

THE APPLICATION

The process of applying to colleges—the various forms to be completed and submitted, the multiple application options and deadlines—can be challenging. We hope that the following information will be helpful.

There are several components to each college application:

- the **application form** itself, including essay(s), prepared and submitted by you
- the **Secondary School Report** that provides an overall description of you, prepared by your high school guidance or college counselor
- your **high school transcript** that covers all 4 years, submitted by your high school; it is a good idea to review your transcript for accuracy in the fall of your senior year
- **standardized test scores** (for those colleges that require them); you must instruct the College Board and/or ACT which scores to send to which colleges

Note: If an additional test is taken after scores have been sent and you want them to be considered, you must again instruct the College Board/ACT to send the latest scores.

- **teacher recommendations** (usually one or two, from 11th or 12th grade)
- **application fee** via credit card
- some colleges may ask for copies of **graded papers** showing teacher comments so look through your collection of great essays
- **supplemental information** such as an art or writing portfolio, or a digital file of a musical performance, should also be submitted when appropriate.

The application form that you submit is the one part of the process over which you have total control; keep in mind that your application readers are looking for consistent themes about your character and accomplishments from every part of your application.

The Common Application

Hundreds of colleges now accept the **Common Application**, designed to make it easier for students to apply to multiple colleges. Students complete one application, including a 250-650 word Personal Statement about themselves, and may submit it to any Common Application college, thereby avoiding the need to fill out multiple applications.

The Common Application may be accessed at www.commonapp.org. The instructions are explained clearly on their website and are quite straightforward.

Many Common Application colleges also require students to complete their respective supplements. The supplement may contain an additional essay or two, a common question being “Why is our college a good fit for you?” Your answers to this question

must be well thought-out and college-specific; as with the main personal essay, the supplement essays should not be left to the last minute. The Common Application website provides links to each supplement.

Other colleges, including most of the public universities, that do not accept the Common Application have their own application platforms but generally ask for similar information and often have essay questions similar to those in the Common Application. As of the printing of this handbook, there is also the **Universal Application** (www.universalcollegeapp.com) and another in development from the **Coalition for Access, Affordability, and Success** (www.coalitionforcollegeaccess.org).



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Application Programs

There are several different programs with varying deadlines and policies for submitting college applications; **these options and deadlines can change from year to year at any given college so be sure to check each college's website for their specifics as you are preparing to apply. Not all colleges offer each of these application programs.**

Regular Decision:

Regular Decision is the most common application program used by applicants.

Deadlines generally fall between December 31 and February 1 so **you will need to check the deadline for each college.** Note: all applications to the University of California must be submitted during the month of November. Some other universities may also have earlier deadlines (e.g., December 1). Some colleges have earlier "Priority" deadlines for honors college/program or merit scholarship consideration.

You may submit as many Regular Decision applications as you like (we suggest a target of approximately 10 colleges).

Most colleges start to read Regular Decision applications after their respective deadlines so there is usually no advantage in applying well ahead of the deadline. However, **we strongly recommend that you not wait until the last minute to submit your applications**—try to submit at least a week before the due dates to avoid missing a deadline due to technical problems.

Decisions are usually announced in the latter half of March. If you get multiple acceptances, you must decide on which college to attend and send them a tuition deposit by May 1; **you may deposit at only one college.**

Regular Decision applications are appropriate for students who may need the fall semester to show improved grades, higher SAT or ACT scores, or need more time to consider their college options and prepare applications. Regular Decision is also recommended for students who wish to keep their options open and do not wish to commit themselves to one college (through an Early Decision application, as well as for students who want to evaluate multiple financial aid offers.

Although Regular Decision allows you to weigh your acceptance options, it is still a good idea to let your school counselor know the order of your preferences, as the colleges will sometimes contact your guidance counselor to learn where the colleges rank with you, and will only feel convinced of your significant interest in them if your counselor tells them that they are one of your top choices. Some students tell every college that they are their first choice; hence the colleges often seek confirmation from the school counselor.

Early Action:

Early Action (EA) deadlines fall generally between October 15 and December 1 with decisions announced in mid-December to late January.

An EA application allows the college to accept you early in the process but includes no obligation on your part to attend (similar to Regular Decision acceptances). In most cases, you may apply to other colleges. If you are accepted, you are not committed in any way to that college and you have until May 1 to make your decision.

An EA application is appropriate for students who have already achieved a strong record and SAT or ACT scores by the end of their junior year and do not need the fall semester of senior year to show improving grades or higher scores.

While it is usually possible to apply Early Action to multiple colleges, some colleges have **Single Choice** or **Restrictive Early Action** policies which prohibit any other Early Action or Early Decision applications. It is important, therefore, to know the specific application guidelines of each college to which you apply.

Because an Early Action application is not binding on the student, **it is important that you demonstrate genuine interest in your Early Action college** so that they feel more assured that you might attend and therefore will be more likely to accept you rather than defer their decision and review your application again in the Regular Decision pool.

Early Decision or Early Decision 1:

Early Decision (ED or ED 1) deadlines are generally between November 1 and November 15. Colleges will usually announce their decision on or about December 15.

By submitting an ED application, you are saying to the college that they are your first choice and that you (under contractual agreement) will attend if admitted (exceptions can be made in cases of financial hardship if the financial aid package offered with the

acceptance does not meet the family's needs). **Therefore you may apply ED to only one college.** An ED application may enhance a well-qualified student's chances of admission because of the commitment to attend; that commitment means it is important that you have considered your college options carefully. Please discuss your decision with us before submitting an ED application.

If admitted, you must withdraw all applications to other colleges, or jeopardize your ED acceptance, and your credibility with all colleges.

If you decide to apply ED to a college, we strongly recommend that you also prepare your other applications and have them ready to submit in the event that you are denied or deferred by your ED college. If some of your other colleges offer unrestricted EA programs, you might consider submitting some EA applications along with your ED application.

Early Decision 2:

Some colleges offer the option of Early Decision 2, allowing students to apply with a binding commitment at a date later than Early Decision 1. ED 2 deadlines vary between January 1 and February 1. Notification usually occurs within a month from the application deadline. If admitted, you must withdraw all applications to other colleges.

This option may be appropriate for students who need more time to evaluate college options (or need the extra time to obtain a higher SAT or ACT score and/or produce stronger grades). Students who have been denied or deferred Early Decision 1 somewhere else may also consider an Early Decision 2 application.

Rolling Admissions:

Some colleges, particularly many public universities, use a Rolling Admissions process. These colleges review applications as they are submitted and accept qualified candidates as they apply. Successful applicants are not committed and have until May 1 to evaluate their other acceptances and make a decision.

Time frames for notification of decisions vary with each college—often 6-8 weeks after their receipt of the complete application—but are usually clearly stated.

Colleges who use Rolling Admission continually review applications until their freshman class is filled, so it is very important to get your application in early—ideally in October. Strong candidates who wait until December or January are sometimes denied admission because the class is already filled by the time they submit their application!

Some Tips on Applying

- ▶ You should take advantage of the time available during your summer vacation to research colleges and work on your applications, the essays in particular. If you can complete most of the application work before school starts again in the fall, you will face less anxiety and have more time to spend on important schoolwork.

- **It is your responsibility to know each application deadline.**
- In most cases, we recommend applying to approximately 10 colleges, several (3-4) of which should be in the Likely category (>75% chance of acceptance). You should apply only to colleges where you would be happy to be for the next four years so be sure you feel that way about **all** your colleges, including those that are Likely.
- Choose an appropriate email address when you register with colleges and the Common Application.
- Ask someone to proofread your application. It is also a good idea to Print Preview your application before submitting. A sloppy application may say to the college that you don't care.
- Don't overload your list of extracurricular activities; don't pad your application with clubs in which you rarely participated or activities that you dropped two years ago. Stress the activities to which you have contributed in depth. Quality over quantity.
- If you have special circumstances or learning differences, there may be ways in which to share this information with admissions readers that can provide a necessary context to your application as a whole; be sure to discuss the situation with us so we can advise you.
- Some colleges will advise you that they have received your application and if they are missing any information; others provide a portal for applicants to check their application status. Be aware that there can be a lag-time between when they receive your materials and update your status. If you have not received confirmation after two or three weeks, you should contact that college or colleges to be certain they have received all the required material.