

Finding the Perfect College

Most students want to find the “perfect” college. The truth is, there’s no such thing. You can find many colleges where you can be happy and get a great education. The college search is about exploring who you are and what you want and then finding colleges that will meet your goals.

BEFORE SEARCHING CONSIDER THESE 8 FACTORS

Size	Location
Available majors and classes	Available extracurricular activities
Distance from home	Makeup of the student body
Housing options	Campus atmosphere

Questions to consider:

- Which of these aspects are things you feel you must have to be comfortable at a college?
- On which factors are you flexible?
- What do you want to accomplish in college?
- Do you want to train for a specific job or get a wide-ranging education?
- If you have a major in mind, do the colleges you are considering specialize in that major?

Bigfuture.collegeboard.org is a great option to sort through the many options out there, based on your preferences.

Here are steps you can take to find colleges where you will thrive.

KEEP AN OPEN MIND

Although it’s good to have some ideas in mind about what sorts of colleges will be right for you, stay open to all the possibilities at the beginning of your search.

TALK TO PEOPLE WHO KNOW YOU

Tell parents, teachers, relatives, friends, and your school counselor about your goals, and ask if they can suggest colleges that may be a good fit for you.

DON'T LIMIT YOUR SEARCH

At the start of this process, you may rule out colleges because you think that they are too expensive or too hard to get into, but this may not be the reality. Remember that financial aid can make college more affordable, and colleges look at more than just grades and test scores.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Once you have a list of schools, it’s time to do some research. To learn more about the colleges you’re considering, check out college guidebooks and websites. Jot down your questions and get answers by:

- Talking to your school counselor or teachers
- Checking out colleges’ student blogs, if available
- Contacting college admission officials
- Asking admission officials to recommend current students or recent graduates with whom you can have conversations
- Visiting college campuses, if possible

FAQ: College Entrance Exams

GENERAL

What are college entrance exams? These tests are designed to measure students' skills and help colleges evaluate how ready you are for college-level work. The SAT[®] and ACT are both accepted by nearly all colleges and universities.

Do all colleges require a college entrance exam as part of the application process? Most four-year institutions require a college entrance exam score. The ones that do not require these scores will indicate that in their admission policies.

What other tests may be recommended or required? Some colleges may require SAT Subject Tests™ as part of the admission application, for application to certain majors, or for course placement.

How many times should a college entrance exam be taken? Most students take a college entrance exam twice—once in the spring of the junior year and once at the beginning of the senior year.

SCORES

How do colleges use test scores? They are used to apply a common standard for all students no matter where they went to high school. Colleges look at your test scores, along with your high school grades and courses, to see how well prepared you are for college-level work.

Does a college receive all scores from every college entrance exam you've taken? Some colleges will allow you to select which scores you would like considered for admission and others might have specific instructions about which scores get reported. This information, along with how they require them to be sent, will be included in their application guidelines.

PREPARING

What is the best way to prepare for a college entrance exam? The best way to prepare is to work hard both inside and outside the classroom. Take challenging courses, study hard, and read and write as much as you can.

What are other ways to prepare for the tests?

- Know what to expect. Being familiar with the test's format is the single best way to prepare for that test. Go to the testing organization's website to get familiar with the various test sections and the instructions for each part.

- Take preliminary tests. These tests (such as the PSAT/NMSQT[®]) are meant to be taken in the sophomore or junior year and have the same format and question types as the admission tests. You can use your score reports to help identify specific areas you need to focus on.
- Practice, practice, practice. Students can use Khan Academy to practice for the SAT for free with a world-class platform offering personalized and instructional content. Using free resources like Khan Academy and practice tests from the testing organizations' websites, you can discover your strengths and weaknesses and learn how to manage your time wisely during the test.