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## How to Apply to College

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It's your senior year, and you know you want to apply to college; what are your next steps? This college application tool kit will help break down the college application and admission process so you can ensure your path to success.

Your senior year will be filled with many important events and deadlines. Use [this checklist](#) to stay on track during your college application process.

### Where are you on your college journey?

**Step 1: I am just Beginning!** Are you at the beginning of your college exploration process? Don't stress there is still time to research colleges, start [here](#) to learn about college.

**Step 2: I need to narrow down my college list!** Do you need to narrow down your college list? [Click here](#) to learn how to select colleges that are the best fit for your personal, financial, and academic needs.

**Step 3: I am Ready to Apply!**

**Step 4: Apply for Financial Aid!** It's never too early to begin applying for financial aid, learn more [here](#).

**Step 5: Decisions, what happens after I apply?** After you've applied, the next steps can be exciting and nerve-wracking as you await your admission decisions. Click [here](#) to learn what happens next.

## I AM READY TO APPLY!

**When Should I Apply?** Deciding when to apply for college is crucial because the application deadline you choose determines when you'll hear back about your admission status. Here's a breakdown of the four general application deadlines:

### 1. Early Decision (ED): For students certain about their first-choice college.

This is the least commonly used application deadline but most common for highly selective colleges and, typically, students who apply **ED** will hear first if they are accepted or not.

*What is the catch?* While this option allows students to apply to their first-choice college, it is a **binding commitment to attend** if accepted (students can apply to other colleges using regular decisions). If accepted, you **must** withdraw all other college applications and commit to enrolling in that college next fall. Before applying, it is important to discuss an early decision application with your caregiver and school counselor because each of you will have to sign the binding commitment.

**Early Decision (ED I)** applications are typically due in November with students receiving an admission decision around mid-December. Some colleges offer a second round of **Early Decision (ED II)** with the application deadline aligning with the regular decision deadline for the college. Regardless if you apply through **ED I** or **ED II**, you will receive your admission decision before regular decision applicants.

Factors to consider before applying **Early Decision**

1. You have researched the colleges thoroughly and are absolutely sure that it is your first-choice college.

2. The college is a “Best Fit,” and you match or exceed the college’s typical admission profile (GPA, test scores, and/or class rank), if you are not sure you can [learn more here](#).
  3. Most likely, you **will not be able to** compare other colleges’ financial aid award packages before committing.
2. **Early Action (EA): For students who want an early response but aren't ready to commit.**  
**Early Action I** deadlines fall between Early Decision and Regular Decision, typically between October 15th and December 1st. Students can expect to receive an admission decision between December and mid-February. **EA II** is later in the winter but before the Regular Decision deadline. **EA** is **not binding**, and students are not required to attend the college if admitted nor are they required to withdraw other college applications. You should consider **EA** if you are a legacy, one of your parents attended the college, or your parent works for the college you are applying to

Advantages of applying **Early Action**:

1. Recommended for competitive majors and/or if the school is a reach school.
  2. **EA** admission decisions come earlier and allow students more time to compare financial aid packages.
  3. If students are not accepted through **EA**, their application will be “deferred” or automatically put in with a regular decision for a second review. You can learn more about decision types [here](#).
3. **Regular Decision (RD): For students who want to keep their options open and have more time to prepare.**  
Regular Decision is the general application deadline, between January 1 and February 15th, for students interested in enrolling in the fall of next year. Students will typically be notified if they are accepted by April 1st.
4. **Rolling Admissions (RA): For students who prefer a flexible timeline and want to apply as soon as possible.**  
The most common admission deadline. Though it is not an actual “deadline” but a window of time, January 1 - February 15, when students may submit their applications, colleges will continually review and accept students instead of waiting until after the deadline, as they do with Regular Decisions. Colleges will continue to accept students until the program is filled or their targeted enrollment number is met. Students are encouraged to apply early to ensure their selected major does not fill up. Most colleges notify students by mid-march, but students may not hear until April 1st

**How to Decide?**

- If you have a clear first-choice college and are ready to commit: **Consider Early Decision.**
- If you want an early answer without the commitment: **Go for Early Action.**
- If you need more time to prepare your application or decide: **Regular Decision might be best.**
- If you want flexibility and the option to apply as soon as you're ready: **Look into Rolling Admissions.**

## **How to Apply to College**

1. **Get Prepared:** In the summer prior to senior year, you should create a plan for the colleges they want to apply. Our [College Application Planner](#) will help you keep track of important deadlines and gather necessary information and documents.

2. **Collect General Information:** The following is information that you will have to provide on your college applications

- a. **Profile-** this is your personal background information including things like name, contact details, demographics, etc.

*Hint-* Create a new personal email address (i.e.- [First.lastname@gmail.com](mailto:First.lastname@gmail.com)) that you only use for college.

- b. **Family-** this is where you will include information about your parents/guardians including all colleges they have attended, if applicable.

*Hint-* include all of the colleges they attended because some colleges give admission preference to legacies (children of alumni) and tuition benefits.

- c. **Education-** is the section where you will provide information about your current high school, any other high schools you have attended, any colleges you have taken dual enrollment courses with, the courses, including Advanced Placement and IB, you have taken in high school and their grades earned, any academic honors and awards, etc.

*Hint:* many colleges give students credit for early college courses (dual enrollment, AP, IB) that they took in high school. This can help reduce the number of courses you have to take, shorten the time to complete your degree, and reduce costs. [Learn more here](#)

- d. **Major-** For each college you will select your 1st and 2nd choice of majors. It is important to select a 2nd-choice major so that if you are not accepted into your 1st-choice major, your application may be considered for admission into your 2nd-choice major. If you're unsure about a specific field, you can select "Undecided" as your 2nd-choice major. This option still allows you to explore different academic areas while starting college.

- e. **Activities-** this is where students should list their extracurricular activities. Typically, applications allow students to include up to 10 activities. Here is some advice on how to prioritize the types of activities to include:

- Long-Term Commitments:** Include any long-year commitments (over two years) such as a sport, club, job, community program, etc.
- Leadership-** highlight any activities where you held an official leadership position or can clearly show leadership activities.
- Meaningful Activities-** Include any activities that *impacted you* and/or were particularly meaningful to you, even if they were short-term
- Work experiences-** Include any part-time jobs, internships, or volunteering opportunities.
- Family Responsibilities-** Include any activities you did to support your family, such as caring for siblings or other family members, working to provide income for your family, working in a family-owned business, etc.. This is especially important for students whose family commitments prevent them from joining other extracurricular activities.

*Hint:* Do not assume that admissions counselors know every type of organization, avoid using acromuyn, spell-out the entire name and provide brief context, if needed.

- f. **Standardized Test Scores-** in this section you will record your SAT/ACT scores. Once you add colleges to your application, you can select if you want to send them the scores you listed in this section.

*Hint:* To submit or not submit? Learn more about if you [should submit your SAT/ACT scores here](#)

### 3. Gather Necessary Documents:

- a. **Transcript-** Ask your school counselor for a copy of your unofficial transcript. This document will provide crucial details such as:
- **Courses Taken:** A complete list of the classes you've completed during high school.
  - **Grades Earned:** Your performance in each course, will be reflected in your final grades.
  - **GPA (Grade Point Average):** Your cumulative GPA, which is a key factor in college admissions.
  - **Class Rank (if applicable):** Your standing relative to other students in your graduating class.

Having this information on hand will help you accurately complete the education section of your application and ensure that you're fully aware of your academic standing

- b. **Recommendation Letters-** are an important part of many college applications. These letters, typically written by school counselors, teachers, or academic advisors, provide insight into your academic abilities, personal qualities, and community engagement. Here's how to go about obtaining them:

- ☐ **How many do you need:** Select 2-3 school staff members.
- ☐ **Pick the Right Recommenders:** Choose someone who knows you well and can speak to your strengths. Ideally, these should be people who can comment on your academic performance, personal qualities, and involvement in the community.
- ☐ **Complete a Brag Sheet/Resume:** Many high schools provide a Brag Sheet—a document where you can list your academic achievements, extracurricular activities, and personal accomplishments. This helps recommenders write more detailed and personalized letters.
- ☐ **Request Letters Early:** Ask your chosen recommender(s) at least one month before your application deadline. Provide them with your completed Brag Sheet to make the process easier.
- ☐ **Add Recommenders to Your Online Application:** After they have agreed to write you a letter, add their contact information to your application portal. Ensure you have their correct email addresses and confirm they received the invitation.
- ☐ **Send Gentle Reminders:** A week before your application deadline, send a polite reminder to your recommenders to ensure they submit the letters on time.
- ☐ **Express Your Gratitude:** After they submit their letters, write a thank you note to show your appreciation for their support.

### 4. Essays and Personal Statements: In this section of the college application, you will be given the opportunity to tell your story and highlight what makes you unique

**Personal Essay:** Most applications require students to write a personal essay. Use this to tell a meaningful story about your life, interests, identity, values, past experiences, and future hopes and dreams. Use this to showcase a meaningful aspect of your life, including personal stories and experiences that highlight your identity, values, and aspirations.

**Optional Essay:** Take advantage of this opportunity to explain any circumstances that might have affected your academic performance or personal life, such as illness, family issues, or other significant events.

**Personal Statement:** This short essay allows you to express your interest in a college and explain why it's a good fit for you. It's not always required but can be a valuable addition.

**Supplemental Essays:** Common for highly-selective colleges, these essays vary by college and often address specific prompts related to the university or program. They offer a chance to provide additional insights into your character and fit for the college.

#### Essay Writing Resources:

- [How to Approach the Essay](#): Common App's guidance on writing effective essays.
- [How to Write a College Application Essay](#): Big Future's tips and strategies for crafting your essay.
- [College Essay Guy](#)- extensive resources for writing the personal essay, supplemental essays, and personal statement
  - [Free Guide to Writing Your College Essay](#): a helpful workbook to get you started
  - [College Essay Guy's Favorite Resources for Helping Students Write Better College Essays](#): free webinar from NACAC
- [Crafting an Unforgettable College Essay](#): Princeton Review's tips for making your essay stand out.
- [Top Ten Tips for Writing a College Essay](#): The National Association of College Admissions Counselors (NACAC) top tips for a strong college essay.

## 5. Where to Apply?

Most colleges use a universal online application that allows students to include their personal and academic information as well as their recommendations and essays. The three most common online applications are:

{insert an image of the pdf and a way to download it} **Online Application Portals**

If you are planning to apply to Delaware State University, we recommend that you apply using the application on their website, available [here](#).

#### Resources:

- [AXS Companion](#) is a free, open, online resource to help students navigate Common App.
- [First-year Application Guide](#) from Common App: Get tips and best practices to give yourself the best chance at success.
- [How to Make Your Common App A Lot Less Common](#) from CollegeWise: Free detailed guide to help you complete the Common Application

## 6. Submit applications

When you are ready to submit your application, keep these things in mind:

1. **Review Your Application:** Carefully check your application for any errors or inconsistencies. Make sure your grammar and spelling are correct, and if possible, have 1-2 people review it as well. Fresh eyes can catch mistakes you might have missed.
2. **Payment:** Each college application usually requires a fee, averaging around \$30 but up to \$100 in some cases. If you're applying to multiple schools, these fees can add up. Here are some ways to manage or reduce these costs:
  - a. **Fee Waivers for Delawareans:** Delaware students can apply for free to over 18 local colleges from October to December through Launch into Your Future Month.
  - b. **Online Application Fee Waivers:** Online application portals often offer fee waivers for students who demonstrate financial need. Your counselor will need to verify your eligibility for these waivers.

- c. **NACAC's Fee Waiver:** The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) provides fee waivers for students with limited financial resources.
- d. **College-Specific Fee Waivers:** Many colleges offer their own fee waivers. Check each college's website or contact their admissions office to find out if they offer application fee waivers and what the eligibility criteria are.

**7. Register for the College's Online Applicant Portal:** 2-10 business days after you have submitted your application, most colleges will send you an official "Thanks for applying to [XYZ college]" email with instructions on how to access and register for their online applicant portal, such as the University of Delaware's "My Blue Hen Portal". This is where the college will confirm your application submission, request any supplemental documents, communicate your admissions decision, and provide your financial aid award package.

*Hint: Check your application portals weekly to make sure you do not miss any key deadlines or communications.*

## **Congratulations, you submitted your application! Now What?**

Even after you have submitted your application to various colleges, there may be additional tasks you need to complete before your application is considered ready for review. Typically colleges will list these in your Online Applicant Portal. While these may vary by college, here are common examples of what you might need to do:

1. **Complete the Self-Reported Academic Record (SRAR/SSAR)-** Some colleges require students to submit their high school courses, grades, and test scores as part of their application. Make sure you have a copy of your unofficial transcript when filling out the form. [Click here](#) to learn more about the SRAR and see to see if your college requires it..

*Hint: If your college requires the SRAR, you **must** complete it before the decision deadline.*

2. **Standardized Test Scores(SAT/AP/ACT)-** If you have elected to submit test scores, it is your responsibility to determine how each college wants to receive them:
  - **Official Test Scores:** Some colleges require official scores sent via your College Board or ACT account, which may involve a fee unless you have a fee waiver.
  - **Self-Reported Scores:** Other colleges accept self-reported test scores, which can be included on your application or uploaded into your application portal at no additional cost.
  - **Check Requirements:** Verify the requirements on each college's admissions website.
3. **Supplemental Essays:** Some colleges require additional essays beyond the ones on the main application. These are common for students applying to honors colleges or if you are applying test-optional.
4. **Mid-Year Report:** Some colleges will request that your school counselor submit your academic progress for the first half of your senior year. This request typically occurs in January and February.
5. **Video Introduction-** some highly-selective colleges require students to upload an introduction video.
6. **Athletic Requirements:** If you plan to play a sport in college, ensure you meet all athletic requirements, learn more [here](#).
7. **Interviews-** some colleges require, recommend, or give the option for students to complete an evaluative interview. These can help the admissions office get to know you, your personality, your interests, and your values.
8. **Creative Portfolios, Prescreens, and Auditions-** For music and visual and performing arts programs it is common that you will have to submit a creative portfolio or participate in a

prescreen and/or audition process. It is important to identify portfolio and/or audition requirements early in your research process since these requirements are often time-consuming and demanding as a part of your review.

*Hint: If a college explicitly states that they do not accept these types of submissions, do not send them.*

## Additional Tips and Resources

- **Email Alerts:** Check your email regularly for communication from the colleges.
- **Application Portals:** Frequently log in to each college's application portal to monitor the status of your application.
- **Contact Admissions:** If you're unsure about any requirements, contact the admissions office for clarification.
- **[Guide to the College Admissions Process](#):** NACAC's free guide offers sound advice on every step of the process, from getting in the right mindset to researching universities, to completing application materials

### What are your next steps?

**Step 4: Apply for Financial Aid!** Its never too early to begin applying for financial aid, learn more [here](#).

**Step 5: Decisions, what happens after I apply?** After you've applied, the next steps can be exciting and nerve-wracking as you await your admission decisions. Click [here](#) to learn what happens next.

# Senior Toolkit

This toolkit aims to guide you through the college application and selection process. The checklists and worksheet links below will give you things to consider when choosing your major and potential colleges, items you need to complete the application, and charts and timelines. Fill out the pages as you work through the school year.



## Resources to Help You Apply

<a href="#">Learn</a>	1st Generation Scholars	Under/Undocumented Scholars			
<a href="#">Identify</a>	College List	Overview of Delaware Colleges & Universities	<a href="#">College Fairs and Campus Visits</a>	<a href="#">Minority Serving Institutions</a>	<a href="#">Disability Support Services</a>
Apply	Application Planner	Student Information Worksheet for Applications	<a href="#">Completing the Self-Reported Academic Record</a>	Fee Waviers	
Confirm					
Pay	Scholarship Compendium	State Scholarships	FAFSA	Compare Financial Aid	

				Award Offers	
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Where to put:

1st Generation Scholars

Under/Undocumented Scholars

Overview of Delaware Colleges & Universities