COLLEGE HANDBOOK



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WALNUT HILLS HIGH SCHOOL

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Introduction

You are embarking on a very exciting part of your high school career – selecting a college. Looking ahead, you may feel overwhelmed, but if you are proactive and willing to map out a step-by-step plan, the process can be manageable and even enlightening.

We have written this handbook to provide an overview of the college application process as well as specific guidance to assist you so that you and your parents feel well informed and confident during your junior and senior years. We suggest you read the handbook carefully and share it with your parents. Keep this booklet handy, so that you can refer to it – there is a Glossary in the back for acronyms and terms that may be unfamiliar to you.

Finding the right college takes teamwork – you, your parents, and the counseling staff all working together. You may feel that there is only one "perfect" college for you. However, there are probably many colleges among the nearly four thousand accredited institutions of higher learning in the United States that are equally suitable for you.

The most important factor in selecting a college is whether the college is right for <u>you</u> in terms of your goals, abilities, interests, needs, and personality. A college that is a good fit for your brother or best friend may be all wrong for you. Size, location, facilities, admission requirements, and the kinds of intellectual demands placed on students are all factors that go into your decision. Family finances also need to be taken into account when considering college choices.

If your academic interests are already developing along specific lines such as engineering or nursing, the strength of a college in those subjects should be explored. However, it is very common for students to change their intended majors once they begin their studies, so you want to be certain that the school you select is strong in other academic areas as well. Keep in mind that a college education should prepare students for living, as well as for earning a living!

Throughout your college search, and especially during the long wait for acceptance letters, remind yourself that your future success and happiness do not depend on admission to a particular college. No matter which college you eventually attend, you are likely to find challenging classes, stimulating professors, and engaging peers – providing the stimuli for an excellent education.

The Proactive Approach

One of the most important things you can do during your last two years of high school is to get organized and stay that way. Although you will not actually complete college applications until the fall of your senior year, junior year is ***incredibly critical***. You will work hard, take standardized tests, and begin to consider your post high school options. Consider the following suggestions:

1. **Learn about colleges and the application process**
    1. Visit the Counseling Office and the College Information Center and go through their pamphlets, directories, and books. Talk to your counselors. Ask questions.
    2. Attend meetings with individual college representatives who visit Walnut Hills High School between mid-September and the end of November. Approximately 100 colleges visit each year. A weekly schedule is posted in Naviance.
    3. Read extensively about colleges and college applications. See Page 20 for recommended books and websites.
2. **Keep track of your activities and awards**

    Make certain your high school resume is current and complete. There is a resume template available in Naviance. Include all extra-curricular activities, such as sports, clubs, jobs, internships, college courses you have taken, and any honors you have received. In the spring of your junior year, you may want to give a copy to each teacher who has agreed to write a recommendation for you, and you will refer to it often as you fill out your applications.
3. **Be realistic**
    1. Compare your academic record to that of various colleges' admitted classes. The common data set includes the middle 50 percent of GPA and standardized test scores. This information is available in Naviance and on individual college web sites, usually on the admissions page. It is important to note that even if your numbers meet or exceed the middle 50 percent of the previously admitted class, admission is never guaranteed.
    2. Walnut students apply to an average of 6 - 8 schools. No matter how many schools you apply to, a balanced list should include "**likely**" schools, where your academic credentials exceed the school's range for the previous year's admitted students; "**target**" schools that will be a good match from a numbers standpoint (colleges where the middle 50 percent of admitted students have test scores and grades similar to yours); and, if you want, "**reach**" colleges, where your academic credentials fall in the lower end – or below – those of the admitted students from the year before. Consider including one or more financial **"safety"** schools, generally an Ohio public university. All of the schools on your list should be schools you'd be happy to attend – ***all first choices!***
4. **Buy a calendar or other organizational tool, like a dry erase board**

    A calendar may be your most important planning tool. Mark all relevant dates including
        i. Test registration dates
        ii. Application due dates
        iii. Financial aid and scholarship deadlines
5. **Keep good records**

    Make a master list of all logins and passwords – for The College Board and ACT as well as for each college to which you apply. ***Keep the list in a secure location that's easy to access.***

Walnut Hills Resources

According to the U.S. Department of Education, there are over 4,000 two and four year degree-granting institutions of higher education in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The average number of applications each student submits keeps rising. How can students possibly find the right fit and present their application in the best possible way so they will receive a number of acceptances from the colleges of their choice?

We have the resources to help you!

Counseling Department

The senior high counselors work with students on a regular basis to develop a four-year academic plan and ensure the selected course load is appropriate for their college aspirations and interests. Students will have a conference with their counselor in February through March of junior year. Counselors will review graduation requirements and transcripts, provide guidance on college options and discuss the role of Naviance. Please review and update your mailing address and your parents' email addresses in Focus and regularly check your CPS email to ensure you receive communications from your counselor.

College Information Center (CIC)

The CIC staff work with the Counseling Department to support each student's needs and goals with regard to the college process. There is one-on-one help with test preparation and strategy, essay writing, application completion, and interview skills. In addition, there are group workshops at lunchtime and after school on a variety of topics. Students and parents may use the CIC library of college catalogs and reference books on all aspects of college selection.

Writing Center

The Writing Center is available to all students who need assistance with their college essays. Students are encouraged to schedule an appointment for brainstorming and essay editing. The Writing Center is open Wednesday through Friday 8:00-3:00.

Naviance, Your Online Tool

Cincinnati Public Schools has contracted with Naviance to provide an online extension of the counseling department, allowing families the ability to explore career and college options, manage paperwork and track the application process from home. Students and their families will be trained to record student information, process transcript requests and request teacher and counselor recommendations. Additionally, counselors convey important college and scholarship information to students and families on Naviance. See the next page for more information about Naviance.

Naviance – Your Online, Personalized Counseling Resource

Naviance Student, a comprehensive web-based service, designed for students and parents, can help with decision-making about career and college choices. *Naviance Student* provides up-to-date information specific to Walnut Hills High School and allows each family to:

- Get involved in the planning process – build a resume, complete on-line personality surveys and interest inventories, manage timelines and deadlines for making decisions about colleges and careers
- Research colleges – compare GPA, standardized test scores and other statistics to actual historical data from our school for students who have applied and been admitted in past years
- Determine which colleges have scheduled virtual visits with Walnut

Parent accounts are also called *Naviance Student* accounts. Parent accounts have limited capabilities in order to allow students to take control of the college process.

Parents who are listed in Focus may request a parent Naviance account by emailing Teresa Christie and identifying their student's name and grade. Teresa will respond to requests by sending parents a registration code, which can be used to create an account on the Naviance website.

Junior College Planning Calendar

Fall Semester

- Continue taking challenging academic courses, i.e. AA, AP, and CCP courses. Maintain or strengthen your GPA. Update your academic goals and four-year plan
- Focus on becoming a leader in a few extracurricular activities. Run for an office, lead a team or club, start your own business or service project
- Continue to compete in matches, contests, and competitions, and add any awards to your résumé
- Use Naviance to expand your list of colleges, including "reach," "target," and "likely" schools. Think about what you seek in a college: location/size/specific major/competitiveness/social environment
- Watch *College Planning Night* program for parents and students for an overview of the entire application process **(November)**
- Prepare for PSAT, ACT and SAT tests by attending review sessions, scheduling tutoring sessions in the CIC during study hall or lunch, and using sample tests available in the CIC
- Take the PSAT, the test that determines National Merit Scholarship qualifiers, at Walnut in October
- Get to know your teachers and start thinking about whom you might ask to write college and scholarship recommendations
- If you intend to seek an athletic scholarship, register at the NCAA Eligibility Center at **www.ncaaclearinghouse.net**. Send out letters of interest to coaches at the schools that most interest you
- Preview how much financial aid for which you may be eligible by completing the Net Price Calculator on individual colleges' websites and the FAFSA Estimator at studentaid.gov/aid-estimator
- Learn about individual colleges through virtual tours and in-person visits. Ask questions!
- Visit colleges. Students are permitted 3 excused absences during junior year and 3 during senior year for college visits. Submit documentation a week in advance
- Complete any available surveys and assessments not previously completed in Naviance
- Register for and take the December ACT. Make a master list of all logins and passwords – for The College Board and ACT as well as for each college to which you apply. Create contacts on your phone.

Spring Semester

- Meet with your counselor in February or March to discuss the college application process
- Register for the March SAT if scores on the PSAT suggest you take that test. Any college will accept either the ACT or SAT, and there is no preference for one test over the other.
- Preview the Common Application and review copies of the supplements from colleges that interest you
- Prepare for and take the district provided ACT **(late February-early March)**
- Attend Wednesday Topics during lunch to learn about preparing for the college application process.
- Visit colleges. Students are permitted 3 excused absences during junior year and 3 during senior year for college visits. Submit documentation a week in advance
- Check out the Common Application essay prompts and start brainstorming topics
- Ask two teachers to commit to writing recommendation letters. Prepare documentation that will help teachers write effective letters. Keep in mind teachers may limit the number of recommendations they agree to write
- Continue to prepare for and take follow-up ACT and/or SAT tests
- Take AP Exams after completing relevant coursework
- Register for a summertime *Common Application Boot Camp* and *Essay Writing Workshop*
- Add passwords and logins to your master list

Summer

- Follow your passion: find a summer job, do volunteer work, attend a summer program, or shadow a professional in the career that interests you
- Continue to research and visit colleges and note any early action or early decision deadlines at colleges of choice
- Read for pleasure and to build your vocabulary
- Draft your Common Application essay before school starts

Selecting a List of Potential Colleges

You could be happy at many of the more than 4,000 colleges and universities in the United States. Take time to learn about your choices. Decide what's important to you – what you want in a college – before you start. Make a list of your requirements and see which colleges may provide them. Browse through Naviance, college guides, and college websites. Listed below are a number of factors to consider:

Geographic Location
- Area of the country
- Campus setting (urban, suburban, rural)
- Convenience and cost of transportation between college and home
- Climate
- Social and cultural opportunities near college campus

Size of the Institution
- Number of students
- Average class size
- Faculty-student ratio

Aims and Philosophy
- Public or private
- Religious or secular
- Research orientation
- Instructional services/equipment

Physical Plant
- Campus housing/off-campus options
- Dining hall/food services
- Library facilities

Academics
- Academic focus
- Strength of department you may be interested in
- Degree requirements for various majors
- Major fields of study; interdisciplinary programs
- Distribution requirements/expected course load
- Grading policies
- Accessibility of faculty to students
- Unique enrichment opportunities such as co-op programs, study abroad, internships
- Independent study opportunities
- Graduation rate (% graduating in 4 years)
- Freshman retention rate

Finances
- Can your family afford this school?
- Grants (need-based aid you don't have to pay back)
- Scholarships (merit-based aid you don't have to pay back)
- Student loans, parent loans (minimize these as much as possible)
- Campus, part-time job availability
- Work-study options

Extracurricular Activities

- Intramural, club, varsity sports
- Clubs and organizations you are interested in pursuing
- Volunteer opportunities
- ROTC

Social Atmosphere

- Diversity of student population
- Ratio of male/female
- Ratio of commuter/resident
- Greek life

Admission Requirements

- Grades, class rank
- Tests – SAT, ACT
- Advanced Placement recognition and credit
- Decision plan (ED, EA, RD, Rolling)
- Interviews
- Recommendations
- Demonstrated interest
- Extracurricular activities

Reputation of Institution

- National rank and reputation (Take all rankings lists with a grain of salt!)
- Achievement of alumni
- Percentage of students entering graduate or professional school
- Success in job placement after graduation

Planning College Visits

College visits can be an extremely valuable part of your college research. Once you have completed some preliminary research, you ought to have a good idea of which ones you would like to explore further. Visiting campuses is crucial for two reasons:

1. You are able to gain a feel for the campus, students, academic departments, and areas that specifically interest you.
2. You can demonstrate your interest in the school and relate what you see to the research you have done.

When you are visiting a school, be tactful, but ask good questions of the right people. Finding the "right" people might mean setting up a meeting with someone in the English Department, the Athletic Department, or the editor of the college newspaper. Make the most of your visit, and let people know that you are interested.

When to Plan Your College Visits

The best way to gain a gut feeling about a school is to visit it when classes are in session. Take advantage of Walnut's vacation periods and long weekends. Do your best to visit when you can see the students, sit in on a lecture, and meet faculty members from the departments in which you are interested.

The Walnut Hills **Junior/Senior Campus Visitation Policy** allows three days of excused absence in Grade 11 and three days in Grade 12. One week prior to your planned visit, bring a note to the Counseling Office from your parent/guardian, stating the date(s) you will be gone and the name of the school(s) you are visiting. You will be given a form for your teachers to sign and when completed, this must be left with the grade level assistant principal in order for absences to be excused.

Maximizing Your College Visits

While it is possible to have a successful college visit with very little prior planning, the best way to make the most of your visit is to plan ahead:

- Spend at least half a day at the school.
- Sign up for one of the school's general information sessions and tours. Be certain to visit the library, career center, dining halls, and dorms, if possible.
- Call the admissions office to arrange an interview if they offer interviews on campus. Ask the admissions office for the name(s) and phone numbers/email addresses of the athletic coaches, and/or the music/art/drama/dance professors who represent your interests so that you may set up an appointment with someone in a specific department.
- If possible, attend a class. Note class size, professor's teaching style, and the general academic atmosphere.
- Plan to meet with students. Contact any friends/acquaintances/Walnut alumni you know at the school and try to meet them for coffee or lunch (if you can't stay with them). They are frequently the best sources for the inside scoop.

After Your Visit

Send a concise and well-written thank you note if you met with anyone individually or had an interview. This note may wind up in your admissions file. After each visit, you should consider recording your impressions in either a journal or on a checklist, such as the Campus Visit Scorecard. Write down the names of all the people you meet and anecdotes that will help you remember who they are and what they do. Start a file on each school as you begin your preliminary research and add to it as the process evolves. This information will be extremely valuable to you when you are writing "Why do you want to attend XX College?" essays.

College Entrance Examinations

PSAT/NMSQT

Reading and Writing module 1	32 min	27 questions
Reading and Writing module 2	32 min	27 questions
Math module 1	35 min	22 questions
Math module 2	35 min	22 questions
Total	2 hrs 14 min	98 questions

The PSAT/NMSQT will be scored with a maximum composite score of 1520 (with a maximum score of 760 on the Critical Reading and Writing combined and a maximum score of 760 for Math.) It will offer practice for the SAT and give students the chance to qualify for National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) scholarship programs.

SAT-register at www.collegeboard.org

Reading and Writing		
Module 1	32 min	27 questions
Module 2	32 min	27 questions
Math		
Module 1	35 min	22 questions
Module 2	35 min	22 questions
Total	2 hrs 14 min	98 questions

The SAT will be scored with a maximum composite score of 1600 (800 maximum for Critical Reading and Writing, and 800 maximum for Math). The score report also will include subscores for each of the three sections.

Important features of the SAT

Emphasis on reasoning alongside a clear, strong focus on the knowledge, skills and understanding most important for college and career readiness and success

Emphasis on the meaning of words in extended contexts and on how word choice shapes meaning, tone and impact

Rights-only scoring – a point for a correct answer but no deduction for an incorrect answer; therefore, every question should be answered.

Reading level tested goes up through 12th grade. Reading questions have become more complex and difficult.

The SAT is now digital-only. It is also an adaptive test, meaning the difficulty level of module 2 will depend on how you score on module 1 for each subject area.

The ACT-register at www.act.org

English	35 min	50 questions
Math	50 min	45 questions
Reading	40 min	36 questions
Science (optional)	40 min	40 questions
Writing (optional)	40 min	1 writing prompt
Total	2 hrs 5 min (2 hrs 45 min if taking optional Science or Writing) (3 hrs 25 min if taking both optional tests)	131 questions (171 if taking optional Science) (plus writing prompt if taking optional Writing)

Important features of the ACT

Each section of the ACT is scored on a scale of 0-36. In addition, test takers receive a composite score of 0-36.

Traditionally, the composite score has been an average of English, Math, Reading, and Science scores. **Now that Science is optional, the composite will be the average of English, Math, and Reading scores.** Science will be a separate score, if you take it.

It remains to be seen which colleges/majors will require the now-optional Science test. So far the colleges we've surveyed have said it will be optional. But each student must check the requirements for their colleges and majors, prior to deciding whether to take/submit the Science score.

There is no penalty for wrong answers; therefore, every question should be answered.

If a student takes the writing test, s/he will receive a subject-level writing test score on a scale of 2-12 and four writing domain scores (Ideas and Analysis, Development and Support, Organization, and Language Use and Conventions), each scored on a scale of 2-12. Only those students who take the ACT with

writing will receive an ELA score on a scale of 1-36.

Very few colleges require the Writing test, so in general we do not recommend taking it.

Test Strategy and Test Preparation

Test Strategy

All four-year colleges will accept results from either the SAT or ACT, and no college prefers one over the other. The ACT is given seven times a year, and the SAT is given eight times a year. We recommend that all juniors plan to take the ACT for the first time in December. After reviewing both the December ACT and October PSAT scores (where available), most students should commit to either the SAT or ACT based on their performances, unless the scores are comparable, in which case those students should choose whichever test they prefer. Students committing to the SAT should plan for the March test to be their first sitting.

For ACT testers, we recommend that students take it on one of the test dates that allow students to order a copy of their test. On these test dates, students can have the test booklets returned for an additional fee (ACT "My Answer Key" (formerly called Test Information Release) $32 before test/$40 after test). This feedback is important, because it provides an opportunity for students to study from their strengths and weaknesses before retesting.The dates this is available are October, April, and June. For planning purposes, please note that the state of Ohio provides juniors with the opportunity to take a free ACT during the school day in February or March. In addition, fee waivers are available for both the SAT and ACT for students who qualify.

Test Preparation

The CIC is now offering weekly test prep lessons during Juniors' study halls. The CIC will also offer lunchtime test prep, referred to as "Lunch Bunch," in the weeks prior to the in-school ACT. Additionally, students may schedule one-on-one tutoring during their study hall or lunch. The CIC has many copies of sample ACTs, along with annotations, for student practice. We also offer free, virtual, timed practice tests through Revolution Prep multiple times per year.

Senior College Planning Calendar

Summer

- Attend *Common App Bootcamp* and/or *Essay Writing Workshop*

Fall Semester

- Continue taking challenging academic courses and keep up your grades. Beware of "senioritis"!
- Continue involvement in volunteer and extracurricular activities; update your résumé
- Meet with your counselor to narrow list of colleges, discuss financial aid and scholarship opportunities
- Decide schools to which you will apply and prepare a list of deadlines, having noted over summer any early action or early decision deadlines at colleges of choice
- Take any additionally needed SAT or ACT tests in September or October
- Watch pre-recorded *Senior College Forum* for all seniors **(September)**
- Parents and students attend *Senior College Forum Q&A* for answers to questions regarding the college application process **(September)**
- Parents attend *Financial Aid Night* **(September)**
- Students complete Senior Packet; parents complete Brag Sheet – both on Naviance
- Submit to WHHS counseling office a Transcript Request Form so that counselors complete letters of recommendation and submit transcripts
- Follow up with teacher recommenders at least three weeks prior to the college deadline and by November 15 at the latest
- Complete official FAFSA (financial aid form) at **www.fafsa.ed.gov**, beginning **October 1**. If required by your college(s), complete the CSS/Financial Aid Profile at **www.profileonline.collegeboard.org**
- Request ACT scores at **www.myact.org** or SAT scores at **www.collegeboard.org** be sent to colleges **at least four weeks before the application deadline(s)** if scores have not been previously sent
- Brainstorm, write your essays, and enlist editors to help you revise them. Create a master list of supplemental essays
- Attend Wednesday topics during lunch to learn how to complete your college applications.
- Attend *Interviewing Skills Workshop* **(November)**
- Arrange for college interviews if required – preparation for which should include scheduling a mock interview in the College Information Center
- Visit colleges of interest. Plan an overnight in a dorm if possible
- Attend college-sponsored sessions, college fairs, and Walnut rep visits. Ask questions!
- Research scholarship opportunities and track deadlines
- Complete NCAA Clearinghouse application (**www.ncaaclearinghouse.net**) if a student athlete
- Continue adding logins and passwords to your master list

Spring Semester

- Continue to apply for scholarships
- Send supplemental information to colleges as it becomes available, i.e., awards
- Meet Acceptance Reply Date (typically May 1). Write to inform and thank colleges whose offers you did not accept
- Write thank-you notes to teachers who wrote letters of recommendation
- Create a college budget and begin applying for additional student loans, if necessary
- Complete the Future Plans / Final Transcript request form on Naviance **(May)**
- Attend Senior Exit Meeting with your counselor **(May)**
- Send official ACT and/or SAT scores (where applicable) to the college you plan to attend, if you self-reported those scores in the application process. Send official AP scores if you are hoping to

receive college credit for those courses. Remember that each college and graduate school has its own policy about AP credit.

Components of an Application

During the summer before senior year, students and their parents should begin to finalize a realistic list of colleges, collect application information, and begin drafts of required essays. Just about every school makes its application available online -- either directly or via the common application.

Over 1,000 colleges and universities accept a standardized online application known as the "Common Application" at www.commonapp.org. Once completed, copies can be sent to any number of participating colleges. The same is true of the Secondary School Report, Midyear Report, and Teacher Evaluation forms.

See the chart below for the various pieces of the application process.

	Public 4-Year Schools	Private 4-Year Schools	2-Year Schools
Application	yes	yes	yes
College-Specific Supplement	most	most	no
Essay	most	most	no
Transcript	yes	yes	yes
Test Scores	varies	varies	no
Counselor Recommendation	varies	varies	no
Teacher Recommendations	varies	varies	no
Interview	no	varies	no
Final Transcript	yes	yes	yes

Admissions Decision Plan Options

In order to manage enrollment, colleges and universities have adopted a variety of decision plans that vary in terms of when and under what conditions a student can apply. The benefit to students is that many of these plans guarantee early admission notification in return for early application submission.

Regular Decision	**Rolling Admissions**	**Early Action**	**Early Decision**	**Restrictive Early Action**
Non-binding	Non-binding	Non-binding	Binding	Non-binding
Students submit applications by a certain date and receive notification within a clearly stated period of time	Colleges review applications, make decisions, and inform students in the order applications were received	Students apply early and receive decisions well in advance of regular response date	Students apply to their first choice school early, are notified in mid-December and agree to enroll if accepted	Students apply and hear decisions early but have until May 1 to confirm. Students may not make another ED or EA application with the exception of public universities

College Application Protocol

Requesting Transcripts

A 2023 study by the National Association for College Admission Counseling confirmed that the most important criteria in admission decisions are grades in college preparatory courses and rigor of curriculum. For some schools, standardized admission test scores and demonstrated interest are important. Among the next most important factors are the essay, class rank (if provided), counselor and teacher recommendations, positive character attributes, and extracurricular activities.

The transcript is a record of your academic progress. Colleges consider the academic rigor of Walnut Hills' curriculum along with your performance in courses you have chosen to take. Walnut Hills is respected as an academically rigorous public high school that prepares students for the challenges they will face in college.

Colleges and universities generally request three transcripts. The first is sent in the fall with the School Profile and your counselor letter of recommendation and contains grades from courses taken from freshman through junior year. The second is sent in February after first semester senior grades are available. At the end of the year, you will need to send to your chosen college a final transcript.

These simple steps will ensure that your transcripts and application are completed in a timely manner:

What seniors need to do in September-November

1. Meet face-to-face with the teachers from whom you would like to request a recommendation. Provide them with your resume and remind them of your accomplishments in class. **You should contact the teachers at the end of junior year and remind them as early as possible in the fall as many have quotas!** Once the teachers confirm in the fall, invite them through Naviance to fill out a recommendation.
2. Send standardized test scores to colleges **at least 4 weeks** before the application deadline!
3. Request transcripts for each school to which you are applying. **You must complete a paper transcript request form, listing each school to which you are applying, and return it to your counselor.**
4. Indicate on the transcript request form if you need your counselor to submit a recommendation. If you do, you must also complete the Senior Packet in Naviance by the first week of October. Have your parents complete the Parent Brag Sheet in their Naviance account. At this time, your resume should already be completed in Naviance. This information helps your counselor write a more informed letter of recommendation about you.
5. File applications online and update your college list in Naviance.
6. Naviance and the Common Application will be updated when transcripts/secondary school reports are sent.

What seniors need to do in April-May

1. Update Naviance to indicate where you were admitted and denied, and where you will be attending college. This information is critical so that the Registrar can send a final transcript.
2. All schools require an official final transcript confirming successful graduation from high school. **Admission may be revoked if the college you plan to attend does not receive this document.**

Completing the Application

The Essay

The essay component can be the most challenging part of the application. Most selective schools require at least one, and sometimes several, essays. As competition to selective schools has increased, admissions committees rely on the essay to evaluate personal qualities that are not revealed by academic performance or test scores. While an applicant usually will not be admitted to a school on the basis of an essay alone, a lively, absorbing, well-written essay can set an applicant apart from others with comparable credentials.

What should you do when writing your essays?

- Brainstorm topics. Think of small "slices of life" that are unique to you.
- Use anecdotes to add life to essays.
- Avoid clichés and overused topics (e.g., "sports taught me the importance of hard work; community service taught me the importance of helping others").
- Make certain you understand the prompt and answer it. Try to include information that is not found elsewhere in your application.
- Give yourself ample time to write good essays. Commit to writing multiple drafts.
- Ask for feedback from two trusted sources -- your parents, English teachers, Writing Center, and College Information Center -- for both content and grammar.
- Be certain to show, not just tell.
- Remember that longer does not necessarily mean better. Certainly do not exceed the word/character limit.

Counselor Letter of Recommendation

Your counselor completes the Secondary School Report. Students and parents are responsible for filling out the Senior Packet and resume and Parent Brag Sheet in Naviance by the first week of October. It is important to provide this background information in a timely manner, because your counselor uses the details you and your parents provide to write a letter of recommendation.

Teacher Recommendations

Many colleges require at least one letter of recommendation from a teacher as part of the application. These letters should be written by teachers of core academic classes, ideally from the **junior year**. Colleges are looking for personal insights about your academic performance in the classroom, not a reiteration of grades or test scores. Teachers who know you well write the most effective letters. **Please remember teachers may commit to writing only a certain number of recommendations**, so it is important that you ask them at the end of junior year and then remind them at the beginning of senior year:

- At the beginning of senior year, give the teacher a resume, list of colleges to which you are applying, school deadlines, and personal highlights -- projects, papers, etc. from their course.
- If the application is not online, provide counselors and teachers with envelopes (addressed with postage).
- Remember to write your teacher a thank you note and at the end of the year and let each teacher know where you will be attending!

The Interview

Many colleges, particularly the more selective schools, encourage a college interview. The interview can be conducted by a student or admissions officer on campus or be conducted by alumni from the Cincinnati area. Although many of these interviews are optional, they show demonstrated interest and become part of your admission file. If you have the opportunity to interview, take it. The interview allows you to put a face to your application and gives both parties an opportunity to explore the "fit." The College Information Center holds an *Interviewing Skills Workshop* and provides one-on-one mock interviews to help you prepare.

- Make an appointment. For on-campus interviews, contact the school well in advance of your planned visit. For alumni interviews, you will be contacted by email to schedule the interview. It is important that you regularly check your email and respond promptly within 48 hours. Also, make sure you have a professionally appropriate email address that uses your name so the colleges can identify you.
- Be prepared to *answer* typical questions.
    - Why do you want to attend this school?
    - Tell me about yourself.
    - What do you do in your free time?
    - Where do you see yourself in the next 5 years?
- Be prepared to *ask* questions about the school. Do your homework and ask anything that you can think of that will give you a feel for the school that goes beyond the numbers you read on the web site or in guidebooks.
- Take charge of the interview. Use the interview as a chance to showcase your strengths and emphasize your potential contributions to campus life.
- Look the part. Wear appropriate clothes; do not chew gum or look at your phone. In fact, turn off your phone!
- Send a thank you note after the interview.

Expenses Associated with College Applications

All figures and fees are subject to change and do so frequently. Fee waivers are available for students who qualify.

Application Fees

4 Year Public and Private Schools	$35-$100
2 Year Schools	$0-$60

Financial Aid Applications

FAFSA	Free
CSS Profile	$25 for the application and initial report; $16 for each additional report

Standardized Tests

SAT (on-time registration)	$68
Additional Score Report (SAT)	$15 per report
ACT	$68
ACT plus Science	$72
ACT plus Writing	$93
My Answer Key (formerly TIR) (ACT)	$36 during registration; $44 after test
Additional Score Report (ACT)	$20 per report
Advanced Placement Tests	$99 each

Deposits to college (after acceptance)

Enrollment deposit	$100-$500
Housing deposit if living in a dorm	$100-$300

College Orientation

Public universities often have summer activities for parents and students as well as placement testing for students. Private colleges generally hold orientation a week before school starts. Costs vary.

Financial Aid and Scholarships

Financial assistance can come in the form of grants, scholarships, loans and/or work-study plans. Scholarships and some grants do not need to be repaid. Loans such as the federal Perkins Loan are low-interest and usually must be repaid after graduation. Students qualify for these loans and grants by an analysis based on need – the lower the total family income (as reported to the IRS) and the higher the cost of a college's tuition, the greater the financial need.

The need analysis for financial aid takes place when you file the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). This form becomes available online on October 1, 2025 for 2026-2027 academic year at www.fafsa.ed.gov and should be completely filled out and submitted as soon as possible after it is available. Many colleges have priority deadlines for the FAFSA. Make certain to include all colleges to which you have applied on your FAFSA. After a student receives a college acceptance letter, a financial award letter follows. This may include scholarships, grants, loans, work-study, or any combination of these.

All students should complete a FAFSA form. Watch All Deadlines!

In the spring of your junior year, start researching scholarship opportunities.

1. Be aware of the requirements and deadlines of the colleges and universities to which you are applying. Many colleges require additional financial information not provided on the FAFSA. Some colleges use the CSS Profile. Other colleges use their own supplemental forms.
2. Submit the completed FAFSA form once it becomes available online on October 1st of senior year. You will receive a student aid report from FAFSA indicating your expected family contribution. The report will also indicate your eligibility for federal subsidized or unsubsidized grants and loans.
3. Check our scholarship database regularly for updated scholarship information.
4. A Financial Aid Workshop will be held in September to provide more information for you and your family.
5. Families with special circumstances – financial hardship, change in family status, medical emergency – should contact their counselor and the financial aid officer at each college to which they are applying.

Walnut Hills High School Alumni Foundation Scholarships

The WHHS Alumni Foundation gives out approximately 60 scholarships each year, totaling over $100,000. These scholarships are named for members of the Walnut Hills family –alumni, faculty, parents, or grandparents – each who valued the Walnut Hills experience. The scholarships were created so that the next generation of students can further their education.

To be considered for an alumni scholarship, students must complete an application in the spring and write a brief essay describing one significant life interest or experience. A committee reviews the applications and selects the winners. Each scholarship has its own criteria such as financial need, merit, community service, or interest in a particular career path or discipline.

College Costs Worksheet

College Names						
	First Year	4-Year Total	First Year	4-Year Total	First Year	4-Year Total
Tuition						
Room						
Board						
Fees						
Books						
Supplies						
Transportation						
Clothing						
Spending Money						
Total Expenses						
Total Cash Anticipated from Self and Family						

Books and supplies usually are estimated in the catalog. Allow at least $1000 per year more if Science or Art is to be the major. Decide how often you will want to come home, and budget for those trips (remember, airfare is higher at holiday times). Figure transportation and costs of living if you plan to stay at home.

Additional Resources

Listed below are a few of the best resources to guide you through the college process.

FIND IT ONLINE

www.act.org
Includes college searches, financial aid resources, and tips for taking the ACT.

www.collegeboard.org
Includes college searches, financial aid resources and tips for taking the PSAT/SAT.

www.collegeessayguy.com
Provides free college resources for students and parents. Access to webinars, essay writing exercises, tips on college affordability, and much more.

www.collegeview.com
Provides a compilation of more than 3,800 schools including Hobson's guides to black colleges, Christian colleges and special information for Hispanic college-bound students as well as virtual campus tours, scholarship searches and a career center.

www.fastweb.com
Lists more than 600,000 scholarships, descriptions of over 4000 colleges and universities and tips on financial aid and careers. Students can also create profiles that will match scholarships and colleges with student criteria.

www.petersons.com
Identifies colleges by tuition, location, major, sports and more. Also offers financial aid search options for grants, scholarships and loans.

www.campusreel.org
Website with over 15,000 candid, student-generated campus tours/videos.

https://scholarmatcher.scholarmatch.org
Tool to assist low-income and first-generation youth with their college search.

FIND IT IN PRINT

Colleges That Change Lives*, *2013-14 ed.
Loren Pope, Penguin Press
A candid review of 40 "life-changing" colleges which are producing outstanding results with a variety of students. www.ctcl.org

Complete Book of Colleges 2021
Princeton Review (Editor)
Contains profiles for more than 1,300 schools. Includes academic programs and majors offered, tuition and other costs, extracurricular activities and much more.

Fiske Guide to Colleges 2025
Edward B. Fiske; Sourcebooks, Inc.
Rates more than 300 schools based on academics, social life and quality of life. Also includes current trends in college admissions and a "Best Buy" list of 44 public and private schools that offer an excellent education at reasonable prices.

The College Finder, 2017 edition
Antonoff, Steven
Lists based on major strengths, campus culture, athletic opportunities, hidden gems, etc. Updates available at collegexpress.com

College Admissions Essentials, 2020
Ethan Sawyer aka The College Essay Guy
How to show colleges who you are in the College Application.

Glossary

ACT. A curriculum-based college entrance examination assessing competency in English, mathematics, reading, and (optional) science reasoning. The ACT includes an optional writing section. The score range is from 1 to a high of 36.

Additional Score Report. An official ACT or SAT score report requested through the ACT or CollegeBoard website that students can send to colleges or scholarship agencies after they have taken the test. Fees associated.

Award Letter. A letter notifying admitted students of the college's financial aid package. The award letter provides information on the types and amounts of aid offered, specific program information, and conditions that govern the awards.

Bachelor of Arts or Sciences (B.A./B.S.). A degree received after satisfactory completion of required credits at a college or university. In general, a program of study resulting in a B.A. requires more liberal arts courses than one resulting in a B.S.

Brag Sheets. These forms are part of the Senior Packet available in Naviance. Seniors and their parents provide information that allows their counselor to get to know them better and write a more comprehensive college recommendation letter. Both forms can be accessed through the student's Naviance account.

Candidate Notification Date. Date by which colleges notify students of their admission decisions.

Candidate Reply Date. Date, typically May 1st, by which students must commit to attend a college or university. A non-refundable deposit is usually required.

Class Rank. List of students in a graduating class, ordered by GPA. Walnut Hills no longer provides class rank to colleges.

College Board. Company that provides Advanced Placement program and college entrance tests, such as SAT, PSAT, and TOEFL.

College Board National Recognition Programs (CBRP). Students who identify as African American, Hispanic American or Latinx, Indigenous, or attend school in a rural area, or are from a small town AND achieve at a high level on the PSAT and/or AP exams may be granted academic honors that can be included on college and scholarship applications.

College Representative Visits. College admission officials virtually visit Walnut Hills in the evenings, primarily in the fall. The schedule of visits is available in Naviance. Students should take advantage of these visits to ask questions and to express interest in a school to its representative.

College Scholarship Service (CSS Financial Aid Profile). CSS is the division of the College Board that assists college and scholarship programs with administering and analyzing a family's financial aid information to determine eligibility for their own private college, non-Federal financial aid. CSS is available online in the early fall. Many private colleges require this form in addition to the FAFSA. There is a fee associated with filing the CSS Profile.

Common Application. A not-for-profit institution that serves students by providing an online admission application that students may submit to any of its more than 900 member colleges and universities.

Common Data Set. Standardized set of information that many colleges use to report information on a wide variety of institutional parameters.

Early Action. The admissions practice that allows students to apply early to colleges and to receive early notice of admission. The deadline is typically in November and students are usually notified in mid-December. There is no commitment to attend if accepted.

Early Decision. The admissions practice that allows students to apply early to a college and to receive early notice of admission. Early Decision applications are binding; if students are accepted under this plan, they are legally obligated to attend. Deadlines are similar to those of Early Action.

FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). A form used by the federal government to determine a student's eligibility for financial aid. The FAFSA should be completed as soon as possible after October 1 of the year in which the student is matriculating (the student's senior year).

FAFSA Submission Summary. The federally calculated results used by the financial aid offices to determine eligibility for a Pell Grant and other federal student aid programs. Sent to students who complete the FAFSA.

Fee Waiver. Form available to students who qualify based on federal income guidelines. The fee waiver form is submitted instead of money when registering for testing or applying to colleges. Fee waivers can be obtained from the student's counselor. Limit of four waivers for ACT and two waivers for SAT. Reasonable limit on college applications – see your counselor for details.

FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) A U.S. Federal law that pertains to privacy protection for education records.

Financial Aid Package. Any combination of student and parent loans, scholarships, work-study opportunities, and grants to help students and their families pay for college.

GPA. (Grade Point Average). A student's unweighted average grade computed on a four point scale: A=4, B=3, C-2, D=1, F=0.

HBCU (Historical Black Colleges and Universities). There are 101 HBCUs in the U.S.

High School Code (CEEB Code). Six digit number assigned to WHHS by the Educational Testing Service that is required on almost every application. Walnut's number is 361130.

Interviews for College. Interviews, often on-campus with an admission representative, sometimes used as part of the evaluation process. College alumni may also hold interviews in the Cincinnati area.

IRS Data Retrieval Tool (DRT). A program which allows students and parents who filed a US tax return with the IRS to access the IRS information needed to complete the FAFSA and transfer the data directly into the FAFSA form. The information will not display on your FAFSA; it simply says "transferred from IRS."

Ivy League. The eight members of a college athletic association who compete with each other: Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, Princeton, University of Pennsylvania, and Yale. *Most accept fewer than 10% of all applicants.*

Liberal Arts. A broad general education program including humanities, social sciences, arts, and physical and natural sciences. Liberal arts do not include pre-professional studies such as business, engineering, or physical therapy.

Major. The concentration of study in college.

Masters Degree (MA). A college degree usually requiring one or two years' work beyond the B.A./B.S. degree.

My Answer Key (formerly called Test Information Release). Test Information Release is available from ACT. For an extra fee, students can order a digital copy of the test booklet with the students' answers. This service, available for some, but not all, administrations each year, enables students to target specific areas for improvement.

National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (NMSQT). Students who achieve at a high level on the PSAT taken during junior year may be recognized as National Merit Semifinalists and may be eligible for scholarship funds.

Naviance. Computer program used by Walnut students, parents, and counselors to obtain information about various careers and colleges.

NCAA Initial Eligibility Clearinghouse. Organization that determines whether prospective college athletes are eligible to play sports at NCAA Division I or Division II institutions. Eligibility is determined by reviewing the student athlete's academic record, SAT or ACT scores, and amateur status to ensure conformity with NCAA rules.

Net Price Calculator. The Department of Education requires that every college and university post a net price calculator on its website to allow students to calculate an estimated net price (defined as cost of attendance minus grant and scholarship aid).

Open Admissions. College admissions policy of admitting high school graduates without regard to conventional academic qualifications. Under this policy, virtually all applicants with high school diplomas or the equivalent are accepted.

Parent Brag Sheet. Required form that parents complete through Naviance to assist counselors with letters of recommendation. It may be accessed through the student's account.

Pell Grants. Grant awarded by the federal government using information furnished on the FAFSA form.

Pride Grant. Grant awarded by University of Cincinnati to CPS students who are eligible for the Pell Grant and have a minimum 2.20 high school GPA equal to the full cost of tuition. Renewable up to four years.

Private College/University. An institution of higher learning that is not supported by state taxes.

Public College/University. An institution of higher learning that is supported by taxes or other public funds.

Restrictive Early Action (aka Single Choice Early Action). Non-binding early action program whereby applicants agree not to apply to any other private college/university under an Early Action, Restrictive Early Action, Early Decision or Early Notification program.

Rolling Admissions. The practice used by some colleges of reviewing candidates' application materials and making admissions decisions on a first-come, first-served basis. When a school has a rolling deadline, the sooner students submit applications, the sooner students will be accepted.

SAT. A college entrance examination containing sections evaluating critical reading, math, and writing skills. Each section is scored on a scale of 800 with the highest score being 1600.

Scholarship or Grant. A type of financial aid that does not have to be repaid.

Secondary School Report. The counselor completes this part of the application including a transcript, recommendation letter, and other pertinent information requested by colleges.

Senior Packet. Required form that seniors complete through Naviance to assist counselors with letters of recommendation.

Student Aid Index. A measure of a family's financial strength generated by the information provided on the FAFSA. It is used to determine eligibility for financial aid and estimates the college costs for one academic year.

Teacher Recommendation. The part of the application completed by a teacher.

TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). A test assessing English-language skills for foreign students.

Transcript. A copy of a student's official academic record listing all courses taken and grades received.

Wait List. A list of students that meet the admissions requirements but will be offered a place in the class only if space becomes available.

Work/Study. A federally funded program that makes part-time jobs available to students with financial need.