





# Introduction

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Blessings and greetings,

Planning and preparing for future can be a time consuming and daunting task. This planning guide is intended to help answer questions you may have, and point you in the right direction. Our goal is to have each of you where the Lord wants you to be. As you begin to plan for your future, we encourage you to be in prayer about the special gifts and talents that the Lord has blessed you with so you can find the “right fit”.

Keep in mind that there is a difference between high school graduation requirements and college entrance requirements, although they sound similar, there are some distinct differences. If you are planning on going to a four year college directly from high school, it is important to begin taking the correct sequence of courses required by the various colleges or universities beginning in ninth grade. There are more than 3,000 institutions of higher learning, hundreds of community colleges, technical and vocational schools, and Bible colleges available to choose from. Each of these will vary in requirements for admission, cost of attendance, size, cost, affiliation, and location. For example, UC system schools require that you fulfill the “a - g” required courses as well as the SAT Reasoning Test and the SAT Subject Area Test. Most colleges and universities require a minimum of two years of a foreign language.

In order to arrive at your destination, it is important to have a map to follow, this planner is intended to assist you and your family develop that map. The information contained in this planner should assist and encourage you to give thoughtful consideration to your future. Begin early and work diligently to follow the necessary steps and procedures outlined in this planning guide, if you have any questions, we are always available!

I am looking forward to working with you and your family in determining the right plan for you. I will be conducting grade level parent/student meetings during the year to keep you updated with college and financial aid information. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions at 714.662.7485 or email me at [paul.woo@calvaryschools.org](mailto:paul.woo@calvaryschools.org).

Blessings,

Paul Woo  
Vice-Principal/Guidance

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him, and he shall direct your path.”*

*Proverbs 3:5-6*



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# Finding The Right Fit

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If you love what you do, you never have to work a day in your life. What talents or abilities has the Lord blessed you with? What career path is the right one for you? As you think on these things, the path you want to follow will become more clear. For example, if you want to be an architect, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo will be one of the schools you should consider, so you will want to make sure you take the right courses to qualify for admission.

It is important that you find the school that is the right fit for you. Should you go to a large school or small? Do you want to stay where it's always sunny or do you want to see the change in seasons? The answers to these and other questions will help you determine the school that is right for you. Ultimately, we know that the Lord has the perfect school already picked out for us, we just have to wait and see where He opens the door. Still, we have to make sure we do our part. The following steps will help you on that journey.

## ***STEP ONE: Know yourself and your reasons for attending college***

- Recognize your strengths and weaknesses
- Analyze your interests and values
- Set measureable, attainable goals
- Pray and ask the Lord to reveal His plan for your life

## ***STEP TWO: Consider College Characteristics***

- Majors, minors, educational programs and opportunities
- What degrees are offered?
- Admission policies and expectations
- Location and population
- Tuition, room and board, and financial aid
- Campus activities
- Support services

## ***STEP THREE: List, Compare, and Visit Colleges***

- Compile information from several resources:
  - College catalogs, videos, and websites
  - College representatives
  - Counselors, teachers, parents, students, alumni
- Prepare a college comparison checklist
- Weigh the advantages and disadvantages
- Go on campus visits, meet with the admissions office

## ***STEP FOUR: Apply for Admission and Observe Deadlines***

- Narrow your choices: Reach, Reasonable, and Really Sure
- Review college admission test requirements
- Know the application fees and deadlines
- Submit your application materials
  - Application for Admission
  - Official High School Transcript
  - Letters of Recommendation
  - Test Results



# Setting Goals

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A young man who graduated from college decided to seek employment. He hoped to find a job somewhere away from his home town. He walked into the local bus station, approached the ticket counter and asked the clerk for a bus ticket. The clerk asked, “Where do you want to go?” The young man said, “I don’t know. Just give me a ticket to somewhere.” If you don’t know where you are going, any road will take you there. Jim Cathcart, a noted professional speaker, once said, “Most people aim at nothing in life and hit it with amazing accuracy.” If we don’t specify exactly what we want, we have no reason to complain about what we get or where we find ourselves. In her article “Success and the Goal Setter,” Bettie B. Youngs tells us, “Goals represent expectations, hopes and dreams, and to the extent our goals are achieved, we are successful.”

Goal setting is a very important life skill and it will have a profound effect on your ability to concentrate and avoid procrastination. Follow these basic guidelines and the process of goal setting will be inspiring, useful and fun. Why waste any more time? If your life has been drifting, or you have difficulty getting down to your studies, you need to begin the habit of goal setting right now!

## Write Down Your Goals

Always write your goals. Keep a journal for long-term, intermediate, and short-term goals. Use to-do lists to keep track of the immediate goals that are part of your everyday life. The principle behind writing down your goals is the same as the one behind making notes rather than relying on your memory. Not only does it make the goal more concrete, but the physical act of writing and expressing the idea in words engages at least two of your many intelligences. Things have a strong tendency to be more of a true commitment when they are written down.

## Keep Several Lists According to Time Scale

Divide your goals into categories according to how distant they are in the future. Typical divisions are:

- \* long-term (5-10 years)
- \* intermediate-term (3-5 years)
- \* short-term (1-2 years)
- \* immediate (this month, this week, or today).

## Set Priorities

You cannot do everything you want to do. You must set priorities or you will end up dissipating your energy and not accomplishing anything to your fullest potential.

## Challenge Yourself

Keep your goals high enough to inspire you and reasonable enough to seem always within your reach. Excellence is never achieved by luck or accident. It requires that you push yourself beyond your comfort zone and challenge yourself. You still have to be reasonable, but there are always ways to achieve some version of your dreams.



# Setting Goals

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## Be Specific

Goals are useless if they are not specific. Don't set your long term career goal as something vague, such as "helping people" or "making a lot of money". You should express your goal in specific terms, such as "I will be a surgeon" or "I will be an aid worker in Africa" or "I will run my own company". The more exact you are, the easier it is to measure your progress. It's also easier to tell when you're done and ready to move on to the next goal. The more specific you are in scope and duration, the more likely you are to succeed.

## Include Actions

Setting the goal isn't enough by itself. You need to commit to the actions required to achieve your goal. The specific actions required to achieve long-term goals become the small goals you set for yourself this month or this week or on today's to-do list. Keep breaking your goals into smaller and smaller steps. You need a sense of where you are going and where you eventually want to be. How you get there is crucial. Look at each step and consider what has to happen before that step can occur. Ask yourself "What do I need to do to accomplish this?"

## Expect Failure

If you find a path with no obstacles, it probably doesn't lead anywhere. That which is truly challenging and inspirational is rarely easy. Don't give up just because you are not immediately successful or the path seems too difficult. If your dreams still feel right for you and still inspire you, your failure should be nothing more than a message that you need to reevaluate your action plan. Learn from your failures, but don't let them determine your life's direction.

## Rewrite, Revise, Revisit, Review and Change

Setting goals, especially in the long and intermediate terms, does not set your life in stone. Take time to review your goals and revise them a little or change them completely if necessary. Develop the flexibility of mind to reevaluate your current goals if your path leads you into contact with better, more inspiring goals.

## Link Your Goals

There should be a thread by which you can trace the direct relationship between today's activity and your longest-term dreams and goals. When the action you are taking right now is directly supporting your long-term goal and is lifting you incrementally toward it, you are experiencing the power of goal setting as a motivator, focusing agent, and cure for procrastination.

## Enjoy the Journey

Goal setting is a tool. It's a vital and incredibly valuable tool, but it is no more than that. Don't become so obsessively goal-oriented that you ignore the joy of the journey and rewards of reveling in the characteristics of the person you become on your way to that goal. Often it is those people who focus on the path of mastery rather than the journey's end who achieve the most in life.



## Goal-Setting for Students

The principles of goal setting can be applied to all aspects of your life. Here are some examples of how you can help motivate yourself in your studying and keep you on track for achieving the results you want.

### Long-term Goals

Long-term goals are your dreams. The reason you are studying today has to be linked to some dream about how you want to spend your life. For some people, the mere exercise of their minds and the expansion of their personal genius potential is enough motivation to study. Others have something more concrete in mind. It is usually a career goal - something that will last much of their adult lives. What vision of your life really grabs your imagination? Imagine your life ten years from now. What do you want to be doing?

### Intermediate Goals

Intermediate goals are usually for three to five years in the future and are one of the keys to achieving your long-term goals. For example, if you want to be a doctor, a necessary intermediate goal is getting into medical school in the first place.

### Short-term Goals

The steps toward your intermediate goal are a series of short-term goals, usually for six months to 2 years in the future. Getting into a medical school requires a high grade average.

### Immediate Goals

You cannot get high grades if you do not get today's homework assignment completed to the very best of your ability. Immediate goals are those that lead to the accomplishment of short-term goals. This is where the principle of "divide and conquer" comes into play most strongly.

### To-do Lists

When you write down your immediate goals (remember, you ALWAYS write your goals), and put them in priority order, you have created a to-do list for today's studying. Every immediate study goal that becomes part of your to-do list must be properly constructed and must -

- \* Be Specific (not "do some studying", but "complete 15 statistics problems")
- \* Be Reasonable (can be done in 30 to 60 minutes)
- \* Be Verifiable (or measurable - you can tell when you're finished)
- \* Be Rewarded (it's okay to bribe yourself - but finishing is the best reward)



# Regional Occupational Program - ROP

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The Regional Occupational Program (ROP) is state-funded public education that provides high quality career preparation and guidance year-round as part of the California public school system. The ROP teaches skills to high school and adult students each year. There are 74 regional occupational programs and centers in California. ROP instructors bring first-hand knowledge and experience to the classroom as a result of their recent employment in business and industry and are fully credentialed by the State Department of Education.

ROP course offerings are based upon labor market demand. Career and technical training is offered by ROP in almost any field where there is a promising local job market. Classes are taught in simulated work settings in high school or ROP campus settings. A wide variety of unpaid (CC) and paid (CVE) community-based workplace learning is available and students can earn graduation credits for these classes, too. Community Classroom (CC) classes are available in several career areas. Students intern in one of more than 700 area business sites to learn skills on the job. Some classes are a part of the Cooperative Vocational Education (CVE) program and include classroom instruction and on-the-job training. Some CVE classes are open-entry. Open-entry classes have ongoing registration or 'open enrollment.' ROP offers several evening and/or Saturday classes.

Who can take ROP classes?

The program is available to high school seniors, juniors, 16 years old, and adults; priority is extended to residents within the geographical region.

Why take an ROP class?

High school students earn grades and credits toward graduation.

- Gain experience required for immediate employment.

- Participate in courses that offer internships.

- Earn certificates of completion.

- Experience careers that may assist in choosing college majors and enhance college admission applications.

When and where are classes offered?

Classes are held in businesses, industries and high schools located within five participating districts, during and after school, evenings and Saturdays. The school year is divided into two 18 week semesters, fall and spring, plus a six week summer semester. Classes are generally one semester in length.

How can you register for courses?

High school students see the ROP career specialist on campus.

What is the cost?

High school students are not charged a registration fee. Some courses require a fee or deposit for books or supplies and / or have expenses related to proof of health and other requirements. Check course description for specific requirements. Bus passes are free to high school students who need transportation to and from ROP classes or internship sites.

For more information regarding ROP opportunities, see your guidance counselor.



# College Planning Calendar

## FRESHMEN YEAR

Develop two lists for planning each year of high school - one for the courses you plan to take to prepare for college, the other for the school and outside activities in which you want to participate.

Ask about taking Honors and/or Advanced Placement (AP) courses.

Begin the college research process, attend college fairs, meet with admission counselors, visit different campuses.

## SOPHOMORE YEAR

Find out what resources are available to help you plan for college. Review catalogs and college-search programs such as [www.californiacolleges.edu](http://www.californiacolleges.edu). Check out college guides such as The College Handbook, Index of Majors, Get A Jump, or The College Board Guide to 150 Popular College Majors.

Update plans for high school courses and activities.

Plan to take the PSAT/NMSQT in October of your sophomore and junior years.

Begin planning to take the SAT II Subject Area Tests for college admission and placement.

Ask about taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses.

## JUNIOR YEAR

### SEPTEMBER

Review your high school course and activities plans.

Take the PSAT/NMSQT in October

Meet with your guidance counselor and discuss your plan.

Know your social security number, you will need it to take tests and apply for college financial aid.

Attend college fairs and schedule visits.

### OCTOBER

Develop lists of your interests, educational priorities, talents, abilities, and personal qualities.

Take the PSAT/NMSQT.

Develop and rank a list of what you would like to study and do in college.

### NOVEMBER

Take the SAT Subject Area Tests, if taking a foreign language.

### DECEMBER

Review the results of your PSAT/NMSQT to help prepare for the SAT.

### JANUARY

Schedule college visits and/or campus tours.

### FEBRUARY

Plan on taking the SAT Reasoning Test register online at [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com).

### MARCH - APRIL

Develop your list of colleges that interest you.

### MAY

AP Exams the first two weeks of May.

Develop a list of teachers and other adults who would write letters of recommendation.

### JUNE

Consider taking part in a summer program or taking a community college course.



# College Planning Calendar

## SENIOR YEAR

### SEPTEMBER

The registration deadline for the October SAT date is in September.

Reduce your preliminary college list to 5 to 10 colleges. Write to each college's director of admission to request information.

Create a complete list of test and registration deadlines, financial aid applications and deadlines, and other materials you will need.

Many students choose to take the SAT more than once, if you do, keep in mind that it will take four to six weeks for the college to receive your scores, make sure they will arrive prior to the college deadline dates.

Most colleges will have an application fee, if you cannot pay the fee, write to the college's admission director regarding a fee waiver.

### OCTOBER

October 1st - Begin submitting CSU applications, submit UC apps on Nov. 1st.

*The October SAT is the most popular test administration with seniors.*

Many applications will require a personal statement, develop your outlines and begin writing rough drafts. Have others read them and give you candid feedback.

Decide whom to ask for recommendations and make sure to give them at least two weeks to write your letter. Provide an addressed stamped return envelope with the appropriate college forms and your personal information sheet.

Speak to high school alumni that attend the college you are interested in. Go on campus visits and make sure to meet with admission counselors and financial aid representatives.

### NOVEMBER

Begin revising your college essays, have others read them over and give their feedback.

Take the SAT Subject Area Tests, if taking a foreign language.

If you are applying early action or early decision, you will have to have your applications completed. Make sure you meet the application deadlines.

November 30 is the deadline for UC and CSU applications.

### DECEMBER

Continue to check on the status of your applications. Get your midyear report forms organized.

### JANUARY

Begin filling out your FAFSA, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, you and your parents will need a PIN. Completing your FAFSA is necessary for student loans too! Go to [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)

### MARCH

If you are enrolled in any AP courses, sign up for the AP exams.

Remember to finish the year strong! Avoid senioritis.

### APRIL

If you have been accepted by more than one college, prayerfully rank your preference, look for the "right fit"!

Carefully review financial aid awards from colleges. Look at how much of your need is covered, not just the amount given.

### MAY

AP Exams the first two weeks of May.

Most colleges must be notified by May 1st of your decision. Notify the colleges you will not attend.

### JUNE

**GRADUATION!**  
Discuss expectations with your parents for next year.



# College Planning Checklist

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<b><i>When To Begin</i></b>	<b><i>What To Do</i></b>	<b><i>How To Do It</i></b>
Freshmen & Sophomore	Become familiar with college entrance requirements. What courses in your high school curriculum satisfy college requirements? What tests will you have to take?	Work with your parents, teachers, and guidance counselor to create a four-year high school curriculum plan that will satisfy your goals.
Junior: <i>September - March</i>	Think about your reasons for going to college. What are your goals? What learning opportunities are most important to you? What are your career plans? Take the PSAT in October.	Talk with your parents, teachers, guidance counselor, and friends. Meet people in the career that you are interested in. Register for the PSAT through the high school office.
Junior: <i>January - March</i>	Identify important factors in choosing a college. Location? Cost? What is the atmosphere on campus? What programs are available?	Focus on your goals and career interests. Check out college brochures and websites.
Junior: <i>March - August</i>	List the colleges you are considering and collect information. Take the appropriate tests, SAT I, SAT II, or ACT with Writing.	Read, discuss, listen, and visit colleges. Attend college fairs and information nights in the area. Register for SAT tests on the College Board website, <a href="http://www.collegeboard.com">www.collegeboard.com</a> .
Senior: <i>August - November</i>	Apply to your "choice" colleges. Make sure you have all the necessary forms. Mark down application deadlines. Request letters of recommendations.	Obtain application forms or apply online. Observe all deadlines for materials. Request official transcripts from the Registrar. Request letters of recommendation, make sure you give them enough time to complete them by the deadlines.
Senior: <i>August - December</i>	Compare the colleges on your list. Have you weighed the pros and cons carefully? Which college is the "right fit" for you?	Continue visiting colleges. Organize information into detailed, useful comparisons.
Senior: <i>November - January</i>	Apply for financial aid. Complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and CalGrant (if attending a school in California). Investigate possible sources for financial aid. Mark deadlines.	Meet with the guidance counselor and discuss possible financial aid options. Complete all the necessary paperwork.
Senior: <i>January - April</i>	Make your final decision. Finish strong! Discuss expectations with your parents, both yours and theirs.	Confer with your parents, teachers, and guidance counselor. Confirm your decision and decline other admission offers.



# SAT Prep Plans

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	<b><u>Early Bird</u></b> Students start right after their Sophomore year	<b><u>Just In Time</u></b> Students start during their Junior year	<b><u>Last Chance</u></b> Students wait until after their Junior year
<b>Before Junior Year</b>	<b>No School = More Prep Time</b> Students utilize the summer after their sophomore year to prep for the PSAT and SAT together. Without school, they have plenty of time to focus on preparation.	<b>Have not started yet</b>	<b>Have not started yet</b>
<b>During Junior Year</b>	<b>Take the SAT I or begin prepping for Subject Tests</b> Some students scored well in the Fall and are done with the SAT I. Others are retaking the test (colleges will take your best score), or taking the SAT Subject Tests and beginning to work on their college list.	<b>Set up prep around your extracurricular activities</b> Prep is typically started in the winter for the spring SAT I and SAT Subject Tests. It may conflict with sports and schoolwork, but they want to get a score during their junior year to determine which colleges are realistic.	<b>Have not started yet</b>
<b>Before Senior Year</b>	<b>Relax – You are ahead of your peers and ready for applications!</b> Students utilize the summer after their sophomore year to prep for the PSAT and SAT together. Without school, they have plenty of time to focus on preparation.	<b>Retake the SAT I and Figure Out Your College List</b> These students are re-taking the SAT in the fall at the same time they are completing college applications. The more prep they can do over the summer, the easier the fall semester will be.	<b>Oh No! Applications are due and you haven't taken the SAT yet!</b> These last chance students prep over the summer and take the SAT I and Subject Tests in the fall of their senior year, along with completing college applications. It is a BUSY time!



# Dispelling Myths About College Admissions

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There are many myths about the college admissions process, by sorting fact from fiction, you can focus your time and energy on what matters most.

*Myth: Small independent colleges are likely to review your entire application, while larger public institutions are more likely to look just at the numbers (e.g., GPA, test scores).*

Not so, says Gretchen Rigol, who authored *Admission Decision-Making Models* for the College Board. Many institutions, large and small, public and private, use complex, multi-step procedures that involve multiple readings. “The only safe generalization that can be made is that the process tends to be more complex if the number of applicants is considerably higher than the number of available spaces.”

*Myth: College “X” accepts everybody.*

No college accepts every candidate who applies. Open access or entitlement-type institutions may automatically accept students who meet minimum academic qualifications, but applicants who don’t meet the minimum standards may be rejected.

*Myth: Interviews are required to be accepted.*

Some colleges do request that you come in for an interview, but most don’t—either because they couldn’t manage to conduct an interview with each applicant or because they don’t want to put applicants who can’t travel to the college at a disadvantage. If you are able to travel to the campus for an interview, you should absolutely do so. In addition to learning more about the college from your interviewer, you can also learn firsthand what the school is really like, especially if you get to meet students and sit in on classes. Interviews may help, but they may also hurt your chances of being accepted, so be well prepared.

*Myth: Colleges that have the highest “yield” rates are the best colleges.*

“Yield” is the percentage of accepted students who then enroll in the college. High yield rates are sometimes considered desirable by organizations and publications that rank colleges. However, it’s important to understand that a college’s yield rate is just a number and doesn’t necessarily determine the quality of the education you can receive there. The best colleges for you are ones that can give you the educational opportunities and experience you want.

*Myth: Essays aren’t really important to college admissions.*

Essays and personal statements are very important to colleges, especially to the most selective colleges and universities. And they’re increasingly important to a wide range of institutions. Essays serve as a measure of your writing abilities and provide information about your personal background that is not revealed through your application or transcript alone. Think of your application essay as an opportunity to demonstrate your uniqueness to colleges and stand out from your peers.



# Dispelling Myths About College Admissions

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*Myth: It's impossible to figure out what a college is really looking for.*

On the contrary, most colleges go to great lengths to specify what kinds of students they're looking for. College view books and websites provide extensive information about academic requirements, as well as profiles of previously-admitted classes including their grades and test scores. You can learn even more by talking with admissions staff, students, faculty, or alumni.

*Myth: When only one of two equally qualified candidates is accepted and the other is rejected, there's no rational basis for a college's admission decisions.*

When this situation occurs, it likely means that the college received more applications from qualified students than it had spaces to fill. Keep in mind, most colleges spend a lot of time and energy considering what kind of student body they want long before any student applications even hit the desk. Many different factors go into admissions decisions, including ones that can't be added up, such as the interview and the application essay. Rejection hurts, particularly if it comes from a college you had your heart set on and where you thought you had a good chance for acceptance. Just remember, rejection doesn't mean the college's admissions process is irrational, nor does it mean that you're not as qualified as the person who got accepted.

*Myth: There's nothing I can do to improve my chances of being accepted by the college I most want to attend.*

Just as there's no guarantee you'll be admitted to a college, you should never take it as a given that you can't get in. The most important thing you can do, though, is to be realistic about your chances and create a balanced college list with a mixture of safety, good fit, and reach schools. Perhaps the most harmful myth about college admissions is that there's one perfect school for you and your life will be ruined if you don't get in. There are many colleges that can meet your educational and personal goals, just keep an open mind and start looking.



# Factors Influencing Admission Decisions

Four-year public and private colleges and universities were asked to rank the importance of various factors in the admission process. These are the results, based on 866 respondents to the survey. Of these institutions, 68 percent were private and 32 percent were public. These results are considered generally representative for colleges and universities.

Values were computed using a 5-point scale: 5 = Single Most Important Factor, 4 = Very Important Factor, 3 = Moderately Important Factor, 2 = Minor Factor, 1 = Not Considered

Admission Factor	Public (by selectivity)				Private (by selectivity)			
	50% or less	50-80%	80-95%	95% or more	50% or less	50-80%	80-95%	95% or more
High School GPA Rank	4.0	4.1	4.0	3.1	4.1	4.1	3.9	3.5
SAT/ACT Scores	3.5	3.7	3.6	3.1	3.5	3.6	3.6	3.0
Pattern of HS course work	3.3	3.2	2.9	2.1	3.7	3.4	3.2	2.2
Letters of recommendation	2.2	2.1	2.0	1.4	3.5	3.1	2.9	2.6
Personal Statement	2.4	2.1	1.9	1.3	3.3	3.0	2.8	2.5
AP/IB Test Scores	1.9	1.7	1.7	1.6	2.9	2.0	2.0	2.1
Portfolios, auditions, etc.	2.2	1.7	1.5	1.3	2.4	2.1	2.0	1.8
Interview	1.9	1.6	1.6	1.3	2.7	2.7	2.6	2.5
Declaration of Major	1.5	1.7	1.6	1.3	2.1	1.7	1.5	1.6
State of residence	1.6	1.6	1.4	1.1	1.5	1.3	1.1	1.1
Health statement	1.4	1.1	1.2	1.6	1.2	1.3	1.3	1.6
Financial need	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.4	1.3	1.1	1.4

*This table is adapted from **Trends in College Admission 2000** (2002), a report prepared by the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), the College Board, and the Educational Testing Service (ETS), among others.*



## Testing Information

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Your SAT scores can tell admission officers how you compare with other students who took the test. Generally speaking, scoring close to the mean (average)—about 500 on critical reading, 500 on mathematics, and 500 on writing—tells you that you scored as well as about half of the students who took the test. Each institution will have its own range of scores that it considers a good fit for its students.

Because no single score can tell everything about how you tested, percentiles and score ranges are also included on the score reports sent to colleges. Admission officers use these tools to evaluate the scores. Remember, your scores are not the only information colleges use in their admission decisions. They may also consider your high school record, essays, recommendations, interviews, and extracurricular activities.

Percentiles allow you to compare your score with the most recent scores of college-bound seniors from the previous year who took the test at any time during high school. The scores for each section stand alone, and percentiles on different sections will differ depending on how the entire group of test-takers performed on them. If your percentile is 95, that means you scored higher than 95 percent of the seniors in the prior year who took the test. The more students there are who received lower scores, the higher your percentile will be. For example, a score of 700 on both the critical reading and mathematics sections can yield a critical reading percentile of 95 and a mathematics percentile of 93 because more students who tested had lower scaled scores for the critical reading section than for the mathematics section.

The SAT does almost as good a job of predicting how you will do in your first year of college as your overall high school grade point average (GPA). Many factors, including personal motivation, influence your college grades. Knowing your SAT scores and high school GPA help the college make a decision about how likely it is that you will succeed at their school.

Subject Test scores are reported on a scale from 200 to 800. Subject Test subscores are reported on a scale from 20 to 80. Your scores tell college admission staff how you did compared with other students who took the test. College admission officers can use Subject Test scores to help determine how well prepared you are for different college programs, place you in freshman or higher-level course work, and advise you on course selection. Subject Test scores can help you demonstrate your academic achievements. Many colleges that do not require Subject Tests will still look at your scores to learn more about your academic background.

The essay will be scored by experienced and trained high school and college teachers. Each essay will be scored by two people who won't know each other's score. They also won't know the student's identity or school. Each reader will give the essay a score from 1 to 6 (6 is the highest score) based on the following scoring guide. See [How the Essay is Scored](#) for more information.

Your registration fee covers four reports. If you are undecided about where to send your scores, you can add or change your score recipients online until 11:59 PM (EST) on the Monday one week after your scheduled test date. If you registered by mail, you also have the option to use the Correction Form that is enclosed with your Admission Ticket to make these changes. You have up until the day of the test to submit the Correction Form to add or change score recipients. Additional score reports can be ordered at any time, for a fee, using the online Score Sender service. When you register for the SAT, you get four score reports included in the test fee. You may also choose four additional schools or scholarship programs for an additional fee for each report. After your test has been scored, you can send additional score reports at any time, for an additional fee per score report, by using the online Score Sender service.



# Testing Information

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To register for a test go to [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org)

## Calendar Dates & Fees

### 2008-09 Test Dates and Registration Deadlines

<i>Test Date</i>	<i>Registration Deadline</i>	<i>Late Registration</i>
September 13, 2008	August 12, 2008	August 22, 2008
October 25, 2008	September 22, 2008	October 3, 2008
December 13, 2008	November 7, 2008	November 20, 2008
February 7, 2009	January 6, 2009	January 16, 2009
April 4, 2009	February 27, 2009	March 13, 2009
June 13, 2009	May 8, 2009	May 22, 2009



To register for a test go to [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)

## Calendar Dates & Fees

### 2008-09 Test Dates and Registration Deadlines

<i>Test Date</i>	<i>Registration Deadline</i>	<i>Late Registration</i>
October 4, 2008	September 9, 2008	September 19, 2008
November 1, 2008	September 26, 2008	October 10, 2008
December 6, 2008	November 5, 2008	November 19, 2008
January 24, 2009	December 26, 2009	January 9, 2009
March 14, 2009	February 10, 2009	February 24, 2009
May 2, 2009	March 31, 2009	April 14, 2009
June 6, 2009	May 5, 2009	May 19, 2009



## Community Colleges

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Can't decide if a community college may be good for you? Here are a few facts to think about in guiding you in your final decision.

Community colleges can help you prepare for a four year degree in a university or other schools. It will help you adjust, better improve your grades, and get to know how university life will be like. It can also help you find out what career path you want to pursue if you are still undecided on what to study for a Bachelor's degree.

If you do know what subject requirements you have to take for the course you want to take, make sure that the university you want to get into will credit them. Sometimes problems occur in regards to credit transfers.

Community college is something to look forward to if you're aiming to get certificates, diplomas, or an Associate's Degree. They will widen your array of job opportunities, and/or help you enter the universities that you want to get into. The colleges also offer trainings in specialized careers like nursing or computers.

Since community colleges are supported by the local community, they are more affordable. Tuition expenses are considerably less, facilities are smaller and resources cost less than a traditional four year college. Furthermore, there is the added benefit of attending locally and keeping your housing expenses to a minimum.

Community colleges are essential for those who are seeking higher salary jobs, and for those who would want to pursue a bright career path. Many have gone to community colleges, teenagers and adults alike, and realized what they want to do with their future.

Orange Coast College ranks first out of Orange County's nine community colleges in the number of students it transfers to the University of California and California State University systems. Over the past decade, nearly 16,000 OCC students have transferred to UC and CSU campuses. Additionally, many Orange Coast students go on to transfer to private colleges and universities within California and across the nation. Community colleges are a great way to begin your post-secondary education affordably. The key is to have a plan and meet with your guidance counselor at the community college. These counselors will be able to assist you with information regarding articulation agreements that they have with the various colleges and universities you are interested in transferring to.



# UC & Cal State Requirements

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The UC and CSU system schools require that students fulfill the “a-g” subject area requirements. The purposes of the “a-g” subject area requirements are to ensure that entering students:

- \* Can participate fully in the first year program at the University in a broad variety of fields of study
- \* Have attained the necessary preparation for courses, majors and programs offered at the University
- \* Have attained a body of knowledge that will provide breadth and perspective to new, more advanced studies
- \* Have attained essential critical thinking and study skills

The following general criteria must be satisfied for courses to meet the requirement:

- \* Be academically challenging
- \* Involve substantial reading and writing
- \* Include problems and laboratory work, as appropriate
- \* Show serious attention to analytical thinking as well as factual content
- \* Develop students’ oral and listening skills

The Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) establishes the subject areas and pattern of courses required for minimum eligibility for freshmen admission to the University of California. BOARS is a committee of the University’s Academic Senate and includes faculty representatives from each campus of the University. The Academic Senate has been given the responsibility from the UC Regents to set the conditions for admission, subject to final approval of the Board of Regents.

The “a-g” requirements are summarized as follows:

- (a) History / Social Science – Two years, including one year of world history, cultures, and historical geography and one year of U.S. history or one-half year of U.S. history and one-half year of civics or American government.
- (b) English – Four years of college preparatory English that include frequent and regular writing, and reading of classic and modern literature.
- (c) Mathematics – Three years of college preparatory mathematics that include the topics covered in elementary and advanced algebra and two and three-dimensional geometry.
- (d) Laboratory Science – Two years of laboratory science providing fundamental knowledge in at least two of these three disciplines: biology, chemistry, and physics.
- (e) Language Other Than English – Two years of the same language other than English.
- (f) Visual & Performing Arts – One year, including dance, drama/theater, music, or visual art.
- (g) College Preparatory Elective – One year (two semesters), chosen from additional “a-f” courses beyond those used to satisfy the requirements above, or courses that have been approved solely for use as “g” electives.



## Student Athletes & NCAA Clearing House

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As the governing body of most college sports, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Clearinghouse is the first place students must go to receive athletic scholarships if they're interested in playing Division I or Division II level sports. Athletes who want to compete at the college level must register with the NCAA Clearinghouse to find out if they are eligible to play. The registration form is available online at the NCAA website, [www.ncaaclearinghouse.net](http://www.ncaaclearinghouse.net).

The first thing to consider is whether or not the student is truly and naturally talented, in top physical form, and has athletic abilities that surpass most others they have competed with in high school sports across the country. The second thing students should consider is the background of each school they are interested in attending and its sports programs. Each college and university, regulated by the NCAA, has established rules on eligibility, recruiting, and financial aid, and falls into one of the three membership divisions (Division I, II, and III). Divisions are based on school size and the scope of their athletic programs and scholarships. Collegiate sports are so intensely competitive that the NCAA advises students to consider these other factors:

- \* There are nearly one million high school football players and about 550,000 basketball players. Of that number, about 250 make it to the NFL and about 50 make an NBA team.
- \* Less than 3 percent of college seniors will play one year in professional basketball.
- \* The odds of a high school football player making it to the pros at all—let alone having a career—are about 6,000 to 1. The same odds for a high school basketball player are 10,000 to 1.

The best way for students to prepare for a future in college athletics is to take appropriate coursework. More students fail to qualify to play NCAA sports because of lack of appropriate coursework than for low test scores. This is where school counselors can play a big role. Cedric W. Dempsey, former NCAA president, says potential student-athletes should not just focus on the athletic details of the institutions they are applying to, but also “find out if they're on track to meet academic eligibility and core-course requirements (of each respective school). See what the graduation rate of the athletics programs are and if the athletes in their sport are at the colleges in which they're interested. Ask what academic support services are available and how academic progress is tracked.”

### Initial Eligibility of Freshmen Athletes for Division I and II

***Note: NCAA requirements have recently changed and the class of 2008 will be required to take 16 core curriculum courses.***

All students who plan on being intercollegiate student-athletes in Divisions I and II must be certified by the NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse ([www.ncaaclearinghouse.net](http://www.ncaaclearinghouse.net)). To do so, incoming freshmen must meet the provisions of NCAA Bylaw 14.3, also called the “freshman eligibility rule,” which are different for each division and based on GPA and standardized test scores (SAT/ACT). Minimum scores are set annually, but have generally gravitated around a GPA minimum of 2.0 with a core curriculum of 14 academic subjects (16 for class of 2008), a minimum ACT score totaling between 68 and 86, and a minimum SAT score ranging between 820 and 1010. Eligibility is determined exclusively by the Clearinghouse and not by the college or university the student hopes to attend. After completing the registration form provided by their counselor and paying a one-time fee of \$30, students must then send the Clearinghouse all registration materials, including the



# Student Athletes & NCAA Clearing House

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student release form, processing fee, and official transcript. Upon registration, the Clearinghouse determines each student's eligibility for practice and competition, as well as eligibility to receive athletic scholarships that have been offered by a college coach. Up-to-date information about the Clearinghouse and its current eligibility requirements can be viewed online or downloaded from the 2006-07 NCAA Guide for the College-Bound Student-Athlete. Students who have qualified for an SAT fee waiver may also qualify for a fee waiver from the NCAA.

## Eligibility of Division III Athletes

NCAA Clearinghouse eligibility requirements differ for this division. Students' eligibility for practice and competition for Division III student-athletes are determined by institutional, conference, and other NCAA regulations.

The NCAA recommends that high school students interested in Divisions I, II, or III register with the clearinghouse after completion of their junior year. A complete transcript along with SAT or ACT test scores should be forwarded directly to the clearinghouse as soon as they are available. Counselors are responsible for sending in students' final transcripts at the end of their senior year. For more information regarding NCAA eligibility requirements, visit the NCAA website at [www.web1.ncaa.org/eligibilitycenter/common](http://www.web1.ncaa.org/eligibilitycenter/common).



# Financing College

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Good news, you know you are going to college! Now the question is, how will you finance it? You have heard about FAFSA and Cal Grants, maybe the college has offered you an academic scholarship. Where should you go, and what is an EFC? It may seem like financial aid administrators have a language all their own. Having a basic understanding of the process and related key terms and acronyms can help you navigate these financial waters. If you're wondering whether FAFSA is a form or a furry animal, this financial aid glossary should be a help to you.

It is important to carefully examine each of the offers that you have been presented and determine which one is the "right fit" for you. Do not make a decision simply based on the amount of a scholarship that a particular college may offer you. You need to determine what your actual cost of attendance (COA) will be, although college A is offering you a \$5,000 academic scholarship, your COA may be much more than college B. These are decisions that you and your family will have to prayerfully consider. Remember, the Lord has a perfect plan for you, and He will open the doors where He wants you to be.

Remember to complete the FAFSA, even if you do not think you will qualify for any grants because you must have your FAFSA submitted in order to receive student loans or work study. Make sure to have your FAFSA turned in by the deadline, you will use the previous year's tax information in order to submit the application on time, then update it with the current information when you have it. Each year, many families miss the deadline, because they are waiting for the current year's taxes. If you have any questions, make sure you speak with your guidance counselor.

Cal Grants may be another source of financial aid if you are attending a college or university in California. In order to apply, you must have your FAFSA completed, and submit your GPA verification form (this is available in the high school office). If you are a California graduating high school senior, recent graduate, or just got your GED, and meet academic, financial and eligibility requirements and submit two forms by the Cal Grant deadline you may qualify for a Cal Grant for college or career or technical school. With a Cal Grant you can get up to \$9,700 a year to pay for college expenses at any qualifying California college, university, career or technical school in California. Cal Grants can be used for tuition, room and board, even books and pencils. The best part is, it's yours to keep and you don't have to pay it back.

To be eligible for a Cal Grant you must:

- \* Submit the FAFSA and your verified Cal Grant GPA by the deadline
- \* Be a U.S. citizen or eligible non-citizen (your parents don't need to be citizens or eligible non-citizens)
- \* Be a California resident when you graduated from high school
- \* Have a Social Security number
- \* Attend a qualifying California college
- \* Not have a bachelor's or professional degree (except for Cal Grant A and B extended awards for a teaching credential program)
- \* Have financial need based on your college costs
- \* Have family income and assets below the established ceilings
- \* Meet the minimum GPA requirements
- \* Be in a program leading to an undergraduate degree or certificate
- \* Be enrolled at least half time
- \* Have registered with U.S. Selective Service (most males)
- \* Not owe a refund on a state or federal grant, or be in default on a student loan



# Financing College

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## ***FINANCIAL AID TERMINOLOGY***

### ***Award Letter***

A document issued to a student financial aid recipient that indicates the type, amount, and disbursement dates of the funds awarded for various financial aid programs.

### ***Business/Farm Supplement***

An additional financial aid form required by some colleges for families and students who own a business or farm. This form is processed by the College Scholarship Service as a supplement to the Financial Aid Profile.

### ***Campus-Based Aid***

Financial assistance for students and their families administered by a college. Funds, regardless of their source, are awarded to students by the college's financial aid office, and not by a state, federal, or private agency.

### ***College Scholarship Service (CSS)***

A service of the College Board that assists postsecondary institutions, state scholarship programs, and other organizations in the equitable distribution of student financial aid funds by measuring a family's financial strength and analyzing its ability to contribute to college costs.

### ***Cooperative Work-Study Education***

Full-time paid employment related to a student's field of study. The student alternates between work and full-time study. As a result, the bachelor's program usually takes five years to complete.

### ***Cost of Attendance (COA - also known as cost of education or budget)***

The student's cost of attendance, including not only tuition and fees (including loan fees), books, and supplies, but also the student's living expenses while attending school. The cost of attendance is estimated by the school, within guidelines established by federal regulations. The difference between the cost of attendance and the student's expected family contribution determines the student's need for financial aid.

### ***CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE***

A financial aid form produced by the College Board required for students seeking aid at approximately 10 percent of the nation's four-year colleges (including the most highly selective institutions).

### ***Default***

Failure to repay a loan according to conditions agreed on at the time of application. Default may also result when a borrower fails to submit a request for deferment on time. Default status goes into your permanent credit record. Students are not eligible for financial aid while in default.

### ***Deferment***

A period of time during which you are not required to make payments on an outstanding student loan.

### ***Dependent Student***

A student claimed as a dependent member of another taxpayer's household for federal income tax purposes.



### ***Entrance/Exit Interviews***

Required counseling sessions about loans that students must attend before receiving loan funds and before leaving college.

### ***Expected Family Contribution (EFC)***

The amount a family can reasonably be expected to pay for one year of college.

### ***Federal Direct Loan***

Federal loan programs for which the lender is the federal government. Federal Direct Loans include government-subsidized loans for students and unsubsidized loans for both students and parents.

### ***Federal Education Loan Programs***

Federal loan programs for which the lender is a bank, savings and loan, credit union, or other private organization. Federal Education Loan Programs include government-subsidized loans for students and unsubsidized loans for both students and parents.

### ***Federal Methodology (FM)***

A formula established by Congress to determine EFC and federal financial aid eligibility. The formula takes into consideration income, assets, expenses, family size, and other factors to help evaluate a family's financial strength.

### ***Federal Pell Grant***

Federal grant awarded on the basis of need to undergraduate students.

### ***Federal Perkins Loan***

A 5% loan funded by the government but awarded by colleges to both undergraduate and graduate students.

### ***Federal Plus Loan***

A nonsubsidized loan program for parents of undergraduate students under the Federal Education Loan Program umbrella.

### ***Federal Stafford Loan***

A Federal Education Loan Program for students. Some Stafford Loans are government-subsidized, in that the government pays any interest while the borrower is attending college. Others are unsubsidized, so interest begins to accrue as soon as the loan is made.

### ***Federal State Student Incentive Grant***

Awards made through a state grant program that utilize both federal funds and state funds.

### ***Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG)***

Awarded by colleges, this grant goes to undergraduate students with the greatest need as determined by the federal need analysis formula.



# Financing College

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## ***Financial Aid Award Letter***

A letter of notification to an applicant from a college that details how much and which types of financial aid are being offered if he or she enrolls.

## ***Financial Aid Package***

The total amount of financial aid—including grants, loans, and work study—awarded to a student by a college or university for a year of study.

## ***Financial Aid Transcript***

A record of financial aid a student has received at a given institution. A student must submit such a transcript from all previously attended postsecondary institutions to be eligible for federal financial aid programs.

## ***529 Savings Plans***

A state-operated investment plan that gives families a federal tax-free way to save money for college. Officially known as qualified tuition programs (QTPs).

## ***Fixed Interest***

A rate of interest that is determined when a loan is negotiated and remains constant over the life of the loan.

## ***Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)***

The need analysis form produced by the U.S. Department of Education that is required for students seeking aid by nearly all colleges and universities. Complete the FAFSA online at <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>

## ***Gift Aid***

Grant and scholarship money received as financial aid that does not have to be repaid.

## ***Grace Period***

Period of time after the student borrower graduates or leaves school during which he or she does not need to make principal or interest payments on certain kinds of loans.

## ***Guaranty Agency (Guarantor)***

An institution, either a state agency or a private nonprofit, that insures student loans and administers the Federal Family Education Loan Program for the federal government.

## ***Institutional Methodology (IM)***

A formula more comprehensive than the Federal Methodology (FM) used by many colleges and aid-granting programs to determine student need.



# Financing College

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## ***Independent Students***

Students whose parents' finances are not taken into account by colleges. To be considered independent, a student must:

- \* be at least 24 years old by December 31 of the award year covered by the FAFSA; or
- \* be a graduate or professional student; or
- \* be married; or
- \* have legal dependents other than a spouse; or
- \* be an orphan or ward of the court; or
- \* be a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces; or
- \* be otherwise identified as independent by the financial aid administrator.

## ***Loan***

Money that is paid back with interest. Most educational loans have a lower interest rate than commercial loans and do not have to be repaid until college is completed.

## ***National Merit Scholarship Program***

A scholarship program based mostly on scores from the PSAT/NMSQT. Each year, National Merit students receive scholarships ranging from several hundred dollars to full costs of attendance.

## ***Need-Analysis Form***

The starting point in applying for financial aid. Students must file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to apply for federal financial aid programs. For many colleges, FAFSA may be the only need-analysis form a student must file. For other schools, particularly private colleges, additional forms, such as the CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE, may be required. Students applying for state financial aid programs should check with their state agency to find out if they must file other application forms in addition to FAFSA.

## ***Need-Based Financial Aid***

Financial aid (scholarships, grants, loans, or work-study opportunities) given to students who have demonstrated financial need, calculated by subtracting the student's expected family contribution (EFC) from a college's total costs.

## ***Need-Blind Admissions***

A policy in which colleges make admissions decisions without taking into account the applicant's financial circumstances. Schools that subscribe to this policy do not necessarily offer aid to meet the full need of an accepted applicant.

## ***Need-Conscious Admissions***

A policy that considers financial aid status for at least some of its applicants in making admissions decisions.

## ***Origination Fee***

A fee deducted proportionately (up to 4%) from each disbursement of a student loan. This fee is used to cover administrative costs of the Stafford Loan Program.



# Financing College

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## ***Overaward***

A situation that happens when a family's contribution plus any financial aid awarded exceeds the cost of attendance at a given college. Overawards result most often when a student's enrollment status changes or when additional resources (such as a private scholarship) become available.

## ***Parent Contribution***

The amount the student's family is expected to pay toward college costs from its income and assets. The figure is derived from a need analysis of the parents' financial situation. The parents' contribution and the student's contribution together constitute the total family contribution, which, when subtracted from the college expense budget, equals financial need. Generally, students are eligible for financial aid equal to their financial need.

## ***Preferential Packaging***

A policy in which the most desirable applicants get the best financial aid packages.

## ***Promissory Note***

A legally binding contract between student and the lender that includes all the terms and conditions under which the student promises to repay your loan.

## ***Satisfactory Academic Progress***

The level of academic achievement expected of a student in order to continue to receive financial aid as determined by each college for its own students.

## ***Scholarship or Grant***

A type of financial aid that doesn't have to be repaid. Grants are often based on financial need. Scholarships may be based solely on need, on need and other criteria, or solely on other criteria, such as academic achievement, artistic ability, or talent in the performing arts.

## ***Self-Help Aid***

Funds that students receive from jobs and the Federal Work-Study Program, and from loan programs like the Federal Perkins Loan, Federal Stafford Loan, and Federal Direct Loan.

## ***Student Aid Report (SAR)***

The form sent to families in response to submission of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) indicating the Expected Family Contribution (EFC).

## ***Tuition Tax Credits***

Allow you to subtract, on a dollar-for-dollar basis, the amount of the credit from your total federal income tax bill.

## ***Work-study***

A federally funded program in which students take campus jobs as part of their financial aid package. To participate in a work-study program, students must complete the FAFSA.



# Writing Your Personal Statement

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## What Role Does the Essay Play in the Admissions Decision?

Increasing numbers of colleges and universities are requiring students to submit personal essays with their applications. A 2003-04 report on the state of college admissions published by the National Association of College Admission Counseling (NACAC) finds that while grades, admission tests, and class standing remain the top factors in the college admission decision, a majority of colleges and universities consider the essay to be a key factor in determining which academically qualified students they would choose. When all else is equal between competing applicants—grades, scores, rank, activities—a compelling essay can make the difference. A powerful, well-written personal statement can also help the marginal applicant who otherwise would not necessarily have been accepted based on grades and test scores alone.

One reason the essay has become an important factor in the admissions decision-making process is because those 300-500 words have the ability to reveal qualities about a candidate (interests, values, thought processes) that grades, class rank, test scores, courses, extracurricular activities, etc. do not. As Angela Skrivanich, an admissions and outreach officer at the University of California, explains, it is a chance for students to “tell us who they are.”

College admission officers look to the essay for evidence that a student can write well and support his or her ideas with logical arguments. They also want to know something about the personality of the student. Andrew Flagel, Dean of Admissions at George Mason University, says there is no magic formula for writing a perfect college essay. “An essay that is well-written, free of grammatical errors, and spells out why the school is a good match can help a student get in,” says Flagel.

For many prospective college students, the personal essay offers students both challenge and opportunity. Facing that blank piece of paper can be very overwhelming for even the most seasoned writer. The role of the guidance counselor is to encourage students to see the positive side of this assignment. Writing a personal essay is the student’s opportunity to show an admissions committee what makes them stand out from other applicants; this is their chance to reveal their best qualities.

There are typically three types of essay questions: The “you,” the “why us,” and the “creative.”

### 1. The “You” Question

Many colleges ask for an essay that boils down to “Tell us about yourself.” The school just wants to know the student better and see how the student will introduce herself or himself. For example, The University of Vermont in its 2005 application asks: “UVM values a diverse student body. What contributions might you make to our campus community outside of academic achievement?” This type of direct question offers you a chance to reveal something about yourself, other than grades, test scores, etc. On the other hand, the open-ended nature of these types of questions can lead to an essay that is all over the place. Focus on just a few things, and avoid the urge to spill everything. This is really a “tell us a story” question. Students should tell a story that only they (the student) can tell. Do NOT write your resume in paragraph form but develop one small event, person, place, feeling, etc. with a lot of narrative and specifics.



# Writing Your Personal Statement

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## 2. The “Why Us” Question

Some schools ask for an essay about a student’s choice of school or career. They are looking for information about the applicant’s goals, and about how serious his or her commitment is to this particular school. For example, the 2005 application to American University asks: “How did you become interested in American University?” The “Why Us” type of question provides a focus for their essay—why they choose this school or path. Hopefully, the answer to this type of question should be pretty clear to you, since you probably went through some kind of selection process. Make absolutely sure that you know your subjects well. The upside to this question is that you might find out that you are NOT a match for the college!

## 3. The “Creative” Question

The goal of the “Creative” question is to evaluate a candidate’s ability to think and write creatively and to assess his or her breadth of knowledge and education. In its 2005 application, Stanford University gives a variety of creative essay options including: “Sharing intellectual interests is an important aspect of university life. Describe an experience or idea that you find intellectually exciting, and explain why.” Recognize that the “Creative” question provides an opportunity for you to show yourself and your real views. Write an informed essay. For example, you should not write about a fantasy meeting with a famous artist and get the titles of the paintings wrong. Also, when considering how creative to get, use common sense. Being creative to the point of obtuse is a risk you shouldn’t take. Do not be fearful about writing about ordinary life—ordinary life is acceptable for an essay. Finally, avoid writing about high-minded topics or exotic locales. Instead, consider selecting an essay topic that you know about. A college essay doesn’t have to be about trekking through China to reveal something profound. In fact, admission officials say that high-minded essays often fail to reveal the unique character of the writer because they are so focused on impressing the reader.

Most students receive some form of help with their essays, but “help” is the operative word. An excessive amount of influence from a counselor, parent, or teacher can mute the unique voice of the writer that schools want to see, and most students will be rejected if the school suspects the essay is not their own work. According to The College Board’s 2003 report “Admissions Decision-Making Models”; admissions officers have expressed concern about how much assistance students receive in preparing an essay. As a result, many institutions now ask students to sign a statement indicating that the essay submitted represents their own work.

You may seek essay advice from teachers who know you well. Your parents or guardians can be an invaluable source of help, too, however you don’t want them writing your essay either. Colleges expect students to get advice on their essays, but the finished product must be in the student’s own words. The University of California at Berkeley even advises students to “consult a friend, teacher, parent, or counselor for comments, and ask this person, ‘What worked? What didn’t? What sounds like me? What doesn’t? If you didn’t know me, would this essay tell you enough about me? Is it clear and understandable?’

A great application essay presents a vivid, personal, and compelling view of you to the admissions committee. It will round out the rest of your application and help you stand out from other applicants. The essay is one of the only parts of the application over which you have complete control, so take the time to do a good job on it.



# Writing Your Personal Statement

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Keep your focus narrow and personal. Your essay must prove a single point or thesis. The reader must be able to find your main idea and follow it from beginning to end. Try having someone read just your introduction to see what he thinks your essay is about.

Following are tips to help you as you write your essay:

- \* Write simply
- \* Keep your focus narrow and personal
- \* Provide specific evidence (facts, events, quotations, examples) to support your main idea
- \* Use vivid, compelling details (show, don't tell)
- \* Address the topic squarely. For example, if an application asks to explain in a personal statement any deficiencies in records (e.g., a low grade or bad semester), provide a straightforward, reasonable response
- \* Exclude information that is found elsewhere in the application, such as listing courses or extracurricular activities
- \* Write about something unique and different—not just what you think the admissions officer wants to hear (they read many essays about the charms of their university, for example)
- \* Apply principles of good composition (e.g., organize the essay with a beginning, middle, and end)
- \* Structure writing in a way that allows the reader to draw his or her own conclusions
- \* Revise and proofread to make sure there are no typographical, spelling, or grammatical errors

Essays that try to be too comprehensive end up sounding watered down. Remember, it's not about telling the committee what you have done, they will pick that up from your list of activities. Instead, it is about showing them who you are.

Develop your main idea with vivid and specific facts, events, quotations, examples, and reasons. There is a big difference between simply stating a point of view and letting an idea unfold in the details:

- \* Okay: "I like to be surrounded by people with a variety of backgrounds and interests"
- \* Better: "During that night, I sang the theme song from Casablanca with a baseball coach who thinks he's Bogie, discussed Marxism with a little old lady, and heard more than I ever wanted to know about some woman's gall bladder operation."

Be Specific, avoid clichéd, generic, and predictable writing by using vivid and specific details.

- \* Okay: "I want to help people. I have gotten so much out of life through the love and guidance of my family, I feel that many individuals have not been as fortunate; therefore, I would like to expand the lives of others."
- \* Better: "My Mom and Dad stood on plenty of sidelines 'til their shoes filled with water or their fingers turned white, or somebody's golden retriever signed his name on their coats in mud. I think that kind of commitment is what I'd like to bring to working with fourth-graders."



# Writing Your Personal Statement

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Don't tell them what you think they want to hear. Most admissions officers read plenty of essays about the charms of their university, the evils of terrorism, and the personal commitment involved in being a doctor. Bring something new to the table, not just what you think they want to hear. Do not write a resumé. Don't include information that is found elsewhere in the application. Your essay will end up sounding like an autobiography, travelogue, or laundry list. Yawn. Don't use 50 words when five will do, eliminate unnecessary words.

- \* Okay: "Over the years it has been pointed out to me by my parents, friends, and teachers—and I have even noticed this about myself, as well—that I am not the neatest person in the world."
- \* Better: "I am a slob."

Don't forget to proofread, typos, spelling or grammatical errors can be interpreted as carelessness or just bad writing. Do not rely on your computer's spell check, it can miss spelling errors like the ones below.

- \* "After I graduate *form* high school, I plan to work for a nonprofit organization during the summer."
- \* "From that day on, Daniel was my best *fried*."

## Secrets For Success

**FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS.** One of the most common mistakes applicants make is to skim the written instructions and rely on information from others.

**DO NOT GET CUTE WITH FONTS OR FORMATTING.** Write your statement on 8.5" x 11" white paper using only one side of each sheet. The top right hand corner of each page should contain your name and the words "Personal Statement". Your personal statement should not exceed two pages. Do not use a typeface that is difficult to read.

**THE PURLOINED AND THE PLAGIARIZED.** Each applicant is expected to write their own personal statement. The strongest essays have an authentic voice in them and admission officers are experts at determining whether that "voice" sounds as if it belongs to the applicant. Essays that do not "ring true" to the admission officer will not advance the student's chances of entry.

**HELLO, IT'S ME.** Let admission officers know what special skills, abilities, or experiences you have had that would add to the diversity of the campus. Use the essay to talk about who you are and the qualities and characteristics you would bring.

**PROOF AND PROOF AGAIN.** A well-written essay that is free of spelling and grammatical errors and which does not contain trite phrases, sentiments, or clichés is expected. Write several drafts and ask others to read it.

**DON'T TRY TO BE WILDLY FUNNY OR CREATIVE.** What is funny to you is not necessarily funny to an admission officer. If you are planning on being creative or humorous, make sure you get feedback from other adults.

**THERE IS MORE TO ME THAN YOU KNOW.** Remember not only to write about what you have accomplished, but why you got involved, and what you learned from it.



# Letters of Recommendation

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Most college applications request two or three recommendation letters from people who know you in and out of the classroom. Whom should you ask? Read the application carefully. Often colleges request letters of recommendation from an academic teacher (sometimes a specific discipline) and/or your school counselor. If a non-specified academic teacher is requested, your English or math teachers usually make good candidates. Also, you should use a teacher from junior year, or a current teacher that know you well enough to form an opinion. It is best not to go back too far; colleges want current perspectives on their potential candidates. All the better if you get a recommendation from a teacher who's also been involved with you outside the classroom, but unless a college specifically requests it, don't use a coach or someone who can't speak to your academic achievements and potential.

Make sure to give your recommendation writers plenty of time—at least one month before letters are due—to complete and send your recommendations, but as with anything, the earlier the better. Many teachers like to have the summer to write recommendations, so if you asked last spring, you're doing great. If you apply under early decision or early action plans, you'll need to ask at the start of the school year, if you didn't request one last spring.

How can you get the best possible recommendations? Talk to your recommendation writers and give them your completed recommendation request form. For teachers, it's important that they focus on your academic talents and accomplishments within their classroom, because that's what colleges are looking for in teacher recommendations. Tell them about what you remember about their class and your participation in it. Highlight a particular incident, paper, or anything else that might help them provide anecdotal information and specific examples of your achievement, rather than just vague praise.

It is also important that you spend time talking with your counselor about your plans, accomplishments, and involvements. Provide them with a brief resume of your activities and goals; your completed recommendation request form will provide the best overview of your high school involvement and contributions. If there is some aspect of your transcript that needs explaining—perhaps low grades during sophomore year—it is helpful to talk with your counselors to explain why and how you have changed and improved.

## Helpful Tips

- \* Don't be shy. Teachers and counselors are usually happy to help you, as long as you respect their time constraints.
- \* Include addressed and stamped envelopes for each school to which you are applying.
- \* Provide teachers and counselors with deadlines for each recommendation that you are requesting, especially noting the earliest deadline.
- \* On the application form, waive your right to view recommendation letters. This gives more credibility to the recommendation in the eyes of the college.
- \* Typically, you know your teachers well enough to know who can provide favorable reviews of your accomplishments. If in doubt, don't hesitate to ask if they feel comfortable writing a recommendation.
- \* Follow up with your recommendation writers a week or so prior to your first deadline, to ensure recommendations have been mailed or to see if they need additional information from you.
- \* Once you have decided which college to attend, write thank you notes to everyone who provided a recommendation and tell them where you have decided to go. Do this before you leave high school.



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# Recommendation Request Form

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What do you consider your most important activities outside of school? List jobs, paid or voluntary; religious activities; hobbies; travel; music; art; and drama. Include the number of years and the amount of time you spent weekly, and explain why this activity is significant to you.

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In or out of school, which awards and honors have you received? Which elected offices have you held?

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What book(s) have had the greatest impact on you? Why?

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