

College Application Handbook



College Admissions Planning Calendar

Junior Year— Semester 2

- Review PSAT scores distributed in December to identify strengths and weaknesses.
- Plan to take SAT and ACT **AT LEAST** once.
- Take SAT Subject Tests when you complete corresponding courses (if applicable).
- Create a resume and submit by the end of the school year. Sample templates are on the STA website.
- Begin to build a list of colleges on your Naviance “Colleges I’m Thinking About” list.
- Check the websites of colleges to learn admissions information and applications.
- Have an appropriate email address to use during the college admissions process. Your first and last name are generally the most professional (ex. John.Smith@gmail.com).
- Make sure any social media accounts are appropriate and set to your intended privacy settings.
- Attend Junior College Night.
- Attend college representative presentations at St. Thomas Aquinas High School.
- Begin communication with the college rep of any college you are remotely interested in.
- Begin writing your main college essay and resume in your English class.
- Complete your Senior Questionnaire, College Essay Draft, and College Resume and submit them by the end of the school year.
- Visit colleges throughout the spring, if possible.
- Ask parents to write the Parent Statement and submit to your College Advisor by the end of the school year.
- Ask two teachers to write a letter of recommendation only if your colleges require them. Supply the teachers with your resume, a favorite memory you have from their class, and any other helpful information.
- Keep your grades up! This is the most important semester!

Summer

- Review SAT/ACT scores and work on your weaknesses.
- Take a SAT/ACT review course, if needed.
- Visit colleges.
- Continue to update list of possible colleges.
- Begin working on college applications.
- Be involved during the summer: volunteer work, job, sports.
- Research scholarship and Financial Aid opportunities.
- Attend a Pre-College Summer Program at a college, if possible.
- Take a Summer Institute course at St. Thomas Aquinas High School.
- Start working on your Common Application, if applicable.

College Admissions Planning Calendar

Senior Year—Semester 1

- Finalize your college list and use the “Beet, Meet, Treat” rule of thumb as a guide.
- Continue to complete applications.
- Follow up on your letters of recommendation or ask two teachers (only if needed).
- Attend college representative presentations at STA.
- Attend Sunshine Invitational College Fair/Attend Broward County College Fair. (TBD)
- Meet with counselor to discuss college choices.
- Retake SAT/ACT in August, October, November, or December if necessary.
- Turn in a Guidance Service Form (GSF) for every college you apply to that requires a transcript and/or other supporting documents.
- Take SAT Subject Tests if you haven’t already – if the college requires them.
- Apply for the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship after October 1.
- Complete all applications by their deadlines; however, the earlier the better!
- Visit colleges, if possible.
- Attend the Financial Aid Night at STA. (Parents) (TBD)
- Research scholarships and Financial Aid. Apply for Financial Aid (FAFSA) after October 1.
- As always, READ and KEEP all materials provided by the counselors and the colleges!
- Keep a copy or record of all colleges on Naviance to which you have applied.
- **Keep your grades up!**

Senior Year—Semester 2

- Keep up your grades! All college acceptances are contingent on your final senior grades.
- Complete any applications with later deadlines.
- Read financial aid website for each college to be sure you are completing everything necessary.
- As you receive decision letters from colleges, continue to investigate them, to help with your decision of where to enroll. Visit if you haven’t already, or visit again if you are trying to decide where to attend.
- Send any new information (test scores, awards, accomplishments) to any college to which you have been deferred or waitlisted.
- Notify the School Counseling and College Advising Office of all acceptances and scholarship offers.
- Meet May 1st Candidate Reply Date for notifying colleges of your decision to attend.
- Contact all colleges to which you have been accepted to let them know if you do not plan to attend.
- Write thank you notes to teachers who wrote letters of recommendation for you, and to anyone else who helped you with your college application process.
- Watch your email or mail for college orientation programs and any other important information from the college you plan to attend.

Choosing Your Colleges

There are thousands of colleges in the United States, so when you begin to put together a college list, it is helpful to narrow the search with the components below. Some helpful websites are listed below to assist you with this process.

Admission Requirements: Colleges range from extremely selective (the hardest to be admitted to) to open enrollment (everyone who applies is admitted). As you begin the college search it is helpful to look at your GPA and any test scores you have, and compare them to the students who are admitted to colleges. There are college searches on Naviance and other websites to help with this (see website page). Most colleges give a mid-range of test scores, this is the middle 50% of students who have been accepted. If your test scores are in this range, your chances of admission are good. On Naviance you can look at Scattergram, which shows students who have applied to each college from St. Thomas in the last few years, their test scores and GPAs, and their admission decision.

Location: Think about where you would like to go to college – any geographic areas you love, or aren't interested in? This can begin with a family discussion – how far away are parents comfortable with? Many students attend colleges in their home state, for reasons of cost, proximity to home, or just preference for one of our great state universities.

Enrollment: There are colleges with as few as 300 students, and colleges with over 50,000 students, and there are pros and cons to both. Do you like smaller classes with discussions? This will happen more at a smaller college, and there will be more large lecture classes at a very large institution. There can be a variety of opportunities, both in and out of the classroom, at both. To get an idea which you prefer visit different size campuses – this can begin with ones which are local.

Costs: College costs can greatly vary, from attending a public university locally and living at home to attending the most expensive private university in the country. It is important to have a family discussion to be realistic about paying for college. There is a lot of financial aid available consisting of need-based aid and merit-based scholarships - see Paying for College document in this packet; however, it is good to have some less expensive options when applying to college in case you do not receive all the financial aid you need to cover the costs.

Majors Offered: If you have an idea what you'd like to study in college, you will want to research colleges with this major. If not, you will want to look at colleges which offer a wide range of majors. Many colleges have a lot of choices, especially the larger colleges. However, some majors, such as Engineering, Nursing, Sports Medicine, and even Business, are not offered at every college, so research your colleges carefully. You can investigate careers using the websites on the Helpful Websites document in this packet.

Student Body: Are you studious, artsy, or want big rah-rah sports, interested in study abroad, internships, fraternities/sororities, drama or debate? Would you be more comfortable on a friendly, accepting campus, or are excited by a very competitive academic environment? These are all things to consider when looking at colleges. If interested, research Visual & Performing Arts Colleges or Military Academies.

Helpful Resources

- **Counselors & College Advisors** – We are here to help you with your college search! Be sure to attend meetings, read all materials we share, including emails and posts on Blackboard and Naviance, and meet with your counselor and/or college advisor to discuss colleges.
- **Naviance** – Begin with St. Thomas Aquinas' Naviance site – a great source to assist you.
- **College Visits at STA** – hundreds of college representatives visit STA each year. These visits are a great chance to get to learn about colleges, college admissions, even if it is not a college you know! College visits are listed on Blackboard and Naviance. To attend a session, sign up on Naviance and obtain a pass from the School Counseling and College Advising Office.
- **College Fairs** - Each fall STA hosts the Sunshine Invitational Fair – this special fair is not open to the public, but only to students at STA and the other host high schools. Make it a priority to attend! Hundreds of college representatives will be there to answer questions.
- **Visiting Colleges** – This is the best way to learn about colleges. If travel is difficult, begin with local campuses – we have a lot in South Florida. Visits can help you determine if you are more interested in a large or smaller campus, urban or suburban and more. Be sure to register online for an orientation session and campus tour for any campus visit. At this point ALWAYS let admissions know you are visiting campus.

Online Resources

College Searches

ACT
www.act.org

College Board
<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/>

College Data
<http://www.collegedata.com/>

College Navigator
<http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>

Colleges That Change Lives
www.ctcl.org

Catholic Colleges
www.catholiccollegesonline.org

National Association for College Admission Counseling
www.nacacnet.org

Liberal Arts Colleges
www.cic.edu
www.liberalarts.org

Visuals Arts Colleges
<http://portfolioday.net/colleges/npda-member-colleges>

Military Service Academies
<http://todaysmilitary.com/training/service-academies-and-military-colleges>

Standardized Tests

SAT
www.collegeboard.org

ACT
www.act.org

Test Optional Colleges
www.fairtest.org

Free Online Test Prep
<https://www.khanacademy.org/sat>

Scholarship Searches

FastWeb
www.fastweb.com

Cappex
www.cappex.com

Going Merry
www.GoingMerry.com

Raise.Me
www.raise.me

Athlete Information

NCAA Eligibility Center
<https://web3.ncaa.org/ecwr3/>

Financial Aid

FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)
<https://fafsa.ed.gov/>

US Dept. of Education Federal Student Aid
<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/>

EFC - To calculate your estimated family contribution for financial aid
<https://fafsa.ed.gov/FAFSA/app/f4cForm?execution=e1s1>

CSS Profile
<https://student.collegeboard.org/css-financial-aid-profile>

Florida Bright Futures Scholarship
www.FloridaStudentFinancialAid.org/SSFAD/bf/

Florida Prepaid College Plan
<http://www.myfloridaprepaid.com/>

Summer Programs

Teen Life
<https://www.teenlife.com/>

Career Information

Occupational Outlook Handbook
www.bls.gov/oco/

**** Please use your Naviance account for scholarships, summer programs, career assessments, resources, and more.**

College Admissions Guide & Policies

Application Components

THE ACADEMIC RECORD: Your high school courses and grades are the #1 component of the application. Get the best grades you can, especially in 11th & 12th grades! If you have had a rocky academic record, be sure to explain the reasons to the college. STA will send your high school transcript to each college you apply to. Some colleges will request a Mid-Year Report which will report your first semester senior grades.

TEST SCORES: This is the 2nd most important component in the application, unless the college is test optional. Take the SAT and/or ACT tests very seriously.

ACTIVITIES: Most colleges are interested in what you do outside of the classroom. It can be activities at school, in the community, at a religious institution, work, etc. Be sure to include everything you have done, 9th – 12th grades, and present your accomplishments very clearly on your applications. You do not need to do a lot of activities, strong involvement in a few activities shows your commitment. Create a resume with your activities using the sample in this packet.

ESSAYS: Most applications have an essay. This is a chance to share something about yourself that is not already on your application. Think about what makes you unique. See the document “College Essay Tips” in this packet for more information.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Many colleges ask for one or two academic teacher recommendations. Think hard about which teachers to ask. It doesn't have to necessarily be a class in which you got an “A”, but could be a class in which you greatly improved. See the “College Application Guide” in this packet for more guidelines. Some colleges also allow you to submit “Other Recommenders” which may be a coach, boss, etc.

APPLICATION FEE: Most colleges require an application fee, which you pay with a credit card when you submit the application online. Application fee waivers are available for students with financial need through NACAC, the Common Application, or if you have used a fee waiver for the SAT or ACT.

INTERVIEWS: Some colleges conduct student interviews, either on campus or by local alumni. See “Questions You May be Asked by a College Representative” in this packet.

College Admissions Guide & Policies

Application Options/Deadlines

Colleges and universities have varying admission practices and deadlines. Find some of the more frequently mentioned practices below.

- **EARLY DECISION:** This is a binding option. If you apply and are accepted, you are committed to attending this college. If you are 100% sure you will be happy attending a college, and do not need to compare financial aid offers, this is good option. Otherwise, DO NOT consider early decision.
- **REGULAR DECISION:** Most colleges have a regular decision deadline. A lot of regular decision deadlines are January 1st or 15th, and you receive a decision in mid to late March.
- **EARLY ACTION or PRIORITY:** Many colleges offer this option, with deadlines in October or November. This is a great option because you receive your decision in December or January and are not committed to attend.
- **ROLLING ADMISSION:** As colleges receive applications, they read them and send out decisions. Some of our state universities use rolling admissions. It is great, as you may receive your decision very early.

Application Decisions

Colleges will notify you with one of the following decisions

- **ACCEPT.** Great, you have this college as an option!
- **DENY.** If you have been denied, move on to focus on other colleges. Colleges do not reconsider students after denials.
- **DEFER.** This is also great; you are still being considered. Email the college and let them know you are very interested, and send any additional information which will help your application such as new test scores, any awards, honors.
- **WAITLIST.** Colleges need to have a number of extra students in case some do not commit to attend so they place students on a Waitlist. There is no guarantee that you will be taken off the Waitlist, so you must commit to another college. However, if this is a top college choice of yours, be sure to contact the college and let them know you are very interested and would like to stay on the Waitlist.
- **SPRING ADMIT:** Some colleges are offering students admission for spring term in January, even if you have applied for fall. Some students will choose to do this, if it is their top choice college. Options of how to spend your fall include community college courses, work, or community service.

YOU DO NOT NEED TO COMMIT TO ANY COLLEGE UNTIL MAY 1ST, UNLESS YOU APPLIED EARLY DECISION.

Some colleges may encourage you to send a deposit before May 1st, but you do not need to.

College Application Guide

Overview

Congratulations! You will be soon be off to college! Before you get there, you must apply early and make sure you have applied correctly. Please use this guide to help you with your applications. There are many components to a college application and the college/university you are applying to will need ALL components for your application to be considered complete. Here are the most common components of a complete application:

- Complete Application
- Transcript
- SAT or ACT scores
- Essay
- Recommendation Letter(s)
- Application Fee

Deadlines

College transcript/scholarship requests should be submitted at least two weeks prior to an application deadline. Check your schools for the appropriate deadline. Some examples are:

College Application Deadline	Transcript Request Deadline
October 15th	October 1st
November 1st	October 18th
December 1st	November 17th
January 1st and 15th	December 1st

The Process & Frequently Asked Questions

Where do I start? Log into your Naviance account and build your “Colleges I’m Applying To” list. From here, you can click on each college’s website to determine what you will need for their specific application.

What will I need? This guide will help walk you through the entire process. Please see the “Overview” section above for the most common components of a complete application.

What is Naviance? Naviance is your comprehensive college application planning tool. It is how you will request letters of recommendation and transcripts. It can also be used to search for colleges based on specific criteria such as location and majors.

What is the SSAR? SSAR stands for Student Self-Reported Academic Record. A few colleges may ask you to complete the SSAR instead of sending your official high school transcript. You will need a copy of your transcript to enter all of the courses you have taken since freshman year, your grades and current senior schedule.

How can I qualify for Scholarships?

- **Apply Early!** The earlier you apply to colleges during your senior year, more scholarship money will be available.
- **FAFSA.** Submit your Free and Federal Student Aid Application as soon as possible. Scholarships, grants and loans are awarded on a first come, first serve basis.
- **Scholarship Newsletter.** Check our monthly Scholarship Newsletter on Blackboard and the STA website.

What are some of the different types of applications?

- **Common Application:** A type of application used by multiple colleges and universities. (www.commonapp.org)
- **Coalition Application:** A type of application used by multiple colleges and universities. (www.coalitionforcollegeaccess.org)
- **Website Application:** You will apply directly through the college or university website.

College Application Guide

Common Application Guide

You will only need to refer to this guide if you are applying to a college or university using the Common Application.

Step 1: Create a Common Application account. Create your account at www.CommonApp.org and locate Saint Thomas Aquinas High School **by the CEEB code: 100475**. STA must be added by the CEEB code ensure it links properly to your Naviance account. **Please use your STA email address when creating your account.** Add any schools using the Common Application to your Common Application account.

Step 2: Sign the FERPA Waiver. Click on the first college in your list and click on [Recommenders & FERPA](#). Follow in the instructions to complete your FERPA waiver. It is your choice whether or not to waive your right to view your recommendations however; we strongly recommend waiving your right, as colleges/universities will place more weight on your recommendations when you waive your right to view them.

Step 3: Link Your Common Application to [Naviance](#). After you have electronically signed your waiver, log into your Naviance account —> Click [Colleges I'm Applying To](#) and link your Common Application account to your Naviance account by typing in your email address and birth date. **Important Note:** If you are applying to a school that uses the Common Application but have decided **not** to use the Common Application, you must specify on Naviance that which way you have chosen to apply.

Step 4: Apply! Once you have submitted your application(s) via Common Application, refer to the “College Application Guide” on the back of this page to complete your steps. **Do NOT request recommenders through Common Application. All recommenders MUST be requested in person and on Naviance only.**

Coalition Application Guide

You will only need to refer to this guide if you are applying to a college or university using the Coalition Application.

Step 1: Create a Coalition Application account. Create your account at www.mycoalition.org and start your profile.

Step 2: Build Your College List. Add any schools you are applying to via the Coalition Application. You can use your Naviance “Colleges I'm Applying To” list to see which of your schools use the Coalition Application.

Step 3: Complete the Profile Section of the Coalition Application.

Step 4: Apply! Begin applying to each of your Coalition Application schools by selecting [Start Application](#) then [I'm a Freshman](#). Complete each section of the application. **Do NOT request recommenders through Coalition Application. All recommenders MUST be requested in person and on Naviance only** (refer to the other side of this page for recommender instructions). Once you have submitted your application(s) via Coalition Application, refer to the first page of this “College Application Guide” to complete the rest of your application steps.

College Application Checklist

Step 1: Narrow Down Your College List.

- Narrow down your list of where you are applying
- Make sure you are using the “Beat, Meet, Treat” rule as a guide

Step 2: How are you Applying? Decide how you are applying to each of your colleges. Some colleges will have multiple application platforms, but you only have to choose ONE.

- [Common Application](#), [Coalition Application](#) or directly to the institution via their website

Step 3: Determine your Deadlines Decide which deadlines you are applying by for each college. Even if applying Regular Decision, you should at least apply by the college’s “scholarship deadline” to be considered for scholarships.

- Early Action/Priority (EA): Preferred if offered. If it is “restrictive early action,” read the fine print as every college is different.
- Early Decision (ED): This is BINDING-you and your parents/guardians must sign a contract stating that if you are accepted, you will attend that university and withdraw all other applications. You can only apply ED to one college. Not sure if you should apply ED based on Financial Aid? Use the [Net Price Calculator](#) to estimate what your financial aid package will be.
- Regular Decision (RD): Regular deadline and usually the last deadline to apply
- Rolling: You can apply at any time, but the earlier is better!

Step 4: Get Organized and Request Recommendation Letters (if needed)

- Create a binder, spreadsheet, or whatever method of organization works best for you to stay on top of your applications. You do not want anything to fall through the cracks!
- Only request recommendation letters if you need them. You should ask as soon as possible to allow teachers and counselors plenty of time. You must first ask them in person then request on [Naviance](#).

Step 5: Begin & Submit Application(s)

- Create your application account(s) and begin filling in the required information.
- Keep track of your username and login information!
- Basic demographic information and activities can all be completed over the summer.
- Pay attention to your deadlines!
- Make sure you request your transcript and any recommendation letters AT LEAST 2 weeks prior to your deadline (See Steps 4 & 6)
- Submit your application & pay the application fee or submit fee waiver (if on financial aid)
- Make sure you have updated your “Colleges I’m Applying To” list on Naviance and have linked your Common Application to Naviance. If you click the “transcript” box for each application on Naviance, you will be able to see when your transcripts are sent to each college.

Step 6: Request your Test Scores (if required)

- You must request your ACT and/or SAT score directly from [Collegeboard.org \(SAT\)](#) and [ACT.org \(ACT\)](#) to be sent to your college(s). STA cannot send official test scores.

Step 7: Request your Transcript Submit one GSF form for each college you are applying to at least 2 weeks prior to your deadline (but the earlier the better!). If you submit a GSF form within 2 weeks of a deadline, you are subject to a late fee. Most Florida public universities require self-reported grades via the [Self-Reported Student Academic Record \(SSAR\)](#). Your “College’s I’m Applying To” list on Naviance MUST be up-to-date and your Common Application MUST be linked.

Step 8: Check Up on Your Application(s) After submitting your application(s), you will be able to check your application status through the college website. This is where you will find a detailed list of received and/or outstanding documents (transcript, test scores, etc.) Please allow at least two weeks for this to be updated as materials do not instantly show up.

Additional Checklist

- Naviance** Make sure your “Colleges I’m Applying To” list on Naviance is up-to-date and your deadlines are accurate. Your Common Application **MUST** be linked for your counselor to send transcripts, recommendation letters, forms, etc.

- Additional Documentation** Check to make sure that you submitted any additional documentation. For example, your application may require one or more of the following:
 - Early Decision Contract (if applying Early Decision)
 - Application Fee or Fee Waiver if you’re on financial aid
 - Resume
 - Proof of Residency
 - Supplemental Essay

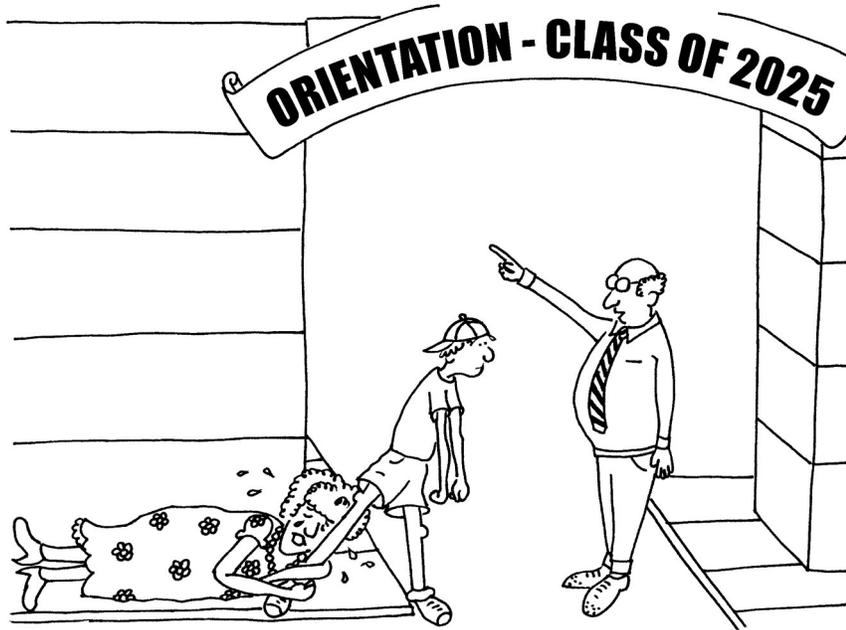
- Financial Aid & Scholarship Applications** A financial aid application is usually required to be considered for aid at a college/university. Check with each individual college to see which application they prefer or if you need to submit more than one.
 - [FAFSA: Free Application for Federal Student Aid](#)
 - [CSS Profile: College Scholarship Service Profile](#)

- Scholarships** You may have to submit a separate scholarship application to the individual college to be considered for institutional scholarships. We will help all Seniors apply for the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship in October. Check out the following resources for additional scholarships:
 - [The STA Scholarship List on Naviance](#)
 - [GoingMerry.com](#)
 - [Raise.Me](#)
 - [FastWeb.com](#)
 - [Cappex.com](#)
 - [BigFuture.org](#)

- College Tours** If you can, go on **official** college tours to where you are applying. This is how most students end up deciding! If you can’t tour in person, check out online college tour websites like [YouVisit.com](#) or [CampusReel.org](#)

**Please see your College Advisor if you have ANY questions.
We are here to help!**

Application Policies



"Let me guess, you're looking for the "Letting Go" workshop."

Guidance Services Forms are due a MINIMUM of TWO WEEKS prior to the college application deadline; however, the earlier they come in, the better. You will be subject to a late fee if you submit your form after the two week required deadline.

However, all applications with deadlines between December 15 through January 15 must be turned into the School Counseling and College Advising Office by **December 1, 2020. Transcript requests are not accepted on the last day before Christmas break as we will not have adequate time to process late requests.** Transcript requests and Guidance Services Forms must be turned into the School Counseling and College Advising Office by the student.

Teacher Recommendations also require a **MINIMUM of TWO WEEKS** notice prior to the deadline. Students should select **ONLY TWO** teachers to write recommendations or complete application materials on their behalf. The student must ask the recommender if he/she is requesting an online recommendation and/or form. A copy must also be given to the School Counseling and College Advising Office for the student's file.

College Essay Prompts

Most students will use the Common Application, and some students will use multiple application platforms. Therefore, it may be in your best interest to choose a topic and word count that suits all application platforms.

Common App Prompts (Word Count: 250-650 words)

- Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
- The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
- Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
- Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma - anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.
- Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
- Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?
- Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.
- **Optional prompt you will see on the Common Application** (this is in addition to one of the main prompts above.): *Community disruptions such as COVID-19 and natural disasters can have deep and long-lasting impacts. If you need it, this space is yours to describe those impacts. Colleges care about the effects on your health and well-being, safety, family circumstances, future plans, and education, including access to reliable technology and quiet study spaces. (maximum of 250 words)*

Coalition App Essay Prompts (Word Count: 500-550 Words)

- Tell a story from your life, describing an experience that either demonstrates your character or helped to shape it.
- Describe a time when you made a meaningful contribution to others in which the greater good was your focus. Discuss the challenges and rewards of making your contribution.
- Has there been a time when you've had a long-cherished or accepted belief challenged? How did you respond? How did the challenge affect your beliefs?
- What is the hardest part of being a teenager now? What's the best part? What advice would you give a younger sibling or friend (assuming they would listen to you)?
- Submit an essay on a topic of your choice.

College Essay Tips

Written by Bryan Rutledge

Make friends with the essay style. The essay style is a distinct kind of writing: intelligent but not intellectual, light but not lightheaded. The essay is not a five-paragraph analysis of the symbolism of Baby Pearl in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. The essay is not a vehicle for you

Here are specific tips on responding to frequently appearing essay topics:

Influential persons. Whether you choose your little brother or Gandhi, if by the essay's end the reader knows more about the influential person than she does you, something has gone wrong. If you write about someone you know and see often, relate specific conversations and events and how they moved or changed you. With a historical figure, reach beyond predictable platitudes to show how you have been inspired or altered. Read up on the person's life to find fascinating facts that might have been overlooked.

Issues that matter. If you care about issues political, social or environmental, your essay will come across as vague or lame unless you have engaged with the issues. You will have more specifics to add interest to your essay if you take part in, for example, student government, community service, or political volunteering. Outside reading can be a real plus, and if you take a stand on a controversial issue, show that you are open-minded and see both sides.

Meaningful activities or employment. Joining a school club is pointless unless you do something worthwhile as a member. For example, if you are in the science club, you can help arrange field trips, expert speakers, or experiments to teach and wow your classmates or younger students. When it comes to employment, whether you mow yards, flip burgers, or tutor math, learning to team up with diverse co-workers, serve others in a professional setting, take direction, and manage your own money can make a compelling story.

Reactions to a quotation. Here's a clever way to impress your reader: Find something else the quoted person wrote or said and work that into your essay. It shows curiosity and depth on your part, an easy way to go the extra mile.

Academic interests and career plans. This one often bugs the undecided writer who feels that it means just one subject and one career. Not to worry. It's fine at this point in your life to be undecided (most students are); just write about what seems most appealing and why, and then, if you prefer, add another subject that interests you and explain why. When writing about a potential college major, visit the college's website for details on some of the more intriguing classes offered in that discipline. Be so passionate about subjects that interest you that you read up on them and their practitioners when you don't have to, and alert your admissions reader that you do so. Be active and curious, probe for tantalizing details.

Special talents or qualifications. This optional essay appears on the Common Application, accepted by hundreds of private and some public schools. Once you have completed all the required essays for your application, ask yourself whether you have left something unsaid. I've seen marvelous special talent essays on child-care, chess, animal husbandry, cooking, tutoring younger students, and one of my favorites, a young woman who built furniture with her father. It's fine if your special talent has nothing to do with your academic interests. As Walt Whitman put it, "I contain multitudes."

College Essay Tips

Why this college or university appeals to you. If you've visited the school, make notes on what you saw, whom you spoke to, how you felt when you saw the academic quad for the first time. If you haven't visited, search the undergraduate website of the school for testimonials from students, research and recreational facilities, or campus organizations you might like. If you know current students or alums of the college, consult them and write about it. If what you write about, for example, Duke's programs, looks exactly like what you write about the University of Puget Sound's, go back to the drawing board and individuate.

Diversity. Asked to write about diversity, seniors sometimes suppose they are at a loss if they are not from an underrepresented ethnic or racial group. Remember that diversity includes but extends beyond race and ethnicity, and those in the majority can certainly join the appreciation and celebration. What's more, an artist, athlete, woodworker, or poet can bring diversity, as can those from various socio-economic backgrounds. "Think diversely about diversity," as they say.

Struggles or challenges. This subject can generate complaints from those who, ironically, have little to complain about: "If only I had something awful happen to me so I could write about it!" Enough already, and be careful what you wish for. Sometimes those writing about significant challenges worry that they will come across as complaining or using their struggle to advantage. Here's the solution: If overcoming or coping with a significant struggle is a vital and meaningful part of who you are, and you want to write about it, do so. Persistence, maturity, character, and optimism are often revealed in our struggles, and these are qualities that colleges want in their communities.

Your final essay checklist. Here is one last check-list before you punch SUBMIT:

1. Your grammar and spelling are flawless. If you are lacking in these skills, find a diction director, punctuation pundit, or syntax censor who can assist.
2. Your essay has natural and regular paragraph breaks, with smooth transitions between them. You have avoided fancy words that are not conversational.
3. All your essays address the prompts, and essential words in the prompts appear in your essays. You have followed the guidelines for essay length.
4. Your essay is your authentic voice, honest and clear, and is positive even if it deals with difficult issues.
5. You have used details and examples to make your point rather than vague generalizations, and you have invited the reader to think or wonder.
6. The first and last sentences of your essay are lively, engaging, and consistent with each other, but not exactly the same. Your conclusion takes the reader beyond the introduction.
7. An intelligent reader who may not have the pleasure of meeting you will know you better after reading the essay. With your "story" you will welcome the reader into your life with goodwill and trust.

Believe in yourself. Change, including going off to college, can be scary at any point in your life, but change is the only and best way to move forward. Albert Einstein, who knew a thing or two about movement, said that life is like riding a bike: "The only way to stay balanced is to keep moving." Completing your college essays will organize your preferences and plans, balancing your ride to college admission.

Beat, Meet, Treat Rule of Thumb

When students are building their college lists, they should follow this general rule of thumb. Students should apply to at least two “Beat” schools. Under no circumstance should students apply only to “Treat” schools.

- **Beat Schools:** (Also known as “safety schools”) Schools where a student’s GPA and test scores beat the averages and the acceptance rate is 50% and higher.
- **Meet Schools:** Schools where the student's GPA and test scores meet the averages and the acceptance rate is 20%-50%.
- **Treat Schools:** Schools where the student's GPA and test scores meet the averages, but because of the school's acceptance rate (less than 20%) they should not necessarily expect to get in but rather it would be a nice "treat."

It is recommended that students apply to approximately 6-8 schools using this general rule of thumb.

Example: 2 Beats, 4 Meets, 2 Treats.

FL SUS ADMISSIONS (Fall 2019 Middle Ranges)

	GPA	SAT	ACT	DEADLINE		GPA	SAT	ACT	DEADLINE
 <p>FLORIDA AGRICULTURAL AND MECAHNICAL UNIVERSITY Tallahassee, FL admissions.famu.edu</p>	3.67	1100	22-27	11.1.19	 <p>NEW COLLEGE OF FLORIDA Sarasota, FL ncf.edu/admissions</p>	3.68 - 4.34	1160 - 1350	25 - 31	11.1.19
 <p>FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY Boca Raton, FL fau.edu/admissions</p>	3.58 - 4.18	1120 - 1160	24 - 29	4.15.20	 <p>UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA Orlando, FL admissions.ucf.edu</p>	3.99 - 4.47	1280 - 1390	27 - 31	
 <p>FLORIDA GULF COAST UNIVERSITY Fort Myers, FL fgcu.edu/admissionsandaid</p>	3.84	1150	24 - 29	11.1.19	 <p>UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA Gainesville, FL admissions.ufl.edu</p>	4.3 - 4.6	1340 - 1470	30 - 33	11.1.19
 <p>FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY Miami, FL admissions.fiu.edu</p>	4.0 - 4.6	1240 - 1360	26 - 31	11.1.19	 <p>UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA Jacksonville, FL unf.edu/admissions</p>	4.0 - 4.5	1200 - 1320	25 - 28	
 <p>FLORIDA POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY Lakeland, FL floridapoly.edu/admissions</p>	3.5 - 4.2	1240 - 1390	27 - 31	11.1.19	 <p>UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA Tampa, FL usf.edu/admissions</p>	4.1 - 4.3	1260 - 1325	27 - 30	11.1.19
 <p>FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY Tallahassee, FL admissions.fsu.edu</p>	4.1 - 4.5	1270 - 1390	28 - 32	11.1.19	 <p>UNIVERSITY OF WEST FLORIDA Pensacola, FL uwf.edu/admissions</p>	3.9	1173	25	12.1.19

Paying for College

Yes, college is more expensive than ever before; however, there is a lot of aid available. Be sure to apply for aid, and apply early, and there may be more money available for you than you think!!! Read the Financial Aid page of each college website to be sure you are submitting any necessary forms to be eligible for financial aid at each college.

Need-Based Aid

College financial aid offices will look at your family income, assets, the size of your family, the number of children in college, and the age of the parents in determining your family contribution. To calculate your estimated family contribution now, go to <https://fafsa.ed.gov/FAFSA/app/f4cForm?execution=e1s1>

FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)

If you are interested in need-based aid, every college requires that you complete this form. You can begin completing it in January of the student's senior year (it is based on your parents' income the year before). This form is free, as the name implies, and can be accessed at www.fafsa.ed.gov. Use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool to simplify the process. Be careful, there are some scams out there that ask for money to help complete the form.

CSS PROFILE

Some select colleges require that you complete this form if you are interested in need-based aid. Go to the following website: <https://student.collegeboard.org/css-financial-aid-profile> to access the CSS PROFILE. There is a fee assessed for processing PROFILE, so check with each college to be sure they require that you complete PROFILE before paying the fee. You can find this information on the Financial Aid section of each college website. You can begin submitting your PROFILE application in the fall of your senior year. Be sure that your CSS Profile accurately matches your FAFSA information. Colleges have different deadlines for when you must submit this information – watch these closely and don't be late! Money is given out first come-first serve.

Scholarships

Most scholarships are merit-based, based upon something the student does well, such as academics, sports or talent. Most are not need-based, your income does not come into the picture.

College Scholarships

These can be the most money, sometimes covering the whole cost of college. Check with each college to see what is available, and be sure to apply in time.

Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program

There are lottery-funded scholarships are rewarded to Florida high school graduates for high academic achievement. **Every** eligible student receives the scholarship to which they meet the qualifications.

Private Scholarships

There are many, many scholarships from associations, organizations, etc. for which students can apply. Many students apply, so although each student may have a chance, they may not win. These are usually \$500 - \$2,000 per year. We receive a lot of scholarship information, and it is posted monthly in the Scholarship Bulletin. In addition to scholarships listed, there are some helpful scholarship search sites at the end. Also, if you have applied to a college using the Common Application, they have helpful information under "Financial Aid Resources."

Be sure to let the School Counseling office know if you have been awarded any scholarships throughout your senior year!

Florida Bright Futures Scholarship

The Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program establishes lottery-funded scholarships to reward Florida high school graduates for high academic achievement. The best part is, every eligible student receives this scholarship!

Students must APPLY for the scholarship as early as October 1st online at <http://www.floridastudentfinancialaid.org/ssfad/bf/> no later than August 31st after high school graduation. If a student does not apply for the scholarship by the deadline, a student cannot receive the scholarship! All eligibility requirements must be met by high school graduation, but scores of ACT[®]/SAT[®]/P.E.R.T. tests taken through June 30 are accepted for evaluation purposes.

Students will be evaluated based on official test scores from the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) repository. To ensure OSFA obtains official test scores:

- Ensure demographics on your test registration and high school transcript match; and
- Request your official test scores be sent to one of Florida’s 12 state universities, Florida state colleges, or public high schools when registering for the ACT[®]/SAT[®].

Florida high school students who wish to qualify for the Florida Academic Scholars (FAS) award or the Florida Medallion Scholars (FMS) award must meet the following initial eligibility requirements:

- Graduate high school from a Florida public high school with a Florida Standard Diploma (high school graduation requirements), graduate from a registered Florida Department of Education private high school, earn a GED, complete a Home Education program, or graduate from a non-Florida high school
- Complete the required high school coursework;
- Achieve the required minimum high school grade point average (GPA);
- Achieve the required minimum score on either the ACT[®] or SAT[®] college entrance exam;
- Complete the required number of service hours

Type	16 High School Course Credits ¹	High School Weighted Bright Futures GPA	College Entrance Exams by High School Graduation Year (ACT [®] /SAT [®])	Service Hours
FAS	4 - English <i>(three must include substantial writing)</i> 4 - Mathematics <i>(at or above the Algebra I level)</i> 3 - Natural Science <i>(two must have substantial laboratory)</i>	3.50	2019-20 Graduates: 29/1290 2020-21 Graduates: 29/1330	100 hours
FMS	3 - Social Science 2 - World Language <i>(sequential, in same language)</i>	3.00	2019-20 Graduates: 26/1170 2020-21 Graduates: 25/1210	75 hours

Florida Academic Scholars (FAS) will receive an award to cover 100% of tuition and applicable fees and \$300 for both fall and spring semesters for additional educational expenses. Students attending a public institution will have tuition and applicable fees covered. These fees include activity and service fee, health fee, athletic fee, financial aid fee, capital improvement fee, campus access/transportation fee, technology fee and tuition differential fee. Students attending a nonpublic institution will receive a comparable amount as noted in the Bright Futures Private Award Chart. **Florida Medallion Scholars (FMS)** is \$77 per credit hour per semester.

Questions to Ask College Representatives

Students and parents should make a list of priorities before meeting with college representatives.

To make a realistic assessment and selection of a college or university, the following factors need to be considered: (1) admission requirements, (2) location, (3) public or private, (4) enrollment, cost, (6) majors offered, (7) nature of the student body.

Bring a pen or pencil. Many representatives ask you to complete a contact card so they can send you additional information. Bring a notebook, laptop or tablet so you can take notes on details about each school you investigate. Develop your own list of questions to ask college representatives by using the suggested topics below as a guide.

Questions About Admission Policies

1. Is the writing required for SAT or ACT?
2. What range of scores are accepted?
3. Will activities and involvement in school be considered?
4. What weight is placed on the essay?
5. Is there an early decision or early action plan?
6. Are personal interviews or letters of recommendation required?
7. Are there special requirements for certain majors?
8. What percent of applicants are accepted for Early Decision, Early Action, and Regular Admissions?
9. Can admission denials be appealed?
10. What range of GPAs are accepted?

Questions About the College

1. What is the surrounding community like?
2. Is the college public, private, church affiliated?
3. What is the current undergraduate student enrollment?
4. What special or unique programs can you tell me about?
5. Does the college have general education or course distribution requirements?
6. Does the college have special programs for transfer students?

Questions About College Cost

1. What is the cost of tuition? Room and board? Are there other fees?
2. Are accepted students required to make deposits for orientation and/or housing? Are these deposits fully refundable until May 1?
3. Are deposits required each year for returning students?

Questions About Student Population

1. From where do the majority of students come?
2. Do most of the students commute or live on campus?
3. What are the most popular student groups on campus?
4. Are there fraternities and sororities on campus? If so, how active are they?
5. What athletic programs are the strongest on campus?
6. Is the surrounding community supportive of the college?
7. Does the college have a campus visitation overnight program?
8. Is housing available/guaranteed for freshmen? Is it available all four years?

Questions About Academics

1. What is the average class size? Largest? Smallest?
2. How many students in last year's freshman class returned for their sophomore year?
4. What is the college's procedure for student orientation, class placement, and scheduling? Are classes guaranteed?
5. How are academic advisors assigned?
6. What services does the school offer for students undecided about a major?
7. What percentage of students graduate in four years? In five years?
8. What are the most popular majors on campus?
9. Are students taught by full-time professors, graduate assistants, or a combination of the two?
10. What types of additional services are provided at no cost to the student--e.g. tutoring, career and personal counseling, developmental reading and study skills workshops, job placement?
11. Is there an honors program? What are the qualifications for entry? Does it last all four years? Is there separate housing?

Questions to Ask College Representatives

Questions About Social Life

1. What is the average age of the student body?
2. What is the male to female ratio?
3. What percent of students reside on campus?
4. Is this considered a “suitcase campus” where a lot of students leave on weekends?
5. Are the residence halls co-ed? Are there theme dorms (i.e. substance-free residence option)?
6. What are the procedures for selecting a roommate?
7. What are some of the rules and regulations that govern campus and residence hall life?

Questions About Financial Aid

1. What percent of students receive need-based financial aid?
2. What forms do I need to complete to apply for financial aid?
3. What percent of students receive scholarships based on merit?
4. What would a typical freshman financial aid package look like?
5. What percent of those who apply for financial aid receive it?
6. Will financial aid be adjusted if need increases?
7. Is a tuition payment plan available?
8. Are campus jobs available? Are nearby off-campus jobs available?

Questions You May be Asked by a College Representative

You cannot prepare for every question that might be asked in an interview, but you can anticipate a few and have an idea of how you might answer. However, be careful; an overly rehearsed answer will come across as disingenuous and insincere. Be sure to be aware of your current events in case you are asked. Some of the questions to prepare for include the following:

- What do you think is our most pressing social issue in the United States right now?
- Why do you want to go to this college? What do you know about this college? How did you come to include us among your choices?
- What have you read recently?
- Tell me about your school, your high school experience.
- What activities are you involved in at school, out of school?
- Describe your family, your background.
- What was the last cultural event you attended, or what have you done or seen lately?
- Who and/or what has influenced you the most? Any heroes?
- What are your academic goals, your career goals?
- Are there any significant events or challenges you have had to overcome? What significant accomplishments or rewards have you received? Oh what accomplishment are you most proud?
- Describe your favorite subject/teacher? What makes a good teacher?

*Be sure to have a couple of your own questions about the college prepared in case they ask you if you have any. At the end of your interview, look the interviewer in the eyes, smile, and thank them. Send them a thank you note or email after the interview. Mention something specific you discussed in the interview and reiterate your interest while thanking them for meeting with you.

Student Self-Reported Academic Record (SSAR) Instructions

SSAR is a self-reported student academic record that lists all courses and associated grades that have been attempted, or will be attempted, for high school and/or college credit. Since accuracy is critical, you must use your high school transcript that was emailed to you during the beginning of the school year as a reference when completing your SSAR. Currently, Florida Atlantic University, Florida Polytechnic University, Florida State University, University of Florida, Florida Gulf Coast University, University of North Florida and New College of Florida require the SSAR. To create your SSAR, please create an account at <https://www.selfreportedtranscript.com/ssar/login.aspx>

Helpful SSAR tips and answers to frequently asked questions

- STA does not rank.
- The GPA on your STA transcript is weighted.
- Enter your semester grades for ALL courses taken for high school credit as shown on your transcript.
- All regular and half honors courses should be categorized as College Prep for Course Level.
- You should report your Theology courses under “Social Sciences.”
- For senior year courses, enter the grades as “In Progress” or “IP.”
- If your senior schedule changes, you must immediately update and resend your SSAR.

Subject Area (<i>minimum units required</i>)	Number of Semesters Entered	Enter/Edit
English (<i>4 units/8 semesters</i>)	0	
Mathematics (<i>4 units/8 semesters, Algebra 1 level and higher</i>)	0	
Natural Science (<i>3 units/6 semesters</i>)	0	
Social Science/History (<i>3 units/6 semesters</i>)	0	
World Language (<i>2 units/4 semesters, same language</i>)	0	
All Other Courses	0	

****For colleges requiring the SSAR, your application will be considered INCOMPLETE until you have linked and/or followed their individual SSAR submission process.****

Students are responsible for sending standardized test scores to all colleges/universities.

2020-2021 ACT & SAT Test Dates



SAT 2020-2021 SAT Test Dates & Registration Deadlines

Test Date	Registration Deadline	Late Registration Deadline
August 29, 2020	July 31, 2020	August 18, 2020
September 26, 2020	August 26, 2020	September 15, 2020
October 3, 2020	September 4, 2020	September 22, 2020
November 7, 2020	October 7, 2020	October 27, 2020
December 5, 2020	November 5, 2020	November 24, 2020
March 13, 2021	February 12, 2021	March 2, 2021
May 8, 2021	April 8, 2021	April 27, 2021
June 5, 2021	May 6, 2021	May 26, 2021

No SAT Subject Tests available on March test dates

Go to www.sat.collegeboard.org to register



2020-2021 ACT Test Dates & Registration Deadlines

Test Date	Registration Deadline	Late Registration Deadline
July 18, 2020	June 19, 2020	June 26, 2020
September 12, 2020	August 14, 2020	August 28, 2020
October 24, 2020	September 18, 2020	October 2, 2020
December 12, 2020	November 6, 2020	November 20, 2020
February 6, 2021	January 8, 2021	January 15, 2021
April 17, 2021	March 12, 2021	March 26, 2021
June 12, 2021	May 7, 2021	May 21, 2021
July 17, 2021*	June 18, 2021	June 25, 2021

Go to www.actstudent.org to register