

## Admissions Guide

### College Admissions Timeline

#### Junior Year

- Think about your college choice. Talk with your guidance counselor about your options.
- Use [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com) to find money for college.
- Take the PSAT; consider the ACT/SAT in the spring.



#### Summer after Junior Year

- Visit college campuses; ask college friends for advice.
- Request applications and brochures from your top college choices and visit their Web sites.
- Practice application essays by writing sample drafts.



#### Senior Year: Fall

- Organize your applications by creating files for your target schools. List app. requirements and deadlines.
- Take the ACT and/or SAT.
- Request letters of recommendation from teachers and community leaders early.
- Talk to your parents about college costs. How much can you afford? Explore your options for funding.
- Check [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com) for new scholarships. Visit [www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org) to learn about financial aid.
- *November:* If you're applying through Early Action or Early Decision, submit your application this month.

#### Senior Year: Winter

- Work on those college applications. Many applications are due in early January.
- *January:* File the Free Application for Federal Student Aid: (FAFSA: [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)) ASAP after January 1.
- Check with your prospective colleges about additional financial aid application forms and requirements.



#### Senior Year: Spring

- Check the mail for admissions letters and financial aid awards.
- Compare your admissions offers. Ask your guidance counselor to help you weigh your options.
- Time for a decision! Most schools ask that you choose your school by May 1.
- *May:* Don't forget to notify schools you have decided not to attend.
- Double check deadlines for housing, financial aid, etc.
- Send your final transcripts to your new school.

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### Financial Aid Questions to Consider

- What type of financial aid packages does the school offer?
- Are there a variety of options?
- Are any tuition increases planned in the next few years?
- What has been the average tuition increase in years past?
- What kind of work opportunities are available?
- What are the deadlines for submitting financial aid forms?
- How will outside scholarships affect my aid package?
- Where can I find more sources of financial aid on campus?
- Are there any departmental scholarships available?
- What state financial aid programs do I qualify for?
- What sort of alternative financial aid programs are available?
- Ask about installment plans or state tax credits.

### Early Decision (ED) vs. Early Action (EA)

ED and EA allow you to both apply and learn the college's decision earlier than regular admission.

**Early Decision** is binding. If accepted, you must attend that school and withdraw any applications sent to other schools. You won't be able to compare financial aid offers.

**Early Action** is not binding. If accepted, you may compare admissions and financial aid offers from other schools and wait to commit to the college until later in the year.

*\*Some schools now offer **Single-Choice Early Action**. This option is similar to Early Action, except that you agree to not apply early to other colleges (though you may apply regular decision).*

Many ED or EA deadlines occur in the fall. Verify with the college whether you are allowed to apply early action to other schools. Speak to your guidance counselor and ask your prospective school for more information.

## What Are Colleges Looking For?

A college admissions office wants to see more than just high test scores and grades. How can you separate yourself from the crowd?

### ***On Your Application?***

*Grades and standardized test scores:* It's obvious, but these marks are one of the first things colleges look at.

*Extracurricular activities:* Quantity doesn't mean quality. Have you taken a leadership role in your chosen activities? What have you accomplished?

*Rigorous course schedule:* Schools want to see challenging courses that will help you grow academically. Don't take classes just to pad your GPA.

*Follow the rules:* If an application asks you to choose one essay, don't answer them all. Read the application directions completely before answering any questions.

*Include everything:* Verify all forms have been signed and that you've included all essays and recommendations. Double check everything before you send it!

*On-time arrival:* Note when the application deadline is and send it in with plenty of time to spare. You may want to send your application via certified mail for added assurance that it arrived on time.

### ***On Your Application Essay?***

*Show, don't tell:* Don't just list your attributes; get specific. For example, saying that you're helpful is not as dynamic as relating your experiences with helping younger students learn how to read.

*Creativity counts:* Avoid cliches or standard essay topics. Try an original idea, something an admissions office hasn't seen a million times before.

*No spelling errors:* First, spell-check your essay. Then, read it again for usage mistakes. Have a parent or teacher look it over for spelling and grammar errors.

*Personality:* The application essay is your opportunity to show your prospective college what makes you *you*. Ask yourself whether what you've written is memorable, engaging and in your own voice.

### ***In Your Interview?***

*Arrive early and dress the part:* Know where the interview will be held ahead of time so you won't arrive late. Dress on the conservative and understated side. If you have questions about the dress code, call the college and ask.

*Identity:* Admissions offices want to know you as a person. If you're discussing your accomplishments, highlight why they were meaningful for you, or what you got out of them.

*Spontaneity, positivity, confidence:* Sounding like you're reading off of a cue card won't leave them with a fond memory. It's a good idea to rehearse, but remember that the interview should be a conversation. Be natural, sure of yourself and optimistic about your future college career.

*Interest in the college:* Come prepared with questions or impressions you have about the college to demonstrate your interest level. Place less emphasis on your plans after graduation and more on what you want to learn and accomplish as a college student. Follow up with a thank-you note.

***FastTip:*** Remember that college selection is all about matching. Different schools have their own ideas regarding the students they want. Just be yourself!

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