
7 Common Questions About College Applications





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You're applying for college!

Congratulations on starting the application process! Higher education is a great step toward a rewarding future. Whether you choose a 2- or 4-year program, private or public, out-of- or in-state, you're taking a significant step toward maximizing the opportunities in your life.

Studies show college graduates live longer, have fewer health issues, make more money and are less likely to be unemployed.^{1,2,3} And with countless degree programs, some conventional, some exclusive to the school, there's never been a better opportunity to not only study what you love, but turn it into a career.

But first, you have to apply, and you'll probably have questions about the process. We're here to help you.

Let's get started.

¹<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4435622/>

²<https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2011.300216>

³<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/02/11/chapter-1-education-and-economic-outcomes-among-the-young/>

Who's involved in the application process?



You

The college application is all about you, after all. Your data, your grades, your extra-curricular activities, your volunteer work and your personal statement all play a role.



Teachers

Colleges may ask for letters of recommendation. Your teachers, coaches, mentors and counselors can be great advocates on your behalf.



Family

Your parents or guardians can help you fill out some of the details on college applications (your social security number, for example). Some colleges also ask for your educational background (if you're a first-generation college student, for example, you may be eligible for a scholarship).



Counselors

Colleges will require copies of your high school transcript, which is a list of the courses you took and the grades you earned. Most colleges require that transcripts are sent directly from the school in an unaltered format. Use Parchment to request your transcripts easily and online.



How should I choose my college?

With over 7,000 institutions in the U.S. alone, whittling down your college choices is no easy feat!⁴ Narrow your list to schools in the following categories (try to include two of each):



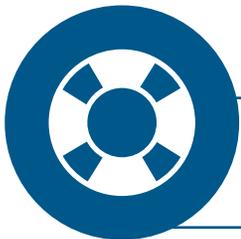
Target:

Your academic credentials fall in line with the school's most recently accepted class. There's a good chance you'll get into your target school, and it has a program suited to your needs.



Reach/Dream:

A school with an amazing program, but some sort of barrier (low acceptance rate or high tuition) will make it hard to get in.



Safety:

A school you'll easily get into but isn't your top choice and may not have the exact program you want.

Parchment's College List can help you find the perfect fit.

Visit www.parchment.com/markets/learners/#college-tools.

Checklist for choosing your school:

- ✓ **Degree programs:** Does the school actually offer what you want to study?
- ✓ **Reputation:** Is the school known for anything?
- ✓ **Location:** Do you want to study away from home or close to it?
- ✓ **Accreditation:** Is the school recognized for its program? Can you transfer your credits?
- ✓ **Cost:** Is tuition within your budget? What about living expenses?
- ✓ **Extra-curricular activities:** Can you find fulfillment outside of classes?

⁴<https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=84>

What tests do I need to take?

You've no doubt heard the terms SAT and ACT before, but what's the difference? In truth, they're very similar.⁵ Choose which test to take by:

Researching your school's admissions requirements.

While most colleges will accept either test, some prefer one over the other.

Considering your strengths.

The SAT primarily tests your reasoning, while the ACT focuses on knowledge and memory. Also, the ACT has a science portion, but the SAT does not.

Taking a practice test.

A few practice tests (at least one, but more if you can) will give you a feel for the format of the real thing. You'll also better understand how much time you'll have for each section. Take practice runs a month or two before the real exam, check your scores, review your study options and choose the test you feel most comfortable with.

Use these websites for practice tests and study resources:

- ✓ CollegeBoard.org
- ✓ ACT.org
- ✓ KaplanTest.com
- ✓ PrincetonReview.com
- ✓ Petersons.com

Other tests to consider are:

AP Exams:

Your exam score determines whether you get college credit for taking Advanced Placement courses in high school. Your AP score may also factor into admissions decisions.

PSAT/NMSQT:

Sophomores and juniors can take the Preliminary SAT to help prepare them for the real deal. PSAT scores are used to determine eligibility for the National Merit Scholarship Program. Note that your PSAT score can't replace that of the SAT or ACT.

⁵<https://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/college-admissions-play-book/2013/10/21/how-to-choose-between-taking-the-act-sat>



What do I include in the personal essay?

While we're on the subject of the application itself, let's talk about the portion that's most within your control: the college essay/personal statement.

This is your opportunity to really shine. Your personal essay shows off your personality and interests, gives you a chance to display what benefits you'd bring to the school. Are you active in student groups? Do you enjoy tutoring others? These are all great attributes, so try to include them.

Here's a list of tips for writing a great essay:

- ✓ List your strengths, both academic and personal.
- ✓ Write your first draft by letting your thoughts flow. Don't worry about getting things perfect - you'll revise later.
- ✓ Include detailed, specific examples and don't forget to include both outcomes and what you learned.
- ✓ Revise your draft several times, and have a teacher or college counselor look through it at least once.
- ✓ Proofread for spelling and grammar.

Head to CollegeEssayGuy.com for more advice!

Also, check the resources or program pages of your chosen schools. Many offer tips for writing a stellar essay, giving you great advice straight from the horse's mouth. *You can also find advice on some of the websites on page 4.*

When and how should I send my college applications?

Each school has one or multiple deadlines for college applications. These dates are categorized as:

Early action:

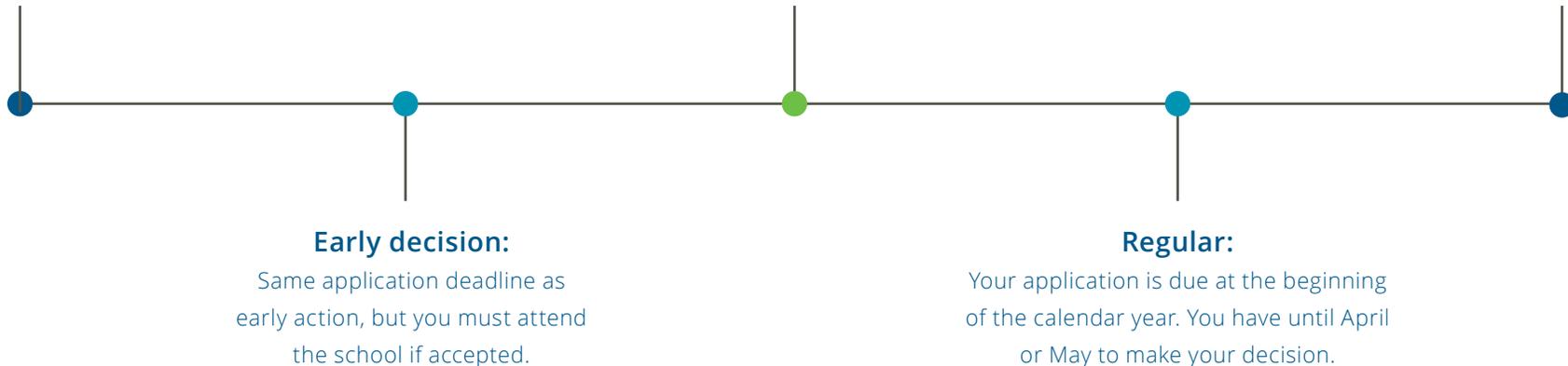
You apply sometime before or in November and receive a decision by the middle of December. You have until May to accept.

Restricted early action:

Same as early action (including the decision deadline), but you're prevented from applying to early programs at most other schools.

Rolling:

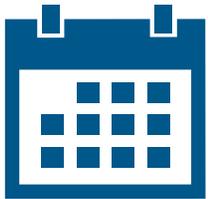
Applications are accepted, processed and decided upon at any time until the school or program fills all of its available spaces.



Each school you apply to will provide detailed instructions on how to send in your application. These days, most accept them online, and many have partnerships with Parchment to receive your transcripts. You'll also have to pay a fee (usually \$50-\$90) for each application you send in.

When will I know if I got in?

Specific dates depend on the schools you applied to. Each will have application and acceptance letter dates on their website, but a general rule of thumb is:



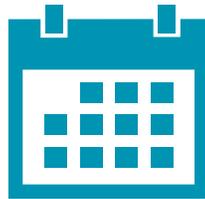
Early decision:

Mid-December.



Regular:

March or April.



Rolling:

Six to eight weeks from the date you sent your application.

If you don't hear back by the deadline or the above timeframes, contact the school's admissions office sooner rather than later. After all, your decision to attend one school could hinge on whether you were accepted to another.

If you get a message saying your application is incomplete, do a bit of detective work. Check Parchment to see if your transcripts arrived, and search for an email confirmation of your online application. Also, give the school a quick call – the message might have been a mistake.



How do I pay for college?

School is expensive, no doubt about it, but there are multiple opportunities to help you pay:

FAFSA:

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid gives you access to the largest source of financial aid to pay for your education.⁵ Some schools, colleges and scholarship organizations also use your FAFSA data to determine your eligibility for additional aid.

Savings accounts:

Ask your parents if you have a 529 plan, also known as a qualified tuition plan. These are operated by states or colleges and come with tax advantages, making saving for college easier.

Loans:

You can get loans from private lenders like banks and other organizations. These typically have higher interest rates, but they can be more flexible than federal aid and don't require a FAFSA.

Scholarships:

Most scholarships are awarded based on some sort of achievement, whether that be your grades, the strength of a personal essay or other factor.

Below is a list of awesome resources to help you on your college application journey:

- ✓ [Parchment.com](https://www.parchment.com)
- ✓ [USNews.com/education/best-colleges/apply-to-college](https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/apply-to-college)
- ✓ [CollegeEssayGuy.com](https://www.collegeessayguy.com)
- ✓ [FAFSA.ed.gov](https://fafsa.ed.gov)
- ✓ [Scholarships.com](https://www.scholarships.com)

⁵<https://fafsa.ed.gov/help.htm>

Good Luck!



Serving students, schools and businesses since 2003, Parchment believes in turning credentials into opportunities. We're the industry's leading digital credential service, putting learners first and connecting them to schools and businesses.