

Academy for Academic Excellence

COLLEGE PLANNING GUIDE

2026-2027



Spring 2026

Dear Academy for Academic Excellence Students and Parents:

The Academy for Academic Excellence, Academic Services Department has compiled this College Planning Guide as an aide to you in preparing for your high school years and future college endeavors. The emphasis is on our two major systems in California, the UC (University of California) and the CSU (California State University) systems. Meeting the admission requirements of either system will often qualify students for entry into other universities and colleges throughout the state and nation.

We sincerely hope that this guide will be of great benefit to you in making important decisions concerning your future plans. Please ask questions regarding information that may be unclear to you.

On behalf of the Academic Services Department,

Mrs. Fernandez-Carrillo

School Counselor

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Graduation / College Entrance Requirement Comparison

Subject Area	AAE Graduation Requirements	UC / CSU Entrance Requirements
Social Science (Area - A)	3 yearlong courses World History - 1 yr. US History - 1 yr. American Gov't - ½ yr. / Economics - ½ yr.	2 years required (3 years recommended) World History - 1 yr. US History - 1 yr. OR World History - 1 yr. US History - ½ yr. / Amer. Gov't. - ½ yr.
English (Area - B)	4 yearlong courses Intro to Literature World Literature English III/AP English Language English IV/AP English Literature	4 years required Intro to Literature World Literature English III English IV
Mathematics (Area - C)	3 yearlong courses including at least Integrated Math 1 Or Algebra 1 and Geometry	3 years required (4 years recommended) College-prep mathematics that includes the topics covered in elementary and advanced algebra and 2D/3D geometry. Approved integrated math courses may be used to fulfill part or all of this requirement
Science (Area - D)	3 yearlong courses Earth Science - 1 yr. Biology - 1 yr. Chemistry - 1 yr.	2 years required (3 years recommended) 2 years of lab science
LOTE (Area - E) Language Other Than English	1 year of a language other than English OR 1 year of a Visual or Performing Art	2 years required (3 years recommended)
VPA (Area - F) Visual or Performing Art		1 year required VPA courses such as art, drama/theater, music, dance, or video
Electives (Area - G)	AAE students must complete a minimum of 70 HS elective credits to graduate from high school.	1 year required Any additional UC approved course
Physical Education	2 years required	None

Freshman College Planning Guide

Starting high school is an exciting experience of new beginnings, with new responsibilities. Students will be involved in a variety of activities, create new friendships and meet new teachers. Grades will now count toward college entrance and coursework begins to lay the foundation for choosing a career or college major. The high school transcript records the details of a student's academic progress in grades 9-12. This is one of the primary documents a college uses to determine admittance, and it is increasingly requested by potential employers. It includes:

- The year, semester and grade level courses were taken
- Name of course
- Letter grade received
- Credits received
- Cumulative GPA
- Weighted GPA which includes extra points for Honors and AP courses
- Class rank which is the student standing in relation to other members of their class

An official transcript includes a signature by a school representative verifying authenticity.

Successful Freshman Skills

- Life Skills - Developing these skills leads to success in school and in life.
 - *Truth, honesty, integrity* - Maintaining academic and personal integrity is a vital reflection of a person's character.
 - *Be on time* - being late means missing out on important information
 - *Be prepared* - A well prepared person is able to learn
 - *Work with others* - Learn to work well with your teachers and other students.
 - *Participate* - Participating in classroom lectures and activities will further your understanding of the course content and lead to better grades.
 - Learn to properly read a textbook for greater understanding.
 - SURVEY - Before beginning to read, survey the text. Read the title, section headings, and everything in **BOLD** or *italic* print. Look at the pictures, graphs, and charts. Read the introduction, summary and review questions.
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- READ - Read with a purpose. To give your reading purpose, turn each heading into a question. Then keep your questions in mind as you read that section. When you're finished reading, see if you can answer the question.
 - REVIEW - Go through the same process you did when you surveyed the text (e.g., read the heading and the words in **bold** and *italic* print), but this time, think about what you've learned.
 - Know How to Properly Write a Paper
 - Know the 6 steps to writing a paper: choosing a topic, gathering information, organizing your information and ideas, first draft, review & rewrite, and completing the final draft.
 - Time Management
 - Use any free time given in class to begin homework, ask questions or get help.
Successful students never leave class with unanswered questions.
 - Have a routine that provides a specific time and place for study each day, equipped with good lighting and necessary tools. Develop a plan to complete long-term assignments
 - Organization
 - Bring necessary technology tools to school each day including your laptop AND charging cord.
 - Use organizational aids such as print or digital calendars or planners.
 - Consider using dividers in your binder for each class.
 - Utilize digital tools such as OneNote to take and organize classroom notes.
 - In the evening, put together all items needed for class the next day.
 - Prioritize!
 - Learning to prioritize is key to success in your education. Study for the test that is tomorrow before you work on the assignment that is due next week.
 - Homework
 - Have a plan and remember to prioritize.
 - Complete all assignments. Their purpose is to help clarify and cement the information presented in class. Additionally, missing homework assignments will negatively impact your grades so be sure to complete all assigned work.
 - Attendance
 - Regular school attendance is vital to high school success.
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- If you miss school, it is your responsibility to ask your teachers for any work you may have missed and return it to the teacher in a timely manner.

Freshman To-Do List

- Develop a four-year high school plan with the assistance of the Counseling department.
(completed in the spring of freshman year during Freshman Studies)
 - Review the UC approved course list to ensure a college prep curriculum.
 - Inform your counselor that you are college bound.
 - Begin to think about future possible careers and setting career goals.
 - Talk with parents, school staff and others to investigate career fields.
 - Utilize online resources (see *Important Websites* section)
 - Develop a broad, general list of colleges that you are interested in as well as a list of majors you would be interested in studying.
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Sophomore College Planning Guide and Checklist

Students in the second year of high school no longer have the nervousness of the first year; it is replaced with a sense of familiarity and confidence in their role at the school. This second year brings a subtle shift for the student as there are more activities, increased difficulty, and more responsibilities. Students must have good study skills, along with time management and organizational skills, to be successful. The grades you earn during sophomore and junior years are the most important during all of high school.

The sophomore year is important as it is the time to identify interests, abilities and aptitudes in preparation for life after high school. Setting goals becomes critical as students look to the future.

Successful Sophomore Skills

- Review your class schedule for college prep courses. Refer to the UC Approved Course List.
- Maintaining an “A” or “B” GPA; 10th grade GPA is especially important.
- Continue to develop good study habits and test taking strategies (see Freshman Planning Guide).
- Participate in clubs, sports and extracurricular activities.
- Participate in academic enrichment programs.
- Continue career exploration.
 - Understanding who you are and how you are equipped will help in identifying the best type of work to pursue.
 - Career Exploration is the process of:
 - learning about yourself; personality, gifts and talents
 - examining the world of work
 - identifying and exploring potentially satisfying occupations, and
 - developing an effective strategy to realize your goals
 - The first step in considering a career is to think carefully about what really drives you; how you enjoy spending your time. By discovering your primary interests and passions, along with your personality type, you may learn about careers that you might not have considered. Once you have this foundation, you can start fine tuning your search.

Successful Sophomore Skills (con’t.)

- Check out free websites that offer career information:
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- California Career Zone offers free online assessment tool to all California residents www.cacareerzone.org/
 - Who do you want to be? Whodouwant2b.com
 - Mapping Your Future has career information, including its CareerShip® tool (mappingyourfuture.org/planyourcareer/careership/)
 - Each year the government updates the Occupational Outlook Handbook which provides information on over 250 careers with a description of the work, advantages and disadvantages of the field, future outlook, and related careers. It is available at: www.bls.gov/oco/.
 - The ACT has a Career Planning tool available at www.actstudent.org.
 - Additional online career assessments: www.skillcow.com/career_quiz and www.lifescrypt.com
 - Set Goals: Setting goals help you determine where you want to go in life and how to accomplish this objective. When goals are established, a student can develop a plan of action providing purpose and focus in the educational experience. Goals need to be specific, measurable and attainable. By setting short term goals for the high school years and long-term goals for life after high school, you will have greater confidence and success in educational endeavors.
 - Read the AAE Catalog of Classes thoroughly to make wise decisions for your 11th grade class schedule.

Sophomore To-Do List

- Take the PSAT. Students must register for the PSAT with the counseling department in the fall.
 - Take the ASVAB
 - The ASVAB is a multiple-aptitude battery that measures developed abilities and helps predict future academic and occupational success. AAE offers the ASVAB every fall.
 - Visit colleges during school breaks, vacation, or other family travel opportunities.
 - Helpful college/career websites:
 - CaliforniaColleges.edu
 - The College Board has two sites for students who have taken the PSAT: www.collegeboard.com/quickstart and www.collegeboard.com/myroadeducator
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- Update your personal file (portfolio) at the end of each semester (see Freshman Planning Guide).
 - Attend college fairs, talk to college representatives and any guest speakers.
 - College Week Live offers virtual college tours at www.collegeweeklive.com
 - Consider summer school (VVC or elsewhere) for enrichment or advancement.
 - Enroll in the SAT prep class at AAE starting in the month of March.
 - Consider AP or Honors classes for next year.
 - Continue saving for college.
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Junior College Planning Guide and Checklist

The junior year's academic record will go a long way toward either helping or hurting your chances of gaining admission to your schools of choice. Your junior year is the last complete year that colleges may review, so it's important to maintain good grades. You can make up ground if you've been slacking and you can keep up the hard work you've already exhibited. Now is the time to focus on identifying colleges and searching for scholarships.

The successful Junior will:

- Begin the search for colleges and universities.
 - Read all college information thoroughly.
 - Attend college fairs and career or college speaking opportunities when available.
 - Create a college file including college search, testing and application data.
 - Develop a list of 10-15 schools that interest you.
 - Research the online application process for these colleges
 - Attend the Parent/Student meeting with the school counselor offered in February.
 - Take PSAT in October (11th grade PSAT is the entry to the National Merit Scholarship competition) and attend the PSAT Parent Interpretation meeting at AAE.
 - Review your previous and current classes to ensure meeting university entrance requirements. Maintain an "A" or "B" GPA. 11th grade GPA is especially important.
 - Enroll in the SAT Prep class offered at AAE starting in February.
 - Colleges and universities are constantly updating their SAT/ACT policies. Check your specific school's website for their current policies of requiring SAT/ACT scores for admission
 - Register for the SAT and/or the ACT in the spring. Fee waivers are available for students with financial need.
 - Take practice ACT or SAT Test offered online and in practice books. Visit <https://www.khanacademy.org/SAT> to sign up for the free, official SAT practice program through Kahn Academy.
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Senior College Planning Guide and Checklist

The senior year is a time to celebrate accomplishments, but it's also a time to work hard to prepare for the future and finalize a college choice. This year is filled with admission applications, scholarship essays, financial aid information and the need to meet deadlines. Throughout the senior year, students should continue to build a resume by achieving academic success, as well as participating in extracurricular activities. Colleges are very interested in well-rounded students.

The Successful Senior will:

August / September

- Use legal name, and be consistent on all documents in preparation for graduation, college and entering the workforce. This is very important – DO NOT use nicknames.
 - MEMORIZE social security number. Many documents will require this number. It can be very inconvenient if you do not have it when it is needed.
 - Create an email address for college/career correspondence. Be sure to use an appropriate username!
 - Register for Selective Service. This is required for male students 18 or older. Students must register within 30 days of their 18th birthday. Do this online at: www.sss.gov.
 - Review and compare your course schedule with the UC Approved Course list to ensure a college prep program. Maintain an “A” or “B” GPA (colleges may deny admission, if your grades drop below a “C”).
 - Narrow the list of potential colleges to 5-7 choices. Think broadly when it comes to applying. Choose varied colleges that have easy, medium & difficult admissions requirements
 - Read all college information thoroughly. View websites for application and financial aid information.
 - Create a master calendar that includes:
 - Tests, fees, and registration deadlines for any tests (ACT, SAT or SAT Subject Tests) you may still need. The CSU/UC systems require testing to be done by December of your Senior year.
 - College application due dates
 - Financial aid forms required and deadlines.
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- Recommendation letters needed and from whom. Give plenty of notice.
 - Create a file or folder to keep track of college application documents.
 - Investigate Early Decision admissions.
 - Request letter of recommendation. Remember to provide a recommender with your resume/questionnaire and directions on where to send it: likely a website, but if it is through the mail, include an addressed, stamped, business sized envelope.
 - Attend senior fall workshops provided by the counselor
 - Workshops include CSU/UC application workshop, financial aid, and how to submit using the Common Application
 - The UC application window opens on August 1st to begin entering information. You will not be able to submit the application until November 1st. Be sure to complete and submit the application by November 30th.
 - Begin working on your UC Personal Insight Questions (PIQ's) as early as possible. These do take an extensive amount of time to complete. Do not leave them until the last minute.

October

- Continue college visits and talk to career/college representatives.
- Continue to do college and career planning.
- Check Google Classroom regularly for scholarship opportunities.
- Polish your college/scholarship essay.
- Cal Grant GPA verification will be submitted by the school registrar.
- Work on CSU applications between October 1 and November 30.
- Look for fall preview days and open houses. Colleges often have preview week-ends where you can stay overnight on the campus.
- If you are using the Common Application, create an account this month. Be sure to identify your school counselor by name and include an email address under the recommender tab.
- Complete the FAFSA starting October 1st.

November

- Submit UC and CSU applications between November 1 and November 30.
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- Be aware of early deadlines to impacted programs.
 - Check for scholarship opportunities at the colleges where you apply. Many require separate applications.
 - Strive to have college applications complete prior to Thanksgiving.
 - Submit all college applications prior to deadlines.
 - Take your final SAT or ACT exam. Most colleges will not consider tests taken after December of the senior year.

December / January

- Continue to update personal files (see Freshman Planning Guide).
- Keep a copy in your college file of all college, scholarship and financial aid applications that you submit.
- Refer to financial aid/scholarship planning checklists.
- Request copy from school registrar of the seventh semester transcript if needed by college. Don't send this transcript unless it is requested.

February / March / April

No *senioritis* please! Colleges look at second semester grades and may rescind acceptance if final grades are unacceptable.

- Notify all colleges to which you have applied, if you make a schedule change.
 - To receive a Cal Grant, the deadline to submit FAFSA is March 2. You will receive the Student Aid Report (SAR) 1-2 weeks after filing.
 - This is the time frame for colleges to send out acceptance letters and financial aid information. Watch for an email, or a letter in the mail.
 - Thoroughly investigate housing options and financial aid packages for each school to which you've been accepted.
 - Do not feel pressured to make a non-refundable deposit before you have heard from all colleges; you have the right to wait until May 1 to make your final choice regarding admission and financial aid.
 - Compare schools to which you have been admitted; notify each school of your acceptance or regret/decline to enroll.
 - Participate in the incoming freshman orientation days at your selected colleges.
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May / June

- Plan to send a deposit to your college of choice by May 1.
 - Continue communicating with college of choice regarding necessary paperwork, fees, etc.
 - Send thank you notes to those who helped you through your senior year.
 - Check the dates for any college placement exams you may need to take.
 - Depending on the college, you may need to register for an orientation session.
 - Request final transcripts for the college of choice from the school registrar.
 - **Celebrate!! You're done!**
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Educational Options in California

University of California (UC)

Facts about the University of California system:

- UC is designed as a four-year public institution and is one of the finest research university systems in the world.
- There are 10 campuses in the UC system. There are 9 undergraduate campuses. There is also 1 graduate campus devoted to the health sciences (UC San Francisco).
- The 10 campuses offer more than 700 majors.
- SAT/ACT Requirements
 - For the Class of 2024 and beyond: The UC system will be “test blind.” Students will not be required to submit their SAT/ACT test scores. They may still choose to submit them if they feel their scores strengthen their application.
- You must take a minimum of 15 year-long UC approved courses during the four years of high school.
- The UC website is: www.universityofcalifornia.edu



If you are in the top 9 percent of California high school graduates and aren't admitted to any of the UC campuses you apply to, you'll be offered a spot at another campus if space is available. UC uses a formula — called an admissions index — to determine if you fall in that group. For more information, please visit: <http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/freshman/california-residents/admissions-index/>

California State University (CSU)

Facts about the California State University system:

- There are 23 campuses in the CSU system.
- The CSU system is also a four-year public institution.
- You must earn a C or better in any UC/CSU approved high school course. Only these courses count toward the CSU college admission.
- SAT/ACT Requirements – For the Class of 2024 and beyond, students will not be required to submit test scores. Students may still choose to submit SAT/ACT scores if they feel it will strengthen their application.
- The tuition cost for CSU schools is generally less expensive than for the UC schools.
- The website for the CSU schools: www.calstate.edu



California Independent Colleges

Facts about the California Independent Colleges:

- They include a variety of 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities
- There are almost 100 schools in this category
- SAT/ACT requirements vary by school. Please see the Admissions department for campus specific requirements.
- For more information check out
 - Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU)
 - www.aiccu.edu
 - Comprised of 85 independent, nonprofit colleges and universities

1. Northern California (1)

Simpson University Redding

2. SF Bay Area (19)

California College of the Arts San Francisco
Calif. Institute of Integral Studies San Francisco
Dominican University of California San Rafael
Golden Gate University San Francisco
Holy Names University Oakland
Institute of Transpersonal Psychology Santa Clara
Mills College Oakland
Notre Dame de Namur University Belmont
Pacific Union College Angwin
Palo Alto University Palo Alto
Saint Mary's College of California Moraga
Samuel Merritt College Oakland
San Francisco Art Institute San Francisco
San Francisco Conservatory of Music San Francisco
Santa Clara University Santa Clara
Saybrook University San Francisco
Stanford University Stanford
Torrey University - California Vallejo
University of San Francisco San Francisco

3. Central Valley (4)

Fresno Pacific University Fresno
Humphreys College Stockton
University of the Pacific Stockton
William Jessup University Rocklin

4. Central Coast (4)

California Lutheran University Thousand Oaks
Fielding Graduate University Santa Barbara
Thomas Aquinas College Santa Paula
Westmont College Santa Barbara

5. Los Angeles/Kern (30)

American Academy of Dram. Arts L.A. Hollywood
American Jewish University Bel Air
Antioch University Los Angeles Los Angeles
Art Center College of Design Pasadena
Azusa Pacific University Azusa
Biola University La Mirada
California Institute of Technology Pasadena
California Institute of the Arts Valencia
Chicago School of Prof. Psychology Los Angeles
Claremont Graduate University Claremont
Claremont McKenna College Claremont
Harvey Mudd College Claremont
Kean Graduate University Claremont
Loyola Marymount University Los Angeles
Marymount College Rancho Palos Verdes
Master's College, The Santa Clarita
Mount St. Mary's College Los Angeles
Occidental College Los Angeles
Otis College of Art & Design Los Angeles
Pacific Oaks College Pasadena
Pepperdine University Malibu
Pitzer College Claremont
Pomona College Claremont
Scripps College Claremont
So. California Univ. of Health Sciences Whittier
University of La Verne La Verne
University of Southern California Los Angeles
Western University of Health Sciences Pomona
Whittier College Whittier
Woodbury University Burbank

6. Orange (7)

Brandman University Irvine
Chapman University Orange
Concordia University Irvine
Hope International University Fullerton
Laguna College of Art & Design Laguna Beach
Soka University Aliso Viejo
Vanguard University of Southern California Costa Mesa

7. Riverside/San Bernardino (4)

California Baptist University Riverside
La Sierra University Riverside
Loma Linda University Loma Linda
University of Redlands Redlands

8. San Diego/Imperial (5)

Alliant International University San Diego
National University La Jolla
Point Loma Nazarene University San Diego
San Diego Christian College El Cajon
University of San Diego San Diego

*See schools websites for satellite locations.



California Community College Transfer

Students may choose to attend a community college and take the first two years of general education courses, then transfer to a 4-year college. Completion of 60 units of course credit is necessary to be considered an upper division transfer student.

- California Promise program: Guarantees 2 years, tuition free attendance at California community colleges for all income eligible California high school graduates,. Students will still be required to pay campus service fees such as parking and ASB, as well as textbooks. However, the \$46 per unit tuition fee will be waived for 2 years. Students must have a current FAFSA on file with the school, maintain a 2.0 GPA, and enroll in a minimum of 12 units per semester.
 - The UC and CSU colleges give priority admittance to CA community college transfer students. This may give some students a better chance at admission to highly selective UC and CSU campuses such as UCLA and Cal State Long Beach.
 - A student does not need to take the SAT or ACT for admittance into a community college. If a 4-year college allows lower division transfer (transferring with less than 60 units of course credit), an ACT or SAT may be necessary. Check the college admission requirements.
 - Assist (www.assist.org) provides statewide student transfer information for students planning a transfer from California community colleges to a UC or CSU.
 - It is important to have a plan! It is helpful for students to choose in advance the 4-year university in which to complete their degree. It is important to discuss this with both the counselor at the community college as well as to contact the admissions counselor of the university. This will maximize appropriate coursework necessary to complete the desired degree.
 - You can research all California 2-year and 4-year colleges at www.californiacolleges.edu
 - Be sure to participate in the VVC Bridge program during your senior year if you intend to go to Victor Valley College (VVC) after graduation.
 - Participation is not required but encouraged.
 - Students who participate in the Bridge program receive priority registration for the Fall semester of their freshman year.
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Financial Aid Information

Financial aid programs provide support for students to help meet the costs of obtaining a college education. Funding for financial aid programs is provided by the federal government, state governments, colleges and schools, and a variety of other public and private sources.

There are two main categories of aid, differentiated primarily by the basis upon which they are awarded:

- Achievement-based aid is awarded to students who have a special characteristic, skill, talent, or ability. Typically, achievement-based aid is in the form of scholarships.
- Need-based aid is provided to students who demonstrate financial need. Most financial aid, particularly public-funded aid, is awarded on the basis of financial need determined through the application process and in accordance with a prescribed federal formula.

Financial aid is available in four basic types of programs.

- **Scholarships** which are "gift aid" and do not have to be repaid. Scholarships typically include criteria such as academic performance or special talents.
 - **Grants** are "gift aid" and generally do not include criteria other than financial need.
 - **Work-study** is a "self-help" program in the form of part-time employment during the student's college career.
 - **Loans** are a form of "self-help" since they represent borrowed money that must be paid back over a period of time, typically after the student leaves school.
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Financial Aid Checklist for Students and Families

Grades 9-11

Students

- Work with a parent to estimate your potential financial aid using FAFSA4caster at fafsa.gov, and continue to save for college.
- Take challenging classes in core academic subjects.
- Stay involved in school- or community-based activities that interest you or let you explore career interests. Consider working or volunteering. Remember that it's quality—not quantity—that counts.
- Talk to your school counselor and other mentors about education after high school. Your counselor can answer questions about what classes to take in high school, how to sign up for standardized tests, and where to get money for college.

Parents/Guardians

- Continue to talk to your child about college plans as if he or she will definitely go to college.
- Add to your child's college savings account regularly.
- Explore StudentAid.gov/parent for information on saving for college, borrowing for college, applying for financial aid, getting tax benefits to help make college affordable, and more.

Summer Before Senior Year

Students

- Create your FSA ID. Your FSA ID is used to confirm your identity when accessing your government financial aid information and electronically signing your federal student aid documents. You and your parents will each need your own unique FSA ID. Learn about the FSA ID, and create yours, at StudentAid.gov/fsaid. Note: You must create your own FSA ID; if your parent creates it for you, that'll cause confusion later and will slow down the financial aid application process.
 - Narrow down the list of colleges you are considering attending. If you can, visit the schools that interest you.
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- Contact colleges to request information about financial aid and deadlines.
 - Apply for scholarships. Your goal is to minimize the amount of loan funds you borrow so you have less to pay back later.

Parents/Guardians

- Create your own FSA ID if you don't have one yet.
- Review your financial situation and make sure your child is looking into or already has applied for scholarships.
- Ask your employer whether scholarships are available for employees' children.

Senior Year

Students

- **FALL** - As soon as possible after its October 1st release, complete and submit your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®) at fafsa.gov, along with any other financial aid applications your chosen school(s) may require. You should submit your FAFSA by the earliest financial aid deadline of the schools to which you are applying, usually by early February.
 - After you submit the FAFSA, you should receive your Student Aid Report (SAR) within three days to three weeks. This document lists your answers to the questions on your FAFSA and gives you some basic information about your aid eligibility. Quickly make any necessary corrections and submit them to the FAFSA processor.
 - **SPRING** - Review your college acceptances and compare the colleges' financial aid offers. Use the "Compare Financial Aid Offers" tool at [www.consumerfinance.gov /paying-for-college](https://www.consumerfinance.gov/paying-for-college) to analyze aid offers side by side.
 - Contact a school's financial aid office if you have questions about the aid that school has offered you. In fact, getting to know your financial aid staff early is a good idea no matter what—they can tell you about deadlines, paperwork you might need to submit, and other aid for which you might wish to apply.
 - When you decide which school you want to attend, notify that school of your commitment and submit any required financial deposit. Many schools require this notification and deposit by May 1.
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Parents/Guardians

- Work with your child on filling out the FAFSA. This is the single most important financial aid task that any college student must complete.
- If your child will be going to community college and plans to take advantage of the California Promise program which provides 2 years of free college tuition for students, a completed FAFSA must be on file.

Financial aid checklist information provided Studentaid.gov. For the complete checklist visit

<https://studentaid.gov/sites/default/files/college-prep-checklist.pdf>

College Entrance Exam Information (PSAT/SAT/ACT)

Most colleges will accept either the SAT or the ACT exam. Note: Since the pandemic, many schools have altered their SAT/ACT requirements. Be sure to check with the individual college or university about their updated SAT/ACT requirements.

PSAT - Preliminary SAT – Recommended in fall of junior year

College bound ninth and tenth grade students are encouraged to take the PSAT exam in the fall. There are three parts: Critical Reading, Math (problem solving skills), and Writing Skills. Taking the test gives you an opportunity to:

- Practice for the SAT.
- Enter scholarship competitions in 11th grade (National Merit Scholarship).
- Receive information from colleges.
- Receive valuable information about your current academic skills and identify areas of academic skills which could improve.
- For more information see <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/psat-nmsqt-psat-10>

SAT - Scholastic Aptitude Test

The SAT is a standardized test that measures a student's skills in three core areas: Critical Reading, Math, and Writing. Students in grades 11 and 12 take the SAT so that they can submit their scores to colleges as part of the college application process.

- The SAT is scored with a total of 1600 points.
 - Both the Evidence-Based Reading and Writing (EBRW) section and the math sections are worth 200-800 points each.
- For more information on the focus and content of the various SAT sections, please visit <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat>

ACT - American College Test

The ACT exam is accepted by the University of California system, the California State Universities, and many private and public universities and colleges to meet entrance requirements for demonstration of college aptitude and readiness.

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- Composed of four sections, and an optional writing test. The four sections of the test are English, Math, Reading, and Science, and each section has a maximum score of 36.
 - Sections are timed and scored individually.
 - There is a composite score, which is the average of the scores from each of the four sections of the test. This composite score is the overall ACT score.
 - The optional writing test is a 40-minute essay designed to demonstrate writing skills developed in English and composition courses.
 - For more information on the focus and content of the various ACT sections, please visit www.act.org.

Which one should I take?

Should I take one test or both? Almost all four-year colleges and universities in the nation accept either the ACT or SAT scores equally. Research indicates that many students perform quite differently on the ACT and SAT. It may benefit you to take both tests. Colleges will usually use the higher score of the two tests. The option is yours! Listed below are some basic differences between the ACT and SAT that can be used as a guide in deciding which test you should take for college admissions.

ACT	SAT
Achievement test - measures what a student has learned in school	Aptitude test - measures student's critical thinking and problem-solving skills, vocabulary in context, and constructing logical arguments.
4 components - English, Reading, Mathematics, and Science. Optional essay	2 components - Evidence-Based Reading and Writing (EBRW) and Mathematics. Optional essay
Content based	Measures skills and knowledge with Evidence Based Reading and Writing

	ACT	SAT
Scoring System	36 Point System Scores from all 4 sections are averaged to provide a composite score between 1 and 36.	1600 Point System Scores averaged between the Evidence-Based Reading and Writing section (200-800 points) and the Mathematics section (200-800 points)
Grading System	A correct answer receives a point which is totaled and used to form a composite score. A wrong answer receives no credit, but no penalty as well, which encourages educated guessing.	A correct answer receives a point which is totaled and used to form a composite score. A wrong answer receives no credit, but no penalty as well, which encourages educated guessing.
	ACT	SAT
Subjects	English, Reading, Mathematics, Science *Test more advanced math concepts with a wider variety of math skills including basic arithmetic through Trigonometry. Optional essay section.	-Evidence-Based Reading and Writing (EBRW) -Mathematics including Algebra through Trigonometry.
Test Dates	7 times per year	7 times per year
Test Structure	English - 45-minute test with 75 multiple choice questions. Reading - 35-minute test with 40 multiple choice questions. Math - 60-minute test with 60 multiple choice questions. Science - 35-minute test with 40 multiple choice questions.	EBRW is comprised of 2 sections: -65-minute Reading test with 52 multiple-choice questions. -35-minute Writing test with 44 questions on grammar & usage. Math section consists of one 80-minute section that features 58 questions focused on algebra, problem solving & data analysis, additional topics (geometry, trigonometry and pre-calculus).
Test Time (not including mandatory breaks)	2 hours 55 minutes The optional essay section is an additional 40 minutes	3 hours

Choosing the Right College

As you develop a list (mental or otherwise) of colleges that interest you, be sure you can answer these questions about them:

The Basics

- Where is the college? Can you locate it on a map? Is it too close to home? Is it too far? Is it too cold or too hot there?
- Have you taken the course work the college requires for admission?
- What size is the college? How many students are undergraduates?
- What is the college's selectivity ratio (what proportion of applications was admitted last year)?
- Does the college offer majors that interest you?
- Is the college coed or single sex?
- What percentage of students live off campus?
- How many of the students graduate in four years? Five years? Six years?
- How many first-year students return for their sophomore year?
- How much does the program cost? What is the total per-year expense?
- What type of financial aid is available?

Where Would You Fit In?

- What are the middle 50 percent scores for SAT verbal and math or for ACT? Where does that place you?
- What was the high school GPA of most of the freshmen last year?
- Are freshmen guaranteed on-campus housing? If not, where do they live?
- Are there extracurricular activities that interest you?

Visit the colleges' websites

- What are their strong academic programs? (Ask a college representative, students, graduates, and teachers.)
 - What courses are required for graduation?
 - Are the courses you need/want available each semester? At convenient times?
 - Are there special programs that interest you (study abroad, internships, etc.)?
-

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- What is social life like on campus? What percentages of students join fraternities or sororities?
 - Do the pictures and the language the college uses to describe itself attract you?
 - What is your general impression of the college?
 - Is the school accredited?
 - If professional certification is required for employment in the field that interests you, how many students enrolled in the school's program pass the certification exam?

Admissions Process

- When are applications due?
- Does the college accept the Common Application? If so, does it require supplemental forms?
- What does the application contain? Are essays required?
- Is an interview suggested or required? Is an interview available from staff or alumni?
- When may you visit the college? What is its policy regarding campus visits?
- What are the financial aid deadlines? What financial aid forms are required?

Now Answer These Questions

- Am I a strong candidate for admission to this college?
- If I am not a strong candidate, what are my chances?
- Do I want to visit this college?
- What additional information do I need?

Tips for Parents on Finding a College Match

How can your child find colleges that match his or her needs? First, identify priorities. Next, carefully research the characteristics of a range of schools. Finally, match the two. Here are some college characteristics to consider.

Size of Student Body

Size will affect many of your child's opportunities and experiences:

- Range of academic majors offered
- Extracurricular possibilities
- Amount of personal attention your child will receive
- Number of academic resources (e.g., books in the library)

In considering size, your child should look beyond the raw number of students attending. For example, perhaps your child is considering a small department within a large school. They should investigate not just the number of faculty members, but also their accessibility to students.

Location

Does your child want to visit home frequently, or is this a time to experience a new part of the country? Would they enjoy an urban, suburban, or even rural environment?

Academic Programs

If your child knows what they want to study, they can research the reputations of academic departments by talking to people in the fields that interest them. If your child is undecided, as many students are, they may want to choose an academically balanced institution that offers a wide range of majors and programs. Students normally don't pick a major until their sophomore or junior year, and those students who know their major before they go to college are very likely to change their minds. Most colleges offer counseling to help students find a focus. In considering academic programs, your child should look for special opportunities and pick a school that offers a number of possibilities.

Campus Life

Your child should consider what college life will be like beyond the classroom. Students have to maintain a balance between academics, activities, and social life. Before choosing a college, your child should learn the answers to these questions:

- What extracurricular activities, athletics, clubs, and organizations are available?
- Does the community around the college offer interesting outlets for students?
- Are students welcomed by the community?
- Is there an ethnic or religious group in which to take part?
- How do fraternities and sororities influence campus life?
- Is housing guaranteed?
- How are dorms assigned?

Cost

In considering cost, look beyond the price tag. For most students, today's college costs make finances an important consideration. At the same time, most colleges work to ensure that academically qualified students from every economic circumstance can find financial aid that allows them to attend.

Diversity

Your child should explore what she might gain from a diverse student body. The geographic, ethnic, racial, and religious diversity of the students can help students learn more about the world. Investigate which student organizations or other groups with ethnic or religious foundations are active and visible on campus.

Retention and Graduation Rates

One of the best ways to measure a school's quality and the satisfaction of its students is to learn the percentage of students who return after the first year and the percentage of entering students who go on to graduate. Comparatively good retention and graduation rates indicate that responsible academic, social, and financial support systems exist for most students.

College Comparison Worksheet

Level of importance	Factors to consider	College (fill in names of colleges that interest you)			
		1.	2.	3.	4.
	Program of study: Which programs does the college offer to help you achieve your career goals?				
	School size: Would you prefer a large or small school? What is the student population?				
	Class size: How large do you like your classes to be? What is the student-to-teacher ratio?				
	Support programs: Which programs does the college offer to help you stay in school and graduate?				
	City and neighborhood: Do you prefer a city or a small town? What is the population of the city or town?				
	Campus culture: When visiting each college, get a feel for its "personality." How or why does it match yours?				
	Distance from home: How close do you want to live to your family?				
	Extracurricular activities: Do you have activities in your life that you can't live without?				
	Religious affiliation: Do you want to attend a college affiliated with your religious beliefs?				
	Net Price: While one college may appear to be less expensive, what will your final cost be after receiving grants and scholarships? Use https://collegecost.ed.gov/net-price to identify your likely estimated cost.				
	Financial aid options: Does the college have special financial aid options? These could include things such as a tuition payment plan to spread out your payments or a guaranteed cost of attendance as long as you are enrolled.				
	Outside learning options: Does the college offer internships, externships, study abroad or service learning opportunities?				
	Housing options near campus: How close or far is housing? Will you need a car, or are where you live, shop, and work within walking or biking distance?				

To download a PDF version of this worksheet, please visit:

<https://www.ecmc.org/students/documents/2019-2020-Worksheet-Choosing-the-Right-College.pdf>

Important Websites

Academy for Academic Excellence - www.aae.lewiscenter.org

Colleges and Universities

- University of California <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/>
 - UC approved A-G courses
<https://hs-articulation.ucop.edu/agcourselist/institution/2743>
- California State University <https://www.calstate.edu/>
- Association of Independent California Community Colleges www.aiccu.edu
- California Community Colleges: <http://www.cccco.edu>
- California Colleges www.californiacolleges.edu
- National Association of Colleges Admissions Counseling: www.nacacnet.org

Financial Aid and Scholarships

- California Student Aid Commission: www.csac.ca.gov
 - California Web Grants for Students: www.mygrantinfo.csac.ca.gov
- Federal Student Aid on the Web: www.studentaid.gov
 - Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA): www.fafsa.ed.gov
- FINAID - The Smart Student Guide to Financial Aid: www.finaid.org/fafsa
- FASTWEB Guide to paying for school: www.fastweb.com
- Scholarshare 529 Educational Savings Accounts: www.scholarshare.com

Testing Information

- College Board (PSAT/SAT/SAT Subject Tests) - www.collegeboard.com
- ACT - www.act.org
- Khan Academy free SAT test prep: <https://www.khanacademy.org/>
- Kaplan free ACT test prep: <https://www.kaptest.com/act/free/act-practice>

These websites are current and appropriate to the best of our knowledge. As always, use discernment when gathering information.
