**Planning Your List of Colleges**

A well-rounded college list will be representative of three admission categories: *probable, target, and reach*. Your list should be a healthy balance of these categories, with approximately 2-4 schools representing each category.

*What is a probable school for me?*  
These are schools where your chances are highly likely or certain for admission.

*What is a target school for me?*

These are realistic schools or those that match your credentials well. Your GPA and test scores are in line with the averages of those students accepted.

*What is a reach school for me?*  
These schools are considered long shots. Your profile may not match that of an accepted student; it may be lower. Due to the extreme selectivity of some colleges, it is important to understand that some colleges will be reaches for everyone, regardless of a strong academic profile. However, we encourage all students to apply to 2-4 reach schools. You never know what a college may be looking for, beyond the numbers. You may have “it”, and your reach could become a reality.

Why create a list of 10-15 colleges?

This number will give you plenty of room for exploration and editing. Typically, students will create a long list of colleges now, then revise it over the next several months through further research and visits. The *average* number of colleges to which most students apply is 8-10. By September of your senior year, we hope you have narrowed your list to this range, maybe slightly less or slightly more. This is a healthy number that allows you to have a good balance between probable, target, and reach schools. Just remember to keep your list representative of the three admission categories. Do you have to create a list of 15 colleges right now? Absolutely not! With just a few schools in mind, you can be very successful with the college admission process.

**Factors to Consider**

The most important factor to consider in creating your list is FIT. How do you know if a college is a good fit for you? Ask yourself these questions:

*Does the college offer a program of study that matches my interests and needs*?  
If you know your major, it makes sense to target schools that will accommodate your interests and strengths. It is also wise to look for colleges that may have strength in your desired major, but not necessarily colleges that focus only on your major (what if you change your mind?).

At least 60% of college students change their major, so if you’re undecided, that is OK! You may want to consider a college that offers a wealth of majors and options. This tends to be available at larger universities, but not always.

*Will the college allow you to grow and expand your academic abilities?*

*Does the college provide a level of academic rigor that matches my aptitude and preparation?*  
Evaluate your comfort level. Are you OK with just “getting by”? Do you prefer to play it safe in a less-challenging environment? Do you need to work extra hard to get average grades? Do you like to venture out and challenge yourself?

Look for a challenge, but don’t overwhelm yourself.

*Does the college provide a style of instruction that matches the way I like to learn?*

Study the curriculum and the way it is delivered at each college on your list.  
Consider your personal learning style. Then, consider the college’s classroom approach. Do they match?

*Does the college offer a community that feels like home to you?*

Maybe you have already visited a campus that feels very comfortable to you, or maybe that is yet to come. You may have an intuitive reaction to a campus, and just know that you’ve found a good match.

Consider the people that will surround you at college, along with the environmental factors. Do these things match your personality and characteristics? Would you have to leave your comfort zone to fit in?

Are you looking for a college that will support your voice and allow for creativity and imagination, or are you looking for a college with structure and a plan that you will follow?

*Does the college value you for what you do well?*  
Consider your contact with admissions prior to being accepted – did you feel valued? Will the college provide the value and investment that you are looking for? Are your talents recognized with scholarships or other academic opportunities?Are your questions answered in a timely manner?  
Does the college feel genuine to you?

In addition to the above considerations, here is a longer list of factors to consider when creating your list:

* Physical size (small or large campus)  
  o Public vs. Private  
  o Cost, Value, & Return on Investment
* Location (urban, rural, near a city, small town)  
  o Distance from home  
  o Residential opportunities (dorms, suites, apartments)  
  o Student body size  
  o Faculty (% that hold a terminal degree, % of teaching assistants/graduate assistants)
* Diversity (male to female ratio, minority population, religious background, international students)
* Availability of majors, unique academic programs, accelerated degrees  
  o Athletics, clubs, and activities  
  o Student support services (for students with disabilities, tutoring, writing center)
* Research opportunities  
  o % of students accepted to graduate school programs  
  o % of students who graduate in 4, 5, or 6 years  
  o % of students who secure a job within 6 months of graduation (research “outcomes”)

**Ranking vs. Fit**

Considerations like reputation, prestige, and name-brand status may play a part in your college list creation. Many students and families will also resort to rankings in magazines and the Internet. We do not suggest this practice, simply because ranking is not nearly as important as fit.

Keep in mind, most of the rankings you will review are identifying prestige, not necessarily quality. Colleges are always looking for an edge in the rankings and ways to increase their reputation. It is wise to look beyond this to see the real nuts and bolts of the college and its offerings.

**Dimensions of Fit**

Another way to approach fit is by examining these three elements:

o Academic and Testing Admission Fit

Determined by the College

Do your scores and grades fit the school profile?

o Social and Academic Fit

Determined by the Student

Does the school have your major? Interests? Social life?

o Financial Fit

Determined by the Family  
Be aware of “sticker” price vs. actual cost.

**Search Tools**

There are several good search tools on the Internet and in print. We have compiled a list of the most comprehensive, reliable sources for you as you narrow your list:   
o College Board (http://www.collegeboard.org)  
o CollegeXpress(http://www.collegexpress.com)

o College Data (http://www.collegedata.com/)

o Princeton Review (http://www.princetonreview.com/)

o Books by Fiske, Princeton Review, and College Board

**Majors & Careers**

When visiting colleges or completing Internet searches, you may be asked about your college major. While some students have a good idea of their course of study, others may be truly undecided. Either way, there are several tools to help you clarify your plans. Keep in mind, though, those plans are bound to change for the majority of students. More than 60% of college students will change their major 2-3 times.

College Board’s website has a very comprehensive look at majors and careers. A major and a career are two different things. Your college major may not necessarily indicate your career path. It is important that you understand the difference between, for example, majoring in Psychology, and being a psychologist. Visit https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/majors-careers for a full list of major and career profiles. There are hundreds of sub-categories to choose from; it is really one of the best resources for major/career searching. Each major profile includes information about courses to take in high school, college-level courses, similar majors, and colleges that offer that major. The career profiles include thorough descriptions, education needed, compensation, and similar careers.

**Standardized Testing**

Since most colleges and universities still ask for standardized test scores, it is important that students take these tests before applying.

**SAT – www.collegeboard.org**

You are encouraged to take the SAT at least once during junior year, while many 11th grade students will take it twice or even three times. Some juniors will be done with testing in 11th grade, while others may test into 12th grade. The timeline of test taking is ***different for every student.***

The SAT is scored out of 1600 points (800 points each for evidence-based reading and writing, and math).

2022–23 School Year Test Dates

| **SAT Test Date\*** | **Registration Deadline** | **Deadline for Changes, Regular Cancellation, and Late Registration** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Aug 27, 2022** | Jul 29, 2022 | Aug 16, 2022 |
| **Oct 1, 2022** | Sept 2, 2022 | Sept 20, 2022 |
| **Nov 5, 2022\*\*** | Oct 7, 2022  [**Register**](https://mysat.collegeboard.org) | Oct 25, 2022 |
| **Dec 3, 2022** | Nov 3, 2022  [**Register**](https://mysat.collegeboard.org) | Nov 22, 2022 |
| **Mar 11, 2023** | Feb 10, 2023 | Feb 28, 2023 |
| **May 6, 2023** | Apr 7, 2023 | Apr 25, 2023 |
| **June 3, 2023** | May 4, 2023 | May 23, 2023 |

**SAT Subject Tests**

Some colleges also require SAT Subject Tests. These are hour-long, content-based tests used to showcase your achievement in specific subject areas. There are 20 Subject Tests in five subject areas – listed below. You choose the test(s) you want to take, and you choose if you share those scores with colleges. College Board’s website has plenty of preparation tools and study guides for Subject Tests.

It is recommended that you take these tests right after you finish the courses that cover the material being tested. Keep in mind, you can’t take the SAT and Subject Tests on the same test date. Therefore, plan your test taking schedule appropriately to be sure you meet all application deadlines during your senior year.

You should know which of your colleges require these tests, how many tests you need to take, and which subjects are recommended or required to take. Typically, colleges that are more selective in admission require or recommend Subject Tests, but you should still check the admission requirements of ALL colleges on your list on the official college website.

**ACT – www.act.org**

Most colleges will accept the ACT or the SAT, so you may consider trying both. If you do take both the ACT and SAT, you can review your scores on a concordance table (example: https://www.compassprep.com/comparing-act-and-new-sat-scores/) to determine which score is higher and should be sent to colleges. The ACT includes a science component. The sections are also much quicker, but the questions are presented in a more direct format. ACT’s writing component is optional, but we STRONGLY RECOMMEND that all students take it.

**Test Date** **Registration Deadline**

Dec. 10, 2022 Nov. 4, 2022

Feb. 11, 2023 Jan. 6, 2023

April 15, 2023 March 10, 2023

June 10, 2023 May 5, 2023

July 15, 2023 June 16, 2023

**College Visits & Interviews**

**Visits**

Visiting a college is one of the strongest ways to show demonstration of interest. Utilize your breaks from school and don’t forget about your (2) excused college visit days. While summer may be a more convenient time to visit colleges, just realize that you may not get the full exposure since campuses will be less populated. Still, any visit is better than no visit. It is recommended that students visit colleges 2-3 times each. After all, the investment you will make in your final choice deserves more than one look.

The spring months afford many opportunities to visit colleges. You will see many advertisements for spring open houses and visitation days geared toward juniors. These events typically include an admissions presentation and campus tour. While you’re at the college, it’s acceptable to spend some time looking around on your own, visiting campus spots that may not be included on the tour, dining on campus, or anything that gives you a good feel for the school. You may compete for individual time during large open house events. Make a point to meet at least one admissions counselor while on campus, make a connection, and ask for the business card to keep in touch.

**Interviews**

While interviews are not required during the college application process, and usually only occur when you are a senior, you may find yourself in position to have an interview during junior year. It is so important to be prepared for this type of meeting. Some basic tips to remember for a college admissions interview:

o Dress appropriately. When in doubt, business casual is recommended – dress shirt/dress pants for the males; professional dress/skirt/blouse/dress pants for the females.

o Shake hands with a firm handshake and be seated when offered.

o Be relaxed, yet poised. Be yourself. Answer all questions fully and frankly, but avoid running on.

o Parents/guardians should wait outside of the interview.

o Be prepared to discuss: your reasons for choosing the college, major/career interests, extracurricular activities, your high school experience.

o Be prepared to know: specific things about the college so you show the interviewer that you are prepared and interested.

o Be prepared with questions of your own.  
o Take with you: your transcript, resume/activity sheet, your standardized test scores printed from the testing agency websites, any notes to help you remember important points you want to discuss.

Always send a note of thanks to your interviewer or any admissions counselor(s) you meet while visiting campus.

**Letters of Recommendation**

Most college applications request 2-3 letters of recommendation from people who know you in and out of the classroom. It is your responsibility to find teachers who will write these letters on your behalf. Some colleges request that teacher letters of recommendation come from certain academic disciplines, so be sure to read the admission requirements carefully. Otherwise, choose teachers who can speak best to your academic abilities and character. The letter does not have to come from a teacher who taught your grade “A” class. Some of the best letters come from teachers who helped you through difficulties in the classroom, and while the highest grade was not achieved, that teacher can speak well to your strengths and determination. Finally, it is even better to ask a teacher who knows you inside and outside the classroom. Perhaps that teacher you had is also your club advisor, music instructor, coach, or personal tutor.

To be sure that you give your recommendation writers plenty of time, **you should verbally ask two teachers before the end of junior year**. You should make this request in person, not via email. If the teacher agrees to write your letter, they may ask you for a resume or answers to a set of questions to assist them with their letter writing. Be prepared to give them this type of document, before junior year concludes. You will follow up with a formal written request.

**Writing College Essays**

You’ve probably heard students who’ve been through the college process tell you – work on your essays early! It’s true – writing college essays takes time, thought, and patience. We recommend brainstorming essay ideas during junior year.

It is important to choose a topic that says something about you. You may have the ultimate freedom to do this through an open-ended essay or personal statement, or you may be given a prompt to guide your response. Either way, you should be using this space to share about YOU. The Common Application, which many students will use to apply to college, has several writing prompts that are typically released in March. To view the writing prompts for 2018-19, and gain a better understanding of the Common App college essay, see below:

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.   
  
2. The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?   
  
3. Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?   
  
4. Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma - anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.   
  
5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.   
  
6. Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?

7. Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.

Your essay should display your preferences, values, creativity, and depth of knowledge. Your writing should reflect your organizational abilities, sense of style, and mastery of strong written English, including grammar and punctuation. (Grammar and punctuation mistakes are quite common in college essays, and can be easily avoided with thorough proofing.)

The topic you select for your essay can reveal much about who you are. Yale's application suggests: “...write about something that matters to you. Use your own voice. Do not worry about making a special effort to include impressive vocabulary words or overly complex sentences. If you sound like yourself and discuss something you care about, your essay will be more effective.”

Allow your essay to be proofread by many people. Consider your family members, close friends, teachers, counselors, trusted adults, boss, coach, and/or someone who you recently met. After you have edited your essay, be sure that you have created a piece that best represents you.

**Building a Resume**

A high school student’s resume may be a requirement or optional piece to the college application. Like the essay, we recommend starting this during junior year. You will need to begin recording all of your high school activities, including clubs, sports, musical/drama productions, academic awards and accomplishments, and leadership positions. Your activities outside of school are just as important – employment experience, involvement with your church, summer programs, and volunteer experience. Do not downplay any of your activities; colleges want to know what you’ve done to fill your time. If you are unsure about including an activity, talk with your counselor. You should only mention activities from 9th grade and beyond, unless it is an activity with many years of participation (examples: Girl/Boy Scouts, dancing since age 4, soccer since age 6, piano since age 10, etc). Colleges would be interested in your dedication to long-term activities.

The presentation of your resume is just as important as content. It should be neat, organized, and pleasant to the eye. Messy resumes with grammar mistakes and awkward formats will be ignored. To keep your resume organized, list the activities of most importance first. Be brief, yet creative, with your activity descriptions.

**College Athletics**

If you plan to compete at the Division I or II level, you must register with the NCAA Eligibility Center here: www.eligibilitycenter.org. This should be done during junior year, as early as possible. (For the Division III level, see the college’s website for eligibility information. It’s still not a bad idea to register with NCAA, as you may end up competing at a different level.)

On the Eligibility Center website, you will find plenty of resources to get you started on your path to becoming a college athlete. At the end of junior year, you will need to have a transcript sent to the NCAA Eligibility Center.

Other tasks for college-bound athletes, aside from determining Division I or II eligibility, include: filling out recruitment questionnaires on official college athletic websites, creating video demonstrating your talent, and working with your coaches (both school and club) to determine best fit athletic programs.

**Admission Plans**

As you explore colleges, you may hear about different types of admission plans, such as early action and early decision. In addition to the regular decision plan, many colleges offer various types of admission to manage enrollments more carefully.

Most of the “early” admission plans operate on earlier deadlines, typically ranging from October 1 – December 1, with many regular decision deadlines between December 1 – February 1.

**Regular Decision**

The student applies by a specified date and receives a decision within a reasonable and clearly stated timeframe. A student may apply to other colleges without restriction.

**Rolling Admission**

The application process in which an institution reviews applications as they are completed and renders admission decisions to students throughout the admission cycle. While the deadline date may be “rolling”, a college may fill their seats early, so it’s best not to delay.

**Early Action (EA)**

Growing very popular, this is a non-binding admission plan. For students who can get their materials in by the earlier deadline, this is a fantastic way to get some results even earlier (possibly before the holidays). You can apply to multiple colleges through EA if you choose.

**Early Decision (ED)**

Originally an application option for very selective colleges to their best candidates, ED has evolved to become an excellent way for colleges to improve their admission statistics and for students to improve their chances of admission. The odds of ED admission are stronger, but a student must proceed with caution. A big commitment is about to be made. When applying ED, you may only apply to one college through this method. If accepted to that college, you are **committing to attend**. All other college applications must be withdrawn (yes, you should be applying to other colleges while you are filing your one ED application). If deferred, your application will be set aside and reviewed at a later date, most likely with the regular admission pool. You may also be denied. Before choosing to apply ED to a college, multiple visits (including an overnight visit) are recommended. Give yourself time to get a good perspective on the college before making a big commitment. Read all rules and fine print when applying ED, including the application, ED agreement, and college’s official website. Inquire with admission counselors via e-mail when you have questions, so you have answers in writing.

**Restrictive Early Action or Single Choice Early Action**

Colleges with this type of admission program do not allow applicants to apply to other schools during the “early” period, either EA or ED. You can still apply to other colleges through Regular Decision. However, once an applicant receives an EA decision, they are free to apply elsewhere, if they so choose. While this option is less common at colleges, it’s still important to read the restrictions on the college’s official website.

**Community College**

Community college has become a popular choice among high school graduates across the nation. With the competitiveness of 4-year colleges rising, and with escalating costs, attending a community college may be a good choice.

Community college is not a repeat of high school, and should never be taken for an easy route in place of attending a 4-year institution. Community colleges pride themselves on a comprehensive education that matches that of 4-year colleges, making the process of transferring possible. If you intend to graduate from a community college with an Associate’s degree, plan to spend 2-3 years at the college. Upon graduation, and with careful planning, you could possibly transfer most of your credits and enter a 4-year college with junior status. Just think, half of your education completed at a lower cost, with the convenience of being near home. This plan works for many people. If you are considering community college following high school, you should complete the application process in winter of your senior year.

**Financial Aid & The FAFSA**

College costs are drastically rising, but there is assistance available. In fact, each year, there is financial aid money that goes unclaimed. Applying for financial aid takes effort and the process can seem complex at first, but the government has created an easy-to-use application known as the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). The FAFSA will be available to you on October 1st of your senior. The form requires financial figures from students and parents. The FAFSA website (http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/) has several tools to help you get organized before filing the FAFSA. Our website is filled with information about financial aid: http://www.hcrhs.org/counseling/college-career-services/financial- aid-information

We recommend using early planning tools such as the *FAFSA4caster* (http://studentaid.ed.gov/fafsa/estimate) or *College Board’s* tools and calculators (https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college/tools-calculators). All of these tools allow you to get early estimates of financial aid figures.

Many students and parents believe that they should only apply to public institutions because of the cost factor. However, we encourage students to have both public and private colleges on their list. Private colleges, with a higher price tag, often have more available funds to give students, bringing their cost similar to that of a public college.