The Anatomy of a College Application

CollegeBoard

FOR STUDENTS

In order to get your college application together, you need to gather many different pieces to give the admission team a glimpse into who you are. Be sure to stay organized and find out from your school counselor or principal which of these items you have to send and which items your high school will send.

APPLICATION

Application Forms

This is the most common first step required to show your interest in a college. It might require information and forms from your family. Both online and paper application forms are available, as well as services (such as The Common Application and the Coalition for College application) that let you complete one application for multiple schools. It is recommended that you apply online if possible, to avoid delays.

Application Fees

Fees vary, but generally it costs from $40 to $90 to apply to each college. Fees are nonrefundable. Many colleges offer fee waivers to students who can't afford to pay. If you need application fee waivers, speak with your school counselor or principal. If you used an SAT® fee waiver, you are automatically eligible for application fee waivers to over 2,000 colleges.

SCORES AND REPORTS

College Entrance Exam Scores

Some colleges require that you send your scores from a college entrance exam (such as the SAT®). Many colleges will only accept scores that are sent directly from the testing organizations. Check with each college to verify whether they require test scores and their policy on receiving test scores.

High School Transcript

This is the record of the classes you have taken and your grades in each one. This is one of the most important parts of your application. Review your transcript for accuracy prior to completing your college application. Follow the procedure outlined by your high school for the submission of your transcript to your prospective colleges.

Secondary School Report

Some colleges require a Secondary School Report form to be completed by a high school official, usually a school counselor, with information about the school, the graduating class, and specific information about you. Your high school is responsible for sending this form to the college.

Midyear School Report

Much like the Secondary School Report, this form is submitted by your high school; it typically includes the fall semester grades of your senior year and updates to your spring semester schedule (if any apply). All colleges do not require this form.

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LETTERS, ESSAYS, AND INTERVIEWS

Letters of Recommendation

Many colleges require letters of recommendation from teachers or other adults who know you well. Ask your references to write recommendations well in advance of the deadlines. It is helpful to give them a short written summary of your achievements and goals to help them write about you.

Essays

Many colleges require an essay or a personal statement as part of your application. Your essay is a chance for you to give admission officers a better idea of your character and strengths. Your essay should be drafted well in advance of the application deadline to ensure adequate time for review and revision.

Interviews, Auditions, and Portfolios

It is a good idea to ask for an interview, even if it is optional. It shows you're serious and gives you a chance to connect with someone in the admission office. Even if a college is far away, you may be able to interview with a local alumnus. If you're applying to music, art, or theater programs, a college may want to see samples of your work as part of your application. This means you may need to audition, send portfolios, or submit videos demonstrating your artistic ability.

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College Application Materials Checklist

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Use this checklist to keep track of the application forms and materials required by each school to which you're applying.

FORMS	College 1	College 2	College 3	College 4
Requires secondary school report	☐	☐	☐	☐
Requires midyear school report	☐	☐	☐	☐
TEST SCORES				
Requires entrance exam	☐	☐	☐	☐
Accepts entrance exam	☐	☐	☐	☐
Requires test scores be sent from testing agency	☐	☐	☐	☐
Requires other state test scores	☐	☐	☐	☐
RECOMMENDATION LETTERS				
Requires teacher letter of recommendation	☐	☐	☐	☐
Requires counselor (or other school official) letter of recommendation	☐	☐	☐	☐
ESSAYS/INTERVIEWS				
Requires essays	☐	☐	☐	☐
Requires interview	☐	☐	☐	☐
Recommends interview	☐	☐	☐	☐
FINANCIAL AID FORMS				
Requires FAFSA®	☐	☐	☐	☐
Requires CSS Profile®	☐	☐	☐	☐
Requires supplemental institutional form	☐	☐	☐	☐
Requires state form	☐	☐	☐	☐

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College Application Tips

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Here are some tips to keep in mind as you start your college application process.

STAY COOL

College applications can be stressful to complete, but this is also an exciting time. Work with your counselor, your family, and others to get through it all. You got this!

PLAN AHEAD

Review each part of the applications before you get to work. Some applications will require the same basic information and others will have unique requests.

GET ORGANIZED

Keep track of the materials and many parts for each application. Make a folder for each application to keep all materials together. Tell your counselor or other appropriate school personnel which materials your school needs to send to the college (such as your transcript and recommendations).

BE ACCURATE

Ensure that you put together an organized and accurate application. Review for grammar and typos. Make sure your name is the same on all elements of your application. Double-check that all documents you're submitting (like transcripts) are correct.

SUBMIT AND SAVE

Print and save the completed application before you send it and keep a copy for your files. And remember: only submit it once—either online or via mail.

USE A FEE WAIVER

If you used an SAT® fee waiver, you are automatically eligible for application fee waivers to over 2,000 colleges.

ASK FOR HELP

Ask your counselor, teachers, or family to review your application, essays, and other materials before you submit them. Request a letter of recommendation at least two weeks before your deadline and provide supporting material to help them write the best one for you.

SET A SCHEDULE

Allow for time to get your requirements together, get input from your counselor or other adults, review them as a whole, and revise as needed. Keep a close eye on the application deadline, along with other deadlines for financial aid and scholarships.

BE CAREFUL NOT TO

- Procrastinate! There is a lot to do, especially if you have several applications to complete and essays to write. You may not do the application (and yourself) justice if you leave it until the last minute.
- Type your essay directly into the application. Draft it separately, and then upload the final proofread version.
- Send a photocopy of your own test score report unless requested to do so. Ask the testing organization to send your official test scores directly to the colleges.
- Take on the application process alone. Your school counselor is your best resource in the college application process. Teachers and family can also help provide advice and support.

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College Application Tracker

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Use this form to note the dates you've completed each task in the application process. It will help you remember what you've already done and what you still need to do.

APPLICATION

	College 1	College 2	College 3	College 4
Made copies of all application materials				
Signed and submitted application (online or paper)				
Requested transcript sent				
Paid application fee				
Sent additional materials if needed				
Confirmed college received all materials				
Gave counselor (or school official) midyear school report				

TEST SCORES

Took entrance exam				
Had test scores sent				
Had additional required test scores sent (AP® Exams, etc.)				

RECOMMENDATION LETTERS/FORMS

Gave teacher(s) form for recommendation				
Provided teacher(s) with helpful information (i.e., résumé, deadlines)				
Gave counselor (or other school official) secondary school form				
Wrote thank-you notes to recommenders				

ESSAYS

Completed first draft of essay				
Had two people proofread essay				
Revised and submitted essay				

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CAMPUS VISITS/INTERVIEW

	College 1	College 2	College 3	College 4
Scheduled visit/interview				
Made campus visit				
Completed interview				
Wrote thank-you notes to college representative and interviewer				

FINANCIAL AID FORMS

Completed and submitted FAFSA®				
Submitted additional required forms (i.e., CSS Profile®, college form)				

ADMISSION

Reviewed letters of admission decisions				
Reviewed and responded to financial aid offers				
Made enrollment deposit to chosen college (by May 1)				
Notified the colleges you will not attend				

NOTES

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