

The Anatomy of a College Application

In order to get your college application together, you need to get many different pieces together to give the admission team a glimpse into who you are. Be sure to stay organized and find out from your school counselor or principal which of these items you have to send and which items your high school will send.

APPLICATION

Application Forms

This is the most common first step required to show your interest in a college. It might require information and forms from your parents. Both online and paper application forms are available, as well as services (such as the Common Application) that let you complete one application for multiple schools.

Application Fees

Fees vary, but generally it costs from \$35 to \$75 to apply to each college. Fees are nonrefundable. Many colleges offer fee waivers to students who can't afford to pay. If you need application fee waivers, speak with your counselor or principal.

SCORES AND REPORTS

College Admission Test Scores

Most colleges require that you send your scores from a college entrance exam (such as the SAT®). Some colleges will only accept scores that are sent directly from the testing organizations. Check with each college to verify their policy on receiving test scores.

High School Transcript

This is the record of the classes you have taken and your grades in each one. This is one of the most important parts of your application. Review your transcript for accuracy prior to completing your college application. Follow the procedure outlined by your high school for the submission of your transcript to your prospective colleges.

Secondary School Report

Some colleges require a Secondary School Report form to be completed by a high school official, usually a school counselor, with information about the school, the graduating class, and specific information about you. Your high school is responsible for sending this form to the college.

Midyear School Report

Much like the Secondary School Report, this form is submitted by your high school; it typically includes the fall semester grades of your senior year and updates to your spring semester schedule (if any apply). All colleges do not require this form.

LETTERS, ESSAYS, AND INTERVIEWS

Letters of Recommendation

Many colleges require letters of recommendation from teachers or other adults who know you well. Ask your references to write recommendations well in advance of the deadlines. You may want to give them a short written summary of your achievements and goals to help them write about you.

Essays

Many colleges require an essay or a personal statement as part of your application. Your essay is a chance for you to give admission officers a better idea of your character and strengths. Your essay should be drafted well in advance of the application deadline to ensure adequate time for review and revision.

Interviews, Auditions, and Portfolios

It is a good idea to ask for an interview, even if it is optional. It shows you're serious and gives you a chance to connect with someone in the admission office. Even if a college is far away, you may be able to interview with a local alumnus. If you're applying to music, art, or theater programs, a college may want to see samples of your work as part of your application. This means you may need to audition, send portfolios, or submit videos demonstrating your artistic ability.