

So...You Want to Go to College? A Guide to Starting Your Academic Career

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I. Introduction to the College Application Process

If the thought of applying to college seems like an overwhelming task, then you should take comfort in the fact that you are not alone. Every year, millions of high school juniors and seniors begin to feel the stress of “life after high school.” Although it can be difficult to balance your academic courses, extracurricular activities, jobs, and social lives, the additional stress of applying to colleges can be made manageable by following a timeline, making sure you are well-informed, and understanding what is required of you.

The college application process primarily involves completing written/online applications, writing application essays, submitting recommendations from teachers, employers, mentors etc., and taking college board examinations such as the SAT, SATII, or ACT.

This booklet is designed to give you an idea of how to plan your college application process as well as to inform you about the requirements for applying to college. You will learn about the New SAT and its components, how to prepare for the SAT, and how to register for the test. In addition, you will be exposed to common college application essays and methods for writing such an essay. Lastly, you will be exposed to the various ways to inquire about scholarship opportunities.

I hope that this information makes your college application process as smooth as possible. Just remember, the sooner you begin the easier your life will be! You don't have to wait until you are a junior or senior to begin researching which colleges you may be interested in attending! High school will fly by very quickly and before you know it, it will be time to think about “life after high school.” Best of luck and feel free to contact me with any questions!

Wishing you a Happy College Application Process!

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II. Timeline of Events

The following timeline is a sequence of events that is recommended by the college board (www.collegeboard.com). This timeline has been adapted from the college board website in an effort to expose you to the resources made available to high school students applying to college. This website has excellent (and free) personal application organizers, tips for applications, several college applications online, as well as other important information. Make sure to visit this website and check it regularly!

JUNIOR YEAR:

Fall Semester-

- Begin thinking about and researching colleges that you may be interested in attending. Make sure to choose colleges that have strong programs in the academic areas you are interested in. Other factors for choosing colleges may include: tuition, location, size of the school, sports programs, degrees offered, scholarship availabilities, family preferences etc.
- You should start studying for the SAT now as many students struggle with standardized tests.
- Also, if you have not engaged in many extracurricular activities, jobs, internships, or volunteer opportunities make sure you get on the bandwagon ASAP!

Spring Semester-

- Register to take the SAT for the first time this spring. Think of this SAT as a “trial run” and remember you can take it again if need be!
- You should also set up college visitations for the summer before your senior year to those colleges you are interested in attending.
- Begin thinking about which teachers, employers, mentors etc. you will ask for college recommendations.
- Download the applications offline or request written applications from colleges you will be applying to.
- Set up an organized file for each school complete with their deadlines for application materials!

II. Timeline of Events

SENIOR YEAR:

Summer Before Senior Year-

- Register to take the SAT for the second time the fall of your senior year.
- Visit colleges that you are interested in attending. Make sure you call ahead and find out the schedule for campus tours. Also, try and set up an on-campus interview or meeting with an admissions counselor.
- Finalize your list of colleges. Make sure that your list includes three divisions: “safe” schools which you are almost positive you can gain acceptance to, “realistic” schools which you will most likely be accepted to, and “reach” schools which may be more difficult to get into.
- Keep a college calendar of admission deadlines that includes all of the deadlines for each school you are applying to. You may want to color code the deadlines based on the school the deadline applies to. As each deadline passes, make sure to cross off the tasks you have completed.
- If you plan on competing in Division I or Division II college sports and want to be eligible to be recruited by colleges, you must register with the NCAA Initial Eligibility Clearinghouse.
- If you took AP Exams in May of your Junior year, you will receive your AP Grade Reports in July before your senior year. Make sure these scores are sent to the colleges you are applying to and also check to see if AP credits are accepted for the specific AP subject test you took!

Fall Semester-

- September-
 - Make a meeting with your high school guidance counselor to go over your college application plans and review your transcripts. Make sure to check in with your counselor often in order to ensure that you are both aware of deadlines and requirements and to stay on the same page.
 - Start working on your applications especially if you are applying for Early Decision or Early Action programs as these deadlines are usually in October or November. Begin writing rough drafts of your college essays and ask friends, family, teachers to edit these and make suggestions.



II. Timeline of Events

SENIOR YEAR:

Fall Semester-

- **September-**

- Make sure you have an updated resume that includes a list of your accomplishments, involvements, leadership positions, work experiences, internships etc. that include your senior year activities.

- **October-**

- Now is the time to ask your counselor, teachers, coaches, or employers for letters of recommendation. You should ask both verbally and give them a written request that clearly states the deadline and protocol they should adhere to. Make sure you give them at least one month to complete these recommendations and don't forget to provide them with stamped and addressed envelopes to send to the colleges.

- Take the SAT for the second time. Make sure you request that your scores are sent to each of the colleges you are applying to.

- Make sure that your Early Decision or Early Action program applications are turned in or about to be turned in!

- **November-**

- Submit early decision and early action applications.

- You should start completing your college essays and make sure to proof read each essay several times and have other proof read them as well.

- Contact those persons whom you have not yet received recommendation letters from in order to ensure that they are sent in on time.

- Begin mailing applications to colleges that have "rolling" deadlines where admission decisions are made as applications are received by the school.

- If you plan on taking the SAT for the third time now is a good time to do so! Remember to request that your scores are sent to the schools you are applying to.



II. Timeline of Events

SENIOR YEAR:

Fall Semester-

- **December-**

-Try to complete all of your college applications prior to winter break. Make a photocopy of each application before you send it in so that you have a copy on file in case any problems arise.

-Yet another opportunity to take the SAT again! Don't forget to send your scores to the appropriate schools!

-Early Decision and Early application responses should arrive this month.

Spring Semester-

- **January-**

- Early Decision and Early application responses should continue to roll in.

- If the colleges you are applying to require your grades from the first-semester of your senior year, have your counselor send your grades to these colleges.

- **February-**

- Contact each college that you have applied to in order to confirm that your application is complete and on file.

-Continue to work hard in your classes during this last semester of high school...many college acceptances are contingent upon you receiving a certain GPA requirement during spring semester of senior year!

- **March-**

- Application decisions may begin to arrive. Make sure to check the mail daily!

- **April-**

-Most admissions decisions and financial award letters will arrive during this month. Make sure you read all forms carefully and respond accordingly.

-By May 1, you should make a final decision as to which school you will attend and, if need be, send a check to the school you select by their enrollment deadline.

II. Timeline of Events

SENIOR YEAR:

- **April-**

- Notify the schools that you were accepted to but will not be attending in writing, so that a spot is opened for another potential student.

- If you are on the waiting list, you may want to contact an admissions counselor to update them on your grades and activities for spring semester and let them know if you are still interested in gaining acceptance to that school

- **May-**

- If you are taking AP Exams, make sure your AP scores are sent to the college you will be attending.

- Don't forget to study for your final exams...remember the contingency policy of college admissions!

- Write thank you letters to your high school counselor, those persons who wrote college recommendation letters for you, and any college admissions counselors who met with you.

- **June-**

- Remind your high school counselor to send your final transcript to the college you will be attending.

- If you are going to play a Division I or Division II college sport, make sure your high school counselor also sends your final transcript to the NCAA Initial Eligibility Clearinghouse.

- **Summer-**

- Make sure you have registered for orientation.

- Confirm that your housing and travel plans are complete.

- Shop for items you may need for your dorm room and for classes etc.

- Begin looking at classes you will take during first semester that may lead you toward your major area of interest.

- Enjoy time with your family and friends! You did it and deserve a break!



III. SAT Registration

Registration by Mail

To register by mail, you need a *Registration Bulletin* which is available at your school counselor's office. The Registration Form and return envelope are included in the *Registration Bulletin*.

Your completed registration form must be returned in the envelope provided with proper payment.

The *Registration Bulletin* contains test dates, registration deadlines, fees, instructions, test center codes, and other registration-related information.

Registration Online

You can also register online by creating an account with the college board. Just go to the following link and follow the directions.

<https://ecl.collegeboard.com/account/login>

Standby Registration

If you happen to miss the late registration deadline you can register as a standby test taker. You will be charged an additional \$35 fee and admission to the test center is not guaranteed.

Contact information for the Educational Testing Services (ETS): Customer Service at 1-609-771-7600 (TTY: 1-609-882-4118)



IV. The NEW SAT

The following description of the NEW SAT was adapted from the College Board (www.collegeboard.com).

The SAT Reasoning Test is a measure of the critical thinking skills you'll need for academic success in college. The SAT assesses how well you analyze and solve problems—skills you learned in school that you'll need in college.

Each section of the SAT is scored on a scale of 200-800, and the writing section will contain two subscores. The SAT is typically taken by high school juniors and seniors. It is administered seven times a year in the U.S., Puerto Rico, and U.S. Territories, and six times a year overseas.

SAT Question Types

Each edition of the SAT includes a Critical Reading, Math, and Writing section, with a specific number of questions related to content.

Critical Reading Section:

70 min. (two 25-min. sections and one 20-min. section)	Critical reading and sentence-level reading	Reading comprehension, sentence completions, and paragraph-length critical reading	200-800
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Math:

70 min. (two 25-min. sections and one 20-min. section)	Number and operations; algebra and functions; geometry; statistics, probability, and data analysis	Five-choice multiple-choice questions and student-produced responses	200-800
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Writing:

60 min.	Grammar, usage, and word choice	Multiple choice questions (35 min.) and student-written essay (25 min.)	200-800
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**** A scoring guide and example essay questions and essays may be found at the following link:**

http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/about/sat/essay_scoring.html

The Unscoored Section

In addition, there is one 25-minute unscoored section, known as the variable or equating section. This unscoored section may be either a critical reading, math, or multiple-choice writing section. This unscoored section does not count toward the final score, but is used to try out new questions for future editions of the SAT and to ensure that scores on new editions of the SAT are comparable to scores on earlier editions of the test.

V. The NEW SAT

Test Order

The 25-minute essay will always be the first section of the SAT, and the 10-minute multiple-choice writing section will always be the final section. The remaining six 25-minute sections can appear in any order, as can the two 20-minute sections. Test takers sitting next to each other in the same testing session may have test books with entirely different sections.

SAT Test Dates:

March 12, 2005** New SAT	SAT only	Feb. 7, 2005	Feb. 16, 2005	N/A	N/A
May 7, 2005 New SAT	SAT & Subject Tests	Mar. 25, 2005	Apr. 6, 2005	Mar. 9, 2005	Mar. 25, 2005
June 4, 2005 New SAT	SAT & Subject Tests	Apr. 29, 2005	May 11, 2005	Apr. 6, 2005	Apr. 29, 2005

SAT Test Fees:

	Fee
SAT Reasoning Test	\$41.50
SAT Subject Tests (add the \$17.00 Basic Registration Fee to the total fee for the Subject Tests):	
Language Tests with Listening	\$18.00
All other Subject Tests	\$ 8.00
Services	Fee
Late registration fee	\$20.00
Standby testing fee	\$35.00
Change test, test date, or test center fee	\$19.00
Scores by Web	Free
Scores by Phone	\$10.00
Extra score report to a college or scholarship program (in addition to four score reports included at no charge on the Registration or Correction Form)	

SAT Subject Tests: The schedule for SAT Subject tests and special requirements may be found at the following link:

<http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/calenefees/calensubj.html>

VI. Tips for Writing the Application Essay

The following tips were adapted from:
The Cambridge Essay Service
40 Tierney Street
Cambridge, Mass. 02138

1. YOUR ESSAY IS NOT GRADED BY OLYMPIC JUDGES:

College application essays are not graded like Olympics diving or gymnastics matches where you start with a 10 and lose points for every error.

The essays are not read by tyrants with red pencils, they are read by harassed admissions officers who are looking for an impression. That impression is mostly emotional. The reader of your essay is reaching an emotional conclusion about YOU, not an intellectual conclusion about your topic.

And the very best emotional conclusion that reader can reach is: "I really like this kid."

2. MAKE SURE YOU HAVE ONE GREAT IDEA:

This follows from the first point. The reader of your essay is looking through the writing--and reading very fast by the way--to get to the gist of what you have done with the question. If you have repeated any one of the thousand most frequent ideas [wrestling taught me to concentrate; grandma's death taught me to stop and smell the roses; I like to help others in my community, and thus I help myself], you have not aided your cause on iota, no matter how well written, typed, and proofread your essay is. In fact, adding polish to a routine idea often makes it worse and less personal.

3. YOUR GOOD IDEA SHOULD BE A PERSONAL, SMALL IDEA:

Avoid "BIG TOPICS"-- not only the obvious big topics like peace in the Middle East, ecology, civil rights and general human nature--but also the thousand smaller versions of those BIG IDEAS which slip into an essay as a pasted on "moral". Keep your idea personal, contained and original. If you paste on a "moral"--try to make it unexpected, but somehow "right" for you.

LESS SUCCESSFUL IDEA: I was at camp when Uncle Harry died, and finding out about his life from my parents convinced me what a warm and generous man he was.

BETTER VERSION: The first time I confronted my parents in an adult way was when Uncle Harry died. I was at camp, and they didn't tell me about it for two weeks, thinking I would rather stay at camp than go to his funeral.

COMMENT: The better version is about YOU, not Uncle Harry (who isn't applying for admission) and you now have a concrete, limited, and personal story. In telling that story,

the details can show the committee who you are: mature, aware and eager to grow. The "real" story of the essay is not about death, Uncle Harry, or even you arguing with your parents. It's about your success in growing up.

4. MYTH # 1: JUST RELAX AND BE YOURSELF:

The application people love to tell you this but the truth is that you have about as much chance of relaxing and being yourself while writing a college application essay as any untrained person would painting a mural or acting in a movie. Painting and acting are things that anyone can "sort of" do but which require practice and training to do well. So is writing. You have to earn relaxation. You'll start to relax when you feel secure. That usually means after you have written several drafts, and someone knowledgeable has guided you through them.

5. MYTH #2: JUST RELAX AND BE YOURSELF:

Who is yourself? We all have several selves. One for our family, one for our friends, one for formal occasions, one for when we are alone. The snapshot taken while fooling around in your basement with a Polaroid is you, and so is the picture of you as the best man in your brother's wedding. Which picture does the admissions committee want to see? It depends. You have to make a strategic decision. You should be a considered and well executed version of one of your better selves. Which self? The self which is best able to get the job done--the self which can present you as unique and passionate about something important.

6. LOVE IS NOT ALL YOU NEED BUT IF YOU GOT IT, GO WITH IT:

Any topic can be handled well, but if all things are equal, choose an upbeat topic. Write about a passion, not a doubt. Teen anxiety and cynicism are pretty tiresome to admissions officers. If you love something, and you can convey that love with detail and conviction, do it. If you are fortunate enough to really love someone in your family, and you can capture that feeling with anecdotes, dialogue, facts, images and stories--write it. If you are rare enough to love a younger sister or brother, and you can explain why, using anecdotes, dialogue, facts, images and stories--and in the same essay tell us something important about you--your chances of getting in anywhere just got a big boost.

7. The Two Effective And Simple Rhetorical Devices Least Used By College Entrance Essay Writers:

1. Dialogue:

Weak Version: Mrs. Von Crabbe, my piano teacher, taught me more than just how to play the piano. Her lessons were filled with advice that one could use in life. Even though her English was often just a little off, and her manner seemed odd, she will always be memorable to me.

Better Version: "Alex," Mrs. Von Crabbe would say, "the concert is starting even so before you sit down on the bench." She had told us the first day never to call her Mrs. Von Crabbe Apple "even with my back in the behind." But how could we? We loved and feared her too much.

Comment: Both essays could become weak essays if the only point they made was that Mrs. Von Crabbe was wonderful. The second essay, however, rich in quotation and detailed memory, has the promise of letting the reader "hear" Alex, the writer, and like him. Having the reader like you is probably the best kept secret of college essay writing.

No, you are not expected to be able to write as well as the Better Version, most professors can't do that, but remembering to directly quote the key people in your essay will put you on the right path.

2. Facts

Which one of these sentences is better?

A. I live in a suburb outside a big city where half the property is conservation land, and the other half is large plot houses.

B. I live in Lincoln, Massachusetts, a town 15 miles west of Boston, where half the property is conservation land, and the other half is large plot houses.

Comment: Both sentences are OK, but B is better. Readers are nosy, they want to know the name of the town. Do not say "my father works for a big law firm in a big city" as if you were writing a bad version of the Great American Novel and were fearful that any real details might limit the "timelessness and universality" or your masterpiece. Write: "My father works for Arnold & Porter, a large law firm in Washington, D.C."

Of course, there's always the possibility of too much detail. "Large law firm" in the sentence above could itself be "a 340 member law firm with branches in 12 cities [and you could name the cities]."

There can be too much detail, but *that flaw is extremely rare in high school writing.*

IV. Tips for Requesting College Recommendations

- Don't be shy. Teachers and counselors are usually happy to help you, as long as you respect their time constraints.
- Include addressed and stamped envelopes for each school to which you're applying.
- Provide teachers and counselors with deadlines for each recommendation that you are requesting, especially noting the earliest deadline.
- On the application form, waive your right to view recommendation letters. This gives more credibility to the recommendation in the eyes of the college.
- Typically, you know your teachers well enough to know who can provide a favorable review of your accomplishments. If in doubt, don't hesitate to ask if they feel comfortable writing a recommendation. In some cases, you may have no choice as to who to use, but when you do, make the best choice possible.
- Follow up with your recommendation writers a week or so prior to your first deadline, to ensure recommendations have been mailed or to see if they need additional information from you.
- Once you have decided which college to attend, write thank-you notes to everyone who provided a recommendation and tell them where you've decided to go to college. Be sure to do this before you leave high school.



VII. College Scholarship Opportunities

The following links provide information on searching for scholarships as well as many search engines for scholarships:

- <http://www.findtuition.com>
- <http://fastweb.monster.com/>
- <http://www.scholarships.com/>
- <http://www.college-scholarships.com>
- <http://www.collegeview.com/>
- <http://www.supercollege.com/>
- http://apps.collegeboard.com/cbsearch_ss/welcome.jsp
- <http://www.fastaid.com/>