

Applying to College

The process of applying for admission varies from one college to another. We will cover everything that could be required, but you might not be asked to submit everything to every college. It is your responsibility to know the steps and the deadlines. In every case you want to beat, not meet the deadlines.

Strategy

Apply to schools of varying selectivity. Make sure you have included a school on your list from each level; Dream School (a reach), Good Bet School (good school/good match), and Safety Net School (sure thing). Applying to at least one in state school is also recommended.

Apply early. October 1st is the target date for completion of all college applications. Housing and financial aid deadlines vary but applying early often means you will receive first consideration for those things. In addition, selective schools admissions offices may only be reading 25 applications per day in the fall as opposed to 75 in the spring.

Types of applications

When possible use The Common Application, www.commonapp.org. You fill out one application and send it to any of the over 500 schools you are interested in applying to. This will save you, parents, teacher, and counselor a lot of time.

On-line applications are preferred; many colleges do not even offer a paper option. You will find the application under the admissions section of the colleges' website.

Parts of an application

Official Transcript: This is normally sent directly from the counseling office to the college. Once you have completed an application, notify the counseling office so your transcript and shot records may be sent.

Standardized Test Scores: Standardized test scores are recorded on your transcript but many colleges require they be sent directly from the testing agency. If you do not have the scores sent when you register for the test you will have to pay an additional fee to have them sent later.

The Application Form: The student is responsible for completing and submitting the application by the college deadline. Applications generally ask for the following information:

- Personal and Educational Data (i.e., name, address, phone number, e-mail, high schools you have attended, college credits you have earned, parental information, senior year schedule, standardized test scores)
- Honors and Awards
- Extracurricular, Personal, and Volunteer Activities
- Employment, Internships, and Summer Activities (Some colleges allow you to submit a resume in addition to the activities section of their application.)
- Essays, both short answer and a longer personal essay
- Disciplinary information

Secondary School Report or Counselor Recommendation Form: This is not required by all colleges. If it is required you need to notify the counseling office at least two weeks in advance of the due date.

Mid-Year Report Form: This form is not required by all colleges. If it is required you must notify the counseling office. The purpose of this form is for the college to see your grades from the first semester of your senior year.

Recommendation Forms: This form is not required by all colleges. If it is required you need to request the recommendation at least two weeks in advance of the due date.

Types of Admissions

Rolling Admission – Applications are processed as they are received and students are notified of admission status within 2-3 weeks.

Regular Decision (Traditional Admission) - Applications are to be filed by a set deadline with decisions mailed to applicants by a set date from early to mid-April. Students must respond back to the college by May 1.

Early Decision – Only one such application may be pending. If accepted, a student must attend that school. This is a binding contract so careful consideration needs to be made before submitting an application.

Early Action – Students may apply to several schools and receive an admission decision well in advance (usually in December) of the usual spring notification. Unlike Early Decision, this process is not binding.

Tips

Develop a resume. You will be asked to develop an academic resume as part of your brag sheet. This will come in handy time and time again as you fill out college and scholarship applications

Keep a copy of everything.

Brag Sheets

Students and parents are asked to complete a Brag Sheet early in the senior year. These are kept on file in the counseling center and are made available to teachers and administrators for writing recommendations.

Recommendation letters are often the last-read component of the admission packet and are considered a critical part of the process by those schools who request them. Brag sheets provide essential information so those writing your recommendation letter can make it personal and unique. Anyone who wants a letter of recommendation from a school staff member **MUST** turn in a brag sheet.

Essay

Many colleges require an essay as part of the admission or scholarship application process, while some make it optional. In truth, there is no such thing as an optional essay; it is a critical component used to set you apart from all the other candidates. The essay is an opportunity to show that you have something to contribute to the college community, as well as your chance to express yourself.

Admission officers are not looking for a particular “correct answer” on an essay, but want to find out what you are like as an individual. It is not a time to recap information already provided in the application but to tell them what they don’t already know about you.

The best essays are original - a story about yourself. Write your essay like you are trying to sell yourself. Start off with a hook to catch the reader’s attention. Admissions officers are busy and may not read the entire essay; therefore, it is important to hook their interest immediately and finish strong with an “Ahhh-ha” moment.

If you chose to use a common topic such as sports, pets, global matters, mission trips, community tragedies, etc. your essay needs to be outstanding. The level of competition is greater when addressing those issues.

Begin working on the essay as early as possible and be sure to have someone proof it. Ask someone who knows you really well and someone who doesn’t know you to read your essay. A good essay will leave both with a greater sense of who you are. Show rather than tell. Give examples and illustrations to make your point.

Stick to the application’s length requirements. If no word count is given, submit at least a page and a half. If you are writing to a prompt be sure to answer the question that is asked.

Recommendations

The first step is to make sure that your colleges require teacher recommendations. Colleges differ when it comes to letters of recommendation. Some require a recommendation from your high school counselor, some from a teacher and some from a family friend, an employer or a member of the clergy. Some colleges have a form to be completed, while others want a letter.

It is important that the people you ask to make your recommendation for you know you well enough to provide valuable insights about you. They will be asked about your intellectual strengths, your personality, and what you do outside of class. Think of people with whom you have a good relationship, who know you best, and who would be enthusiastic about writing a recommendation for you. Teachers should be from academic subjects, preferably from junior or senior year. Teachers whom you have had for more than one class are often good choices.

When requesting a recommendation you should give a minimum of two weeks' notice to the person you are asking. You should also provide any forms the colleges require and an addressed and stamped envelope for each college. You will also need to notify the counseling center who to send copies of your brag sheets to.

Many letter of recommendation are due at the same time, so be considerate and ask early. Do not expect someone to write a letter over the weekend or holiday because you waited until the last minute to ask for it.

Writing recommendation letters is very time consuming and for most people must be done outside of their regular work day. Please show your appreciation by writing a thank you note to those who write a recommendation for you.