



# College: How to Get There From Here

We know you're ready for college—your academic track record has proven that. Now it's time to apply. Here are some tips on how to get started.

## Apply to four or more colleges.

AT LEAST  
**1**  
SAFETY

A college you're confident you can get into.

AT LEAST  
**2**  
GOOD FITS

Colleges you have a pretty good chance of getting into.

AT LEAST  
**1**  
REACH

A college that you have a chance of getting into, but it's a stretch.

Applying to two colleges instead of one makes it **40% MORE LIKELY** that you'll enroll in a four-year college. If you apply to more than two, then your chances of enrolling will be even better.

## Never rule out applying to a college because you think it's too expensive.

There are scholarships and financial aid packages available at almost all four-year colleges.

The estimated average grant aid for four-year colleges in 2016-17  
PUBLIC COLLEGES

**MORE THAN \$4,700**

PRIVATE NONPROFIT COLLEGES

**MORE THAN \$18,600**

Many students receive much more than the average aid.

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) opens October 1.

## When looking at colleges, consider the following:

### ACADEMIC

What are the average SAT® scores and GPA of students admitted to the school? Does it have any prerequisites? Apply to colleges that are a good academic fit—whether they're a safe bet or a little out of reach.

### GRADUATION RATE

Do most students graduate in four years? If not, why not?

### LOCATION

Do you prefer a big city, suburb, or small town?

### MAJORS

Does the college offer a variety of majors that interest you?

### SIZE

Do you want a smaller campus with smaller class sizes or a larger school with a wider variety of programs, such as a state university?

### ACADEMIC RESOURCES

Does the college's library meet your needs? Does the campus use the latest technology? What about lab facilities?

### CAMPUS LIFE AND SERVICES

What are the housing options? Are there social activities, cultural events, clubs, or athletics that interest you?

What support services are available on campus to help with social, health, academic, and financial challenges?

## Take a college tour.

Set up campus visits. These visits are always free, but if you can't travel, take a virtual tour, or visit a local college. Even if you don't tour your first-choice college, you'll get an idea of what campus life is really like.

# College Application Timeline

Want to know if you're on track in the college application process? This timeline shows you what you should be doing, and when.

## SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER—PREPARE

- Sign up for updates at [bigfuture.org](https://bigfuture.org).**
- Talk to your school counselor or adviser** about the college search and application process.
- College requirements:** Make a list of the application, testing, and financial aid requirements for each college.
- Letters of recommendation:** Decide who to ask, and reach out to them early so they have time to write good letters. If you have a résumé or list of accomplishments, be sure to send it to them.
- Application essays:** Look over essays you have already written for inspiration. Share your ideas with parents, teachers, or other trusted adults, so they can help you craft the strongest essays possible.
- Register for the SAT:** If you haven't taken it yet, or would like to take it again, it's not too late! Sign up now, and be sure to send score reports to colleges.
- Opt in to Student Search Service®:** More than 1,100 colleges use this service and are looking for students like you.
- Complete the FAFSA, which opens October 1:** It's necessary if you're applying for federal and state grants and loans. Funds are limited, so make sure to file by the financial aid priority filing dates.
- Complete the CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE®, which also opens October 1:** Certain colleges use it to see if you qualify for additional grants and scholarships. (There's a fee for application.)

## NOVEMBER/DECEMBER—APPLY TO COLLEGES

- Work on your applications:** Some have deadlines as early as November.
- Send your SAT and AP® scores:** This ensures that colleges have the most complete set of your information to review for admission, as well as scholarship awards, course placement, or selection to a specific program or major.
- Consider college application services:** Application systems like the Coalition Application, Common Application, and Universal College Application let you complete one application online and submit it to several colleges.
- Send transcripts:** Ask your transcripts to be sent to your chosen colleges.

## JANUARY/FEBRUARY—EXPLORE FINANCIAL AID OPTIONS

- Compare award letters:** After examining the financial aid packages you're offered, you'll see that schools may be more affordable than you thought.
- Search for scholarships:** Scholarships provide money for college that you don't need to repay. And they're not just for academic superstars.

## MARCH/APRIL—DECIDE!

- Get information:** Dig a little deeper to help you make the best choice. Ask questions. Create a list of any questions you still have about the colleges you're considering.
- Review acceptance letters:** Go over all offers of admission, consider the pros and cons of each school, and pick the college that's the best fit for you.

Visit [bigfuture.org](https://bigfuture.org) for more information.