

College Planning Guide



Finding the Right College

Applying to College

Finding the “Right” College

The purpose of this packet is to reduce stress and anxiety over the college admission process. If you understand the process, you will feel better prepared to research and apply for the schools of your choice. If you know what you are supposed to do and how to do it— you can face the task with confidence.

First, the goal is to find the right school for you. Your goal is not to gain admission to the most academically grueling institution in America; it is to find a school where you can grow, learn, and succeed— a school where your special talents and interests will be appreciated and cultivated. You will make your choices with information from a wide range of sources:

- Guidebooks
- Catalogs, websites, and flyers from the colleges
- Reputation, word of mouth, media coverage
- Alumni and other applicants from your high school
- Counselors, teachers, and other professionals
- College representatives at your high school
- Campus visits and interviews

A close look at the admission process may help, too. Colleges are not looking for one type of student. They are trying to put together a diverse community. Their goal is remarkably similar to yours: to find a successful match of school and student. It is interesting to compare the way you choose a school with the way the college chooses a student. The college relies on a much more focused set of resources:

- Grades, class rank, and GPA
- Course of study (course load, APs, Honors, etc)
- Test scores (SAT& ACT)
- Biographical data (summer activities, jobs, special interests, community service, background)
- Recommendations
- One or more essays

Each of these elements contributes to the “big picture” (YOU) that colleges will examine and consider. Of course, the evaluation process is different at every school; every college makes decisions its own way. Generally though, the admissions committee is made up of a group of individuals given the task to read hundreds, sometimes thousands of applications. It is up to you to make your application stand apart from the rest by making it personal and adding your

own creativity. Many things are considered when compiling a new freshman class and different elements make up the admission committee's final decisions.

Attractive Qualities: What Colleges Find Attractive

Before you start, you must select colleges. With your colleges list, you will want to brainstorm the qualities specific colleges find attractive.

- **Strong GPAs/Test Scores:** Admissions officers look at grades before anything else. If your grades are low compared to the applicant pool, you better write an incredibly moving and memorable essay.
 - **Fitting the Colleges Needs & Involvement:** It is very important to convince the college that you will contribute meaningfully to the campus during your 4-5 years and that you won't drop out. Colleges are looking for people to contribute to campus organizations, be classroom stars, or be sports stars—the key word is **active**.
 - **Selflessness:** Admissions officers find selfless people attractive because they tend to volunteer when they are in school and may give alumni donations once they graduate. Also, admissions officers are people; no one enjoys reading an essay that is arrogant.
 - **Depth:** Admissions officers want evidence that you have accomplished substantial achievements outside the classroom, not that you've just occasionally attended meetings.
 - **Breadth:** Depth is ultimately more important, but if you are a true Renaissance person, that's even better.
 - **Consistency:** Your application should not have any weak links, but if it does (low GPA or low test scores), your personal statement and teacher recommendations must emphasize why you will excel at your selected college. Select teachers who know you well and will write about your best qualities.
 - **Extracurricular and Community Involvement:** You want to emphasize that you will be a mover and a shaker on campus. You want to convince the admissions office that you will leave your mark on the college campus and community.
 - **Personality Traits:** The following are viewed favorably by most colleges: academic ability, athletic ability, honesty, community involvement, creativity, responsibility, goal-orientation, curiosity, sense of humor, love for family/friends, commitment, perseverance, leadership, empathy, listening ability, love for life, love of nature, career-orientation, a history of success.
 - **Special gifts and abilities:** Colleges are not just looking for well-rounded students. No one can do everything perfectly well. Schools are more interested in creating a well-rounded class. Your job is to show how you can help to create that class with your distinctive talents.
 - **Well-done applications:** Committees are looking for the story behind the story. They have a skeletal picture of you through grades, test scores and recommendations. How
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you complete your application will make you stand out. Aim for an enthusiastic, articulate, genuine, and reflective presentation of yourself.

The Bottom Line: You will be compared to other students with similar backgrounds. You want to stand out within a category. Categories are based on gender, race, anticipated major, alumni connections, athletic ability, etc.

Personal Characteristics Audit: Looking at You

Answer the following questions. Review and update your answers periodically.

1. Make a list of five adjectives you feel your friends/peers and teachers/counselors would use to describe you:

Friends/Peers	Teachers/Counselors
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____
4. _____	4. _____
5. _____	5. _____

2. Make a list of the five adjectives you would use to describe yourself:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

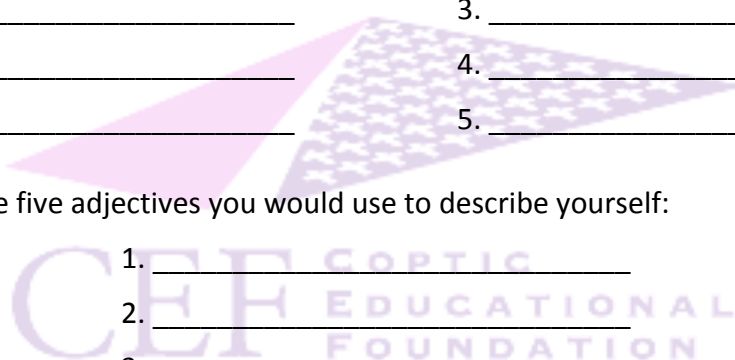
5. _____

3. What are your greatest personal strengths or attributes?

4. What are your greatest weaknesses or shortcomings?

5. List three academic subjects or interests you would like to continue to study:

a. _____ b. _____ c. _____



6. Which high school courses have you enjoyed the most?

7. Which high school courses have been the most difficult?

8. Identify a recent experience that stimulated your intellectual curiosity:

9. How would you describe your academic performance to date? Is your high school record a true reflection of your academic ability and potential? If not, how would you characterize your ability and potential to succeed in college?

Setting Educational and Career Goals



1. What is your immediate educational goal? Why are you going to college?

2. What would you like to study? Have you decided on a college major or specific program of study?

3. What is your eventual educational goal (ex: Bachelor's degree, Masters degree)?

4. Have you set a career goal or identified a field (ex: business, communication, health) in which you would like to work? If yes, what is that occupation or field?

5. What do you consider to be your strongest academic (ex: writing, computation, analytical) skills? To what extent do you wish to pursue collegiate studies related to these skills?

Narrowing Choices: Deciding Where to Apply

Insert names of the colleges (in any order) that you continue to consider below. To the right, offer an appraisal as to whether the college is a “safe” or a “reach” school. A “safe” school is one that has a history of admitting students with your kind of academic and personal credentials. A “reach” school suggests that your qualifications are more borderline and the competition for admission is greater.

Don't create a list made up entirely of “reach” schools. Finally, list three or more characteristics (ex: strong journalism school, friendly atmosphere, affordable, etc) that have impressed you about the college. These characteristics should be influential in your final decisions.

College: _____ Safe: _____ Reach: _____

Characteristics of the college that impressed me during the search process:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

College: _____ Safe: _____ Reach: _____

Characteristics of the college that impressed me during the search process:

- 1.
 - 2.
-

3.

College: _____ Safe: _____ Reach: _____

Characteristics of the college that impressed me during the search process:

1.

2.

3.

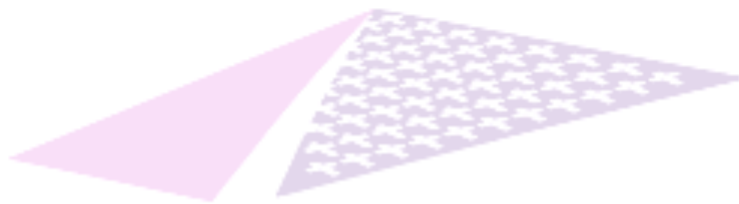
College: _____ Safe: _____ Reach: _____

Characteristics of the college that impressed me during the search process:

1.

2.

3.



Once you have completed the exercise above, review the list and the characteristics you have identified for each college. Next rank the colleges (1 through?) in the order of personal preference.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

Now you're ready!

Note:

- Complete college applications – apply to **at least four UC and** CSU institutions.
 - DO NOT apply to a school you wouldn't actually attend.
- Arrange to pay for application fees. Fees can cost anywhere from \$20-\$100 each.
 - When applying to UCs and CSUs the online application will ask if you want to apply for a fee waiver. If eligible, you may receive to up to **four** UC and **four** CSU application fee waivers.
- Request that your high school transcripts be sent to all institutions to which you are applying.

