This is a good think-outside-the-box book that identifies top-notch, but often lesser-known, liberal arts colleges.
 - **Creative Colleges: A Guide for Student Actors, Artists, Dancers, Musicians and Writers**, by Elaina Loveland – Identifies more than 125 schools for the artistic student.
 - **Cool Colleges: For the Hyper-Intelligent, Self-Directed, Late-Blooming, and Just Plain Different**, by Donald Asher – Profiles more than 40 innovative and unconventional schools, including schools that do not require SAT scores.

- **Use Naviance, Schoollinks, College Board, Big Future or similar websites.** All of these programs have features that allow you to plug in your GPA, test scores, and personal preferences and receive recommendations for colleges that fit your parameters.
- **Visit the Student College and Career Center** at your school where you can peruse hundreds of college brochures, thumb through guides, and access a multitude of other resources.
- **Attend College Fairs** throughout the school year to learn about developing a personalized college list.
- **Attend college visits in the fall and spring of your freshman through senior year at your school campus.** These visits are an excellent chance to meet individual admission officers in a small group setting, learn more about their colleges, and have your questions answered. The college visit schedule will be posted on your school website.
- **Attend regional college meetings and college fairs.** In addition to college visits, many schools hold regional information meetings with admission officers in OC and LA counties and/or attend local college fairs. To learn about these, check your individual college websites.
- **Investigate colleges online and register online with any schools of interest.** Once you register with a school, they will send you information and contact you when they have any recruiting events in the area.
- **Talk with family, friends, counselors and teachers.** Ask their opinions of what schools they think might be right for you. Remember to ask, **“Why do you think this school would be a good fit for me?”**
- **Narrow down your list of target schools and make plans to visit them, if possible.** Try to visit colleges of interest before you apply. Until you visit you really will not know if a school is right for you. It is also a good way to show admissions that you are genuinely interested. However, if you cannot visit before applying, you can always visit if you are admitted to help you decide.
- **Analyze your target schools using matrix analysis.** Getting all your choices and variables down on one or two sheets will help you compare the pros and cons of each school.

Step 3: Planning College Visits

- Plan in advance. Make reservations (if needed) on college websites for campus tours, information sessions and interviews.
- Visit when school is in session, if possible. (Check the college academic calendar on the college website.) You will not get a good read of the college if all the students are on break.
- Take advantage of overnight programs whenever possible.
- Travel via public transportation so you get the feel of how you will travel as a student. (Many colleges prohibit cars for freshmen; others have inadequate parking to make having a car feasible.)
- Walk the campus. Visit the library, student union, a dorm room, a cafeteria, technology facilities, athletic facilities and any departments of interest.
- Look for posters, flyers and student newspapers to find out what is happening in and around campus.
- Include parents on visits but spend some time alone and/or with enrolled students.
- Sign up for interviews if appropriate.
- Bring your resume and latest transcripts to your interviews.

Step 4: Finalizing Your List

- **It is recommended you apply to between 8 and 15 schools** that you will be happy to attend.
- **Applying to too many colleges can be counterproductive.** Research has shown that the more applications a student completes, the poorer the quality of the applications submitted. Do your research ahead of time, identify 8-15 colleges that really fit your needs and capabilities, and concentrate on doing the best job you can on your applications.
- **Develop a range of target colleges.**
 - 2-3 likely schools where you are a very qualified applicant in terms of their admission standards.
 - 2-7 target schools where you are a strong match, but you are not positive you will be admitted based on admission standards.
 - 1-3 reach schools – where you are not very confident but have a possibility as far as admissions standards.

Overview of California Higher Education Options

The State of California funds three different higher education options: The University of California (UC) system, the California State University (CSU) system, and the Community Colleges. Here is an overview of these three options.

	UC	Cal State	Community Colleges
Number of Campuses	9 for undergraduates	23	113
Curriculum	Generally, more theoretical, prep for graduate school	Generally, more career-oriented	Three tracks: vocational, AA & prep for transfer to 4-year college
Minimum admission criteria	Top 9% of CA. Students or top 9% of graduation class	Eligibility index based on grades and scores	Anyone 18 years or older
Tests Required	No admission tests required	No SAT or ACT for class of 2023.	No admission tests required
Essay	Answer 4 questions from a choice of 8 prompts.	No essay	No essay
Teacher & Counselor Recommendations	None required; UC Berkeley upon request	None required or accepted	None required or accepted
High School Grades Evaluated	10 th and 11 th	10 th and 11 th	Grades not considered.
Applications	1 application for all campuses	1 Application for all campuses	Individual applications for each campus.
Cost to Apply	\$70 per campus	\$55 per campus	No application fee
Annual Cost of Attendance	~\$38,000 – includes living expenses	~\$28,000 – includes living expenses	~\$12,000 - \$19,000 – includes living expenses
Housing	Most freshmen guaranteed	On-campus housing generally not included	Most do not have on-campus housing
Articulation Agreements	Yes	Yes	Yes

Community College Planning

Articulation Agreements for Transfer Students

Articulation agreements are partnerships between community colleges and 4-year colleges that facilitate the transfer from a 2-year college to a 4-year college. There are various types of articulation agreements. Some identify courses that will transfer for full credit from a 2-year school to 4-year colleges. Others give community college students preference over applicants coming from 4-year universities. It is important that you research the specific articulation agreement between your community college and your target school(s).

University of California Articulation Agreements

The UC system welcomes students who perform successfully for two years at the community college level. UC has a variety of agreements with the California community colleges system to assist, facilitate and even guarantee successful transfers.

- **Transfer Course Agreements (TCA)** — Every California community college has an agreement with the University of California (all campuses) called a Transfer Course Agreement that specifies which of its courses receive UC credit.
- **ASSIST** — The ASSIST website (www.assist.org) provides the most accurate and up-to-date information about student transfers from one California public college or university to another.
- **Transfer Centers** — many community colleges have Transfer Centers with advisors who can help you plan your community college courses so you get full credit when you transfer.
- **Priority Consideration** — The University of California gives junior-level California community college students first priority over other transfer applicants, including those from other four-year institutions and UC's own intercampus transfer students.
- **Transfer Admission Programs (TAP)** — The UC campuses offer a variety of transfer admission programs for community college students. These programs vary by campus.
- **Transfer Admissions Guarantee Program (TAG)** — Six UC campuses offer **guaranteed admissions programs** for students who meet their criteria. Students may apply for a TAG at only one UC campus.

For more information go to: www.universityofcalifornia.edu and click on Admissions > Transfer > Transfer Admission Planner.

Private School Articulation Agreements

Private schools, such as USC and many others, also have articulation agreements with community colleges. Contact the individual school you are interested in attending to obtain the precise terms of their articulation agreements.

Benefits of Transferring from Community College

1. **Lower Cost** – By going to community college for two years and transferring to a 4-year school, your total cost of a degree can be reduced nearly by half as community college tuition is nominal, compared to 4-year colleges.
2. **Grade requirements** – Under articulation agreements, community college transfer students generally are more competitive for admission to 4-year colleges than they would have been directly out of high school. In most cases, admission to 4-year colleges and universities will be based on community college program rigor and grades. College grade point averages for transferring students are generally lower than grade point averages required for admittance right out of high school.
3. **No standardized testing** – In most cases, standardized testing is not required for students transferring from community colleges to a 4-year college or university.
4. **Second Chance** – For students whose high school record was less than required to be admitted into the school of their choice, articulation agreements provide a second chance. 4-year schools do not evaluate high school records when evaluating community college students as transfer applicants. They look solely at their community college record. So, students start community college with a clean slate and a fresh start.

Section V: Applying to College



Overview of College Applications

Your college list is complete, and you are ready to apply! Now what? Begin by finding out which application is accepted by each of your colleges and check their requirements and deadlines. Most college applications may be completed entirely online. Some colleges accept only one application, whereas others accept your choice of more than one application. The primary applications that students use are:

The Common Application (commonapp.org)

This online application is accepted by more than 900 member colleges. Students complete the main application and then complete supplemental information for each college to which they plan to apply. The Common Application includes sections for activities, honors, and one main essay, 650 words max, from your choice of five essay prompts. Individual colleges may require additional essays, usually shorter. There is a separate and varying fee per college. The Common Application makes it easy for students to apply to multiple colleges. Students applying to two or more member colleges are strongly recommended to use it.

Important points about the Common Application:

- Application opens August 1
- Each member college sets its own application deadlines
- Each member college has its own decision notification dates
- Each member college has its own section for member questions and supplemental essays (if required)

The University of California Application (admission.universityofcalifornia.edu)

The UC system has one application for all nine campuses. Students simply check the campuses to which they would like their application submitted and pay a fee of \$70 per campus. Effective in 2016, the UC application requires students to choose four of eight questions to answer. These answers, at 350 words max, are in lieu of essays. The UC application also includes sections for activities and honors. Students self-report their grades from 9th through 11th grades, but UC uses only 10th and 11th grades to calculate the GPA. Teacher and counselor recommendations are not accepted except by special request (UC Berkeley only).

The UC application timeline is as follows:

August 1	Application opens for fall admission. Students may work on the application but may not yet submit it.
October 1–30	Filing period for fall admission applications. Final deadline is November 30. Students are advised to submit applications several days in advance in case of server overload!
March	Notification dates vary by campus but are usually mid to late March.

The California State University Application (calstate.edu/apply)

Like the UC Application, the Cal State Application is accepted at all campuses, system wide. This includes Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and Cal Poly Pomona. The fee is \$70 per campus. This very straightforward application does not include essays or have space to list your extracurricular activities. Admission to certain campuses or programs is based solely on an eligibility index, whereas admission to impacted majors or campuses is more competitive. To find out if a program or campus is impacted, visit: calstate.edu/sas/impactioninfo.shtml

The Cal State Application submission period begins October 1. Submission deadlines and notification dates vary widely by campus. It is the student's responsibility to check deadlines for the campuses to which they intend to apply.

The Coalition Application (coalitionforcollegeaccess.org)

Launched in 2016, this application is part of an entire college planning platform developed by the Coalition for Access, Affordability, and Success. As of 2022, the application is accepted by more than 150 U.S. colleges. The Coalition Application includes one required essay from a choice of five prompts. The platform allows students to set up an account as early as freshman year and use an online "locker" to store the documents and tools they will eventually use to apply to college.

Other Applications

The other applications you may be required to submit are primarily school-specific; for example, MIT and Georgetown University each have their own application. If you are applying to multiple colleges in Texas, you might consider completing the apply Texas application at applytexas.org. Applications, and the colleges that accept them, change year to year, so always check each college's website to see what they accept and require.

Getting Organized

At first it may seem like a monumental task to get all the applications, forms, deadline dates, checklists, addresses, envelopes, letters of recommendation packets, etc. together to submit your applications.

Word to the wise: A little bit of organization early on will pay huge dividends and reduce your stress level considerably.

- **Start in the summer before senior year.** Finalize your college list, begin filling in your applications, and start on your essays.
- **Get a portable file box** with hanging folders. Put together a folder for each college to which you are applying. Also make folders for your transcript, test scores, resume, activity records, community service records—anything you may need.
- **Make a master calendar** of all the deadlines for each college. You can do this by creating an online customized calendar with your college's deadlines. Your college and career school platform may also track all your dates and deadlines.
- **Check your email address** to make sure it is appropriate for communicating with colleges. No studmuffin@yahoo.com email addresses please! Along the same vein, check your email regularly! If a college emails you needing information (such as a UC school asking for a recommendation, as referenced in the previous section) you *do not* want to miss that email!
- **Edit your Instagram, Facebook and other social media** to make sure that there is nothing on these sites that you would not want an admissions officer (or future employer) to see. Be sure to check how the public views your account.
- **Remove any spam blockers** from your computer that would prevent a college from communicating with you by email.

When to apply: Early Decision, Early Action, Rolling Decision, Regular Decision... and more!

Many colleges give you a choice of application deadline and timing of admission decision, with a caveat. Some of these options just let you know sooner whether you are admitted or not, whereas others carry an obligation to attend. Here is a summary of the options. Bear in mind that colleges are increasingly modifying these options, so be sure to check each individual college restrictions.

Early Decision

If you have a clear, definite first choice college that you would attend above all other colleges and you are organized and ready to apply, you may want to consider applying Early Decision. You may only apply to **ONE** college Early Decision. Be aware that if you are accepted under Early Decision your acceptance is binding and you must attend. (The exception is if the college's financial aid offer does not make it affordable for your family.) Under most Early Decision plans, you may apply to other colleges using Early Action and Regular applications, but if you are accepted by your Early Decision school, you **must withdraw** your applications to all other schools.

Early Decision deadlines are usually November 1 or 15, with decisions typically delivered around December 15. You may be accepted, denied, or deferred to regular decision.

A growing number of colleges are offering a second round of Early Decision, called ED II. The application deadline for ED II is typically January 1 or 15, with decisions delivered around February 1 or 15.

The greatest advantage to Early Decision is that it enables students to complete the application process sooner. At many schools, Early Decision acceptance rates are higher than overall acceptance rates. Some colleges—most notably, Northwestern, Penn, and Duke—are filling about half of their incoming freshman class with applicants. It is not clear whether this is because applicants have signaled their sincere interest in a college, applicants tend to be stronger than the regular pool of applicants, ED applicants include recruited athletes and legacy applicants who are more likely to be accepted, or some combination of all of the above.

The greatest disadvantages to Early Decision are that you do not have the chance to know all your college options; you cannot compare financial aid packages; and you may change your mind by the time spring rolls around. For these reasons, you should apply ED only with great certainty that you will be happy to attend that college if accepted.

Do not apply Early Decision to a college you have not visited!

Early Action

Early Action is similar in timing to Early Decision, but it is not binding. application deadlines are typically November 1 or 15, decisions are usually delivered by mid-December, and you have until May 1 to decide whether or not to enroll. Most Early Action plans permit you to apply to other colleges at the

same time, whether through Early Action, Regular or Rolling Decision plans. The exceptions are colleges with **Restrictive Early Action** or **Single Choice Early Action**, each of which restricts you from applying early to other private colleges, except in cases where you would otherwise miss a deadline. Check with each individual college regarding their admissions policies and restrictions.

If you are declined by an Early Action school, some colleges may defer your application to the regular application pool where you will have a second chance to be considered. Check each school for their policy. If deferred, send your first semester senior year grades and any new honors, awards or leadership accomplishments that were not in your original application.

If you are admitted by an Early Action college, you can commit as soon as you receive your acceptance, or you can wait to see what other acceptances you will have and compare financial aid packages.

Regular Decision

Regular Decision involves a fixed application deadline—most typically, January 1 or January 15—and notification by April 1. Exceptions include the University of California, which has a November 30 application deadline, and University of Washington, whose deadline is November 15. The Regular Decision deadline is your last chance to apply to a college. Make note of this date for every college on your list. Many colleges with Regular Decision plans also have Early Decision or Early Action plans. Regular Decision is not binding, and you will have the chance to review all your offers before committing to a college.

Rolling Decision

Colleges with Rolling Decision review applications as they are received and send you a decision once your file is complete. Decisions may take a few days or up to 4-6 weeks. Some colleges begin the Rolling Decision process as early as August and continue to accept applications until all spaces are full. It is advantageous to apply to a Rolling Decision college early, while spaces are still plentiful. It can also be reassuring to know during the fall that you have been admitted to at least one college.

TIP!

Apply to at least one Early Action or Rolling Admissions college where you have a high likelihood of acceptance. Early acceptance is a great confidence booster and relieves stress while you continue the application process. It can also help you reduce the number of colleges to which you apply Regular Decision if you know you will be happy to attend the school to which you have already been admitted.

Essays

The college essay gives admissions officers unique insight as to who you are as a person. Most students think the essay is the place to tell about their academic achievements or extracurricular activities. Instead, the essay should be an authentic reflection of your personal qualities and values, illustrated through some of the things you have done. Your essay also provides an opportunity for you to demonstrate writing ability, one of the most important skills in college.

The number of essays you will need to write depends on where you are applying. As of 2016, essay requirements are as follows:

Common Application: Students must write one essay, up to 650 words, in response to a choice of five prompts. This essay goes to all Common application colleges. In addition, many colleges will require one or more **supplemental essays**, typically from 100-500 words. The prompts, specific to each college, may ask why you want to attend their college, why you have chosen your major, or a variety of other topics. These essays are your chance to show your genuine interest in attending a college and how you will contribute to their community.

University of California application: Students are given eight prompts. They must answer their choice of four of them in up to 350 words.

California State University application: No essays required.

Other applications: Many other applications require a “personal statement” or have prompts for which you can carefully modify your Common App or UC essays. It is essential to make sure your essays are specific to each college; don’t write “Go Trojans” in your UCLA essay.

Writing the essay is a time-intensive process best started the summer before senior year.

- Take time to carefully read the prompts and brainstorm ideas.
- Write multiple drafts and get input from one or two (not too many) trusted advisors.
- Carefully check spelling and grammar.
- Most importantly, use your own words. Admissions officers want to hear *your* voice, and they can tell when an essay has been heavily edited by an adult.

TIP!

If someone who doesn’t know you reads your essay; will they have a good picture of who you are?
If someone who knows you well finds your essay on the ground, will they know you wrote it, even if your name isn’t on it?

If you’ve written a good essay, the answer to both questions should be YES!

Completing the Applications

Most college applications are now online and become available for the application season around August 1. Most include space—albeit limited—for you to report on your high school activities, awards, and community service, including hours per week you spent at each activity, for all four years of high school. How can this possibly be done?

Plan Ahead

Keep your forms in the back of this planning guide up-to-date. Remember to record your hours for each activity. Check at the end of each semester to be sure you have included everything you have done. If you do this, you will greatly simplify your application process.

Guesstimate if Necessary

Chances are you won't remember exactly how many hours and how many weeks per year you spent at each activity. And even if you do remember, your hours may have varied significantly from week to week. Give it your best guess. Just be sure that your total number of hours spent on activities outside of school is reasonable.

Keep Your Resume Updated

Update your college resume at the end of each semester, so you don't forget your accomplishments!

Be Brief

You will pack more information in your activity descriptions if you say "Planned blood drive that collected 50 pints from 60 donors" than if you say "I was responsible for planning a blood drive in which we collected 50 pints of blood from 60 people who came to donate."

Save Early and Often

Hit "Save" often if it is an option. Computers can go down and you don't want to have to start your application over again.

Print a Preview

Before electronically submitting an application, be sure to print a copy and review it for errors. It can also be helpful to save the copy as a guideline for completing other applications.

Interviews

Most colleges do not require personal interviews, and many, such as the UC's, don't offer them at all.

A few private colleges still require or strongly advise a personal interview. Research the specific interview requirements of your schools. Call early to arrange for your appointments.

Interviews may be arranged on the college campus. Additionally, many schools provide opportunities to interview with a representative close to your home. Some of these interviews don't have much bearing on the admission process but can be beneficial to you in learning more about a college, especially if you are unable to visit. Some colleges consider the interview a way to demonstrate your genuine interest in their school, which may affect admission decisions. Local interviews are often conducted by alumni, whereas on campus interviews are often admission officers or student volunteers.

Some scholarships will also require personal interviews. When going on an interview:

- Plan in advance. Arrange the interview well ahead of time. Print out good directions to the meeting location.
- Do not go into the interview with your parent.
- Be prepared to talk about:
 - Your scholastic standing
 - Current coursework
 - Extracurricular activities
 - The “personal” you
 - If admitted, what contributions you would make to the school
 - Questions you have about the college that cannot be answered on the school website
 - What excites you about the college you are interviewing with
- Dress appropriately. (Depends on the school, but usually “business casual.”)
- Turn your cell phone off.
- Get the interviewer's name and address and send either a handwritten letter or email follow-up thank you letter within a couple days of the interview.

Meeting with College Admissions Officers

College Visits at Your High School

Every school year, especially in the fall, college admissions officers visit high school campuses. The list varies from year to year. To find out when colleges of interest are coming, check your school's website. These visits give you an opportunity to learn more about the college, to demonstrate your interest in the school, and to get to know the person who may ultimately read your application. Sign in with the college rep.

Regional Meetings

Additionally, many colleges will hold regional information meetings in other locations in Orange County and Los Angeles. Some of these meetings are held by individual colleges, while others include several from different regions but with similar characteristics. Check your college and career center for times and locations. Be sure to sign in.

College Visits

If you are applying to local colleges, it is very important to visit the campus and take a tour. Not everyone can afford to visit out-of-state colleges, but there is no excuse for not visiting local colleges you are applying to. Online virtual tours and chats are also a good way to "visit." If you are unable to visit a college before applying, it's advisable to visit before you enroll.

Register with Admissions Offices

If you are interested in a college, go to their website and fill out their prospective student information form. This will put you on their list to receive information about high school visits, regional meetings, open houses, application, and financial aid. This also shows colleges you are genuinely interested in them.

More about Demonstrated Interest

Many colleges consider evidence of your genuine interest in their admission decisions. They want to accept students whom they believe will enroll. If you have not visited, nor met with an admission officer at school, nor registered for information from the college, you have not demonstrated interest. You are essentially a stranger who seems to have applied on a whim. A good way to demonstrate interest is to register online for an in-person campus tour.

Admission Decisions

May 1 is the National Candidates Reply Date and/or National College Decision Day, the date by which you must notify all colleges that have accepted you of your decision on whether to attend or not. Colleges may not require you to commit prior to May 1. (The exceptions are if you have applied Early Decision or have signed a Letter of Intent with an NCAA athletic team.) By May 1, it is your responsibility to:

- Notify the college you plan to attend, send in your deposit, and complete forms for enrollment.
- Notify all other colleges that have accepted you that you will not be attending. The sooner you notify them, the better, as your decision will likely affect other students on a waitlist.
- Deposit at ONE, and only one, college, even if you are undecided. It is both unethical and illegal to deposit at more than one college, as you are taking a space from another student.
- Apply for housing and complete your housing questionnaire. Do this as soon as possible at colleges that do not guarantee housing. Some colleges will match you with a roommate while others allow you to choose one. Students often use Facebook groups to “meet” other admitted students and find a roommate.
- Register for orientation. Some colleges hold one or more orientation sessions during the summer, while others are just prior to the start of school. Many colleges also offer pre-orientation activities, such as hiking trips, cultural excursions, or community service activities, which give you a chance to meet other students who share your interests. Sign up for these activities as soon as possible in case they fill.
- Register for classes. Sometimes this is done at orientation, and earlier orientation sessions may give you an advantage in enrolling in the classes of your choice.
- Get excited about this new phase of your life!

Waitlists

If you are waitlisted at a college you would like to attend, you must follow these steps:

- Follow instructions to accept a space on the waitlist.
- Send a letter or any additional information if requested and/or allowed. Some colleges will not accept or consider additional information.
- Deposit at one other college by May 1st. Get excited about that college. You cannot count on being accepted off the waitlist, so you must have an alternate option.
- If admitted off the waitlist, notify the other college immediately.
- Keep perspective and know your odds. Some colleges waitlist hundreds or thousands of applicants and accept very few.

Appeals

At times, you may be able to gain admission to a college that did not accept you by appealing the decision. The odds are generally not good. You should appeal only if you have **NEW** information to add to your application that you think makes you a more compelling candidate. Check the college’s policy on appeals and follow the instructions.

Embrace your future

Every year, counselors have students crying in their offices in April, dismayed that they were not accepted to their first-choice college. When most of these students return to visit, they are all smiles and can hardly recall why they were so upset. The truth is students can find academic and personal fulfillment most anywhere. Your admission decisions may feel like the ultimate judgment on your high school accomplishments. In reality, college admission is a flawed and complicated process that has little bearing on your future success. Embrace the exciting future that waits wherever you choose to go!

Section VI: Financial Aid

VI

Financial Aid Planning

Financial assistance for college may come in the form of need-based or merit-based grants, loans, or work-study. Sources of funding include federal and state governments, colleges, and private organizations. For in-depth information on financing your college education, we recommend visiting [bestcolleges.com/financial aid/overview](https://bestcolleges.com/financial-aid/overview) as well as thecollegesolution.com. Schools often offer a “Paying for College” night, typically in September. For the purposes of this guide, here is a brief overview of how to approach college financial aid.

Step 1: Estimate your Student Aid Index-SAI (formerly Expected Family Contribution-EFC)

Every college website is required to have a Net Price Calculator (NPC), which you may use to estimate your Expected Family Contribution (EFC). The NPC is *not* a guarantee of financial aid but can help students and parents determine whether or not a college might be affordable. The EFC is the minimum amount that the family will be expected to pay toward the cost of attendance, which includes tuition, room and board, books and supplies, travel and other expenses. *It is not advisable to apply to a college with an unaffordable EFC.*

Step 2: Estimate your Aid

The cost of attendance minus the EFC is your financial need. How much of that need will a college meet? It depends in part on whether a college **meets full need**. Returning to the NPC can help you determine how much aid you are likely to receive, and whether there is a gap between your aid and your EFC. You might also speak with the financial aid officer at colleges of interest. Bear in mind that financial aid typically is a combination of grants, loans and work study. You will likely need to decide how much you are willing to borrow.

A word about need-blind versus need-aware colleges: Some colleges with limited financial aid funding may weigh your financial need in their admission decisions. Other colleges—typically those with large endowments and a guarantee to meet full need—promise to evaluate candidates without regard to their financial need. It is helpful to know in advance if the colleges you are applying to are need-blind or need-aware.

Step 3: Apply for Aid

FAFSA (fafsa.ed.gov)

To qualify for need-based aid, parents must file the Free application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The FAFSA is used to determine eligibility for Pell Grants, subsidized and unsubsidized loans, and certain state grants. Have your federal tax return handy, because the FAFSA closely mirrors it, making it easy to complete. Soon after submitting your FAFSA, you will receive a Student Aid Report (SAR) with basic information about your eligibility for federal aid, as well as your official Expected Family Contribution. Families can file the FAFSA beginning October 1, using prior-prior year income data (i.e., 2018 data for fall 2020 enrollment.) This enables families to apply, and get an answer, sooner than before. Be cognizant of individual colleges’ deadlines.

CSS Profile (css.collegeboard.org)

Over 200 colleges, most of them private, require students seeking aid to file the CSS/Financial Aid Profile in addition to the FAFSA. Distributed by the College Board, the CSS Profile gives colleges a closer look at family finances. It is typically used to determine student eligibility for a college's own institutional aid. Check with the College Board website for the most updated fee information for submission.

Step 4: Evaluate Financial Aid Offers

Financial aid offers are often delivered days or weeks after offers of admission. You may need to hold off on celebrating until you receive word from the financial aid office. Below is a summary of the types of aid you may receive.

California State Grants, Pell Grants, and other government grants

Cal Grants are need-based awards for California college costs. They do not need to be paid back. To receive an award, students must file a FAFSA (or a California Dream Act application for certain undocumented or non-resident students) and submit a Grade Point Average to the California Student Aid Commission. High schools automatically submit GPAs electronically for all students, unless they opt out.

Pell Grants and **Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants** are federal need-based grants for very low-income students.

Institutional Grants are need-based financial aid given by the colleges themselves.

Merit Scholarships are awarded by colleges directly to students whose grades and/or test scores are in the highest range of the applicant pool as an enticement for these students to attend. Merit scholarships may range from a few thousand dollars to full tuition. For example, an applicant to University of Alabama with a 32 ACT/1420 SAT and 3.5 GPA could receive a full tuition scholarship, regardless of financial need. Families with financial need are well-advised to look for colleges that will award merit aid, as it is often applied in addition to need-based aid. It is also an excellent source of funding for families who won't receive need-based aid but cannot pay the full cost of college. A list of colleges offering merit aid is available at meritaid.com.

Loans

Federal student loan programs include subsidized and unsubsidized direct loans, direct PLUS loans to parents, and Perkins loans for those with exceptional need. For more information on these loans, including the amount you can borrow and current interest rates, go to studentaid.ed.gov. The website also has a repayment estimator so you can explore repayment options and determine if they are affordable.

Alternative student loans are also available through private lenders, such as banks.

Federal Work-Study

Administered by individual colleges, the work-study program provides part-time jobs, typically on campus, for students with financial need.

Additional Funding Sources

Students may apply for a wide range of **Community-Based** and **National** scholarships, in addition to those awarded by individual colleges. It is up to the student to seek out scholarships. The college and career center at your school and the counseling office can also help guide you in your search. Online, the following websites can help:

- Fastweb.com
- Cappex.com
- Myscholly.com (also includes a smartphone application)
- Unigo.com
- Needcollegemoney.org

Students whose PSAT scores qualified them as National Merit Scholars may receive additional funding from colleges to which they are admitted.

Section VII: My Forms

VII

My Four-Year High School Course Plan

Name: _____ Post-Graduation Goal: _____

	1st Semester	2nd Semester

	1st Semester	2nd Semester

	1st Semester	2nd Semester

	1st Semester	2nd Semester

9th Grade Activity Worksheet

	Description	Weeks Involved (include dates)	Hours Per Week
Honors & Awards			
Leadership (include role in organization)			
Community Service			
Sports			
Hobbies/Special Program Participation			
Work Experience (include duties)			
Summer Activities			
Other			
Other			

10th Grade Activity Worksheet

	Description	Weeks Involved (include dates)	Hours Per Week
Honors & Awards			
Leadership (include role in organization)			
Community Service			
Sports			
Hobbies/Special Program Participation			
Work Experience (include duties)			
Summer Activities			
Other			
Other			

11th Grade Activity Worksheet

	Description	Weeks Involved (include dates)	Hours Per Week
Honors & Awards			
Leadership (include role in organization)			
Community Service			
Sports			
Hobbies/Special Program Participation			
Work Experience (include duties)			
Summer Activities			
Other			
Other			

12th Grade Activity Worksheet

	Description	Weeks Involved (include dates)	Hours Per Week
Honors & Awards			
Leadership (include role in organization)			
Community Service			
Sports			
Hobbies/Special Program Participation			
Work Experience (include duties)			
Summer Activities			
Other			
Other			

Service Activities

Hours

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

My Standardized Testing Plan

10 th Grade	Tests	Date	Registration Deadline	Date I Registered

11 th Grade	Tests	Date	Registration Deadline	Date I Registered

12 th Grade	Tests	Date	Registration Deadline	Date I Registered

My Personal College Inventory:

Choosing the Right College for You

Fill this form out to begin your search for a college that is right for you. Use the results of this guide when you search for colleges on Naviance and in college guidebooks.

What are your academic goals?

What are your interests?

Describe your strengths

What are your work habits?

Are you interested in a 2-year or a 4-year college?

What academic level are you qualified for?

General or specialized curriculum?

How much can you afford?

Do you prefer in-state or out-of-state schools?

Large or small campus?

Large or small class size?

Urban or rural location?

Co-ed or separate?

Religious orientation?

-

Greek system?

Is school spirit important to you?

Do you want to continue playing sports? If so, what sports options does school offer? _____

Do you want to study abroad?

Do you want to live on campus? For how long?

Other important factors for you?

My Matrix Application Analysis Form

Once you decide on which colleges you will apply to, fill out this form with all the various application deadlines. Keep a copy here and post one at your desk or family bulletin board. Check it frequently to make sure you do not miss any important deadlines.

College								
Location								
Area								
Size								
SAT's								
SAT Subject								
Avg. GPA								
Housing								
Price								
Grad Rate								
Class Size								
Other								

My College Application Deadline Chart

Once you decide on which colleges you will apply to, fill out this form with all the various application deadlines. Keep a copy here and post one at your desk or family bulletin board. Check it frequently to make sure you do not miss any important deadlines.

Name of College						
Application Process						
EA / ED Deadline						
Deadline for Regular Decision						
Required Testing						
Test Scores Sent (date)						
Recommendation Letters						
Supplement / Optional Material						
Mid-year Transcript						
Interview						
Scholarship						
Financial Aid Form						
Housing Deposit						
Enrollment Deposit						
Tuition & Housing Payment						