

I. Conducting a Search

Finding a school is never as easy as meeting the minimum requirements for ACT and GPA. Schools often report the middle 50%, the average academic profile of admitted students, but just because you fall in that range doesn't mean it's a good FIT. Schools come in different sizes, locations, demographics, and with programs of varying quality. These are all important to consider when choosing a college.

Our advice is that you consider the following things when picking a college:

1. Selectivity***
2. Location/Distance from Home
3. Major/Program of Study
4. Size of School
5. Demographics of Student Population
6. % of Financial Need met

The following websites can be used to conduct college searches. They work like search engines that YOU set the parameters for. It's important to play around with them a bit. If your criteria for schools are too specific, you might miss out on a lot of schools that are a great fit. If your criteria for schools are too broad, your list might be too long to look through.

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

Information provided includes:

Selectivity, Location, Majors, Size, Demographic, % of Financial Need met



<http://www.naviance.com/>

Information provided includes:

Selectivity, Location, Majors, Size, Demographic, % of Financial Need met



<http://www.collegeresults.org/>

Information provided includes:

Location, Size, Demographic, 4-year and 6-year graduation rates

Again, there is no substitute for one-on-one meetings. Even if you think you've found a list of perfect colleges from one search alone, show them to an adult. There might be a school that is a great match for you that you haven't considered yet.



***Selectivity refers to the relative difficulty of being admitted into a college. The most selective institutions in the country typically accept a very low percentage of applicants. Some examples include the University of Chicago (accepts 9% of applicants) and Harvard College (accepts 6% of applicants). The middle 50%, or the average academic profile of admitted students, is usually quite high at selective institutions. Locate yourself in relation to the middle 50% of any college by comparing your GPA and ACT with the GPA and ACT of students typically admitted. Using this information alone will let you know if the school is an academic match, reach, or safety.

II. The College Essay

More often than not, the college essay and personal statement are a necessary part of the college application. The two terms are used interchangeably, but they are NOT the same thing. Most students only write a college essay, never encountering the personal statement. A college essay is a response to any *specific* prompt. The prompts you find on the common application are examples of the kind of responses you will write in a college essay.

A personal statement is more like an intellectual autobiography. It's all about you, your accomplishments, and your long-term goals. Notice that for the common app prompts you won't need to include all of these. However, a successful personal statement will definitely incorporate all aspects in some fashion.

General Tips for the College Essay & Personal Statement

1. Show, Don't Tell
2. Be Organized
3. Proofread
4. Don't: write to impress, write in clichés, re-write your resume, manufacture drama
5. MAKE SURE YOU ANSWER THE QUESTION

The Personal Statement

Good Personal Statements Focus on the Following

1. Academic Performance: Your high school academic performance is an important consideration in all admissions decisions. Describe your academic strengths and weaknesses; explain challenges that impacted your performance, how you dealt with them and what you will do to succeed at the college you will be attending.
2. Life Experiences: Describe any significant life experience or challenge you have faced, the steps you have taken to address this experience or challenge, and what you have learned about yourself. Be sure to value who you are and where you come from in the essay. Colleges want diversity and you bring a unique experience to the college you will be attending.
3. Goals: What are your goals and how do you plan to accomplish these goals? Provide specific examples. How can the college you will be attending help you meet your goals?
4. Involvement: Colleges want students who will make a contribution to their school. They especially value leadership and service. Describe significant experiences you have had outside the classroom. Any leadership experience or contribution to your community that you can highlight will be helpful to the admissions committee. (Examples include clubs, sports, jobs, and significant family responsibilities).

If the school you're interested in has an open prompt, or isn't available in the common app, consider using the following EXTREMELY general structure to get started:

1st Paragraph- Tell a unique story about yourself

- Choose one event that had a significant impact on your life that encouraged you to go to college.
 - Try to describe something that relates to your goals for college and beyond.

2nd Paragraph- Explain your grades/Talk about the Classes you've enjoyed/Describe your academic experiences

- If your grades are good, explain what your motivation was
- If your grades at any point are bad, what caused you to slip in your classes
- Talk about courses you've taken that have influenced your future goals

3rd School/community involvement

- What organizations are you apart of and how are they positively contributing to your growth?

4th Paragraph- Your College plans

- What major will you study?
- What influenced you to choose that major?
- What do you want to be when you grow up?
- Why do you want to attend this particular college?

Make sure that all of the paragraphs are connected! You don't need to cover every single question, but you do have to ensure there is unity. Ideally, the story you chose to share, the courses you've taken, your community service, and your goals for college and beyond will all fit together.

Helpful Links

How to Write an Essay about Why You Want to Attend a College

<http://blog.collegegreenlight.com/blog/how-to-write-an-essay-about-why-you-want-to-attend-a-college/#sthash.M1wPktlk.mR5jbuCj.dpbs>

Essays that Worked (Johns Hopkins)

<https://apply.jhu.edu/apply/essays-that-worked/#essay1>

Personal Statement Writing Tips (Meant for undergraduates applying to graduate school, but most of these tips will apply to you as well! Focus on the "Checklist for Evaluating your Personal Statement Draft" at the bottom of the page)

<http://undergraduate.research.gwu.edu/personal-statement-writing-tips>

Story Works Alaska

<http://storyworksak.org/college-essay-workshop/>

III. Conducting a Career Search/Picking a College Major

Many students have at least some idea of what they want to study. Other students are completely lost, and the thought of having to make a choice induces terror in them. If you fall into the latter category, don't fret! Many students who are absolutely sure of what they want to do in college change their minds, and almost no person's career path is linear anymore. The truth is that life is full of unexpected twists and turns.

With that being said, it is useful to begin at least thinking about what careers you are interested in. Having a few careers in mind can make college major selection easier. There are a number of websites which can help you identify potential careers and better understand the link between majors and the job field.

BLS and O*Net

<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/>

<https://www.onetonline.org/>



Both of these websites provide comprehensive information about various careers. You can find information about salary, typical job tasks, education requirements, and projected field growth. These websites also allow you to view related careers once you've exhausted information about any particular occupation. Whether you're looking to learn more about a career you don't know much about, or your curious about the average salary for a career you've aspired to your whole life, both websites have a wealth of information that will be useful to you.

Cal State Career Development Center

<http://www.calstatela.edu/univ/cdc/majors/index.html>

The website above gives more direct information about careers that are relevant to particular majors. If you're curious about what you might be able to do with a psychology degree (or many other degrees for that matter) make sure to pay the site a visit.

City Colleges CareerFinder

<http://www.ccc.edu/careers/Pages/default.aspx>

The website above allows you to identify which city colleges offer academic programs in the occupational fields you're interested in.

IV. Summer Enrichment & College Fly-in Programs

Summer Enrichment Directories

Taking time to explore interests and engage in challenging coursework during the summer is an excellent way to distinguish yourself. Check out the links below to take full advantage of the summer breaks in high school.

https://www.iacac.org/summer-programs/#summerprograms2016/?view_21_view=month&view_21_date=%222015-09-10T19%3A10%3A34.470Z%22

<http://www.questbridge.org/for-students/summer-programs>

<http://www.ams.org/programs/students/emp-mathcamps>

<https://engage.illinois.edu/filter/SummerCamps>

College Fly-in Programs

Visiting an actual college campus is an excellent way to get a feel for what it might be like to be a student at that college. While visiting schools out of state can be cost-prohibitive, many selective and very-selective institutions are willing to pay for minority, low-income, and underrepresented students to visit campus. See the links below for opportunities to visit excellent schools at no cost to you.

<http://blog.collegegreenlight.com/blog/2015-college-fly-in-programs/>

<http://getmetocollege.org/hs/tag/diversity-fly-in-programs>