

MEFA's Guide to College Admissions

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There's a lot to know about applying to college. The information in this guide will get you started. You'll learn about building a balanced list of colleges, admissions timing options, the different components of the college application including transcripts, essays, and interviews, and alternatives to 4-year colleges.

Resource Guide



Blog Post



Webinar



Web Page



Video



Tool



Podcast Episode

College Admissions Overview

Get the guidance on all things related to college admissions.



[College Admissions Webinar](#)

This webinar will help you establish a personalized admissions road map by addressing topics such as current trends in admissions, building a balanced list of colleges, and the different components of the college application including transcripts, essays, and interviews.



[College Admissions Webinar in Spanish](#)

This webinar, presented in Spanish, will help you establish a personalized admissions road map by addressing topics such as current trends in admissions, building a balanced list of colleges, and the different components of the college application including transcripts, essays, and interviews.



[Our How-To Guide on Applying to College](#)

Learn how many colleges to apply to, how to write the college essay, when college applications are due, how to create a resume, how to find colleges with no application fees, and when to apply for college.



[College Admissions FAQs](#)

Learn how to find a college that is strong for a particular major or interest, the average cost of a college application, when to start filling in the Common App, and how long the college essay should be.



[Planning for College with First-Gen Students](#)

Three first-generation college students share how they chose a college, what they're most looking forward to in college, how COVID-19 has changed their process, and advice for other first-generation college students.














[Timeline for College Admissions & Financial Aid](#)

From identifying potential schools to paying your first college bill, planning for college requires you to be motivated, organized, and thorough. Follow our checklist for college admissions and financial aid to stay on track.



Build Your College List

When compiling your college list, you should focus on three factors simultaneously: appeal, affordability, and selectivity.

-  [How to Build the College List with Probable, Target, and Reach Schools](#)
Consider attributes you want in a school, majors you are interested in, and current GPA and test scores when building your college list.
-  [What's the Difference Between a College and a University?](#)
Differences include size, the inclusion of smaller colleges, types of degrees, and programs offered.
-  [Tools to Help You Make Your College List](#)
Tools include the College Navigator, the College Scorecard, and Net Price Calculators.
-  [How Many Schools Should Be On Your College List?](#)
Factors to consider include money, time, financial aid, if you apply early decision, if you want a specific program, if you have specific needs, and if you apply to selective colleges.
-  [The College Search: Researching Financial Fit](#)
Our checklist includes checking the College Scorecard, using Net Price Calculators, and reading through admissions and financial aid websites.
-  [How to Make a Financially Balanced College List](#)
Learn the difference between financial need-based and merit aid and how to optimize your chances at receiving them, and consider schools with a low sticker price.
-  [How to Use the College Scorecard](#)
Use the College Scorecard to learn about a school's student body, cost, financial aid, student debt figures, average annual cost, graduation rate, and salary of alumni.
-  [Consider Affordability When Building the College List](#)
Place college costs in the context of your other important financial life decisions, determine your parameters of college affordability, and understand how financial aid works.
-  [Creating a Balanced College List](#)
Consider academics, the social scene, admissibility, and affordability.
-  [How Does Your College List Measure Up?](#)
Learn how to create a balanced college list by focusing on likability, affordability, and admissibility.
-  [Researching Colleges and Building the College List](#)
Learn about tools that help you explore schools and build your list.



Explore the Colleges You Like

Once you create a list of colleges you are interested in, start exploring them on a deeper level.



[College Visits Checklist](#)

These six steps will help you make the most of a college visit.



[College Fairs](#)

Get tips on exploring schools and connecting with admissions representatives, both in-person and remotely.



[Using Social Media to Research and Connect with Colleges](#)

Social media can be great for research, connecting with admitted students, and getting an authentic glimpse of campus life, but it's important to consider privacy and appropriateness as well.



[How to Research Colleges Online from Home](#)

Tips including asking questions about the school and understanding the truth about college myths.



[Why Demonstrated Interest in College Admissions Matters](#)

Learn what demonstrated interest is, why it's important for college admissions, how to demonstrate interest, and how schools measure it.



[Researching Colleges When You Can't Visit Campus](#)

Get advice on conducting the college search virtually.



[Researching Colleges When You Can't Visit Campus](#)

Learn how to know if a college is a good investment, online tools you can use in the absence of campus visits, and what resources colleges are offering prospective students to help them get a feel for campus.



[Taking Advantage of Campus Visits to Find the Right Fit](#)

Learn why college campus visits are an essential part of the college planning and admissions process.



[How Music Students Find a College](#)

A recent high school graduate shares how she decided to pursue music in college, what the college search and admissions process is like for a music major, and what her college coursework will look like.



[Navigating College Athletics](#)

Learn how a high school athlete hoping to play sports in college can communicate that interest, how recruiting works, and how athletic scholarships are awarded.



[Athletics in College Admissions](#)

This webinar discusses athletics in college admissions including sports divisions, eligibility, and the college search process.



Understand Admission Timing Options

The college application process includes a range of timing options, though each college decides which ones it will offer to applicants. Each option has a different deadline.



[Rolling Admissions](#)

Learn what Rolling Admissions is, how the deadlines differ, why schools use it, and if the application requirements are the same.



[Breaking Down the Different College Application Processes](#)

Learn what it means to apply Early Decision (ED), Early Decision II, Early Action (EA), Restrictive Early Action (REA), Single Choice Early Action (SCEA), Rolling Admission, and Regular Decision.



[To ED or Not to ED, That Is the Question](#)

Learn the differences between Early Decision (when a student agrees to submit an enrollment deposit and enroll in that school if admitted) and Early Action (when a student finds out the decision on the application early, but with no commitment).



[Making Sense of Early Action and Early Decision](#)

Learn the differences between Early Action and Early Decision and things to consider before applying.



[Early Action VS Early Decision](#)

This short video explains the similarities and differences between the two and provides some tips to help guide you through the early admission process.



Completing the College Application

Your college application will include several different pieces. Learn the details of each required component and stay organized as you pull together your applications.

[Steps to Finish Your College Applications](#)

Steps include finalizing your list, getting your letters of recommendation, finishing your essay, making sure you've sent official test scores, meeting with your school counselor, and hitting submit.

[What is a College Applicant Portal?](#)

A College Applicant Portal contains key, personal information for every applicant at a college and allows you to update contact information, monitor application status, upload and track documents, and view the decision on the application.

[Ready to Complete the Common App?](#)

Read up on several resources the Common App provides on its website to help you create an account, add an advisor, watch videos, search for schools, set up a practice account, complete the application, reach out for assistance, and connect on social media.

[5 Tips on Completing the Common Application](#)

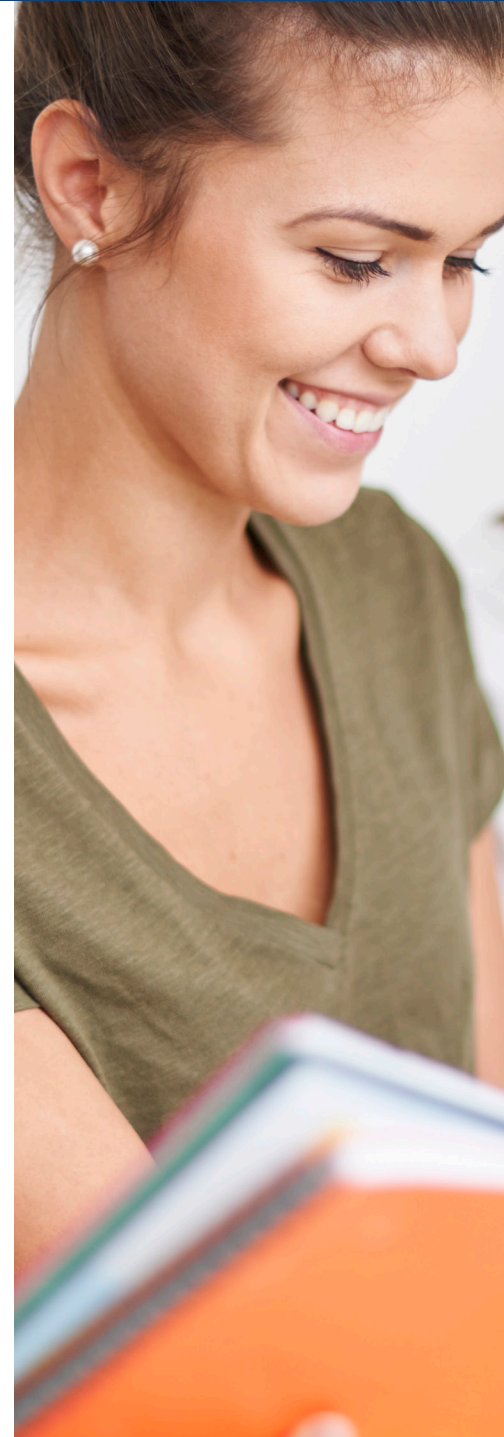
Learn how to complete the additional information section, activities section, and university member page.

[Understanding the Different Types of College Applications](#)

Types include the Common Application, the Universal Application, individual college applications, the Coalition for Access, Affordability, and Success Application, and a shared application for a system of colleges.

[5 Ways High School Juniors Can Strengthen Their College Admissions Application](#)

Learn how students can put forward their best college admissions application, the parents' role in this process, and how to best take advantage of virtual college visits.



Standardized Tests

Each school on your list may require you to complete one or more standardized college entrance exams. While standardized test scores are mandatory at many colleges and universities, more than 1,800 four-year schools in the US do not require them.



[SAT® or ACT®? How to Decide](#)

Tips include exploring the differences between the tests, taking practice tests for each, and making a test preparation plan.



[Making the Most of Your SAT/ACT Test Day](#)

It's wise to prepare for not only the content of the tests, but for the experience of testing itself. These tips cover what to do the day before the test, test day, after the test, and when the results arrive.



[How Do You Improve an SAT Score? With Practice](#)

Learn the tips and resources for practicing the SAT in order to improve your score.



[ACT and SAT: What's The Difference?](#)

Learn the difference between the SAT and ACT, which test to take, and how test re-takes work.



[SAT Scores: To Send or Not to Send](#)

Learn why it might be in your best interest to not take advantage of the free score report option and how you have the potential to be awarded much more in scholarships if you only send colleges your best scores.



College Essays

Many colleges and universities require an essay as part of the admissions application. The essay allows a student to write about something important to him or her and it gives the admissions office more insight into the student's personality and passions.



[How to Write a College Essay](#)

The college essay is one of the few chances you have in the college application process to express yourself. Make the most of this opportunity to leave a lasting impression by following our tips.



[FAQs about College Essays](#)

Learn how long the essay typically is, if you can use the same essay for different schools, how to make your essay stand out, and if you'll need to answer other questions in addition to the essay.



[How to Stand Out in the College Admissions Process](#)

The key to standing out is writing a college essay that demonstrates your values, personality, and intellectual maturity while communicating ideas effectively with a bit of a story-telling flair.



[7 Suggestions for College Application Essay Topics](#)

Topics include share your cause, think about who you admire, reflect on how you've grown, talk about a challenge, describe something you love, brag a bit, and share something new.



[5 Common College Essay Mistakes to Avoid](#)

Tips include proofreading, thoroughly reading the essay question, making it personal, avoiding plagiarizing, and using smart vocabulary.



[Five Tips for Writing Your College Essay](#)

Tips include choosing a topic that appeals to you, brainstorming, writing multiple drafts, having a good opening, middle, and conclusion, and getting feedback.



[How to Conquer the College Essay](#)

Hear what Elizabeth Fontaine, Assistant Executive Director of MEFA, says about what makes an essay effective, what colleges are looking for, and how to avoid sounding contrived.



Letters of Recommendation

An important part of the college application process, letters of recommendation are short statements written by teachers or counselors on behalf of student applicants. They provide insight into a student's academic work and character, and help admissions committees learn more about a student as an individual, beyond the grades and test scores.

[Tips for College Letters of Recommendation](#)

Get tips on letters of recommendation, a way for colleges to assess your abilities, work ethic, and personality, through the perspectives of your teachers, counselors, and coaches.

[Letters of Recommendation FAQs](#)

Learn who your letter of recommendation should come from, how many letters are needed, and what qualities are most valued in the letter.

[Who Will Write My Letters of Recommendation?](#)

When you choose individuals to write your letters of recommendation, pick teachers and mentors who taught you in one of the five core subjects, who know you well, who helped you along the way, or who made your high school career easier.

[Getting Letters of Recommendation for College Admissions](#)

Learn not just the importance of college admissions letters of recommendation, but also whom to ask and why—and what colleges are looking for in those letters.



College Interviews

Another way that colleges learn about your personality is through the college interview. While an interview is not typically required, some colleges do offer it, and it can provide you with a great opportunity to show the admissions office what they may not see on paper.



[College Interview Tips](#)

Get tips for college interviews, which allow you to learn more about a specific college, and also give the admissions committee a more personal and candid view of you.



[What to Know About the College Interview](#)

Learn how interviews can help students assert their voice and share their passions, and what the two biggest obstacles to interviews are—schools' varying policies and urban legends about trick questions.



4-Year College Alternatives

A 4-year college is not the right choice for every student. Learn about other options, including community college, trade schools, and gap years.

[The New England College Transfer Guarantee](#)

Learn about NEBHE's New England College Transfer Guarantee program and recent expansion, what states participate, who is eligible, why it's beneficial, and how to apply.

[Applying to Community College](#)

Steps include submitting the application and transcripts, applying for financial aid, taking the academic skills assessment, meeting with an advisor, attending orientation, and showing proof of immunization.

[What are My Alternatives to a 4-Year College?](#)

Options include community college, trade schools, technology programs, and gap years.

[What You Need to Know About Online Colleges](#)

Learn about online colleges and degree programs, what they offer, what advantages they provide, how they're structured, and how they compare to a traditional college.

[The Facts on MassTransfer](#)

Learn how MassTransfer can make a bachelor's degree more affordable, what the benefits are based on GPA, and how to take the next steps of planning, applying, and enrolling to a Massachusetts 4-year public college or university.

[Gap Year: A Year Off...Or On?](#)

Gap years often teach participants a skill, and can either require a fee or earn the participant money.

[What You Need to Know About Applying to Community College](#)

Tips include don't wait until spring to submit your application, send a complete application packet so as to not delay your acceptance, and complete your FAFSA.



College for Students with a Disability

Learn about the resources available and factors to consider when students with a disability select a college.



[Helping Your Student with a Disability Transition to College](#)

Learn about IEPs, the accommodations available in college, and the role parents can play in helping their child with a disability succeed.



[Perspectives on IEPs and College Admissions](#)

Learn if you have to disclose that your student is on an IEP, if it's a good idea to tell a college during the admissions process that your student is on an IEP, when you should let a college know about an IEP, and how to learn about support for students with IEPs.



[College Planning for Students with Disabilities](#)

Learn the information to gather during the college search process and the steps to take during the disability services application process.



[How Students with Disabilities Can Save for Expenses and Prepare for College](#)

Learn how students with disabilities can prepare for college success.



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