

V. APPLYING TO COLLEGE



Searching for and applying to colleges **sets the stage for life** after high school.

Getting into college means creating a great application. Every minute invested in your application is a minute invested in your future.



THE BIG PICTURE

Applying to college

Applying to college is an exciting part of figuring out the next stage in your life. For some schools, it's a big task and can seem overwhelming at first. But if you break it down into smaller steps, the process becomes much more manageable.

This section will help you think about each step along the way.

01 PICKING SCHOOLS THAT ARE RIGHT FOR YOU

02 PREPARING FOR COLLEGE ADMISSIONS TESTS

03 YOUR COLLEGE APPLICATION

04 MAKING A DECISION

UNDERSTAND

Picking schools that are right for you

Choosing a school is ultimately about what matters most to you, not what has worked for friends or family.

There are a lot of great tools that allow you to search for and compare schools. But you can start by asking a few simple questions.



Does the school offer many degrees or does it specialize in just a few?

If you know your preferred college major, does the school provide that degree program? If you're undecided, does the school offer a diverse range of classes and degrees?



How far away from home do you want to be?

Is it important for you to stay close to home? Or do you want to move to a new area? Do you want to live at home and commute to school? Keep in mind, tuition at public colleges is more affordable for in-state students.

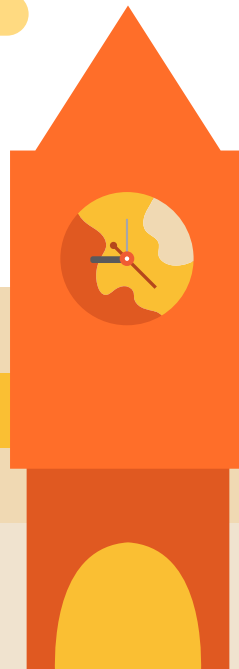


Do you prefer a big school or a small one?

Do you enjoy learning in a smaller community? Or are you interested in a larger environment with lots of people from different backgrounds?

Are activities outside of the classroom a factor?

Are there extracurricular activities that are important to you? If you have passions you want to continue to pursue in college, such as sports, playing an instrument, or acting in theater productions, check to see what opportunities exist.



UNDERSTAND

Types of colleges

Four-year colleges

offer programs that lead to bachelor's (and higher) degrees.

- + **Public colleges** are supported by taxpayers and usually cost less than private colleges.
- + **Private colleges** rely mainly on tuition, fees, and private sources of funding, and often provide financial aid to help bring costs down.

Two-year colleges

offer programs that lead to certificates or associate's degrees.

- + **Community colleges** offer associate's degrees that prepare students to transfer to a four-year college and earn a bachelor's degree.
- + **Technical programs** offer specialized training in a particular industry or career.

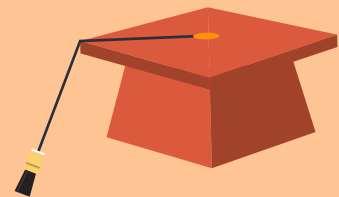
Technical and career colleges (for-profit)

offer degree programs for specific careers.

They tend to have higher costs and often have lower completion rates. Be careful, the credits you earn may not transfer to other colleges.

Things to consider

- Students who attend full-time are more likely to complete their degrees than those who attend part-time.
- Students are more likely to earn a bachelor's degree if they start in a four-year college.
- Many for-profit colleges have low graduation rates, often resulting in students ending up with lots of debt and no degree.
- Students who enter two-year programs sometimes have a hard time transferring their credits to four-year institutions.



UNDERSTAND

Preparing for college admissions tests

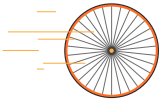
Admissions tests like the ACT and the SAT are used by many colleges to measure high school students' likelihood of success.

This can be one of the most nerve-wracking parts of applying, so make sure you plan ahead.

1

START WITH THE PSAT/PACT

Register and take the PSAT/PACT in 10th grade to help you get a feel for what it's like to take a standardized test. Use your score to set goals and understand where to focus your preparation.



2

REGISTER FOR THE SAT/ACT

Plan to take the SAT/ACT in 11th grade, or even earlier. You can check the [SAT website](#) and [ACT website](#) for test dates and registration deadlines. Registration usually closes a month before the test date, so make sure you sign up before the deadline! In some cases, test fees can be subsidized or waived. Check out the resources on [page 12](#) for more information.



3

STUDY FOR THE SAT/ACT

Like all things in life, standardized tests require practice. Set a target score based on where you want to apply. Take a practice test a month before the exam—if you score above your target, aim higher! If you score below, determine which areas need improvement and set aside time to consistently practice.

There are [many free resources](#) available online to help you study. You can also find more personalized test prep options including workshops, classes, and tutoring for a fee.

4

UNDERSTAND YOUR SCORE

Once you receive your score, make sure you compare it to the average score for your college choices. If your score isn't as high as you'd hoped, take the test again. Just make sure you register ahead of the next deadline.

UNDERSTAND

Your college application

Each part of your application helps colleges get a better understanding of you.

Here are some tips on how to excel in all of them.

Essays

Essays are an opportunity to showcase your writing skills and share information that might not appear in other areas of your application. Remember, you don't need to finish the essay in one sitting. Take time to reflect on the prompt and then create a thoughtful, focused outline. Write a first draft and collect feedback from a trusted adult or friend. Use their tips and suggestions to complete your final draft.

Letters of recommendation

Letters of recommendation are a chance for people who know you well (teachers, mentors, counselors, coaches, etc.) to share their thoughts about your character and achievements. Ask your references at least a month in advance so they have time to write a thoughtful letter. Make sure they know why you are asking them and provide a list of things you want them to highlight.

Activities, jobs, and awards

Colleges want to know that you have interests and experiences outside of the classroom. Activities, jobs, and awards demonstrate leadership and commitment. Include activities at school and out in the community, highlighting meaningful involvement.

UNDERSTAND

Making a decision

Congratulations, you're in! Now what?

If you have been accepted to more than one college, you'll need to weigh your options in order to determine which school will be best for you.

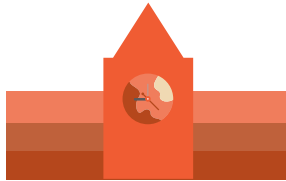
Things to consider:



COST

Compare tuition, fees, and financial aid packages to understand your out-of-pocket costs for each school.

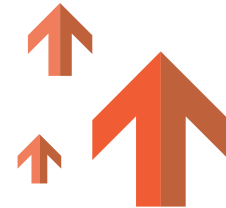
Check out the [Paying for College](#) section for more information and resources.



CAMPUS LIFE

Does the school have clubs and activities that fit your interests? What's the housing like? Are there job opportunities on campus or relationships with local employers? Does the school provide child care?

If possible, visit each school to get a sense for what works for your interests and needs.



OUTCOMES

College is an investment, so you'll want to make sure your college is going to add value to your future.

Assess each school's graduation rates, job prospects, and the average amount of student loan debt.

THE PLAN

Find and get into the school that is right for me

THE STEPS I WILL TAKE

1. Create a list of schools to apply to

2. Study for the SAT/ACT

3. Start my college applications early

4. (Write my own)

Want to learn more?

These resources will help you get started.



START HERE

One-stop college shop

Visit BigFuture's website to begin your college search and application process.

 Explore

SCHOOL SEARCH

Find your college fit

Look for schools based on what's important to you with the College Board's interactive guide.

 Explore

Get college data

Evaluate schools based on national data with this US Dept. of Education interactive search tool.

 Explore

Search and compare colleges

Compare, map, and share top colleges with CollegeView's detailed attributes filters.

 Explore



SCHOOL SEARCH

Virtual college fairs

Connect to colleges and admissions officers from home at a CollegeWeekLive virtual event.

[→ Explore](#)

360° college visits

View over 1,300 campuses on your computer with eCampus tours.

[→ Explore](#)

Community colleges

Learn whether community college is right for you with answers to these frequently asked questions.

[→ Explore](#)

Advice for undocumented students

Research the important things you need to know if you're applying to college as an undocumented student.

[→ Explore](#)

STANDARDIZED TESTS

PSAT information

Learn about taking the PSAT and using your score to study for the SAT with this suite of assessments.

[→ Explore](#)

SAT test preparation

Prepare for the SAT with free, personalized practice resources from Khan Academy.

[→ Explore](#)

SAT registration

Research test dates, locations, and deadlines, and then register online at College Board for the SAT.

[→ Explore](#)



STANDARDIZED TESTS

SAT test and application fee waivers

Find out whether you are eligible to take the SAT for free and apply to four colleges for free too.

 Explore

ACT preparation

Download the ACT's free practice questions and tests to review subject areas where you need help.

 Explore

ACT registration

Register online and learn about how ACT's Educational Opportunity Service can help you find colleges.

 Explore

ACT test and application fee waivers

Find out whether you are eligible to take the ACT for free.

 Explore

COLLEGE APPLICATIONS

Anatomy of an application

Learn about the most common college application requirements with this quick guide.

 Explore

Application checklist

Follow these steps to stay organized and on top of your college applications.

 Explore

A single application

Search the 700 schools that accept the Common Application and find out whether it might be right for you.

 Explore



STANDARDIZED TESTS

Craft strong essays

Refer to these College Board tips and articles as you outline and write your college essays.

 Explore

Get great letters

Remember this advice for figuring out who, when, and how to ask for letters of recommendation.

 Explore

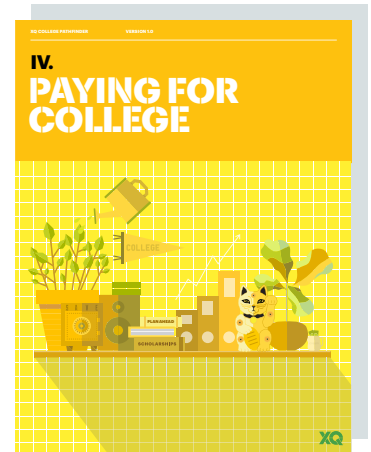
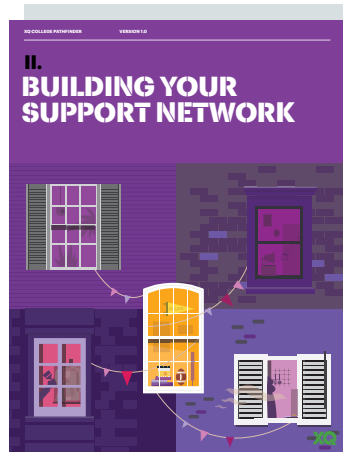
Application tips and tricks

This article provides a few easy steps for increasing your chances of getting accepted.

 Explore

Continue your journey, grow your knowledge.

Don't forget to check out these other XQ College Pathfinder resources.



There's more to come.

We will keep adding new tools and resources.

We'd love to hear from you!

What do you think of this guide? How can we make it better? Are there other resources you're looking for? Please let us know!

→ [Send Feedback](#)