

# college bound

Every Why, What, Where, When and  
How of College,  
answered in a guide for students by  
students

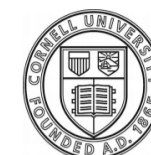


## About this Guide

My name is Alex and I'm a co-president of **Students onto Scholars (SOS)**, an organization at Cornell University that works to close the educational opportunity gap by providing academic resources to K-12 students. Even though I help run SOS, I didn't make this on my own! By collaborating with SOS members, the Cornell Public Service Center, Village at Ithaca, and more than 30 undergraduates across the country, we've put together this guide to help you navigate through the college application process. If you have any questions about the college process and want the input of a current college student, you can email [sos.collegeguide@cornell.edu](mailto:sos.collegeguide@cornell.edu). Please note that all of this information is up to date as of May 2019 and some of this information may change over time (especially things like standardized testing).

We would like to thank the Community Partnership Funding Board, the Cornell University Public Service Center, the Village at Ithaca, and all of the college students who participated to help create this project.

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Cornell University  
Public Service Center

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## A letter to my high-school self

Dear High School Alex,

Why should you go to college? Well, college is a lot more than just taking classes; it gives you the chance to explore! As a result, it helps you grow as an individual and figure out who you are and what you want to do professionally. In college, you'll have the opportunity to do a lot of cool things you wouldn't be able to do anywhere else. You'll get to be a part of an organization that provides academic resources for K-12 students. You'll be able to teach a math course at an incarceration facility. You'll be able to do research in a lab and work on a project to make a new vaccine for typhoid fever. All of these experiences will help shape you into who you are and help you decide what career path you want to go on!

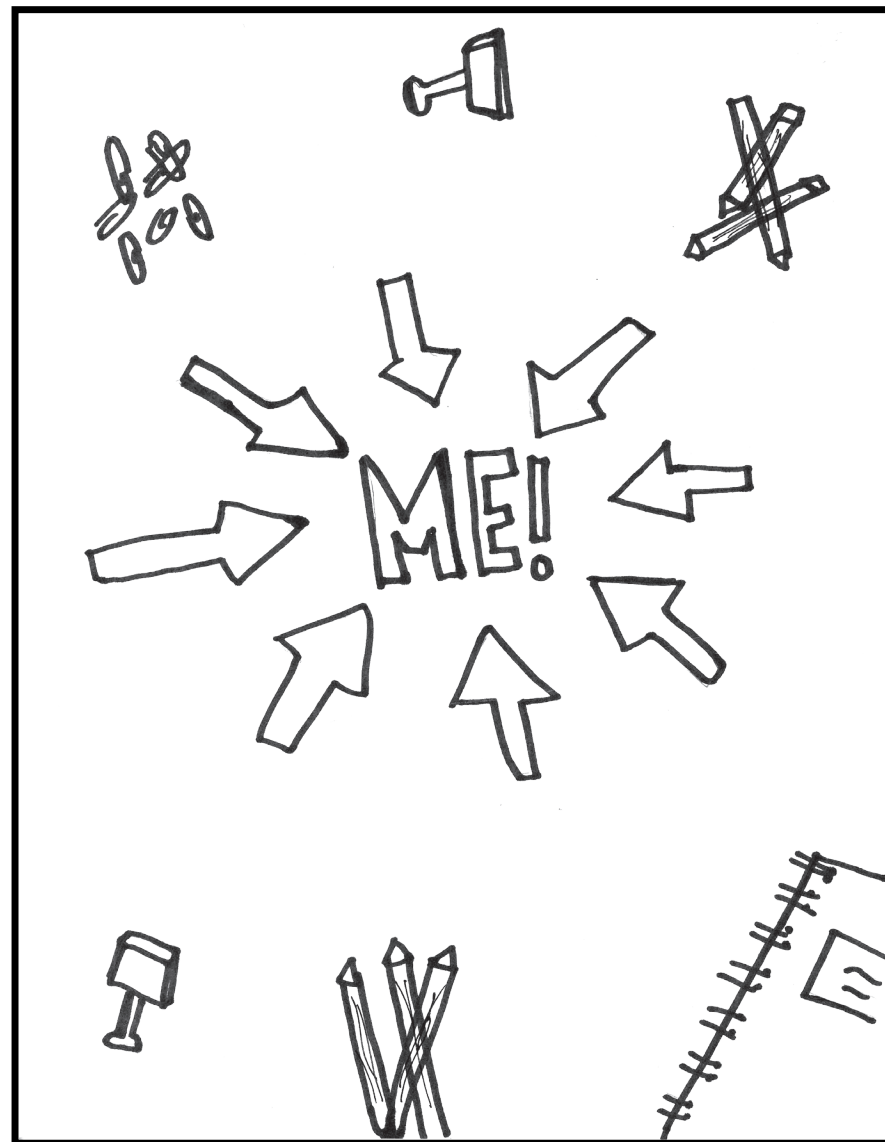
As a senior in college, I have some advice for you. Don't let the “sticker price” of colleges discourage you from applying: a lot of colleges offer financial aid and there are tons of outside scholarships you can apply for to help fund your education. Don't be afraid to apply to your dream school, even if you don't think you'll get in--you never know. And finally, don't let anyone or anything stop you from applying to where you want to go, whether your GPA, test scores, or personal statements aren't “good enough”, your potential is limitless and don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

The college process is a time for reflection on who you are as a person and what you've accomplished. But it does not define you! **College is not about where you go, but what you make of your experience.** As cliché as it sounds, it is true. Something I realized in college is that things don't always work out the way you want them to, but they usually pan out the way they should.

College has been a challenging experience for me, but I wouldn't trade it for anything. I learned a lot about myself and what I want to achieve after I graduate. I made friends from around the world (and I even got to visit one of them in their hometown...Mumbai, India!). I got to try new things I never thought I'd be able to, like working at a summer camp with children whose parents are impacted by cancer. College has been four years of laughter, stress, learning, exhaustion, and fun. Enjoy every moment of it.

Best,

Your Future Self



## How to Prepare for Applying for College

A college application is an opportunity for you to present yourself to an admissions committee and **show them why they should accept you to their college**. This means that throughout high school, you'll want to do things that show admissions committees you'll be able to contribute to and graduate from their college, if they were to accept you. But don't worry! We've outlined some suggestions in this timeline to help you build up your application. Note that everyone's college process is different, so your timeline may look different from the one below, and that's ok! This is simply here to help you plan for your own application process.

*I didn't have a long list of activities that I did in high school. I wasn't super involved in school clubs, but I had a few things that I did outside of school that I did for several years, which I think demonstrated my commitment and passion, qualities I believe admissions officers look for in an applicant. Mainly, I volunteered, tutored and was able to gain some opportunities to do research. I think these actives strengthened my application.*

*-Jenna, Recent Graduate of UC Berkeley*

I held leadership positions in clubs I was in (orchestra, track, hiking club, etc). I branched out and showed I liked doing more than just one type of activity. I think it's best to get involved in things that interest you to show that you are a well rounded person with multiple interests. I also had strong letters of recommendation and an extensively reviewed common app essay.

*-Viola, Recent Graduate of Cornell University*

## Freshman Year

During your Freshman Year, you should **develop strong study habits and get involved in extracurricular activities**, which is a great way to help you figure out what you like (or don't like) and meet new people who have similar interests as you do! For clubs, sports teams, and other activities you join, college admissions value **quality and consistency over quantity**. For example, they would much rather see that you joined the track team Freshman Year, were an active member throughout highschool, and were picked as the captain during your Senior Year than if you joined ten different clubs that you were just a regular member of.

Keep in mind that while you don't need to have a leadership position in a club when you apply for college, it's always something that will help make your application stand out! In addition, extracurricular activities can include things outside of school like volunteering and research, not just clubs and sports. Think outside the box and just **commit yourself to something you're excited about!**

## Sophomore Year

During your Sophomore Year, you should find out when your school offers the **preliminary SAT exam (PSAT) and try to take it for the first time as practice**. Although it might seem like a lot of extra work, if you score well on the PSAT when you take it again during your Junior Year you may be able to qualify for some scholarships! So some extra practice never hurts.

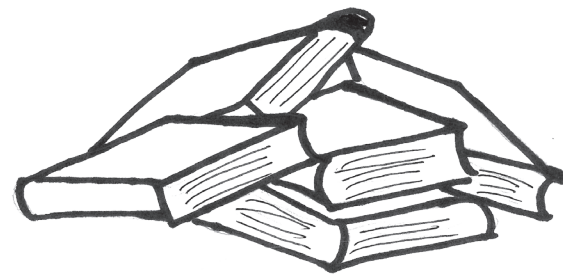
This is a good time to start **researching school-based and local scholarships** that you might apply for to help fund your college education! By starting early, you can find out how these scholarships are awarded and what you need in order to be eligible for them. You can start a profile on [unigo.com](http://unigo.com) or [fastweb.com](http://fastweb.com) to help you search for scholarships.

You may also have the chance to pick more advanced courses like Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and Honors to take during your Junior Year. In addition, you can consider enrolling in some classes at a local community college if your school doesn't offer many advanced courses you want to take. Taking advanced courses is a great way to **show colleges you'll be able to handle the course load and that you have a genuine interest in learning**. Although you should strive to take a relatively difficult course load, it's fine if you're just taking the regular classes too! Just make sure you're not biting off more than you can chew; focus on doing well in the courses you're in, regardless of whether they are advanced or not.

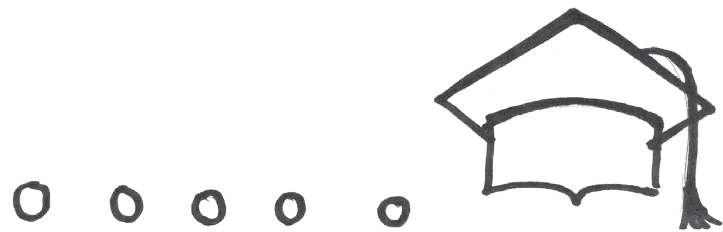
Finally, you should **go to your guidance counselor's office and get to know them** (and more importantly, make sure they get to know you). You might feel a little shy or awkward about this at first, but your guidance counselors are there to help you! You can talk to them about anything (even things like researching scholarships or taking advanced courses) and they're especially helpful with things related to the college process. In addition, it's a good idea to **introduce yourself early** on because the better your counselor gets to know you, the better their letter of recommendation will be for your college application



HIT THE BOOKS!



ALMOST



## Junior Year

During your Junior Year, you'll probably be taking a lot of tests. First, you should take the PSAT to try and qualify for National Merit Scholarships. In addition, you'll need to take either the SAT or the ACT--these two tests are super important for your college application! If you're having trouble deciding which test to take, you can refer to the "Standardized Testing" (pg 28) section of the guide. These tests do come with a fee, but before you register, check with your guidance counselor to see if you're eligible for fee waivers so you can take the test for free! Keep in mind that even if you do qualify for a fee waiver, you may only get a couple so it's best to make sure you register for a test date that gives you plenty of time to study.

At the end of your Junior Year, you should start asking teachers for letters of recommendation, which are extremely important for your college application. You can check out the "Letters of Recommendation" (pg 34) section of this guide for more information on who to ask, how to ask, and why asking them is important! This is also a good time to start looking into schools you might apply to and visiting them if you're able to. Keep in mind that college applications and college visits are some things that cost money, so it's always a good idea to start saving ahead of time if possible.

## Senior Year

During your Senior Year, you should be starting the college application and financial aid processes. In the Fall, you should finalize your college list and check the deadlines for each school's application (Early Decision, Early Action, Regular Decision, and Rolling Decision). You should also check to see if any colleges on your list require you to apply in a way other than the Common Application (refer to "The Common Application" section (pg 26) for more information). In addition, if you aren't happy with your SAT or ACT score, this is the time to retake it! At the same time, you'll need to be working on your college essays (check out the "Personal Statement" section for more info), sending in your test scores, and sending in your transcripts.

In the Fall, you'll also have to start applying for financial aid, which will help you pay for school if you're eligible. There are a few main types of financial aid: FAFSA (all schools), the CSS Profile (private schools only), and TAP (specific to New York State); for some schools you'll need to apply for all 3 (i.e. Cornell, since it's a private school in New York). You can learn more about this in the "How Will I Pay For My Education?" section (pg 42) of this guide. You can also look at financial aid calculators on college websites to get a sense of how much it might cost you to attend that school.

Once you've applied, it becomes a waiting game while colleges review your application. Some schools release all of their decisions on a specific date, while others release them on a rolling basis (decisions are released as the applications are reviewed). Once you've received your acceptances, you'll have to make your decision by May 1st, so take some time to think about the schools you were accepted to and what each of them has to offer. A good tip: save some money for a college deposit, as many colleges may require you to pay a fee after accepting their offer.

## Freshman Year

1. Develop **strong study habits**
2. Get involved in **extracurricular activities**, quality and consistency over quantity

## Sophomore Year

1. Find out when your high school offers the **PSAT** (typically in October, take it for practice)
2. Consider enrolling in **AP, IB, and Honors courses** for your Junior Year
3. Begin **researching scholarships** (school-based and local)
4. Develop a **relationship** with your **guidance counselor**

## A Summary

## Senior Year: In the Fall...

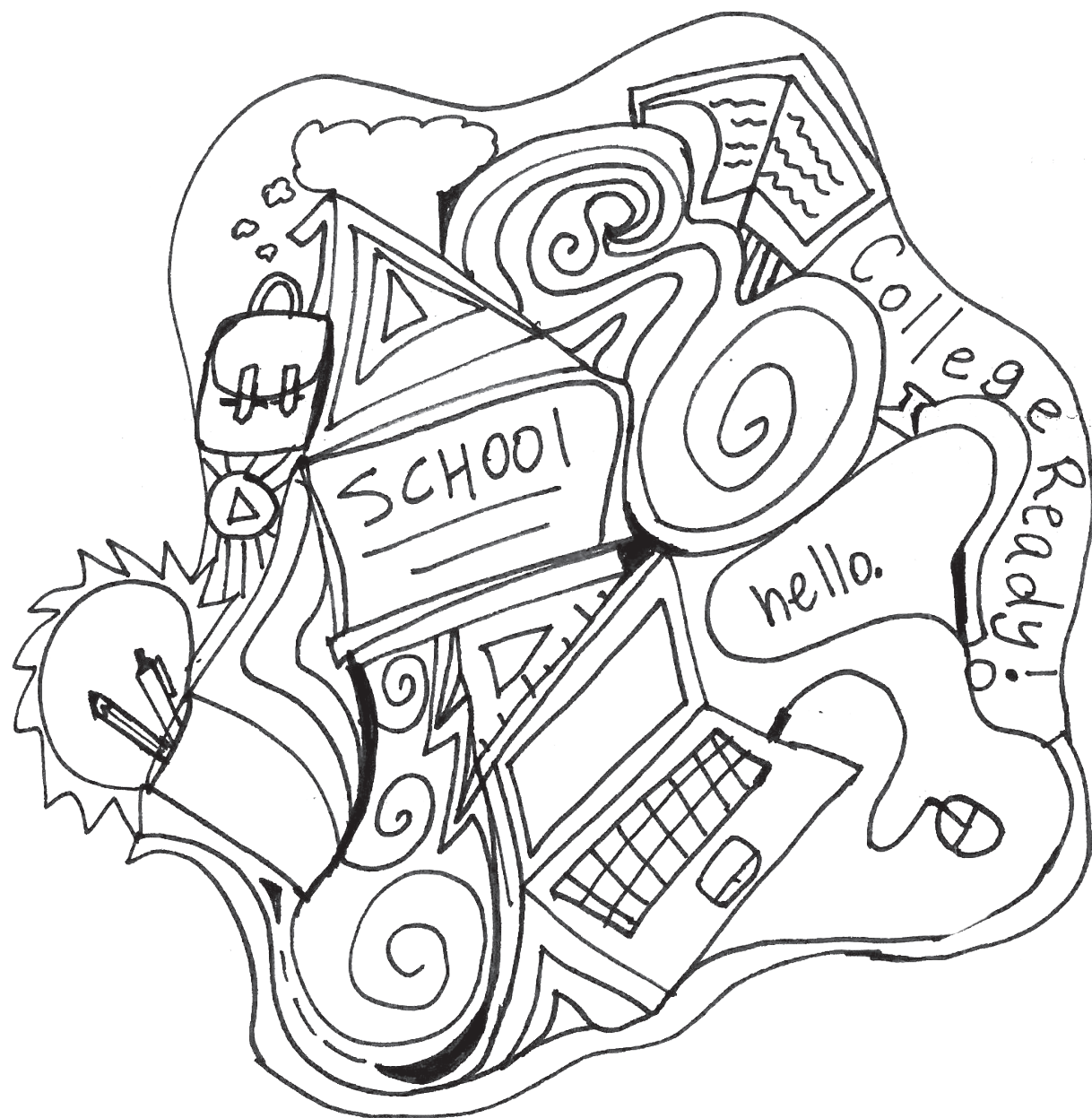
1. Take the **SAT/ACT for the last time** (in December at the latest) if you aren't satisfied with your previous score(s)
  2. Check deadlines and **make a plan to complete applications**
  3. Ask your counselor about **fee-waivers** for applications
  4. Write your **personal statement** and any **required supplemental essays**
  5. Have your **test scores sent to colleges** you're applying to
  6. Have your high school **transcript sent to colleges**
- Complete financial aid** (FAFSA, CSS Profile, TAP)

## Junior Year

1. Start asking for **letters of recommendation** (ask at the end of the year)
2. Prepare a **resume**
3. Think about **subject areas you're interested in** and what you might want to study in college.
4. Consider asking someone in that career to let you **shadow** them for a day.
5. If you have the opportunity to, **start visiting schools** that you might apply to
6. Take the **SAT or ACT once** or twice (more on this later)

## Senior Year: In the Spring...

1. Have your parents, family, or other adults (i.e. guidance counselor) **review your financial aid package** if you're not sure what it means
2. Do **further research into the schools** you were accepted to so you can compare what each has to offer
3. **Make your decision by May 1st** and pay a deposit



## What Kind Of College Should I Apply To?

There are many different types of colleges. Crazy right? Mainly, there are 4-year colleges (research universities and small liberal arts colleges) and 2-year colleges (community colleges). So how do you decide which one is right for you?

*"I applied to some schools that my friends had gone to and also researched some schools online, but I wish I had spent more time trying to figure out which schools would be the best fit for me before I applied"*

*- Soumeeka, Junior at Cornell University*

*"I picked colleges to apply to based on (1) academic programs that matched my interests -considering professor rating, rigor level, school size, class size, campus size, campus resources (2) location - whether the school was an area in a geographic area that I would enjoy exploring (3) financial considerations - whether it is a smart decision to spend this much money on this school based on what I will get out of it at the end. I was fortunate to be able to visit many schools, which gave me a good sense of the location aspect, and some schools let me sit in on a class. If you are able to do this, ask questions on tours! I always loved to ask how many great professors a guide had, as this gave me an idea of how good the teachers were and whether any of them could be an inspiring mentor!"*

*- Jenna, Recent Graduate of University of California Berkeley*



## Where Should You Apply?

Deciding which college you should apply to can be tough, especially if you don't know where to start or what you want to do. Hopefully, we can help you figure out which colleges would best suit you!

Initially, you want to have an idea of what you want to get out of your college experience. **Ask yourself questions** like: What am I interested in? What do I have a passion for? What can I see myself doing for the rest of my life? **Make a list of all the things that are important for you to have in a college** and organize them into 3 columns: 1) Must Have 2) Want But Not A Deal Breaker 3) Not Necessary. This will help you to prioritize what you're looking for in a college!

After you get a general idea of what you'd like out of your college experience, you should **do some research**. Websites like [CollegeBoard.org](https://collegeboard.org) can be a great tool to help you compare schools so you can see which ones offer you the best selections. These sites will give you more in depth information about the school once you have a better idea of what you're looking for. Don't forget that **visiting colleges can be helpful** as well if you're able to go.

Once you have an idea of which schools you'd prefer, make another list to organize the schools of your pickings. You should separate them into another 3-column list: 1) Safety Schools 2) Match Schools 3) Reach Schools.

**Safety Schools** are schools you think you have a high chance of getting accepted into.

**Match Schools** are schools that you qualify for based on academics and test scores. If they meet those standards, you have a decent shot of being selected.

**Reach Schools** are schools that may be more difficult for you to gain acceptance into and are typically pretty selective.

Last piece of advice: **do not let your test scores or GPA deter you from applying to a school you really want to go to!** You may be missing out on an opportunity to attend those "seemingly impossible" schools. Admissions committees look at so much more than just test scores. You should always believe in yourself! Wherever you decide to go, be proud of your decision and make the best of that opportunity because not everyone gets the chance to go to college. Happy hunting!

### 4-Year Colleges

This guide will mostly focus on these colleges. Typically for 4 years of study, you concentrate in a particular area of focus (biology, english, art history, math, etc.). The choices are pretty much infinite. At the end of your college career, you typically earn a Bachelor of Arts (BA) or Bachelor of Science (BS) depending on your major. This may be a requirement for some jobs and professional schools (graduate school, medical school, law school, etc.) so please keep your future plans in mind!

Generally 4-year colleges are split into two main categories: research universities and liberal arts colleges. While research universities typically have more research opportunities and a larger network, liberal arts colleges usually have smaller class sizes and a more balanced schedule (it is often encouraged or required to take classes in many different subjects). Each college is unique in its own way, so make sure to do your research ahead of time!

### 2-Year Colleges

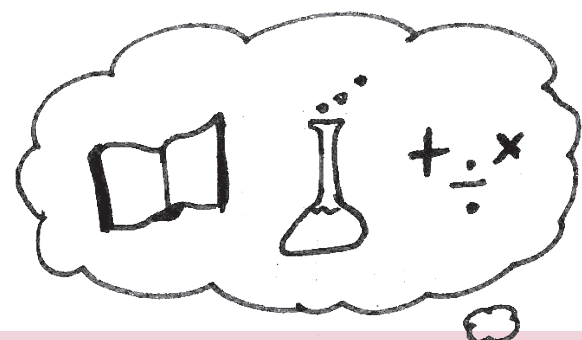
Typically after 2 years of study, you graduate with an Associate's Degree. Many Community Colleges offer these 2 year programs. This is a great place to start if you're not sure what you want to study or just what a general background in college level courses. However, if you want to continue your education or pursue a job that requires a Bachelor's Degree, you'll need to transfer into a 4 year program. Don't worry though! Many 4 year colleges will accept the credits you completed at your 2-year college, so you'll only have 2 more years to go. These schools are often cheaper and most students live at home and commute to campus during the day.

### Public vs. Private Colleges

Besides research universities and liberal arts colleges, 4-year colleges can be categorized into public and private colleges. While public colleges typically offer a reduced tuition rate for in-state students, private colleges do not. However, private colleges may have more funding and therefore may have better financial aid for their students.

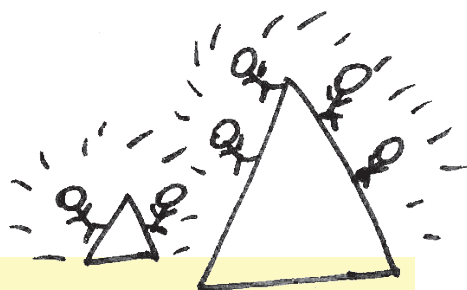
## Things to Consider When Picking Where to Apply

There are lots of things to think about when you're making the list of colleges you're planning to apply to! Offered majors, location, size, extracurricular activities, cost, and job placement are some factors that you might consider.



### Majors

Take a look at the different majors colleges offer to see if they have subjects that interest you. Different colleges will ask students to declare majors at different times. Most won't expect you to know what you want to major in right away, but it's always a good idea to check out the options and compare colleges' offerings. Also, if you are considering pursuing a pre-professional track, such as pre-health or pre-law, check out the requirements and type of support each college offers.



### Size

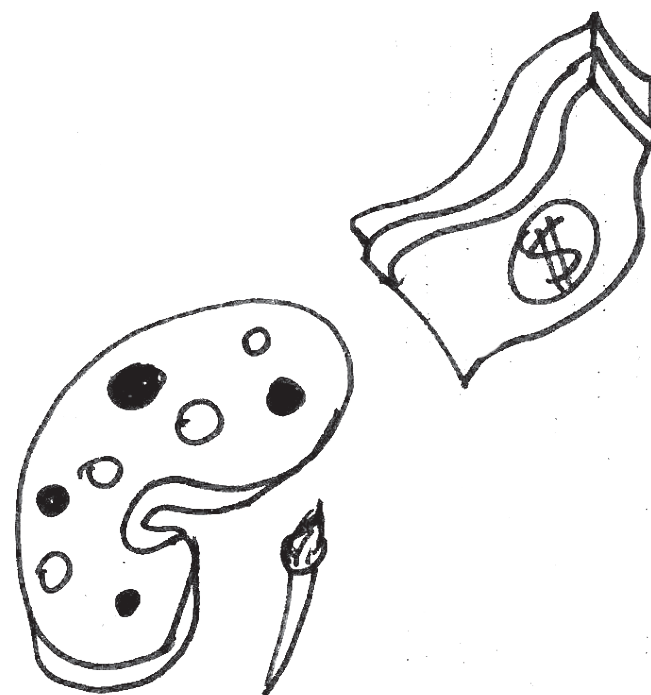
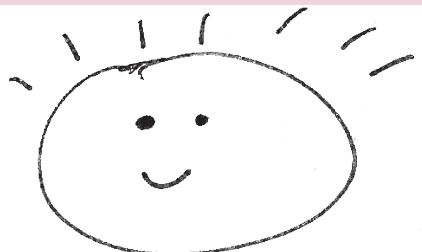
Some people may feel more comfortable being at a smaller school and getting more individualized attention from teachers while others may prefer bigger schools with larger networks and the ability to meet new people all the time.

Many colleges have classes that can contain any number of students from 15 to 300! However, smaller colleges typically have smaller class sizes on average, which may give you more opportunities to interact with your professors.



### Job Placement

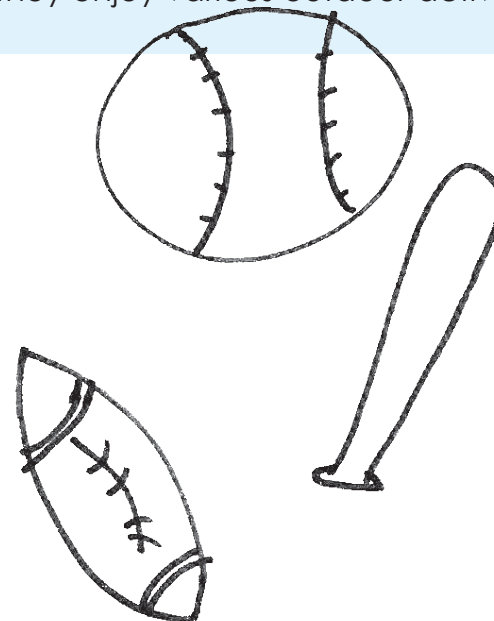
It's important to see what career services are offered in order to help you find jobs during and after your undergraduate experience. You want to make sure you can use your degree after all your hard work! A college's network can also be an important factor when considering what colleges to apply to because the connections you make can help you with job or internship placement.



### Extracurriculars/sports

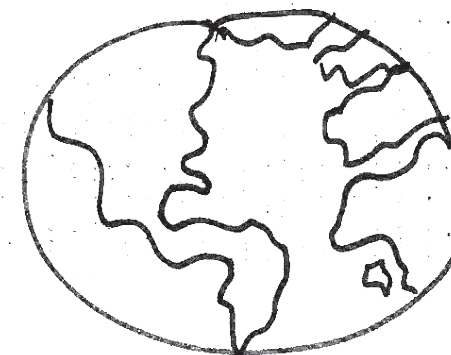
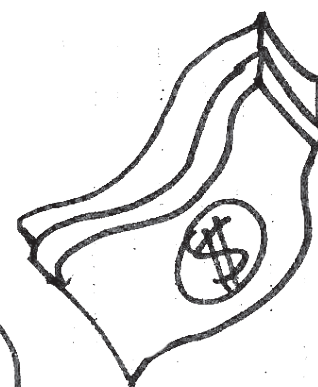
If you plan on playing a sport in college, you should look into what division each college is in/level of competitiveness, who the coaches are, and what the qualifications, expectations, and time commitments are for varsity, club, and intramural sports.

You can also look at the clubs colleges have to see what extracurriculars you could see yourself getting involved in. The surrounding area of a school can also contribute to your interests. For example, there are a lot of students who love Cornell because Ithaca has a lot of nature (especially in the summer!) and they enjoy various outdoor activities.



### Costs

Talk to your family about what they are willing and able to spend and determine what colleges fit your own personal standards and are within your budget. . But don't be discouraged by the "sticker price" (or the price that colleges list as full tuition)! Many colleges offer financial aid and merit scholarships; you can also apply for outside scholarships to help fund your education. While the cost might be less important to consider when initially looking at colleges (because many colleges give you financial aid so you don't end up paying the full price), it is often the first thing to consider when deciding where to go once you've been accepted. There are also special programs that can help provide support and financial assistance like Questbridge (refer to <https://www.questbridge.org/>), Posse (refer to <https://www.possefoundation.org/>), and H/EOP (refer to Appendix A, page xxx)



### Location

Geographic location is important in terms of how far away you want to be from home and how easy it is to commute back and forth. In addition, the climate and setting (i.e. urban vs. rural) are important factors to consider.

## How To Find Colleges You Want To Apply To

There are lots of ways to find colleges to apply to! To name some, you can look at online resources, talk to your guidance counselor, or go on college visits.

### CollegeBoard Website

A great way to get started is by going to [CollegeBoard.org](http://CollegeBoard.org). Once you make an account, you can **narrow your college search** by looking at location, campus settings (rural, urban, etc.), cost (but keep in mind financial aid and scholarship options!), majors, and school size.

You can even use the College Search function of this website and the 3 column list you just made to come up with a personalized list of schools based on your preferences! This will prioritize schools based on things you must have and help you initially narrow down your list. This website gives basic information about each school (such as size, majors they offer, clubs they have, etc) and also links you to the individual college websites.

### Talking To Your Guidance Counselor

Starting the college search can be very difficult, especially if you don't know where to begin. An incredibly useful resource for you as you apply to college is your guidance counselor. They are extremely accessible, knowledgeable, and experienced in helping students find the right college.

It's important that you **start talking with them early** because the earlier you start, the more your counselor will get to know you. If they know you well, they'll be able to help you choose the college that's best for you. They can also give suggestions for classes you might want to take that will strengthen your application and help you with financial aid.

Many high school advising offices often have college fairs, where colleges can visit your school and meet interested students. These college fairs are a great way to learn more about the school, meet admissions representatives, and ask any questions you may have!

### College Visits

College visits are a great way to not only learn about the school, but to **get a feel for the campus, school environment, and student body!** If you aren't able to go on one, don't worry--a lot of colleges offer virtual tours so check online to see if that's an option that's available. Also consider asking your guidance counselor if there are any students from your highschool that are currently in your college of interest that you can talk to or stay with on a visit.

#### How you can prepare for a college visit:

- Create a list of colleges to visit.
- Group colleges by location.
- Think about which colleges can be visited within one day or one trip.
- Visit the website of the college to see when they offer tours.
- Sign up for a tour.
- Allow yourself time to walk around and ask questions before leaving.
- Try to sign up for both an information session and a tour.



Finalizing your list can be difficult! Students typically apply to 5-10 colleges; some apply to less while others apply to more. Apply to a number of schools that you feel comfortable with!

Use the **information you gain on college tours**, it's a good idea to think about: what the student body is like, how far it is to walk to classes from the dorms, whether or not the school guarantees housing for all 4 years, and what the meal plans are like.

Although a lot of the information sessions go over things that can be found on the college's website, take note of the application process, acceptance statistics, early applications, important dates, and financial aid.

After a college visit, write down what you liked about the school and what you did not like about the school. Make sure to write this down as soon as you get back before you forget! After going on multiple visits, you won't remember all the details from the first few. **Figuring out likes and dislikes** will help narrow the college search process. Ask yourself if it the right school for you, and then decide whether or not you will be applying. If you decide to apply, make sure to keep the application date in mind.

## Some Tips

- One suggestion is to have 1-2 reach schools, 3-4 match schools, and 2-3 safety schools. This will differ depending on each person according to what best fits their needs.
- Keep track of all application deadlines and start early!
- Applications can be rather long and time consuming, so it's good to give yourself enough time to write and revise your essays so you can submit an application you're confident about.
- Know what kind of application you want to do for each school: **Early Decision** (ED is early deadline and binding), **Early Action** (EA is early deadline and nonbinding), and **Regular Decision** (RD is later deadline and nonbinding).
- **ED** is typically a **binding** decision; if accepted, you have to go! Applying ED shows you really want to go to the particular school. You're only allowed to apply Early Decision to one school!  
  
**EA** is similar to ED in that it has an earlier deadline and shows your commitment and desire to attend, but it is non-binding. You can still choose to go somewhere else and you can apply to more than one school EA.  
  
**RD** is the regular pool of applicants. This tends to be the largest pool, and there are no outright advantages or disadvantages in terms of the consideration of your application.
- The deadline for many schools is typically **January 1st**.
- Don't let the acceptance rate deter you from applying, but also don't let it deceive you into thinking you're definitely going to get in.
- One great way to judge if a school might be a good option is to look at the College Search on CollegeBoard.org and look at previously accepted students' average test scores, gpas, classes, etc.
- **Colleges often follow a trend** and are often looking for the same type of people every year.



## What Do I Need to Apply?

Every college may have a set of specific requirements for their program, but for the most part, these are the things that college applications require:

- Common Application
- Standardized Testing Scores
- Transcript
- Letters of Recommendation.
- Personal Statement & Supplemental Essays
- Other (Financial Aid, Picking Major / School)

# The Common Application

The Common Application is the most widely used college admissions application, but it may be confusing to figure out how to use it. The process is as follows:

## step 1.

**Make an account** on [commonapp.org](https://commonapp.org) in August before your Senior Year. Your username will be your email address, so make sure that you use the email address you check on a regular basis.

## step 2.

**Add colleges to your list.** Click on the “College Search” tab. Then, search for colleges and universities based on their name, location, application deadline, or even distance from home. Finally, select the colleges you want to add to your list.

## step 3.

**Know the requirements** of the colleges and universities you want to apply to. Some colleges require supplemental essays, some require different numbers of recommendation letters, and some require different types of testing. Be aware of the application deadline to submit all of your materials by. Early Decision (ED) applications are often due on November 1, Early Action (EA) applications are often due during November and December, and Regular Decision (RD) applications are due around January to February. In addition to these applications, some schools may offer scholarships that have different deadlines even though you are applying RD.

## step 4.

**Fill out the information being asked under “Common App” tab.** These sections include your education, details about your activities, a writing section and any supplemental essays required by the school. More information about each section on the right!

## step 5.

**Press the submit button** for each college under the last tab on the page of the college you are applying to once you’re done with all of your essays. In addition, try to avoid potential crashing of the website at the last minute by sending your application and any supplements a few days in advance, especially for ED. The day before and the day of the application deadline is when the majority of applications are submitted.

### Education Section -

You can list your future plans here, including the career you are interested in and the highest degree you want to earn, but this is not a binding choice! It just gives the colleges a general sense of what you might be interested in studying.

### Activities Section -

While there is a limit of 10 activities, it is alright if you have less than 10 activities. Colleges prefer quality and commitment over quantity. However, if you do have more than 10 activities that you want to list, list the most important activities, such as the activities you are most proud of, most involved with, most committed to, etc. Then, consider creating a resume about the other activities you have completed and want colleges to know about.

Here are some tips for writing the activities list.

- State your role and organization in the top box to avoid wasting characters in the description box: Be specific when describing what you did to emphasize a tangible and measurable impact but keep in mind the 150 character limit
- List your tasks: Use past tense action verbs to describe your previous activities and present tense action verbs to describe activities you are still involved in
- Use a variety of verbs and adjectives” Use sophisticated verbs. For example, instead of saying “come up with,” you can write “develop” or “brainstorm” to create the same effect that sounds more professional
- Try to avoid using complicated language, such as “helping all of those,” and just say it as it is
- If you’re unsure of what activities to list or how to phrase the descriptions, always ask for help from a counselor, teacher, or mentor!

### Writing Section -

This section asks you to write your Common App essay (i.e. Personal Statement) in the space provided. This will be discussed in more detail in the “Personal Statement” section of this guide.

Lastly, make sure your supplemental essays are powerful. Since many of them have short word limits, you need to make sure they’re impactful while staying within the word count!

# Standardized Testing

Another key component of the college admissions process is standardized testing. Most schools, although some do not, require either the SAT or the ACT and the score that you receive is very important. It may seem daunting but don't worry - we'll lay out many of the details you need to know here and point you to some great online resources to get you prepared.

The best sources of information are the College Board website for more information and practice for the SAT and the ACT website for more information and practice for the ACT. These are also where you will register for the tests. We will not discuss this in depth here, but you may also want or need to take SAT subject tests in order to showcase your abilities in specific areas. This is in addition to either the SAT or the ACT and is something to consider in relation to the schools you are applying to so check their requirements carefully!

A great way to gauge your strengths and the different types of questions is to take a practice test or go through some practice questions of each test! There are many resources available online to help with this.

The SAT and the ACT both have similar sections, such as math, reading, English and language, and an optional essay section. However, the ACT also contains a science section.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

## How To Choose?

Since both the SAT and the ACT are accepted by U.S. universities, it is up to you to choose which test plays to your strength. The format and type of questions you see on each test can be quite different, so here are some differences to think through when choosing a test:

### Math

The SAT provides a greater emphasis on math, as it counts for half of your score. The SAT also includes questions where you have to fill in your own answers rather than just multiple choice. The ACT covers more math concepts, but there is only one math section on the ACT, so it doesn't count for as much of your total score. If you feel more comfortable with math, with and without a calculator, think about taking the SAT! If math isn't your strongest subject, choose the ACT.

### Science

The ACT includes a science section whereas the SAT does not. This section requires understanding of a few topics, and interpreting graphs and tables relating to these topics. If you are less confident in science, and your ability to break down graphs & tables, choose the SAT instead, but if science is your strong suit, use the ACT as a way to show this off!

### Reading

SAT reading questions flow chronologically - they go in order of when they occurred in the passage. This makes SAT reading questions easier to follow, so if you aren't as confident in your ability to link ideas in literature, choose the SAT!

### Writing

The essay component is optional for both the SAT the ACT, however, most schools do require it. It's a good idea to take this section in case you decide to apply to a school that requires it; don't let this be a reason you can't apply!

The SAT and ACT essays differ in terms of what you will be writing about -- in the SAT, you will be responding to a passage and will write about the author's argument, while in the ACT, you will be responding to an issue and giving your own opinion. If you are better at reading comprehension, choose the SAT! Alternatively, if you are better at coming up with different arguments and supporting them, choose the ACT

## ACT FORMAT\*

(With Writing: 3 hours 55 minutes; Without Writing 2 hours 55 minutes)

### English

75 questions

45 minutes

Question type: multiple choice with 4 answer choices

Time per question: 53 seconds/question

### Math

60 questions

60 minutes

Question type: multiple choice with 5 answer choices

Time per question: 60 seconds/question

Larger focus on geometry

Includes matrices, graphs of trigonometric functions, logarithms

### Reading

40 questions

35 minutes

Question type: multiple choice with 4 answer choices

Time per question: 53 seconds/question

### Science

40 questions

35 minutes

Question type: multiple choice with 4 answer choices

Time per question: 53 seconds/question

### Writing (optional)

1 question

40 minutes

You will be given different passages about various groups' perspectives on a topic.

You will compare and contrast perspectives and add your own

### How ACT Scoring works

On a scale of 1 - 36

Optional writing on a scale of 2-12 (not counted towards final score)

*\*This information is accurate as of May 2019. If you are reading this several years later, be sure to check (either online or by asking your guidance counselor) if the test format has changed since this was published.*

## SAT FORMAT\*

(With Essay: 3 hours, Without Essay; 3 hours 50 minutes)

### Reading

52 questions

65 minutes

Time per question: 75 seconds/question

### Writing and Language

35 minutes

44 questions

Time per question: 48 seconds/question

### Math No Calculator

25 minutes

20 questions

4 answer choices per question

Includes "grid in" answer choices, where you write in the correct answer

Time per question: 75 seconds/question

Provides a "formula sheet" for questions regarding geometry

### Math Calculator

55 minutes

38 questions

4 answer choices per question

Includes "grid in" answer choices, where you write in the correct answer

Time per question: 87 seconds/question

Provides a "formula sheet" for questions regarding geometry

### Optional Writing

50 minutes

1 essay

You are given a passage written by another author, and you analyze and expand

### How SAT Scoring Works

On a scale of 400-1600 total

Each individual section is graded on a scale of 200-800

The optional essay is graded on three separate scales of 1-8

*\*This information is accurate as of May 2019. If you are reading this several years later, be sure to check (either online or by asking your guidance counselor) if the test format has changed since this was published.*



## When To Test

When thinking about when you want to prepare, it is best to choose a test date where you have a lighter schedule or less school work. For example, if you are very busy during the school year, it **may be easier to take the test over the summer**. If you have less activities during one season in the year, think about taking the test then! The SAT and ACT both have a couple of test dates scattered throughout the year -- take a look at the official testing dates online and make sure to keep track of the registration deadlines.

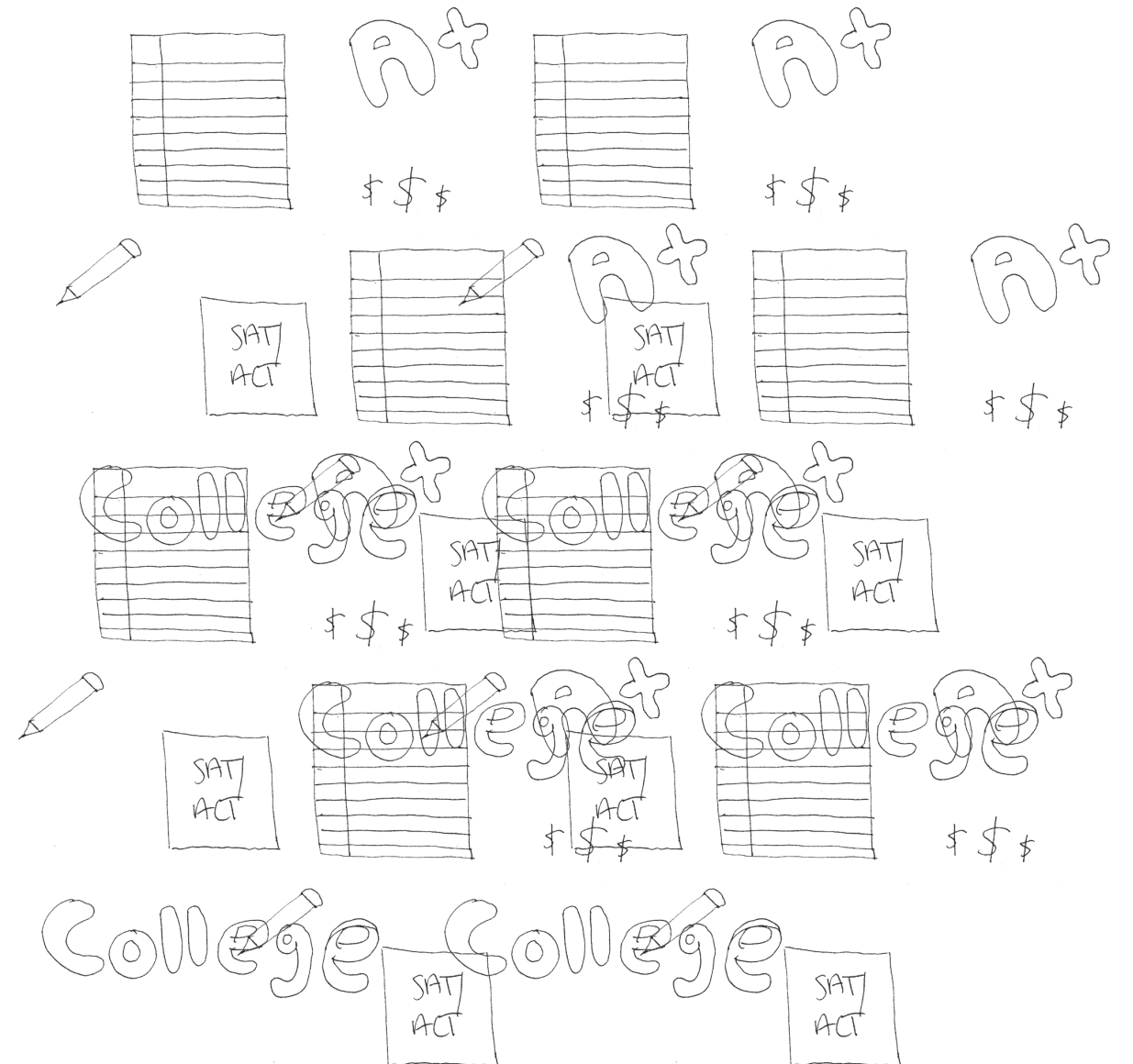
The amount of time each person will want to prepare for a standardized test depends on the individual. **Generally, students prepare for about three months** when taking the SAT or ACT for the first time but gauge your level of understanding and formulate your own study plan. If possible, plan enough time to study the material, do practice tests, and brush up on the rules of the test so you do not need to cram at the last minute! In addition, **it's important to give yourself enough time to prepare for the exam** because even if you qualify for fee waivers (which will allow you to take the exams for free), there may be a limited number of times you can use them.

### Accommodations

If you need other accommodations to take the exam due to disabilities that will impact your performance on the exam, take a look at the online documentation about what you need to provide in order to be able to take the exam with special accommodations. Your guidance counselor can help determine if you qualify for accommodations and help you collect any necessary documentation.

### Final Notes

This may all seem overwhelming now but there are various resources available online and perhaps in your local community to help you do the best you can! Here are the key links to resources that we recommend using: <https://www.collegeboard.org/> for the SAT and <http://www.act.org/> for the ACT. If you aren't satisfied with your score, don't worry! It is very common to take these tests more than once (although usually no more than three times) so take a breath and just try again! Your scores are very important, but they aren't everything.



# Letters of Recommendation

Almost all universities and scholarship programs require at least two letters of recommendation as part of the application process. One or two letters should ideally be written by a teacher or counselor who is familiar with your academic achievements and abilities. Additional letters can be written by coaches, mentors, bosses, or other adult figures who know you personally and can speak to your unique qualities.

Don't ask family members for letters as they are generally not accepted. Be sure to look into what the specific school you are applying to requires.

Admissions officers and scholarship organizations want to get a better understanding of who you are as a person; recommendation letters help shed light on who you are beyond your grades and extracurriculars!

## Get to know your teachers and advisors - and have them get to know you

Besides needing someone to complete a vital part of your college application, getting to know your teachers in a genuine way is an important part of the high school experience! The idea is to provide teachers, your potential recommenders, with a sense of who you are as a person and how you handle yourself in an academic setting. Admissions officers want to see students who try to engage with the material and persevere when they face something difficult! Starting Sophomore Year, think about two to three teachers each year that you get along with. You won't get letters from all of them, but you do want backups in case your top choice writers don't work out.

Here are a few ways you can get to know your teachers:

Stay after class if you have a question or your teacher mentioned an idea that interested you.

Be active and engaged in class discussions and always be prepared for class; don't be afraid to speak your mind!

If you're struggling with the course material, always take the time to meet with your teacher and explain what you're having trouble with.

When you see your teacher in the hallway say hello or strike up a conversation.

## Choosing which teachers to write your letters

Who you ask to write your letters of recommendation is an important choice. When it's time for you to decide, don't immediately jump to the teachers who gave you the best grades. Try to think about what teachers know you the best as a person rather than just as their student.

Good grades, internships, volunteer work and other involvements can be seen on a transcript and resume. Letters of recommendation should be able to speak to your character, unique characteristics and personality that makes you more than a name on the paper. Pick passionate teachers-teachers who care; their passion comes across in the letter too! Choose teachers that can give specific examples, not just say you were "nice" or "hardworking". You want them to show how you possess these characteristics.

In the spring (April, May, June) of your Junior Year you should ask your teachers to write your letter of recommendation. You want to give them time to write it, so the earlier the better! Many teachers are asked to write a significant number of letters and you want to make sure they have enough time to write yours.

## How to ask for a recommendation

Ask your recommenders in person! Depending on your teacher's schedule and school culture, it may be appropriate to email your teacher to set up an appointment or meeting. Asking for a letter of recommendation solely over email could be interpreted as impersonal, distant, and less mature, an impression you don't want to make in the mind of a recommender. Find time during a free period, after school, or whenever the teacher has free time to meet. The request may be short, but you still want to leave time in case your teacher wants to further discuss your plans.

Asking your teacher for a recommendation can be nerve wracking, but remember that your teachers are expecting students to ask them for letters at this time and they want to help you succeed! If you're unsure what to say, here's an example:

"I really enjoyed your class. I've learned a lot from you and feel like you've gotten to know me well. I'm applying to College X for next year and would really appreciate if you could write me a strong letter of recommendation for my application(s)."

Make sure the teacher can write a strong letter, you do not want an average letter! It's even better if the recommender can speak to your abilities or interest in the subject you will be studying in college. However, anyone who can speak to how different you are from the pack is most important!

Don't feel discouraged if the recommender says they can't write you a letter. Some teachers don't have time to write tons of letters or they might feel like they don't know you well enough to write a solid letter. Thank them for their time and move on to your backups (another reason having backups is important!).

## Sample “Brag Sheet” to give to your recommenders:

### Information to give your recommenders

If you've asked someone who knows you well and agrees to provide you with a letter of recommendation, then it's a good idea to share some further information with him/her. In many schools, they call this a “brag sheet.”

First: your teachers need to know the logistics. When are your college deadlines? How do they submit a letter of recommendation? In most cases, your early decision deadlines will be in October and your regular decision deadlines will be in early January. Typically, writers upload their recommendations through the Common Application or, if your school uses it, through Naviance.

Ask your teachers if they'd like a list of your accomplishments and extracurriculars (the “brag sheet”). The more detailed and thoughtful you are about your values, goals, and accomplishments, the more useful your brag sheet will be to the writer. And while you might not be used to or all that comfortable writing about yourself, you should take the time to reflect deeply about what you care about and what experiences have been especially meaningful in your life.

Give them a resume, with concrete examples of things you've done and you're passionate about, and simply ask them what they want to know more of. Tell them what you want on that letter (with limits) about yourself. Traits, accomplishments, passions, goals, your personal story etc. Ask teachers who can each speak to a different aspect of your character so that you're not asking them all to write the same thing. Letters are one way of showing how well rounded you are as a person.

### What to do after you ask

After your teacher agrees to write your recommendation, it is always a good idea to write a thank you note (handwritten is always better than email). In this letter you'll get another chance to explain why you've chosen them and express gratitude.

Follow up with your recommenders a week or two before your deadlines with a polite reminder. In this reminder, you could thank them again for providing you with a letter of recommendation, express your excitement about your future plans, and invite them to contact you if they need any more information from you. If you word it this way, then it won't feel like you're asking why they haven't uploaded their letter yet (unless they have, in which case, thank them again!)

### First and Last Name

College Recommendation Resume

Teacher/Recommender name, Class [Smith, AP Biology]

GPA and Class Rank:

[.....]

SAT/ACT Score:

[.....]

### Adjectives that describe me:

Choose two adjectives, and provide an explanation of why these adjectives describes you.

Move away from the typical words like “hard working, caring, considerate, smart”

Examples:

Innovative

Multifaceted

Diligent

Visionary

Methodical

### Moments from class:

*Try to recall a significant story from class. This can be an activity, a conversation with the teacher, or something this teacher did to make you remember the class. Chances are, you are not the only recommendation letter the teacher is writing. Make their job easier, and make your recommendation stand out from the typical letter, by giving them substance. This is your opportunity to insert what you want the admission officers to see about you and show the colleges that you have relationships with your teachers.*

### Keep in mind:

Why choose this teacher out of all your teachers?

How did this class stand out amongst your other classes?

What do you want this teacher to focus on?

### Outside of class:

List all of your extracurricular activities

Honor Societies

Volunteer Work

Leadership positions

\*Your information should fit concisely onto one page as to not overwhelm the reader.

## Personal Statement - The Big Essay

While there are many prompts available to choose from, all prompts get at one thing-

**who are you and what is your story?**

An essay that answers this question is called your personal statement. Your test scores, transcripts and extracurriculars are definitely important, but colleges want to hear your story from your own voice!

As an example, below are the Common App Prompts from 2018-2019. A student is required to write an essay addressing one of these prompts that is sent to all the schools they apply to. Even schools that are not on the Common App will ask very similar questions. These prompts will change each year but generally follow the same pattern.

### Common App Prompts 2018-2019:

**Q.** Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

**Q.** The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

**Q.** Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?

**Q.** Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma - anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.

**Q.** Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

**Q.** Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?

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



**What Shawn Felton, Director of Undergraduate Admissions at Cornell University says about the personal narrative:**

.....It's a moment to be creative and tell your story.....

.....Beyond the transcript, it's the most important part of admissions.....

While there is unfortunately no silver bullet to writing the perfect essay to get you into college, here are some important tips from current college students to keep in mind as you write your own.

## Essay Writing Tips:

### Tip 1: Be Authentic

One of the most important things-no matter what you write-is to be authentic. Be yourself. The people reading your essays typically do this everyday and can tell if you're bluffing or over exaggerating. Your story is unique so tell it!

### Tip 2: Balance Your Essay

The key is to find balance, which is easier said than done. This means include above average vocabulary and sound sophisticated, but don't over do it. Same with your story. Be personal but don't let it gravitate from the fact that it's a college admission essay and you need to convey a sense of professionalism.

### Tip 3: Break Down Your Essay Prompt

Break down the essay into smaller parts and remember: although they are usually asking you one question, there are hidden questions! For example: let's say a question asks, "Tell us about a time you experience failure. How did it affect you, and what lessons did you learn?" The visible questions are: When did I experience failure? How did this experience affect me? What did I learn? A hidden question could be: How will I apply what I learned to future college experiences?

Admissions committees not only want to choose you because of good merit, but also for your character, resilience, work ethic, and traits that will not only allow you to survive college but thrive. They're investing in you and they want to make it worth it.

### Tip 4: Show, don't tell.

Instead of simply saying "I work hard" or "I have good grades," express these characteristics through your writing. For example, this was the closing paragraph of a personal essay for Cornell:

***"I received my EMT certification, was on the Dean's List for the third semester in a row, and also got accepted into the Global Citizenship Alliance Program where accepted fellows go to Salzburg, Austria during spring break to speak about globalization in regards to bettering the world. And recently, I secured an internship at the American Heart Association in their advocacy department. My resiliency, my drive and my action plan kept me going despite all the adversities my third semester brought and after accomplishing so much in my time at Queensborough Community College, out of all the things I learned; I learned one very important thing. I am good enough. I am more than good enough."***

***"I could have easily said I have a high GPA, I work hard, I don't give up; but I told a story and showed them my work ethic, my drive, and what I was passionate about. Stories bring about emotions, feelings, and they allow people to picture you as a person. Show, don't just tell."***

### Tip 5: Proofread.

Definitely get your essay reviewed for grammatical errors and flow. If you feel strongly about your story, don't let others influence you from changing it. If you genuinely feel passionate about something, that passion will come across in your essay.

### Tip 6: Get help with personal statements

Essays are never easy to write. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Here are some resources you can consult during the writing process:

- The Common App Website - The Help Center has videos with tips on how to get started, as well as general advice for writing your personal statement.
- Twitter - If you tweet with the hashtag #AskVirtualCounselor you can get help on any questions about college admissions, including help on your essays.
- Google - This seems like a simple one, but google searches will give you forums, lists on commonly asked questions and examples of both successful and unsuccessful essays.
- Teachers, Librarians, Friends and Family - Have others read your essays: don't let spelling mistakes distract you from your essay. Make sure others get the message you are trying to get across; when you look at your essay long enough, it becomes harder for you to identify room for improvement. Again, don't be afraid to ask for help!

### Tip 7: Get advice from College Students!

***"Tell a story that lets the readers deduce what kind of person and therefore student you are. You don't have to tell/show them every positive characteristic you have, but one large prominent one. For example I wrote about running my first race (a half marathon) and described the disbelief people had in me completing it and yet I did because nobody can tell me what I can't do. It's okay to leave out facts like oh and I'm super interested in nature that's why I want to do environmental science and I have great work ethic and blah blah blah. They just need a jist of your greatest qualities not a list of all of them. Also have everyone you know and their mother look over it for their feedback."***

- Viola, Recent Graduate of Cornell University

***"Write 5,000 drafts and start early!! Okay maybe not 5,000, but as soon as you get an idea, write it down. Make many attempts at developing it. It is hard to talk about yourself, but don't be afraid of "flattering yourself" or talking yourself up. You are trying to convince these schools that you are important and deserve to go there, which you do, so make the admissions officers' jobs easy and tell them why you're so great! The MOST important thing is so have as many people as possible to read it and give you feedback. This should be many different people - peers, friends, teachers, family, etc. Ask for negative feedback and don't get discouraged."***

- Jenna, Recent Graduate of University of California Berkeley

## How will I pay for my education?

Paying for college is daunting. Many colleges estimate the cost of attendance to be as much as \$70,000 a year. This is known as a sticker price. Don't let this sticker price scare you; there are many ways you can fund your college education.

### Financial Aid

Financial aid is one of the best ways to help reduce the cost of attendance. Check with the colleges you're interested in attending to see if they offer need-based financial aid--grants that will be given to students so they can afford to study there. This also includes work-study and loans as well. Some colleges also give merit based scholarships and have special honors programs with discounted tuition, so be sure to check if you are eligible for any of these at the schools you are applying to.

What is financial aid? There are two main types of financial aid: need-based and merit-based. Need based financial aid is awarded based on financial need while merit-based aid is awarded based on other factors (academic excellence, athletic achievement, etc.).

Financial aid comes in two forms: Gift Aid and Self-Help. Gift Aid is free money that does not have to be repaid and comes in the form of grants, scholarships, tuition benefits, and federal and state grants. Self-Help is either taking out loans (money that must be repaid) or working (money that you earn during the academic year).

### How to Apply?

Find out which form(s) your school requires, read all of the directions, and submit completed forms by the deadline. If you have any questions, you should reach out to your college's financial aid office. One tip: keep a copy of everything on file in case some forms get lost along the way!

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

This is required for federal and state aid. You can apply for FAFSA at the beginning of October during your Senior Year. Note that you don't need to complete your tax returns before applying! You can apply on [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)

### New York State Tuition Assistance Program (NYS TAP)

This is required in order to receive state aid from New York. You can apply for TAP at the beginning of October during your Senior Year. You're eligible for TAP if your parents' New York State taxable income is < \$80,000. Apply when you file FAFSA on [www.hesc.com](http://www.hesc.com)

### CSS Profile

This is required by some schools for their aid. It's available at the beginning of October during your Senior Year. There's a \$25 fee for initial application to one school and \$16 fee per each additional school. Fee waivers may be available so check with your guidance counselor. Just like the FAFSA, you don't have to complete your tax returns before applying. You can apply on [student.collegeboard.org/css-financial-aid-profile](http://student.collegeboard.org/css-financial-aid-profile)

### Outside Scholarships

Besides funds given by colleges, you can help pay for your college education through outside scholarships! This is a great way to fund your college education and there are thousands of scholarships you may be eligible for.

### Strategies

Apply to several scholarships that are worth smaller dollar amounts. This is not to discourage you from applying to the big ones--go for it! But typically, the scholarships that give you less money are significantly less competitive. As a result, it increases your odds of getting them! These small amounts start to add up and hopefully amount to the funds you need to attend.

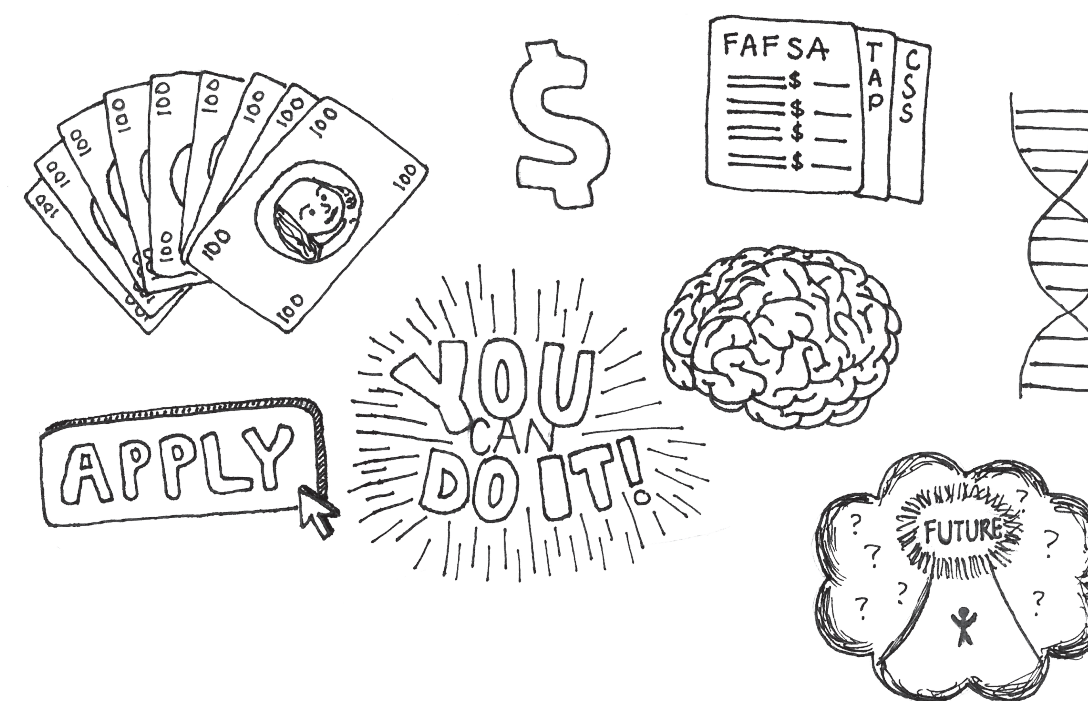
Look for scholarships that are specific to certain demographics (i.e. minorities, socioeconomic status, geographic location, etc.). Talk to your high school guidance counselor about local scholarships you can apply for, and check for scholarships offered at local businesses. Some banks and corporations also offer scholarships, especially if a family member works there.

Some bigger scholarships that will help fund your education are Questbridge (refer to <https://www.questbridge.org/>) and Posse (refer to <https://www.possefoundation.org/>). They each have several partner colleges, so be sure to research them if you're interested in applying!

If you're looking for more scholarships to start off your applications, refer to Appendix B at the end of the guide for some links and information about a couple of other options.

### A Final Note

Don't give up. Planning your college finances can be stressful, but remember to look at it as an investment in your future.



## I got into College. Now What?

Now that you've gotten into college and all of your hard work has paid off, it's time to start thinking about next steps! From picking schools to figuring out your major, it can seem like there are a lot more steps but most schools will lay out a general checklist for you!

### Picking a School

If you didn't have the chance to visit colleges when you were applying, now is a good time! It's important to make sure you feel comfortable and that the school is a good fit for you before you accept an offer. If you can't visit all the colleges you're interested in, try reaching out to student groups that you are interested in on that campus and see if you can talk to a student about their experiences! Many students on campus are always willing to talk to prospective students about their experience and more. Your guidance counselor may also be able to connect you with other students that graduated from your high school and are currently attending the colleges you were accepted to.

Ultimately, picking a school comes down to what you want. For some people, it came down to small differences like which school offered better food. For others, it came down to which school was more affordable. Refer back to the list you made at the start of your application process of things that are important for you in a college and use it to help you decide! Also be sure to consider what you would need to spend to attend colleges you've been accepted to. Decide in your own time but make sure to keep track of the acceptance deadlines.

### Things to do Before College

After accepting an offer, make sure to keep track of the deposit deadline--schools generally will have you put down a deposit when you officially accept. Usually, students also fill out housing questionnaires or look for roommates around this time based on their specific college housing system. Another key action item at this time is to look into scholarships for your specific college and apply to those as needed!

### Picking a Major

Your major in college is an area of study that you choose to specialize in. While every college student has general requirements they need to fulfill, your major is typically a group of courses that help you develop a deeper understanding of the topic.

So how do you choose your major? There are hundreds of choices to pick from and it's okay not to know what you want to study. You will have the chance to explore many fields of study your first and second year. If you are having issues deciding what is best, your college has many resources to help you make the best decisions.

Can you change your major after declaring? Yes. In college, you will have the chance to study different subjects and foster a new interest. For example, you might enter college wanting to major in Chemistry, but realize you enjoy History even more. Unfortunately, if you decide to change your major junior or senior year, it may take you more than the traditional four years to earn your degree, especially if the new major has many requirements. In addition, some schools make it very difficult to switch majors, especially if you have to change schools within a university. Think hard about what you want to major in, but remember that it is possible to switch as you explore other areas!

### Advice From College Students - How We Picked Our Majors

***"I changed majors after my first year of college from chemistry to psychology. This was based on my enjoyment of classes, performance in classes, and thinking more closely about what I want to do in the future and what questions I want to answer in my career."***

-Jenna, Recent Graduate of University of California Berkeley

***"I was a Biology major when I first entered college and chose that major because that's what I had studied the most in high school. I was interested in Biology, but after a few semesters in college, my interests changed. Although I still liked Biology, I fell in love with Literature. I would look forward to all my literature classes and enjoyed all my projects and assignments. I felt passionate about the books we read and the topics we discussed so I knew I had to change my major"***

-Naima, Senior at Long Island University

***"I decided on neuroscience very early into my first semester when I was in an introductory neuroscience class. It was my favorite class of the semester and I had gone in thinking about biology so I decided it would be most exciting for me. Later, in my last semester of freshman year I randomly took an art history class to fulfill a requirement and fell in love with it, so after a couple more classes I decided to double major."***

- Samuel, Sophomore at Dartmouth College

## Advice from College Students: What we wished we knew...

*"Start early and develop yourself professionally. You start your network as start as you step foot on campus. Seize every opportunity you get (DON'T be afraid to go to events). DON'T be afraid of talking to professors. Reach out and find a mentor." -Joyce, Senior at Boston University*

*"I wish I knew that getting A's in high school is not like getting A's in college. Getting a 40% on a test can get you an A in a class, which I think is completely ridiculous. Don't worry so much about grades, it will drive you nuts and defining yourself based on grades is SO not worth it." -Jenna, Recent Graduate of University of California Berkeley*

*"I wish I had known that it's okay not to know what you want to do or be in the future." -Samuel, Sophomore at Dartmouth College*

*"That it is okay to go to the dining hall alone!" -Noa, Recent Graduate of Skidmore College*

*"To really push your limits during the first week when making friends. People are super friendly during the first week and you are more likely to form good friendships and have a good first semester if you push yourself to make friends in the beginning." -Soumeeka, Junior at Cornell University*

*"Everyone is just as nervous and scared as you are and are very open to being your friend. Also, your homework and study schedule will not be like the one you had in high school because your classes will be at different times every semester." -Bianca, Senior at Boston University*

*"That everything will work itself out so there's no point in being anxious over the unknown. Just focus on the present and what you do know for sure." -Hayley, Senior at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry*

*"As a transfer from a state college to an Ivy League school, the name really does not matter. It's so easy to see that brilliant minds are found at all universities." -Tiffany, Graduate of Cornell University*

*"When I first came to college, I wish I had known that it is alright to struggle. I did poorly in math my first semester, which made me nervous about trying math classes again during my college career. Had I known just how many people struggled with the course that I took my freshman year, I might have stuck through it and gained the knowledge it would have offered me." -Senior at Yale University*



## Appendix A: EOP/HEOP

### Arthur O. Eve Educational Opportunity Program and Higher Education Opportunity Programs (EOP/HEOP)

This is not a “minority access program,” rather it is a program that provides access and most notably academic support, for any qualifying NYS student, i.e. one who meets both academic and economic eligibility requirements

#### Financial Aid Review Documentation

A copy of your FAFSA SAR and completed TAP Application faxed to 978-967-2716

Also a copy of your cover sheet

[https://oadi.cornell.edu/user\\_uploads/files/Admissions-Checklist%2019-20.pdf](https://oadi.cornell.edu/user_uploads/files/Admissions-Checklist%2019-20.pdf)

For students whose parents are divorced, separated, or never married

[https://finaid.cornell.edu/sites/finaid.cornell.edu/files/Noncustodial\\_Parent\\_Waiver\\_Request\\_CSS\\_Profile\\_181019.pdf](https://finaid.cornell.edu/sites/finaid.cornell.edu/files/Noncustodial_Parent_Waiver_Request_CSS_Profile_181019.pdf)

#### How can I be considered for EOP/HEOP?

Submit an eligibility questionnaire

[https://cornell.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_ewHcXW3zLBlus5](https://cornell.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_ewHcXW3zLBlus5)

Submit signed copies of income taxes for “prior prior” (Form 1040, 1040A, 1040EZ including all pages submitted to the IRS) and W2s from both the custodial and non-custodial parents

Documentation of any type (e.g. Social Security, Unemployment, Public Assistance)

#### What is the difference between EOP and HEOP?

EOP is for state contract colleges:

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

College of Human Ecology

SC Johnson College of Business - Dyson School

The School of Industrial and Labor Relations

HEOP is for endowed, or private, colleges and universities

College of Art, Architecture, and Planning

College of Arts and Sciences

SC Johnson College of Business - Hotel Administration

## Appendix B: Scholarships

A Comprehensive list of scholarships and details can be found on our blog page at

<http://blogs.cornell.edu/pscprek12outreach/home/sos-for-education/>

The spreadsheet includes vast amounts of information including deadlines, amounts, citizenship status and other important requirements.

## Contributors

### Alexander Chong -

Senior at Cornell University studying Biological Sciences with a concentration in Microbiology. After graduation, he'll be working as a Research Technician in an infectious disease laboratory at Columbia University Medical Center for two years before applying to medical school.



### Francesca Viazzoli -

Senior at Cornell University studying Development Sociology with a focus in mass incarceration in the United States. After graduation she will be working in prison reform advocacy before entering law school.



### Ami Mehta -

Junior at Cornell University studying Architecture, interested in the intersection between humanitarian work and design. Education equality has always been important for her as college has incredibly developed her personal strengths and that opportunity for growth should be available to everyone.



### Elizabeth DoBell -

Senior at Cornell University studying Biological Sciences with a concentration in Genetics, Genomics, and Development. After graduation, she will be completing a masters degree in biomedical sciences before applying to medical school.



### Riddhima Narravula -

Junior at Cornell University studying Computer Science with a minor in Information Science. This summer, she will be working as a software development intern and is still deciding whether she wants to go into industry or to graduate school after she graduates!



### Lizeth Arzate -

Junior at Cornell University studying American Studies and Psychology. This summer, she will be working at a psychiatric health center as an intern. She plans to attend graduate school and eventually earn a PhD in psychology with the intention to focus on immigrants' mental health.



### Reviewers at Cornell University

Chelsea Benson

Jen Rudolph

Ethan Leigers

Julio Rodriguez

### Community Partners

Village at Ithaca

# Glossary

## Cornell Contributors

Andy Lok - Freshman at Cornell University  
Caroline Johnson - Freshman at Cornell University  
Emily Yueh - Freshman at Cornell University  
Julio Salas - Sophomore at Cornell University  
La'Treil Allen - Freshman at Cornell University  
Marisa Brail - Sophomore at Cornell University  
Riya Desai - Freshman at Cornell University  
Adam Chih - Sophomore at Cornell University  
Amina Hasan - Freshman at Cornell University  
Christine Shen - Senior at Cornell University  
Kathy Ma - Recent Graduate of Cornell University  
Gaby Furman - Freshman at Cornell University  
Heather Ginsburg - Freshman at Cornell University  
Kate Chmiel - Freshman at Cornell University  
Kate Hofer - Freshman at Cornell University  
Naina Murthy - Freshman at Cornell University  
Rocio Chanez - Freshman at Cornell University  
Jennifer Hoang - Freshman at Cornell University  
Zoe Fleishaker - Freshman at Cornell University

## List of Other Contributors

Viola - Recent Graduate of Cornell University  
Jenna - Recent Graduate of University of California Berkeley  
Soumeeka - Junior at Cornell University  
Samuel - Sophomore at Dartmouth College  
Naima - Senior at Long Island University  
Noa - Recent Graduate of Skidmore College  
Bianca - Senior at Boston University  
Hayley - Senior at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry  
Tiffany - Recent Graduate of Cornell University  
Joyce - Senior at Boston University

## Illustrators

Emily Yueh  
Kelly Stone  
Amina Hasan  
Ami Mehta  
Naina Murthy

## Design

Ami Mehta

**Associate's Degree** - A two-year degree from a community or junior college  
**Award Letter** - The official document, issued by the financial aid office, which lists all the financial aid awarded to the student: generally lists the expected family contribution, cost of attendance and all the terms of the aid awarded

**Bachelor's Degree** - A four-year degree from a college, university or professional school; usually requires over 120 credit hours

**Common Application** - Standardized application accepted by over 400 colleges and universities

**CSS Profile** - Application for financial aid, required by most private universities

**Early Action (EA)** - Early application deadline but non-binding; can typically apply to more than 1 school EA if you choose to

**Early Decision (ED)** - Early application deadline but binding (if accepted, you must attend)

**Expected Family Contribution (EFC)** - In calculating financial aid, the amount that a student and parents are expected to contribute toward college costs

**FAFSA** - The federal aid application – Free Application for Federal Student Aid

**Financial Aid** - The total financial aid a student receives. Federal and non-federal aid such as grants, loans, work-study, and scholarships are combined in a “package” to help meet the student's need

**Loans** - A type of financial aid that is borrowed money and must be repaid by the student

**Major** - A student's concentrated field of study

**Merit-Based Aid** - Financial aid that is awarded based on a student's academic, leadership or artistic merit, or some other criteria, and does not depend on financial need

**Need-Based Aid** - A type of financial aid award based on need or merit that is not repaid by the student

**Rolling Admission** - Policy in which a school accepts applications during a large window of time and makes admission decisions as credentials are received

**Subsidized Loan** - loans for undergraduate students that accrue interest while you are in school at least half-time or during deferment periods

**Unsubsidized Loan** - loans for undergraduate students that accrue interest as soon as you take out the loan  
**Work-Study Program** - helps students earn financial funding through a part-time employment program

## Works Cited

<https://blog.prepscholar.com/act-vs-sat>  
<https://www.collegeboard.org/>  
<http://www.act.org/>  
Cornell Office of Financial Aid

## About this Guide

My name is Alex and I'm a co-president of Students onto Scholars (SOS), an organization at Cornell University that works to close the educational opportunity gap by providing academic resources to K-12 students. Even though I help run SOS, I didn't make this on my own! By collaborating with SOS members, the Cornell Public Service Center, Village at Ithaca, and more than 30 undergraduates across the country, we've put together this guide to help you navigate through the college application process. If you have any questions about the college process and want the input of a current college student, you can email [sos.collegeguide@cornell.edu](mailto:sos.collegeguide@cornell.edu).

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