

**UNLOCKING  
COLLEGE  
ADMISSIONS**





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COLLEGE  
ADMISSIONS**

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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*For more information about Matt and his work, visit [www.unlockingcollegeadmissions.com](http://www.unlockingcollegeadmissions.com) or [www.lifecoachingsd.com](http://www.lifecoachingsd.com).*

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

---

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK.....	1
-------------------------------	---

### **WORKBOOK | 5**

FRESHMAN AND SOPHOMORE YEAR .....	6
-----------------------------------	---

*Thinking About Your High School Resume*

FRESHMAN AND SOPHOMORE YEAR .....	10
-----------------------------------	----

*Thinking About Colleges*

THE SUMMER BEFORE YOUR JUNIOR YEAR .....	14
------------------------------------------	----

JUNIOR YEAR.....	18
------------------	----

*Parts of Your High School Resume*

JUNIOR YEAR.....	25
------------------	----

*Thinking About Colleges*

THE SUMMER BEFORE YOUR SENIOR YEAR .....	36
------------------------------------------	----

*The In-Between Time*

SENIOR YEAR.....	45
------------------	----

*Parts of Your High School Resume*

SENIOR YEAR.....	53
------------------	----

*College Applications*

### **COLLEGE PLANNING CALENDAR | 75**

Freshman & Sophomore Year.....	76
--------------------------------	----

The Summer Before Junior Year .....	78
-------------------------------------	----

Junior Year .....	79
-------------------	----

The Summer Before Senior Year .....	82
-------------------------------------	----

Senior Year .....	84
-------------------	----

College Applications.....	86
---------------------------	----

**RESOURCE PAGES | 89**

RESOURCE PAGE . . . . . 90  
*Types of Colleges*

RESOURCE PAGE . . . . . 92  
*Reach, Target and Safety Schools*

RESOURCE PAGE . . . . . 97  
*The Application*

RESOURCE PAGE . . . . . 102  
*College Costs*

RESOURCE PAGE . . . . . 108  
*College Search Resources*

RESOURCE PAGE . . . . . 110  
*The PSAT, SAT and ACT*

RESOURCE PAGE . . . . . 114  
*College Essays*

RESOURCE PAGE . . . . . 116  
*College Visit Notes*

Additional Notes . . . . . 118

References . . . . . 132

Acknowledgments . . . . . 133





## HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

If you picked up this book, you're probably a high school student, parent, professional or someone looking to help a student through the often challenging and sometimes overwhelming college admissions process. It's a lot! As someone who has been helping students navigate college professionally for many years, I still learn something new almost every day. In many cases, what was true about the college admissions process 10 or even 5 years ago is no longer true today.

This workbook is designed to be an interactive roadmap to help you determine what you, your child, or the student you're working with wants to do after high school and how they will get there. These are rarely easy questions to answer. It's written in a conversational style, as if I or another college consultant was working directly with you. In many ways, this workbook mirrors what college consultants, who are often quite expensive, do for their clients. Thankfully, though, this workbook is much cheaper (though nothing quite substitutes for an experienced college consultant who understands you, your goals, and the options that might work best for you).

So how do you use this workbook? The short answer is however you want! If this workbook helps you at all in your college search and application journey, it has been successful. But if you want to get the most out of it, take it all step-by-step and follow the guidelines below.

### How to Use This Workbook if You're a:

- **Freshman or Sophomore in High School** : If you're picking up this workbook as a Freshman or Sophomore, well done! You're ahead of the game. The first sections of this workbook, titled "Freshman and Sophomore Year: Thinking About Your High School Resume" and "Freshman and Sophomore Year: Thinking About Colleges" are where you should start. They walk you through everything you need as you consider your options after high school and what you can do to get there. When you're a Junior or Senior, you can come back to this workbook and work through those sections.

You'll find a College Planning Calendar on page 75 to help keep you on track as well as lots of Resource Pages at the back of the book describing all the ins and outs of the college search and admissions process, from "Type of Colleges" to "The PSAT, SAT and ACT" to "College Search Resources" and more. There's no need to check them out now, but if you're curious, go ahead! You'll probably learn a lot.

- **Junior in High School:** Welcome to your Junior year! What you do this year will play an important role in the types of colleges you'll eventually apply to and be accepted to. As a Junior, the sections of this workbook titled "The Summer Before Your Junior Year," "Junior Year: Parts of Your High School Resume," and "Junior Year: Thinking About Colleges" are for you. You may find it helpful to look back and work through the Freshman and Sophomore sections, but they're not necessary.

The Junior Year sections walk you through two main things: how to determine the types of colleges or other post-high school programs you might want to apply to and what you need to do as a Junior to have the best possible chance of getting in. Throughout these sections, you'll also see numerous references to the Resource Pages in the back of the book. Make sure you read those as you go along. They give you lots of great details about all sorts of things related to the college search and application process, like "Types of Colleges," "The PSAT, SAT and ACT," "College Essays," "College Search Resources," and much more. There's also a College Planning Calendar on page 75 to help keep you on track.

- **Senior in High School:** If you're picking this book up as a Senior, you're likely about to start or already working on your college applications. That's exciting, congrats! You probably have a lot on your plate. You'll want to start with the section titled "Junior Year: Thinking About Colleges," as it gives lots of helpful information about finding colleges that are a good fit for you. Once you're done with that section, continue on to the Senior Year sections.

If you've already been using this workbook, you'll start by revisiting the section titled "Junior Year: Thinking About Colleges" and then continue to the Senior Year sections, "The Summer Before Your Senior Year (The In-Between Time)," "Senior Year: Parts of Your High School Resume," and "Senior Year: College Applications". These will walk you through everything you need to do as you work on your high school resume and apply to your colleges. It can be a lot, but well done! You got there!

As you work through these sections, you'll also see numerous references to the Resource Pages in the back of the book. Use these not just to educate yourself but also to make sure you understand all the ins and outs of the college search and application process. You'll need to become especially familiar with the section "Reach, Target and Safety Schools." There is also lots of helpful information for working through your application in "The Application" and "College Essays" sections. Additionally, there is a College Planning Calendar to help keep you on track, which can be especially helpful as you're juggling all the different timelines for colleges you're applying to.

- **Parent:** If you're the parent of a high school student, thank you for picking up this book! Applying to colleges can be complex and overwhelming, not just for students but for parents too. This workbook is designed to make that process as simple and

straightforward as possible, and mirrors the type of advice and guidance a college consultant (like me) would be giving their students. This workbook is also much cheaper! And since it's short, to the point, and designed by a former teacher, it's that much more likely your child will actually use it.

You'll notice there are different sections in this workbook, one for Freshmen and Sophomores, one for Juniors, and one for Seniors. Take a look at the descriptions above to see how they might apply to your child. There's also a College Planning Calendar on page 75 to help keep your child (and you) on track. Finally, the back of the book contains important sections called Resource Pages detailing all the ins and outs of the college search and application process. These are meant to be concise but informative primers. They explain everything from what is on the college application to college costs and ways to save money. They also include everything you need to know about the PSAT, SAT, ACT and college essays, as well as what to look for when going on college visits and much more. If you're using this workbook directly with your child, you'll need to become especially familiar with the "Reach, Target and Safety Schools" section, as that's a big part of how this workbook helps students choose which colleges to apply to.

- **Professional:** If you're a professional, like a school counselor, college consultant, independent educational consultant, or anyone who wants to learn more about the college search and application process, thank you for picking up this book. Please use this with your students however you see fit. The workbook is designed to walk students through the college search and application process at each stage in their journey, from their Freshman and Sophomore years all the way through Senior year.

This book contains a College Planning Calendar to help keep you on track, and the back of the book includes a wealth of information in the Resource Pages. These are meant to be concise but informative primers. They explain everything from what is on the college application to college costs and ways to save money. They also include everything you need to know about the PSAT, SAT, ACT and college essays, as well as what to look for when going on college visits and much more. If you're using this workbook directly with a student, you'll need to become especially familiar with the "Reach, Target and Safety Schools" section, as that's a big part of how this workbook helps students choose which colleges to apply to.

*Note:* There are two important terms used frequently throughout this workbook that are necessary to understand to use it effectively: "high school resume" and "college". A student's high school resume includes all of that student's classes, grades, extracurricular activities, etc.—in short, anything from a student's time in high school that might go into their college application. College refers to all institutions of higher learning, even though technically a college is a school that doesn't offer Masters or Ph. D programs, while a university is a school that does.

## UNLOCKING COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

I hope you find this workbook helpful as you navigate the exciting yet often challenging world of college admissions. Use it in the way that works best for you, revisit sections as necessary, and don't hesitate to get help if needed. The college search and application process is about finding the right fit for *you*—academically, socially and personally.

Good luck, and here's to taking the next big step toward your future!

# WORKBOOK

**FRESHMAN AND SOPHOMORE YEAR**

## Thinking About Your High School Resume

If you're picking up this workbook as a Freshman or Sophomore, well done! You're ahead of the game.

As you think about the type of student you are and what that might mean after high school, it's important to consider how the choices you make today can shape the opportunities available to you later. Colleges value not just your grades, but also the level of courses you take and what you do outside the classroom.

Here's what to think about:

### **ACADEMICS**

The most important things colleges look at in an applicant are the grades they get in high school and the types of classes they take (they're especially interested in more difficult classes like Honors, APs, IBs and Dual Enrollment). They want to see you've challenged yourself with the classes you've taken and have gotten the best grades you can.

Which classes have you taken so far? Which are you planning to take in the future? Write them here.

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## GPA

GPA stands for Grade Point Average—your average grade as a student.

Write your GPA below. You can informally calculate this by averaging the grades you've gotten or get an exact number by asking your school counselor.

*For more information about GPA, including a breakdown of “weighted” vs. “unweighted” GPA, see the Resource Page: Reach, Target and Safety Schools on page 92*

GPA: \_\_\_\_\_

Is your GPA where you want it to be? If not, what can you do now and over the next few years to improve it? Think about the classes you might want to take and any additional help you might want to use like tutors, executive functioning coaches, classroom accommodations, etc.

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## Extracurriculars

Colleges want to see a well-rounded applicant. They're interested in much more than just the classes you've taken and your GPA. What kinds of extracurricular activities (clubs, sports, volunteering, jobs, internships, etc.) are you a part of, or do you plan to be? Colleges also love to see students in leadership roles. Have you been in any or do you plan to be?

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## The PSAT, SAT and ACT

For many years, almost all students applying to college were required to take the SAT or ACT. Today, however, this is no longer the case. Many colleges are now called “test optional,” meaning you only need to take the test or send your scores if you want to — and good news! — there’s no penalty for not sending scores.

*For more information about the PSAT, SAT and ACT, see the Resource Page: PSAT, SAT and ACT on page 110*

Have you taken the PSAT? If so, what was your score?

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Do you plan to take the SAT or ACT? If so, what is your ideal score? Do you think you’ll want to do test prep to get ready for it?

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**FRESHMAN AND SOPHOMORE YEAR**

## Thinking About Colleges

Your days of applying to college (or other post-high school options) are still pretty far off, but you may already be thinking about which path is best for you. To read a detailed breakdown of all the different options, refer to the Resource Page: Types of Colleges on page 90. There's probably more than you think!

Here are some things to consider as you begin to think about colleges:

Do you plan to go to college? Start here. Are you sure a standard 4-Year College is the right option for you? Are there other options you'd consider?

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FRESHMAN AND SOPHOMORE YEAR

If college is your plan, have you thought about what you might want to study? What subjects, activities or fields are you most interested in or passionate about? Most Freshmen and Sophomores (and many upperclassmen for that matter!) don't know the answer to this question yet, so don't worry if you're not sure.

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If college is your plan, what aspects of going to college are most important to you?

Is it the academics, the career opportunities, the social life, or is it something else? Below is a list of common factors students think about when deciding which college is right for them. Circle the ones which are most important to you and then write your thoughts about each one below. For a longer list of factors, skip ahead to Senior Year: College Applications on page 53

- Academics
- Majors or Programs Offered
- Career Opportunities
- Social Life
- Sports
- Location
- Weather
- School Size
- Class Size

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FRESHMAN AND SOPHOMORE YEAR

Are there any colleges that you're already interested in? If so, write them here and describe why you're interested in each one.

Horizontal lines for writing

**THE SUMMER BEFORE YOUR JUNIOR YEAR**

Congratulations, you finished your Freshman and Sophomore years of high school and are now a Junior!

As you transition to the last two years of high school, take some time to reflect on your Freshman and Sophomore years. Think about your goals for Junior and Senior year and your potential plans after graduating.

Reflect on your Freshman and Sophomore years. What went well? What could you have done better? Are you where you want to be academically and with the activities you're involved in?

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THE SUMMER BEFORE YOUR JUNIOR YEAR

Which classes will you be taking as a Junior? Make sure the classes you choose match your post-high school goals, both in terms of the difficulty of classes you take and, if applicable, electives your school offers. Challenge yourself but don't overwhelm yourself. Colleges want to see you've received the best grades you could achieve and that you've taken a challenging course load.

**Classes Chosen**

**Grades Expected**


**Extracurriculars**

What extracurricular activities (clubs, sports, volunteering, jobs, internships, etc.) do you plan to participate in your Junior year? Do you have any specific goals for those activities?

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## THE SUMMER BEFORE YOUR JUNIOR YEAR

Is there anything else besides academics and extracurricular activities you want to focus or work on during your Junior year? This can include, but is certainly not limited to, personal goals or projects, SAT/ACT tests, college visits, etc.

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## JUNIOR YEAR

### Parts of Your High School Resume

Welcome to your Junior year!

The decisions you make about what to do this year will play an important role in the types of colleges you'll eventually apply to and be accepted to.

Here are the most important things to consider this year as you work on your high school resume.

#### **Classes**

For colleges, your high school transcript (the classes you take and the grades you get) is almost always the most important part of your high school resume.

Write down the classes you're taking, the grades you want, and at the end of the semester (or year), the grades you received.

JUNIOR YEAR

<b>Class</b>	<b>Grade You Want</b>	<b>Grade You Received</b>
(Ex.) Algebra II	A-	B

**GPA**

Freshman and Sophomore Year GPA \_\_\_\_\_

Junior Year GPA \_\_\_\_\_

Overall GPA \_\_\_\_\_

You can informally calculate your GPA by using a GPA calculator online or get an exact number by asking your school counselor.

*For more information about GPA, including a breakdown of “weighted” vs. “unweighted” GPA, see the Resource Page: Reach, Target and Safety Schools on page 92*

## The PSAT, SAT and ACT

If you decide to take the SAT or ACT, you'll typically first take it during your Junior year. These tests are offered about once a month.

*For more information about the PSAT, SAT and ACT, see the Resource Page: The PSAT, SAT and ACT on page 110*

Did you take the PSAT this year? If so, what was your score?

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What date(s) do you plan to take the SAT/ACT?

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What score do you want?

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What is your study plan?

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## **Academic or Personal Achievements**

Colleges are interested in any academic or other personal achievements you may have earned.

Are there any awards, achievements or honors you've earned or are currently pursuing? Examples include Eagle Scout, awards in sports or clubs, and achievements like starting a business or writing a book. They also include memberships in honor societies such as the National Honor Society, the French National Honor Society, and Quill and Scroll.

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## **Meeting with your School Counselor**

At some point during your Junior year, you'll need to meet with your school counselor so you know your school's role in the college application process.

Each school has slightly different timelines, requirements, and ways they help their students. Have you met with your school counselor about college applications? If so, what did they tell you and what are you required to do?

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## Letters of Recommendation

Most colleges will ask for at least one letter of recommendation. These letters are important because they allow for a trusted individual close to you to vouch for your abilities and character.

There are probably at least a few adults that know you well enough to write a good one. Most colleges want one from a teacher, but also think about school counselors, administrators, coaches, bosses or other adults that can speak highly of you, your talent and character (just no family members).

Write a list of adults who could write your letters of recommendation below. If possible, reach out to them before the end of Junior year to see if they'll write one for you.

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## JUNIOR YEAR

### Thinking About Colleges

**Goal 1: Decide What Is Most Important to You When Considering a College**

**Goal 2: Create a List of Colleges You'd Consider Applying To**

Junior year is the time when most students start seriously considering their post-high school plans. If you're feeling a mix of nervousness and excitement about it, don't worry. That's completely normal! The good news is you have a long time before you need to decide where you want to apply. This can be an exciting but sometimes overwhelming process, so breaking it up into small, manageable steps will help you focus on finding colleges or programs that align best with your goals, values, abilities and interests.

In this section, you'll consider all the different factors that go into choosing what colleges or programs might be a good fit for you, including types of colleges, academics, school size, location and more. Then, based on those factors, you'll actually create a list of colleges you'd consider applying to. You're on your way!

#### Types of Colleges and Post High-School Programs

What types of colleges or post-high school programs are you interested in?

Start by going to the Resource Page: Types of Colleges on page 90 and read through the list of options (there's probably more than you think!). Once you've done that, you may want to do more research on your own. The Resource Page: College Search Resources on page 108 gives you some great resources to look at. When you feel like you have a good understanding of all the different options, come back to this page and circle the ones you're interested in.

Liberal Arts	Community College
Public	Online
Private	Vocational School
Ivy League	Gap Year
Special Interest	



## Academics

What level of academic intensity do you want in a college?

Do you want to go to one of the top colleges in the country, a more standard 4-year college, or something different, such as a community college or trade school? Explain why and write your thoughts below.

*For more information, see the Resource Page: Types of Colleges on page 90*

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## Size

Do you want to go to a small (under 5,000 students), medium (5,000-15,000), or large (15,000+) college? If you're not sure, that's okay! List the pros and cons of each.

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**Location**

Where in the country (or world) do you think you want to go to college?

List all the regions, states, cities, or other locations that you're interested in.

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## UNLOCKING COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

Do you think you want to go to college in a city (urban), close to a city (suburban) or in the country (rural)?

It's likely you'll apply to colleges in two or all three of these locations, so list the pros and cons of each.

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## Other Important Factors

What other aspects of a college are important to you? Think about majors and minors offered, class size, social life, sports, extracurriculars, academic support services, safety, religious affiliation, etc.? (For more factors, skip ahead a few pages to Senior Year: College Applications)

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## Visiting Colleges

Junior year is a great time to start visiting colleges. Visits will help you better understand what you want in a college. Have you visited any colleges so far? What were your impressions of them?

*For more information about college visits, see the Resource Page: College Visit Notes on page 116*

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JUNIOR YEAR

Do you plan to visit any colleges this year? Which ones?

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**Cost**

Now is the time to have a conversation with your parents (or whoever may be helping to fund your college experience) about cost.

How much will you be given for college? How much will you have to pay yourself? These answers may factor heavily into the schools you wish to apply to.

*For more information about the cost of college, see the Resource Page: College Costs on page 102*

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## UNLOCKING COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

Using the information you wrote down on the previous pages, create a list of all the colleges that you might want to apply to.

Write your list, reasons for wanting to apply to each school, and any additional thoughts or questions below. If you need more space, use the additional pages in the back of the book.

*For more information on how to search for colleges that meet your criteria, see the Resource Page: College Search Resources on page 108*

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**THE SUMMER BEFORE YOUR SENIOR YEAR**

## The In-Between Time

Congratulations! You just finished what was probably the hardest year of your high school career, and you're (\*gasp\*) only a few months away from applying to college.

Here's what you should keep in mind.

### **GPA**

Is your GPA where you want it to be? If not, how can you prepare to be more successful for Senior year?

Now is the time to think about ways to improve your grades, like working with tutors or executive functioning coaches, being more organized, changing habits, etc.

Remember, you can informally calculate your GPA by using a GPA calculator online or get an exact number by asking your school counselor.

*For more information about GPA, including a breakdown of “weighted” vs. “unweighted” GPA, see the Resource Page: Reach, Target and Safety Schools on page 92*

GPA \_\_\_\_\_

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THE SUMMER BEFORE YOUR SENIOR YEAR

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**Classes**

Are you taking the level of classes that match the type of college you want to attend?

YES / NO / MAYBE

If you answered no or you're unsure, consider taking more advanced classes or electives that match your goals. Challenge yourself but don't overwhelm yourself. Colleges want to see you've received the best grades you could achieve and that you've taken a challenging course load. Write the classes you plan to take your Senior year and any other thoughts below:

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## The SAT and ACT

Have you taken the SAT/ACT?

YES / NO.

Is your score where you want it to be?

YES / NO.

Do you plan on taking the SAT/ACT again (or for the first time)?

YES / NO / MAYBE.

*For more information about SAT/ACT, see the Resource Page: The PSAT, SAT and ACT on page 110*

Write any additional thoughts below. If you plan to take the SAT/ACT, when will you be taking the test and how will you prepare?

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## Extracurriculars

What kinds of extracurricular activities (clubs, sports, volunteering, jobs, internships, etc.) do you plan to participate in as a Senior? How involved will you be? Will you take on any leadership roles?

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## College Essays

Now is the best time to get started on your college essays. You should have some free time this summer, and if you can start or finish your essays before school starts it will help you immensely.

*For more information about college essays, see the Resource Page: College Essays on page 114*

Do you plan to get a head start on your college essays over the summer?

YES / NO / MAYBE.

Write down some ideas for topics you could write about below.

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## College Visits

Although there won't be many students on campus, summer is a great time to travel and visit some of the colleges on your list. Are there any colleges you plan to visit this summer?

*For more information about college visits, see the Resource Page: College Visit Notes on page 116*

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## SENIOR YEAR

### Parts of Your High School Resume

Welcome to your Senior year. You're in the home stretch! This is your final opportunity to build your high school resume.

Most college applications are due between November and February, so colleges will still see what you've accomplished for the first half of the year.

#### Classes

For colleges, your high school transcript (the classes you take and the grades you get) is almost always the most important part of your high school resume.

Below, write down the classes you're taking, the grades you want, and at the end of the semester (or year), the grades you received.

UNLOCKING COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

Class	Grade You Want	Grade You Received
(Ex.) Algebra II	A-	B

**GPA**

Freshman to Junior Year GPA \_\_\_\_\_

1<sup>st</sup> Half of Senior Year GPA \_\_\_\_\_

Overall GPA \_\_\_\_\_

Remember, you can informally calculate your GPA by using a GPA calculator online or get an exact number by asking your school counselor.

*For more information about GPA, including a breakdown of “weighted” vs. “unweighted” GPA, see the Resource Page: Reach, Target and Safety Schools on page 92*

## The SAT and ACT

Are you planning to take the SAT or ACT again (or for the first time)? If so, try to take it as soon as you can. Some colleges will not allow you to submit SAT/ACT scores after their application deadline has passed, and your results may not be ready to send for a few weeks (or longer) after taking the test.

*For more information about SAT/ACT, see the Resource Page: The PSAT, SAT and ACT on page 110*

What date(s) do you plan to take your test(s)?

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If you've taken the test(s) before, what scores have you gotten?

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What score do you want?

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What is your study plan?

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## Extracurriculars

Colleges want to see what your interests, passions and responsibilities are outside the classroom (and are especially interested in leadership roles).

Which clubs, sports, volunteering, jobs, internships or other extracurricular activities will you be participating in? How involved will you be?

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## Meeting With Your School Counselor

You will probably need to meet with your school counselor during the beginning of Senior year so you know your school's role in the college application process. Each school has slightly different timelines, requirements, and ways they help their students.

Have you met with your school counselor about college applications? If so, what did they tell you and what are you required to do? Important things school counselors usually help with include sending transcripts to colleges, helping with letters of recommendation, and general advising about post-high school options.

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### **Academic or Personal Achievements**

Are there any awards, achievements, or honors you've earned or can pursue? These can be excellent additions to your high school resume and look great on a college application. Examples include Eagle Scout, awards in sports or clubs, and achievements like starting a business or writing a book. They also include memberships in honor societies such as the National Honor Society, the French National Honor Society, and Quill and Scroll.

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## Scholarships

If you're interested in pursuing scholarships, now's the time to start.

Scholarships can sometimes be found through your school or the activities you participate in and are available through all kinds of local, national, and international organizations.

Do you plan to apply for scholarships? Where will you look?

*For more information on finding and applying to scholarships, see the Resource Page: College Costs on page 102*

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**SENIOR YEAR**

## College Applications

### **Goal 1: Narrow Down Your List of Colleges**

### **Goal 2: Apply to Colleges!**

Your Senior year marks the culmination of all the hard work and preparation you've put into your high school career. Soon, you'll not only be deciding on which colleges you want to apply to, but working on and submitting your applications!

It's no secret that this can be a stressful and time consuming process, but if done right, it's manageable and you'll be able to submit strong applications to all the colleges you're interested in. Most college applications are due between November and February of your Senior year, so be aware of how much time you have to work on them. Follow the step-by-step instructions in this section, use the College Planning Calendar as an additional resource to help keep you on track, and you'll be well on your way.

Before working on this section, go back to the previous section Junior Year: Thinking About Colleges (if you're just picking up this workbook now as a Senior, do that section first). Take a look at everything you wrote down, the types of colleges you were interested in, the different factors and preferences you wanted in a college, and finally the list of colleges you wrote down that you might want to apply to. Check to see that everything you wrote down is still accurate. If anything has changed, you can go back and edit that section or write your thoughts below:

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## Step 1: Consider Which Factors Are Most Important To You

You've already been thinking about this, but now is the time to more deeply consider the factors that are most important to you for college. Everyone has different preferences and needs, and it's okay if you're still not sure about them all.

Below are some of the most common factors students consider when thinking about the college they might want to attend. Circle the ones that you think are relevant or important to you. If you're unsure about what any of these factors mean, the Resource Pages: College Search Resources, Types of Colleges and College Costs give some great information and resources to learn more.

### Academic Experience

College Type (See Resource Page: Types of Colleges)

School Size

Class Size

Academic Rigor

Majors and Minors Offered

Internship, Volunteer, and Employment Opportunities

Study Abroad

### Location

Urban, Suburban, Rural

Weather

Region or State

Distance from Home

### Campus Life

Sports

Extracurriculars

Social Experience

Fraternities/Sororities

Housing Options

Dining Options

### Other

Cost

Religious Affiliation

Academic Support Services

Disability Support Services

Mental Health Services

Safety

Reputation





## Step 2: Research Each College on Your List

Now that you know your priorities, research each college on your list from Junior Year: Thinking About Colleges on page 25, keeping in mind the factors you circled and wrote about above. To find a comprehensive list of ways to research and find out more about the colleges on your list, see the Resource Page: College Search Resources on page 108 (there's much more than just a college's website!)

Below, write down each college on your list and make note of:

- The ways in which the school meets your preferences and needs.
- The ways in which the school might not meet your preferences and needs.
- Any questions or concerns you'd like to address before making a final decision.

If you need more space, use the additional pages in the back of the book.

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UNLOCKING COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

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Which colleges are you planning to visit? When will you visit them?

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**Step 5: Label Each School**

Using the Resource Page: Reach, Target and Safety Schools, research each college on your list and decide if each is a Reach, Target or Safety School. When in doubt, be conservative and assume it will be harder to get into a college than you think. It's better to underestimate your ability to get into a college and end up with lots of acceptances than overestimate and get into fewer.

For each school on your list, rank them as *Very Interested*, *Somewhat Interested*, or *Not Very Interested*, and label each as a *Reach*, *Target*, or *Safety* School.

<b>Ex. College:</b> <i>University of Maryland</i>	<b>Rank:</b> <i>Very Interested</i>	<b>Reach/Target/Safety:</b> <i>Target</i>
College:	Rank:	Reach/Target/Safety:
College:	Rank:	Reach/Target/Safety:
College:	Rank:	Reach/Target/Safety:
College:	Rank:	Reach/Target/Safety:
College:	Rank:	Reach/Target/Safety:
College:	Rank:	Reach/Target/Safety:
College:	Rank:	Reach/Target/Safety:
College:	Rank:	Reach/Target/Safety:
College:	Rank:	Reach/Target/Safety:

UNLOCKING COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

<b>Ex. College:</b> <i>University of Maryland</i>	<b>Rank:</b> <i>Very Interested</i>	<b>Reach/Target/Safety:</b> <i>Target</i>
College:	Rank:	Reach/Target/Safety:
College:	Rank:	Reach/Target/Safety:
College:	Rank:	Reach/Target/Safety:
College:	Rank:	Reach/Target/Safety:
College:	Rank:	Reach/Target/Safety:
College:	Rank:	Reach/Target/Safety:
College:	Rank:	Reach/Target/Safety:
College:	Rank:	Reach/Target/Safety:
College:	Rank:	Reach/Target/Safety:
College:	Rank:	Reach/Target/Safety:
College:	Rank:	Reach/Target/Safety:
College:	Rank:	Reach/Target/Safety:
College:	Rank:	Reach/Target/Safety:



### Step 6: Create A Master List Of Colleges To Apply To

Create the Master List of colleges you want to apply to. Your list should include a mix of Reach, Target, and Safety schools. Your decisions will be unique and your own, but most people apply to between 5-15 schools. Remember to *always* apply to at least one or two Safety Schools. This gives you as close to a guarantee as possible that you'll be accepted to college somewhere.

Master List of Colleges to Apply to

Reach	Target	Safety

## Step 7: College Applications Checklist

Once you've decided on the colleges you want to apply to, begin filling out the College Applications Checklist for each below. Be sure to research and write in the application deadlines as soon as possible so you give yourself enough time to complete each application to the best of your ability.

<b>College:</b>	
<b>Application Deadline:</b>	
<b>Reach, Target, or Safety:</b>	
<b>Essay(s) Completed:</b>	
<b>Letters of Rec. Completed:</b>	
<b>Other:</b>	
<b>Application Submitted:</b>	

SENIOR YEAR

<b>College:</b>	
<b>Application Deadline:</b>	
<b>Reach, Target, or Safety:</b>	
<b>Essay(s) Completed:</b>	
<b>Letters of Rec. Completed:</b>	
<b>Other:</b>	
<b>Application Submitted:</b>	

<b>College:</b>	
<b>Application Deadline:</b>	
<b>Reach, Target, or Safety:</b>	
<b>Essay(s) Completed:</b>	
<b>Letters of Rec. Completed:</b>	
<b>Other:</b>	
<b>Application Submitted:</b>	

UNLOCKING COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

<b>College:</b>	
<b>Application Deadline:</b>	
<b>Reach, Target, or Safety:</b>	
<b>Essay(s) Completed:</b>	
<b>Letters of Rec. Completed:</b>	
<b>Other:</b>	
<b>Application Submitted:</b>	

<b>College:</b>	
<b>Application Deadline:</b>	
<b>Reach, Target, or Safety:</b>	
<b>Essay(s) Completed:</b>	
<b>Letters of Rec. Completed:</b>	
<b>Other:</b>	
<b>Application Submitted:</b>	

SENIOR YEAR

<b>College:</b>	
<b>Application Deadline:</b>	
<b>Reach, Target, or Safety:</b>	
<b>Essay(s) Completed:</b>	
<b>Letters of Rec. Completed:</b>	
<b>Other:</b>	
<b>Application Submitted:</b>	

<b>College:</b>	
<b>Application Deadline:</b>	
<b>Reach, Target, or Safety:</b>	
<b>Essay(s) Completed:</b>	
<b>Letters of Rec. Completed:</b>	
<b>Other:</b>	
<b>Application Submitted:</b>	

UNLOCKING COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

<b>College:</b>	
<b>Application Deadline:</b>	
<b>Reach, Target, or Safety:</b>	
<b>Essay(s) Completed:</b>	
<b>Letters of Rec. Completed:</b>	
<b>Other:</b>	
<b>Application Submitted:</b>	

<b>College:</b>	
<b>Application Deadline:</b>	
<b>Reach, Target, or Safety:</b>	
<b>Essay(s) Completed:</b>	
<b>Letters of Rec. Completed:</b>	
<b>Other:</b>	
<b>Application Submitted:</b>	

SENIOR YEAR

<b>College:</b>	
<b>Application Deadline:</b>	
<b>Reach, Target, or Safety:</b>	
<b>Essay(s) Completed:</b>	
<b>Letters of Rec. Completed:</b>	
<b>Other:</b>	
<b>Application Submitted:</b>	

<b>College:</b>	
<b>Application Deadline:</b>	
<b>Reach, Target, or Safety:</b>	
<b>Essay(s) Completed:</b>	
<b>Letters of Rec. Completed:</b>	
<b>Other:</b>	
<b>Application Submitted:</b>	

UNLOCKING COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

<b>College:</b>	
<b>Application Deadline:</b>	
<b>Reach, Target, or Safety:</b>	
<b>Essay(s) Completed:</b>	
<b>Letters of Rec. Completed:</b>	
<b>Other:</b>	
<b>Application Submitted:</b>	

<b>College:</b>	
<b>Application Deadline:</b>	
<b>Reach, Target, or Safety:</b>	
<b>Essay(s) Completed:</b>	
<b>Letters of Rec. Completed:</b>	
<b>Other:</b>	
<b>Application Submitted:</b>	



SENIOR YEAR

<b>College:</b>	
<b>Application Deadline:</b>	
<b>Reach, Target, or Safety:</b>	
<b>Essay(s) Completed:</b>	
<b>Letters of Rec. Completed:</b>	
<b>Other:</b>	
<b>Application Submitted:</b>	

<b>College:</b>	
<b>Application Deadline:</b>	
<b>Reach, Target, or Safety:</b>	
<b>Essay(s) Completed:</b>	
<b>Letters of Rec. Completed:</b>	
<b>Other:</b>	
<b>Application Submitted:</b>	

UNLOCKING COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

<b>College:</b>	
<b>Application Deadline:</b>	
<b>Reach, Target, or Safety:</b>	
<b>Essay(s) Completed:</b>	
<b>Letters of Rec. Completed:</b>	
<b>Other:</b>	
<b>Application Submitted:</b>	

<b>College:</b>	
<b>Application Deadline:</b>	
<b>Reach, Target, or Safety:</b>	
<b>Essay(s) Completed:</b>	
<b>Letters of Rec. Completed:</b>	
<b>Other:</b>	
<b>Application Submitted:</b>	

# COLLEGE PLANNING CALENDAR

# FRESHMAN & SOPHOMORE YEAR

## High School Resume

What classes did you take Freshman Year? What grades did you receive?

**CLASS**

**GRADES**

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

What classes did you take Sophomore Year? What grades did you receive?

**CLASS**

**GRADES**

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

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Overall GPA \_\_\_\_\_

Extracurricular Activities & Leadership Positions

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PSAT Score (if taken) \_\_\_\_\_

Are you doing anything else to help with your high school resume?

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### **Thinking About Colleges**

What are your goals for after high school?

If your goal is a 4-Year College, what kind of college are you interested in?

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## THE SUMMER BEFORE JUNIOR YEAR

Which classes will you take Junior year? What grades do you hope to receive?

**CLASS**

**GRADES**

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Which extracurricular activities do you plan to participate in? Will you be in any leadership positions?

_____
_____
_____
_____

# JUNIOR YEAR

## High School Resume

Which classes did you take Junior year? What grades did you receive?

**CLASS**

**GRADES**

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Overall GPA \_\_\_\_\_

Extracurricular Activities & Leadership Positions

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

PSAT Score (if taken this year)

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SAT/ACT Score(s) (if taken) \_\_\_\_\_

Have you met with your school counselor? What did they tell you about their role and/or your school's role in the college application process?

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Are you doing anything else to help with your high school resume?

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### **Thinking About Colleges**

Have you decided what the most important factors are in the colleges you want to apply to? What are they?

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Have you created a list of the colleges you're considering applying to? What are they?

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Have you visited any of the colleges you're considering applying to? If so, which ones?

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Do you have a list of adults you can ask for letters of recommendation? Have you asked them already?

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# THE SUMMER BEFORE SENIOR YEAR

## High School Resume

Which classes will you take Senior year? What grades do you hope to receive?

**CLASS**

**GRADES**

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Which extracurricular activities do you plan to participate in? Will you be in any leadership positions?

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## College Applications

Have you started narrowing down your list of colleges to the ones you plan to apply to? If so, which ones are they?

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Have you started any of your applications, especially the essays?

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Have you visited any of the colleges you plan to apply to? If so, which ones?

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Have you asked the adults you want to write your letters of recommendation yet?

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# SENIOR YEAR

## High School Resume

Which classes did you take Senior year? What grades did you receive?

**CLASS**

**GRADES**

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Overall GPA \_\_\_\_\_

Extracurricular Activities & Leadership Positions

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

SAT/ACT Score(s) (if taken)

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Are you doing anything else to help with your high school resume?

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## COLLEGE APPLICATIONS

### August – October

Have you finalized the list of colleges you will apply to? If so, which ones are they?

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Have you met with your school counselor? Do you know what role they play in the college admissions process (sending transcripts, letters of recommendation, etc.)?

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Have all the adults you asked written your letters of recommendation? If not, have you followed up with them?

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Have you started your college applications, especially the essays? If so, what have you worked on?

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### November – February

Have you submitted all your college applications? If so, where have you applied? If not, where do you still need to apply?

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Is there anything else that still needs to be done (college visits, interviews, etc.)?

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### **March – May**

Are you making sure your grades still match the expectations of the colleges you applied to?

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Have you visited all the colleges you've been accepted to? Are you planning to go to any of your colleges' accepted students days?

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Have you followed up with colleges where you were waitlisted or deferred (if applicable)?

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Have you applied to all the scholarships you want?

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Have you chosen the college you wish to attend (Congratulations!)?

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# RESOURCE PAGES

## RESOURCE PAGE

### Types of Colleges

Note: The words “college” and “university” are usually used interchangeably, but technically a college is a school that doesn’t offer Masters or Ph.D. programs, while a university does. For simplicity’s sake, we’ll just be referring to them all as colleges.

#### 4-Year College

This is what most people think of when they hear the word college. They come in many types and levels of academic rigor. Types of 4-Year Colleges include:

- **Liberal Arts College:** A college that focuses on giving its students a broad-based education in the humanities (like English and history), sciences (like physics and biology), and social sciences (like psychology and economics). Liberal Arts Colleges tend to have smaller class sizes and a smaller student population.
- **Public College:** A college that receives a significant amount of public funding. Public Colleges are typically less expensive than Private Colleges, especially if you live in-state. They are large, often over 25,000 students, and offer almost every major and course of study one could ask for. They typically have fairly large class sizes, especially for undergrads. Most Public Colleges have multiple campuses throughout the state, often with their own specialties and separate applications.
- **Private College:** A college that receives no public funding. Private Colleges are typically more expensive than Public Colleges, but they come in all different sizes, specialties and levels of academic rigor. They often, but not always, have smaller class sizes and a smaller student population.
- **Ivy League College:** The Ivy League Colleges are a group of 8 colleges founded over 150 years ago that represent some of the most prestigious and academically rigorous educational institutions in the world. Today, the term is often loosely applied to any of the best 15 or so colleges in the country. They are all internationally renowned and extremely difficult to get into.
- **Special Interest College:** A catchall term that describes a college with a unique focus or characteristic. Special Interest Colleges can include art colleges, religious colleges,

single-sex colleges, colleges that focus on students with learning differences or physical disabilities, and others.

- **Community College:** Sometimes called a Junior College, a Community College offers Associate's Degrees and/or certificate programs, as opposed to the more comprehensive degrees a 4-Year College offers. Most programs at a Community College can be completed within 2 years if a student attends full-time. Community Colleges usually accept any student with a high school diploma. They serve the local community, and there are often dozens of them in a given state. They rarely have on-campus housing, usually offer flexible class schedules and hours, and many students attend part-time. Many students choose to take classes at a Community College until they're able to transfer to a 4-Year College.
- **Online College:** Online Colleges have become more and more popular. Enrollment is often open to any student with a high school diploma, and classes can usually be taken full or part-time on a schedule that works for the student. A word of caution: some Online Colleges are not as regulated as typical in-person colleges, so if you choose to apply be sure to check the school's reputation and ensure their credits will transfer to a typical 4-Year College. If you're getting some kind of certification, make sure it will actually make you employable within that field.
- **Vocational School:** A Vocational School is any college or school that teaches you a specific trade or certifies you for a specific job upon graduation. This can include Trade Schools, some Technical Institutes, and some specific types of colleges. Students can typically graduate within 2 years, and examples of jobs you might go to a Vocational School for include welding, plumbing, hairdressing, becoming a chef and some nursing and veterinary work, to name a few.
- **Gap Year:** Gap Years have become increasingly popular with many students looking to leave some time between graduating high school and attending college, either for travel, work, academic or personal reasons. Most, but not all, colleges will allow you to apply as a Senior in high school and then defer your enrollment for a year as you complete your Gap Year.

## RESOURCE PAGE

### Reach, Target and Safety Schools

This is one of the most important things you'll need to understand about the college application and admissions process, and it requires you to be honest about your high school resume. Read the breakdowns of Reach, Target and Safety Schools, Other College Statistics, and Other Parts of Your Application below carefully to understand each and how it applies to you.

#### How To Use This Resource Page

Determining if a school is a Reach, Target or Safety School is not an exact science, but each piece of your high school resume and college application plays a part.

1. **Start with your GPA.** Compare it to the average GPA of accepted students for the colleges you're looking at. This is the most important factor in determining whether a school is a Reach, Target or Safety School. For a breakdown of "weighted" vs. "unweighted" GPA, see page 93
2. **Look at other statistics.** The other two statistics most colleges publish, Acceptance Rates and SAT/ACT Scores, may affect whether a school is a Reach, Target or Safety School.
3. **Assess your resume and application.** Finally, look at the other parts of your high school resume and college application, like your extracurricular activities, essay(s), and letters of recommendation, to see how they might affect whether a school is a Reach, Target or Safety School.

#### Reach, Target and Safety Schools

A "**Reach School**" is a college whose average accepted student is significantly more qualified than you.

In other words, it is a school that it is possible, but unlikely, for you to get accepted to based on your high school resume. Find the average GPA of accepted students and add/subtract .3 points, which will give you the estimated GPA range for that college (ex. if the average GPA is listed as

a 3.7, then the estimated GPA range for that college is 3.4-4.0). This number was determined by averaging the GPA range for schools that publish their 25<sup>th</sup>-75<sup>th</sup> percentile range, so it is not exact.

If your GPA is at the bottom of or below that range, then it is likely a Reach School. If a college you're interested in publishes their 25<sup>th</sup>-75<sup>th</sup> GPA percentile range of accepted students (which is sometimes listed as the average 50% GPA range), use that as it's a more exact statistic.

*Recommendation:* Consider applying to at least 1 or 2 Reach Schools. You probably won't get in, but it's absolutely worth a shot. Imagine how happy you'll be if you get accepted to one of your Reach Schools! Remember, just because you get into a college doesn't necessarily mean it's a good fit.

A “**Target School**” is a college whose average accepted student is about as qualified as you.

In other words, it is a school that it is likely, but not guaranteed, for you to get accepted to based on your high school resume. Find the average GPA of accepted students (see how above). If your GPA is within that range, then it is likely a Target School.

*Recommendation:* This is your sweet spot. Apply to at least a few Target Schools. It's likely that the school you'll end up going to will be one of your Target Schools.

A “**Safety School**” is a college whose average accepted student is significantly less qualified than you.

In other words, it is a school that is very likely to accept you based on your high school resume. Find the average GPA of accepted students (see how above). If your GPA is above that range, then it is likely a Safety School.

*Recommendation:* Always apply to at least 1 or 2 Safety Schools. This way you know that worst case scenario, you'll almost certainly be going to college somewhere. These are also the schools that are more likely to give you a scholarship or admit you to a specialized program, like an Honors program.

## How to Determine Your GPA

Your GPA is basically just your average grade on a 0-4.0 scale. “Weighted” GPA takes into account the difficulty of the classes you took, while “unweighted” is just an average of all the grades you got in high school. Most high schools and colleges use weighted GPA, so it is a good

overall summary of your academic record in high school. You can calculate your GPA using a variety of online GPA calculators, but for an exact number you usually need to talk to your school counselor.

## Other College Statistics - Acceptance Rates and SAT/ACT Scores

The two other main statistics that most colleges provide that can help you determine if a school is a Reach, Target or Safety School are Acceptance Rates and SAT/ACT scores.

- **Acceptance Rates:** The higher the acceptance rate, in general the easier it will be to get into that school. Likewise, the lower the acceptance rate, in general the harder it is to get into that school. For example, a college with an 80% acceptance rate means they accept most students who apply. A college with a 9% acceptance rate, however, is likely much harder to get into.
- **SAT/ACT Scores:** In the past, your SAT/ACT scores were a great way to help determine which schools might be Reach, Target or Safety Schools. As of the writing of this workbook during the 2024/2025 school year, however, this has changed significantly. In short, matching your SAT/ACT scores to the average SAT/ACT scores of a particular college is no longer as accurate an indicator of whether a school is a Reach, Target or Safety School as it used to be, but it can still be helpful as a way to get a general sense of how well you match that school. Colleges with average SAT/ACT scores far above your score are still very likely to be Reach Schools, and schools far below your score are still very likely to be Safety Schools, for example.

The reason for these changes is because so many colleges are now “test optional”, meaning they don’t require students to submit SAT/ACT scores, and many, if not the majority, of students no longer take the SAT/ACT. The result is that students who do submit scores to colleges tend to be those who have done very well, so looking at the average SAT/ACT scores of a particular college is no longer guaranteed to show you the actual breakdown of the average student. If you haven’t taken the SAT/ACT, it’s generally not recommended to substitute your PSAT score instead to see if you’re a good fit, since the tests are not the same and you likely took it much earlier in your high school career than you would have taken the SAT/ACT.

*For more information see Resource Page: The PSAT, SAT and ACT on page 110*

## Other Parts of Your Application

Your college application is more than just your GPA and test scores—it's a holistic snapshot of who you are as a student and a person. Colleges use the various components of your application to get a sense of your academic abilities, character, and fit for their school. Each piece plays an important role, and together they create a comprehensive picture of your potential.

Here's a breakdown of the key components colleges will consider:

- **Classes Taken:** Most high schools offer a mix of classes for students to take with different levels of academic rigor. To determine how rigorous your class schedule was, colleges look at which classes you took compared to the most advanced classes your school offered. Taking the most advanced classes your school offers, like Honors, APs, IBs and Dual Enrollment, generally looks very good to colleges because it shows you have challenged yourself. The level of classes you took is generally taken into account in your weighted GPA. If you took many of these higher level classes, it is likely to increase your chances of getting into a particular college. If you took few or none, it is likely to decrease your chances of getting into a particular college.
- **Extracurricular Activities:** An impressive set of extracurricular activities, especially if they include leadership positions, awards or honors, can help boost your high school resume and make it more likely to get into a particular college. These can include things like Eagle Scout, president of a club, captain of a sports team, starting a business, etc. Conversely, having few or no extracurricular activities on your high school resume may make it less likely for you to get into a particular college.
- **Essay(s):** The college essay (or essays) is one of the few opportunities you have to showcase your abilities independent of the rest of your high school resume. A stellar college essay may make it more likely to get into a particular college. A poorly written essay or an essay that does not sound like it was written by you, however, may make it less likely for you to get into a particular college (for the latter, they may throw out your application entirely).

For a more detailed breakdown of the college essay(s), see the Resource Page: College Essays on page 114

- **Letters of Recommendation:** An excellent letter or letters of recommendation may make it more likely to get into a particular college. Poor letters of recommendation, or not submitting any, may make it less likely for you to get into a particular college.
- **Demonstrated Interest:** Colleges love to see that you're specifically interested in their school. Wherever possible, show them that! Take the time to visit the college. Meet or

Speak with admissions representatives when you visit, if they come to your school or a local college fair, or simply by emailing or calling them. This can make a huge difference, especially if you make a good impression with an admissions rep. Also, make sure to research the college, what you like about them and why you'd be a good fit. This will usually come out in the Essay or Interview portion of the application (if they have one). Showing demonstrated interest can certainly increase your chances of getting into a particular college.

- **Miscellaneous:** Besides these main factors, there may be other factors that are unique to you that may increase or decrease your chances of getting into a particular college and affect whether a college is a Reach, Target or Safety School. Some students have had extenuating circumstances during their high school career that negatively affected their performance and high school resume, like a health or family crisis. Depending on the college, you may be able to explain these extenuating circumstances to them, and they may be more likely to admit you after understanding your situation. On the other hand, things like suspensions or expulsions on your record, inappropriate social media activity, etc., may negatively affect your chances of getting into a particular college.

## Other Resources to Help

If this all seems a little confusing to you, don't worry, you're not alone! Your high school resume is complex and so are the reasons colleges might accept or reject certain students. It's never an exact science.

Fortunately, besides this workbook, there are many other people and resources that can help, like your school counselor, college placement consultants (often called independent educational consultants), and a wide range of college search and application resources. Your school may also use sophisticated systems, like Naviance, which track their students, their record in high school and where they got into college. If your school uses a system like this, it can be a helpful way to determine which schools might be Reach, Target and Safety Schools.

Take any information or advice you receive from friends, family members, fellow students, neighbors, and others with a grain of salt. They likely mean well, but their information is usually anecdotal, and if they're not professionals it may be unreliable, misleading or simply incorrect.

*For more information and resources to help, see the Resource Page: College Search Resources on page 108*



## **RESOURCE PAGE**

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# The Application

The college application process involves a lot of moving parts, and understanding each step is essential to submitting a strong application.

One of the key factors to consider is the type of application deadline you choose. Your decision can impact not only your timeline but also your chances of acceptance. Colleges offer various deadline options to meet different needs, and each has its advantages and obligations.

Below is an overview of the different types of application deadlines to help you determine which is best for you:

### **Types of Application Deadlines**

- **Early Decision:** Some colleges offer an Early Decision deadline, which is usually about two months before the college's Regular Decision deadline. Early Decision applications, however, are binding, which means if the college accepts you then you are required to attend. Applying Early Decision shows a college you are very interested in attending their school, and for some colleges that can increase your chances of getting in. Do NOT apply to a school Early Decision unless you're absolutely sure you want to go there.
- **Early Action:** Some colleges offer an Early Action deadline, which is also usually about two months before the college's Regular Decision deadline (and typically at the same time or after an Early Decision deadline, if the college offers it). This allows a student to apply early, which shows the college you're more interested in attending. Each school is different, but if you have a strong application, there is some evidence to suggest that applying Early Action may slightly increase your chances of getting accepted (although not to the degree of applying Early Decision).
- **Regular Decision:** This is the route most students take when applying to college. It is the normal application deadline and puts you in a pool with all the other applicants who applied at that time.

- **Rolling Admissions:** Some colleges offer Rolling Admissions, which means they have no formal application deadline. Colleges that offer Rolling Admissions are often less academically rigorous, are some sort of specialty college, or have other reasons for wanting to offer flexible admissions.

A note about applying Early Action vs. Regular Decision: Many students (and their parents) push to apply Early Action because they think it might increase their chances of getting into a school. As mentioned above, while there is some evidence to suggest it may slightly increase your chances, any increase is likely minimal and you do NOT want to rush your application just so you can submit it Early Action instead of Regular Decision. A complete, quality application submitted for the Regular Decision deadline almost always gives you a better chance of getting into a school than a rushed, incomplete, or lower quality application submitted for the Early Action deadline.

## Parts of a College Application

A college application is a combination of documents and materials that provides admissions officers with a comprehensive view of your academic achievements, extracurricular activities, and personal qualities.

Each component plays an important role in helping colleges evaluate your readiness for their school and fit within their community. Below is an overview of the key elements that make up a college application.

- **Transcript:** The record of all the classes you took as a high school student and the grades you received. For most colleges, this is the most important part of your application.
- **Extracurriculars:** Colleges love to see well-rounded applicants who have participated in activities outside of the classroom. They especially like students who have taken on leadership roles. Extracurriculars include things like clubs, sports, volunteering, work and internship experiences, and sometimes family responsibilities and personal hobbies. If you've received awards or honors during your high school career, they will typically go in this section. On the Common App, extracurriculars go under the Activities section.
- **Essay(s):** Most colleges require students to submit at least one main essay. This is your chance to show colleges the things about you they can't learn by just looking at your transcript or the other parts of your application. Be honest, proud of your accomplishments, and write your essays to the highest academic quality that you can. If you have anything on your transcript or resume that you think an admissions officer might be

concerned about, like a year of poor grades or suspensions on your record, there is an additional section at the end of most college applications where you can address this. Some colleges may also require students to write one or more shorter supplemental essays.

*For more information about college essays, see the Resource Page: College Essays on page 114*

- **SAT/ACT:** As described throughout this workbook, the SAT/ACT is no longer required by many colleges, although plenty of students still choose to take one or both of the tests and submit their scores when applying. Most colleges will only look at your highest overall score. For the SAT, that is usually your “superscore” (the highest Reading/Writing score added to the Math highest score). A word of caution: when looking at the average SAT/ACT scores of a particular college, be aware that they are likely skewed to show higher scores than the actual average range of students who are accepted or attend. This is because since so many schools changed to “test optional” in the past few years, most students who take the test have chosen to only submit their score if they are within or above the average posted SAT/ACT score range of a particular college (like this workbook recommends to do). As a result, schools’ SAT/ACT score ranges have slowly crept higher.

*For more information, see the Resource Page: The PSAT, SAT and ACT on page 110*

- **Letters of Recommendation:** Many colleges require at least one letter of recommendation. This is a chance for a trusted adult, such as a teacher, school counselor, administrator, coach, or boss to give their opinion of you, your talent and your character. They can tell a college a lot about an applicant. Many colleges require or prefer one of the letters submitted to be from a teacher. Note: always ask adults, especially teachers, months in advance to write your letter. They are busy people and are usually inundated with requests from other seniors at the start of the school year. Also, letters of recommendation should never be from family members.
- **Personal Information:** College applications will also typically include a variety of informational questions about you, your family, your education, etc. The Common App includes the following sections – Profile, Family, Education, Testing, Activities, Writing and Courses & Grades. Most colleges will ask you to complete the majority of these sections, some will ask you to complete all, and some may have other specific questions or things they will require from you. Colleges may ask for financial information and you may want to submit a FAFSA form.

*For more information about the FAFSA, see the Resource Page: College Costs on page 102*

- **Interviews:** Some colleges may offer or require interviews; however, this is much less common than it used to be. If your college asks you to conduct an interview make sure you take time to prepare by thinking of questions they might ask you (they want to know about you and why you're interested in their school), as well as questions you might want to ask them. Make sure to practice, either on your own or with someone you trust, before going on your interview.
- **Portfolios:** Some specialized colleges, programs or majors require portfolios of your work to apply. These are rare, but can include programs like art, music, creative writing, or theater.

## Recommendations

Applications, especially the essay(s), almost always take students longer to complete than they initially think. It is highly recommended that you start your applications early.

If at all possible, finish (or at least start) your essay(s) and as much of the rest of your application as you can during the summer before your Senior year. This prevents you from having to do the work for your college applications AND take classes. It also helps make sure your application is as strong as it can be. Students who rush to submit materials last minute often feel more stressed and submit lower quality applications than if they had started earlier.

Whenever possible, show the college you're applying to that you're specifically interested in their school. Take the time to visit colleges and meet or speak with admissions representatives. This can make a huge difference, especially if you make a good impression with an admissions rep. Also, make sure to research the colleges you're applying to, what you like about them and why you'd be a good fit. These things will usually come out in the Essay or Interview portion of the application (if they have one).

## Types of Applications

The way you apply to colleges can vary depending on the schools you're interested in and the systems they use.

Understanding the different types of applications available will help you navigate the process efficiently and choose the best method for your needs. Some application platforms allow you to apply to multiple schools at once, while others require individual submissions. Below is an overview of the most common application types.

- **The Common App:** The Common App has become the most standard way to apply to colleges in recent years, and it covers over 1,000 colleges. It's easy to use, has features that can help you in your college search, and allows you to easily enter information and essays to the colleges you're applying to. To learn more about it and create an account go to [www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org).
- **The Coalition App:** The Coalition App is similar to the Common App, but is newer and fewer colleges use it. Many of the top colleges in the country are available on the Coalition App, and it only accepts schools that offer substantial financial support. To learn more about it and create an account go to [www.coalitionforcollegeaccess.org](http://www.coalitionforcollegeaccess.org).
- **Individual School Applications:** Some colleges ask students to apply directly through their website. The University of California (UC) system, which includes almost a dozen schools, is one of the most prominent examples.

## Receiving a College's Decision

Most colleges send out their application decisions to students between December and April. There are three possible results: Accepted, Waitlisted/Deferred, and Rejected/Denied.

- **Accepted:** Congratulations, you got in! Most colleges require a decision from you by May 1st. You'll need to weigh your options carefully and make the choice that is best for you.
- **Waitlisted/Deferred:** The good news is you haven't been rejected, but there's also no guarantee you'll be accepted. Sometimes it's a waiting game, and you'll get an acceptance (or rejection) in a few weeks or months. If you're waitlisted or deferred at a college you really want to attend, do everything you can to help your chances by following up with the admissions office to show your interest and sharing any new or important accomplishments.
- **Rejected/Denied:** Unfortunately, this college doesn't think your high school resume matches their college well enough. You should expect at least a few of these. No worries, move on to the next college on your list!

**RESOURCE PAGE**

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## College Costs

Simply put, college is expensive. In order to make an informed and financially intelligent decision about which college options are right for you, you'll need to understand the costs. Unless you're one of the few fortunate enough to have their college experience fully funded, this will need to be a top priority. You should have an honest conversation with those helping you to pay for college, typically parents or close family members, as soon as possible, preferably by the end of your Junior year.

The Cost of Attendance for college, a term which includes tuition, fees, housing and food (called room & board), books, supplies, transportation and other expenses, can easily top \$50,000 for a single year, and for some colleges that number can easily reach \$80,000 (or higher!) If you know where to look, there are lots of ways to save, but you must be honest about your finances and, if you choose to go to a college that will require taking out loans, understand how much money you'll personally have to pay back after graduating.

To give you an idea of the potential cost of college, see the 2023 and 2024 statistics below from College Board:

**Average Cost for Tuition and Fees for 1 Year at:  
(2024-2025 school year)**

*Community College: \$4,050*

*Public College (in-state): \$11,610*

*Public College (out-of-state): \$30,780*

*Private College: \$43,350*

**Average Total Cost of Attendance for 1 Year at:  
(2023-2024 school year)**

*Community College: \$19,860*

*Public College (in-state): \$28,840*

*Public College (out-of-state): \$46,730*

*Private College: \$60,420*

**Average Total Cost of Attendance for 1 Year  
Without Room & Board (for students who choose  
to live at home). (2023-2024 school year)**

*Community College: \$9,890*

*Public College (in-state): \$16,070*

*Public College (out-of-state): \$33,960 Note  
- living at home when going to an out-of-  
state Public College is rarely an option*

*Private College: \$45,770*

**Total Cost of Attendance for 1 Year  
at: (2024-2025 school year)**

*Public College (in-state):*

*Penn State University: \$39,892*

*University of Virginia: \$39,926*

*Public College (out-of-state):*

*Penn State University: \$59,846*

*University of Virginia: \$76,954*

As mentioned previously, though these are averages, certain colleges can have much higher total costs. These are typically colleges that are highly selective, prestigious, and/or are located in high cost-of-living areas such as Chicago or Washington D.C. For example:

**Private College:**

*George Washington University (located  
in Washington, D.C.): \$89,205*

*Northwestern University (located just  
outside of Chicago, IL): \$91,290*

Looking to find a breakdown of costs for a particular college you're interested in? Visit the National Center for Education Statistics' College Navigator website, which provides incredibly detailed college cost statistics for thousands of colleges across the country (as well as lots of other interesting data too!).



## **Additional Considerations**

As if those costs aren't enough, there are two more important factors to consider. First, college costs will likely continue to rise each year due to inflation and the rising cost of college. Second, while most Americans think of college as lasting 4 years (and for many that is the case), it's not uncommon for students to take 5 or 6 years to graduate. It's important to factor these considerations into your financial plans.

Because college can be so expensive it makes it even more important to choose the right college to start. It's far better to make a thoughtful, informed choice about which college is best for you, especially financially, than to have to switch midway through your college career.

## **Ways to Save (Whew!)**

Thankfully, there are multiple ways to save on the cost of college. Believe it or not, the advertised "sticker price" of college is often far higher than the actual cost a student has to pay! This is due in large part to the increased prevalence of need-based and merit-based financial aid, as well as other cost saving options. See below for a list of possible ways to save on the cost of college.

## **Financial Aid**

Generally speaking, there are two types of financial aid, "need-based" and "merit-based".

Need-based financial aid is given based on the finances of the student, while merit-based aid is given based on the academic record of the student. As of the 2019-2020 school year, 57% of students at private, nonprofit colleges received aid with an average discount of \$20,800/year. At private, for-profit colleges, 21% of students received aid averaging \$3,300/year. For public colleges, more than a third of students received aid with an average discount of \$5,200/year (Barshay, 2023). Although many colleges offer financial aid, you will typically have to apply to a college and wait until after you are accepted to see what aid, if any, they might give.

The FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) is an additional way to save money. It is free to apply and available for all students. As of 2024, 56% of undergraduates received an average of \$4,983 in federal grants each year (Hanson, 2025).

## Scholarships

Scholarships are another great way to lower your college expenses. Scholarships may be offered through your high school and the activities you participate in, and there are literally thousands of scholarships available through all kinds of local, national, and international organizations. Take the time to research them. Many colleges also offer scholarships to students upon acceptance (typically as merit-based aid) as an extra incentive to have them attend. For this reason, you're more likely to get scholarships from the colleges that are your Safety and Target Schools. When looking for scholarships, it can be helpful to talk to your school counselor and those who help run any organizations you might be a part of. For an additional list of resources to help you look for and apply to scholarships, see below.

- **The Department of Education's Federal Student Aid:** The U.S. Department of Education offers a wealth of resources to help students understand their financial aid options, including scholarships, grants, loans, and work-study programs. Their Federal Student Aid website is an excellent starting point for finding federal scholarships and learning about eligibility criteria, application processes, and deadlines.  
Visit: <https://studentaid.gov/understand-aid/types/scholarships>.
- **College Board's BigFuture Page:** The College Board's BigFuture platform is a comprehensive tool for exploring scholarship opportunities. With their Scholarship Search feature, you can access a database of over 6,000 programs tailored to your personal and academic profile. BigFuture also provides guidance on financial planning, college affordability, and other aspects of the college admissions process.  
Visit: <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college/scholarship-search>.
- **Scholarships.com:** Scholarships.com is a dedicated platform for finding scholarship opportunities tailored to your background, interests, and academic achievements. The website offers a free search engine and resources to guide you through the scholarship application process. Additionally, it includes tips for organizing your applications and maximizing your financial aid potential.  
Visit: [www.scholarships.com](http://www.scholarships.com).

## Loans

The federal government offers education loans. In 2024, 38.6% of undergraduates received an average of \$7,487 in federal loans. (Hanson, 2025) ). Private loans may be available as well, although they can be riskier and may have higher interest rates than federal loans. Always consult a financial professional before entering into any type of loan.

## **Student Work & Work Study Programs**

Many students choose to work while attending college, and 41.7% of all full-time students are employed in some way. The federal government also offers work study programs. As of 2024, 5% of undergraduates (and 9.2% of full-time undergraduates) participated in federal work study, earning an average of \$1,821 each year. (Hanson, 2025).

## RESOURCE PAGE

### College Search Resources

There are thousands of colleges out there, but thankfully there are also all kinds of ways to research and discover which ones might be a good fit for you.

Below are some of the most common ways to research and narrow down a list of possible college options.

- **Online resources:** This is where most people start. There are countless websites, search engines and apps that allow you to research colleges based on all kinds of factors, including academic rigor, size, location, price and much more. Some even allow you to create a personal account to save and modify your choices. Here are some of the best and most well known:
  - The Common App's Explore page: [www.commonapp.org/explore/](http://www.commonapp.org/explore/)
  - The National Center for Education Statistics' College Navigator page: <https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>
  - Princeton Review's College Search: [www.princetonreview.com/college-search](http://www.princetonreview.com/college-search)
  - Niche: [www.niche.com/colleges/search/best-colleges/](http://www.niche.com/colleges/search/best-colleges/)
  - Unigo: [www.unigo.com/colleges](http://www.unigo.com/colleges)
  - USNews Best Colleges: [www.usnews.com/best-colleges](http://www.usnews.com/best-colleges)
  - Top College Consultants' Free Resources (for students with learning differences): [www.topcollegeconsultants.com/freeresources/](http://www.topcollegeconsultants.com/freeresources/)
- **College Websites:** It's always a good idea to research the website for a specific college that you're interested in. You will find all kinds of great information there like school programs and course offerings, unique opportunities, application information and price breakdowns. Some colleges will also include helpful resources to learn more about their school and campus, such as virtual tours and student testimonial videos.
- **School Counselors:** Your school counselor can be one of the best resources to talk to. They are probably familiar with the types of colleges that could be a good fit for you. They can also point you to lots of resources they have access to, like college guides or other college search resources.

- **College Consultants:** Sometimes called Independent Educational Consultants (IECs), college consultants can be an excellent resource to help you find colleges or other programs that might be a good fit for you and help you apply. They are, however, often quite expensive.
- **College Guides:** Companies like The Princeton Review and Fiske make excellent college guides, literally encyclopedias of most colleges that exist, detailing all the important and relevant information for each.
- **College Fairs:** College fairs, large events where dozens of college admissions representatives come to share information about their schools, are a great way to learn about colleges, especially ones local to you. Many high schools will host college fairs during the year, and sometimes other organizations will have them too. Some high schools invite representatives from individual colleges to visit or host virtual meetings throughout the year instead of all at once at a college fair.

A reminder about “word of mouth”: Take any information or advice you receive from friends, family members, fellow students, neighbors, and others with a grain of salt. They likely mean well, but their information is usually anecdotal, and if they’re not professionals it may be unreliable, misleading or simply incorrect.

## **RESOURCE PAGE**

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### The PSAT, SAT and ACT

Standardized testing has long been a part of the college admissions process, but these tests and the importance they play in college admissions have changed significantly in recent years.

Below, you'll find an overview of the PSAT, SAT, and ACT, insights into how their role has changed over time, and recommendations to help you determine if you should take these tests and, if so, how you should prepare.

- **PSAT:** The Preliminary SAT, taken in Sophomore and Junior year of high school. It is a 2-hour and 14-minute test broken up into two sections, Reading/Writing and Math, with 98 total questions. As of 2023 the PSAT is taken on a computer, not with pencil and paper. Students can get as high as a 1520, and if a student does well enough when they take it in their Junior year, they can be awarded the title of National Merit Scholar. This is an impressive award which is looked upon very highly by colleges and can be put on a student's college application.
- **SAT:** Taken in Junior and Senior year of high school, it is a 2-hour and 14-minute test broken up into two sections, Reading/Writing and Math, with 98 total questions. As of 2024 the SAT is taken on a computer, not with pencil and paper. As of 2024 it is also now "adaptive", which means the difficulty of the test changes based on how well a student has done on previous questions. Students can get as high as an 800 on each section, for a total high score of 1600.
- **ACT:** Taken in Junior and Senior year of high school, it is a 2-hour and 55-minute test broken up into four sections, English, Math, Reading and Science, with 215 total questions. There is also an optional Writing section. Starting in mid 2025, however, major changes are coming to the ACT. The ACT has announced the Science section will be optional, the total number of questions will drop to 171, the total length of the test will decrease to 2 hours and 5 minutes, and the test will be able to be taken on the computer or with pencil and paper. Regardless of the type of test taken, students can get a total high score of 36.

## Changes in the Importance of the SAT/ACT

Up until recently, almost all students applying to college would take the PSAT during their Sophomore or Junior year and then either the SAT, ACT, or both during their Junior and Senior year.

The SAT and ACT used to be seen as very important parts of a student's college application. Today, though, things are much different. Students still take the PSAT in their Sophomore or Junior year, usually through their high school. However, many colleges no longer require students to submit SAT or ACT scores to apply. In almost all cases, there is no penalty given to students who do not submit these scores.

Why? Well, the reasons for this are a bit complicated and differ slightly for each school, but the trend of colleges deemphasizing standardized test scores in favor of things like GPA, class schedule, extracurriculars, college essays, letters of recommendation, etc., had already begun in the past couple decades and then accelerated during Covid-19.

Due to the effects of Covid-19, many students were simply not able to take the SAT or ACT tests, and schools and life in general were so interrupted that many colleges didn't see them as reliable indicators of a student's ability.

As a result, most colleges stopped requiring the SAT/ACT for students who graduated high school in 2020 and 2021. And what was the effect? Well, wouldn't you know it, students still successfully applied and were admitted to college, and colleges still had quality applicants and attendees! In some ways, Covid-19 broke the spell that the SAT and ACT were necessary markers of a student's ability. So, while they can still be important tests, and there has certainly been some resurgence in their use since 2021, it seems unlikely they will regain the same level of prestige and be required by colleges to the same degree as they were before Covid-19.

## Should you take the SAT/ACT?

As of the writing of this workbook during the 2024/2025 school year, there are only a relatively small number of schools that still require a student to take the SAT/ACT and submit scores.

For the most part, they are Ivy League schools and some schools in the southern US. If you're not applying to any of those schools, then taking the SAT/ACT can't really hurt, since it's your choice to submit your scores or not. You can typically take the tests as many times as you want and only submit your highest score.

For the SAT, most colleges accept your “superscore” (some, but not all colleges, also accept a superscore for the ACT). Your superscore is your highest total score when adding the Reading/Writing and Math sections together. So, for example, if you took the SAT test twice and got a 550 on the Reading/Writing and 600 on the Math on your first test (for a total score of 1150) and a 610 on the Reading/Writing and a 570 on the Math on your second test (for a total score of 1180), you could combine your highest Reading/Writing and Math scores, in this case 610 and 600, for a total superscore of 1210. As noted above, there are major changes coming to the ACT in 2025. It’s unclear exactly how these changes may affect the difficulty of the test, comparability of the scores with previous years’ tests, how colleges may view the scores, etc.

### **I want to take the SAT/ACT. What do I need to know? How should I prepare?**

If you decide to take the SAT or ACT, here’s what you should know. Each test is offered on different dates, and they are each offered about once a month. You can find a calendar of the dates and locations (usually, but not always, given at your local high school) they are offered online. The SAT has a reputation for being a bit more like a logic test, while the ACT has a reputation of being more similar to a test you might take in high school. The ACT also has a reputation for being a bit easier for some students who have learning differences. It’s usually best to take each test once to see which one you prefer, and then take your preferred test a second or third time.

Test preparation can also be quite helpful. There are a wide range of test prep resources available, including practice tests, test prep books, tutors and test prep centers. Most SAT/ACT tutors recommend studying about 2-3 months in advance of taking your first test. Make sure you take at least one (if not more!) full, timed practice tests in that time, as that is the best way to simulate what it will be like taking the SAT or ACT.

### **I’ve taken the SAT/ACT. Should I submit my scores to the colleges I’m applying to?**

If you take the SAT or ACT and want to know if you should submit your scores to a particular college, look at that college’s breakdown for the range of SAT/ACT scores for their students. This is usually shown as the middle 50%, or 25th-75th percentile.

For example, you may look up a college and see that their 25th–75th percentile range is 1150-1280. If you fall within that range or above it, it’s usually a good idea to submit your scores. If you fall at the low end or below that range, it’s usually best not to submit.



Remember, for schools that are test optional there is no penalty for not submitting your scores, so you should only submit a score if you think it helps you.

*For information on how to use your SAT/ACT score to determine which schools might be Reach, Target, or Safety Schools, see the Resource Page: Reach, Target and Safety Schools on page 92*

### **SAT to ACT Conversion Table and Percentiles (Estimated)**

The table below gives you a detailed breakdown of SAT scores compared to ACT scores. It also shows the Percentile Rank of each score you could receive. So, for example, if you received an 1100 on the SAT, that would be comparable to a 22 on the ACT. It would also put you in the 69th percentile rank, meaning you did better than 69% of other students who took the SAT or ACT. You can use this table to determine how well you did on your SAT or ACT test and how it compares to other students who took it.

<b>SAT Score</b>	<b>ACT Score</b>	<b>Percentile Rank</b>	<b>SAT Score</b>	<b>ACT Score</b>	<b>Percentile Rank</b>
1570-1600	36	100 <sup>th</sup>	1100-1120	22	69 <sup>th</sup>
1530-1560	35	99 <sup>th</sup>	1060-1090	21	64 <sup>th</sup>
1490-1520	34	99 <sup>th</sup>	1030-1050	20	59 <sup>th</sup>
1450-1480	33	98 <sup>th</sup>	990-1020	19	53 <sup>rd</sup>
1420-1440	32	97 <sup>th</sup>	960-980	18	47 <sup>th</sup>
1390-1410	31	95 <sup>th</sup>	920-950	17	41 <sup>st</sup>
1360-1380	30	94 <sup>th</sup>	880-910	16	35 <sup>th</sup>
1330-1350	29	92 <sup>nd</sup>	830-870	15	28 <sup>th</sup>
1300-1320	28	90 <sup>th</sup>	780-820	14	22 <sup>nd</sup>
1260-1290	27	87 <sup>th</sup>	730-770	13	14 <sup>th</sup>
1230-1250	26	85 <sup>th</sup>	690-720	12	8 <sup>th</sup>
1200-1220	25	81 <sup>st</sup>	650-680	11	3 <sup>rd</sup>
1160-1190	24	78 <sup>th</sup>	620-640	10	1 <sup>st</sup>
1130-1150	23	74 <sup>th</sup>	590-610	9	1 <sup>st</sup>

Source: [www.act.org](http://www.act.org)

**RESOURCE PAGE**

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## College Essays

There is not enough room in this workbook to go into all the intricate detail of college essays, but here are the basics of what you need to know.

Almost every college in the country uses the Common App and requires a student to submit one main college essay of between 250 and 650 words in length. The various essay prompts ask the student to talk about themselves in a way that they may have never done before. It's not like a typical research paper or English essay, and for that reason alone, it can be challenging. You can find this year's essay questions on the Common App or any number of other college and education websites.

The key to a good college essay is that it sounds authentic, is written well and shows the student's personality, achievements, goals and/or other important characteristics a college cannot see simply by looking at grades, extracurriculars and letters of recommendation.

A great college essay can be about almost anything, a sport a student plays, a leadership role they've had, an important moment in their life, a hobby of theirs, a realization they had, etc. Think about it this way, you're trying to show a college admissions officer – someone you've never met and who has never heard of you – something important or interesting about yourself in 650 words or less.

Some colleges also require supplemental essays. These can take many forms, but generally they are short (under 250 words) and ask something more specific about the student. The most common question is some form of "Why do you want to attend this school?" Some students dismiss these questions as not as important as the main essay, but this is NOT true. Most colleges get thousands of applications a year, if they are asking you a question like this it's probably because they want to know how serious you are about attending.

Simply put, you are much more likely to be accepted if the school thinks you really want to attend. When answering a question like this, be honest about your reasons for wanting to go and prove to them you've done your research and know their school well (they love that). If you've visited their campus, mention that. And if there's a particular program, club, class, professor, etc. that is of interest to you mention that too!

*A very important note:* College essay readers know how a Senior in high school writes. They read literally hundreds or thousands of these essays a year. If you use AI, or a parent or someone else helps you write it, or it doesn't sound like it's authentically you, it is VERY likely the reader will know and throw out your application. Do NOT do this!

**RESOURCE PAGE****College Visit Notes****College:****Location:****Visit Date:**

Rate the categories below on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the highest) and add your comments. If it's easier, use the categories listed to take notes on your phone, the additional pages at the back of the book, or any other preferred method. For a list of additional categories, see the section Senior Year: College Applications on page 53.

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b><i>Academics</i></b>		
School and Class Size		
Academic Quality		
Majors, Minors and Programs Offered		
Other		
<b><i>Location</i></b>		
Urban, Suburban or Rural		

RESOURCE PAGE: COLLEGE VISIT NOTES

Categories	Score	Comments
Weather		
Distance from Home		
Other		
<b>Campus Life</b>		
Social Experience		
Extracurricular Activities		
Sports		
Campus "Vibe"		
Other		
Additional Notes		
Overall Impression		

































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