



## College Preparation Handbook: Your Roadmap to Success

Welcome to your Premium Prep College Preparation Handbook! This guide is designed to assist you in planning, organizing, and navigating the college application process. By following these steps, using valuable resources, checklists, and exercises, you'll stay on track and make informed decisions on your path to college success.

### College Planning Timeline

#### 9th Grade

- Adjust to course schedule and academic expectations.
- Create disciplined student habits.
- Introduce yourself to teachers.
- Learn how to advocate for yourself.
- Familiarize yourself with support services.
- Explore new extracurricular activities.

#### 10th Grade

- Get more involved in extracurricular activities. Continue to meet with teachers regularly.
- Visit a sampling of different types of colleges.
- Be mindful of your social media posts.
- Take PSAT and/or PreACT.
- Set up an email account to use for your application process.
- Explore summer jobs, internships or other activities.

#### 11th Grade

- Earn your best grades in an academically rigorous program that is appropriate for you.
- Assume impactful leadership roles and deepen your commitment to meaningful extracurricular activities.
- Reflect on your passions, skills, and strengths. Think about who you are, what you enjoy doing, and explore colleges that match those factors.
- Be mindful of your social media posts.

##### FALL

- Take PSAT in the fall and organize a testing plan.
- Complete online college inquiry forms to provide your contact information. Once you do so, electronic notices about tours, information sessions and college events will be emailed automatically to you.

##### WINTER

- Register either for the SAT or ACT.
- Correspond regularly with your school counselor.
- Discuss family finances as they relate to college choices.

##### SPRING



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- Select an academically rigorous senior course schedule in which you can be successful.
- Take SAT and/or ACT.
- Visit college campuses in person, especially over spring break.
- Consider teachers whom you may ask to write recommendation letters. Make requests before summer break.
- Practice interviewing skills by doing a mock interview.

## Summer Between 11th Grade & 12th Grade

- Pursue summer activities related to your interest and passion.
- Create a Common Application account.
- Complete a draft of Common Application, Coalition, and/or other applications.
- Work intensively on your personal statement and supplemental essay questions.
- Refine your college list to achieve balance between Reaches, Targets, and Likelies.
- Reach out and email relevant questions to regional admissions counselors.

## 12th Grade

- Maintain a high level of achievement in an academically rigorous program that is appropriate for you.
- Exercise effective leadership and make impactful contributions in those activities that are important to you. Communicate consistently and often with your school and college counselor.
- Be mindful of your social media posts.

### FALL

- Check daily the email account you have used to apply to colleges.
- Complete SAT and/or ACT, and send scores to colleges if needed.
- Finalize a balanced college list: 3-4 Reaches, 3-4 Targets, 3-4 Likelies.
- Inform your teacher-recommenders of your college deadlines.
- Be aware of all application requirements and deadlines.
- Determine if you are applying Early Decision, Early Action, Regular Decision or Rolling.
- Finalize your application, personal statement, and any supplemental essays.
- Fill out financial aid application forms, if applicable.
- Identify and apply to merit scholarships, if appropriate.
- Communicate with admissions counselors if you have questions.

### WINTER

- Submit applications for any January/February Early Decision II or Regular deadlines.
- Continue to keep up your grades!
- If you have been admitted Early Decision, withdraw applications to other schools.
- Send updates to admissions counselors, if appropriate.

### SPRING



- Discuss strategies for responding to waitlist opportunities, if applicable.
- Thoughtfully consider your college options. Attend admission events for accepted students.
- Notify colleges that you will not be attending.
- Thank your school counselor and teachers who wrote recommendation letters.
- Submit an enrollment deposit to your school of choice by May 1.

## Introduction

### Understanding the College Application Journey

Before you start, it's essential to understand the college application process. Research and planning are key, but so is staying true to yourself.

#### Exercise 1.1: Set Your Goals

Take a moment to write down your short-term and long-term goals for college. Consider what you want to study, where you want to live, and what kind of college experience you envision.

#### Exercise 1.2: Prioritizing Factors

Create a list and rank the importance of factors such as location, size, majors, extracurricular activities, and cost when considering colleges.

## The College List

### Identifying Your Interests, Strengths, and Values

Knowing yourself is crucial for finding the right college fit. Reflect on your interests, strengths, and values.

#### Exercise 2.1: Self-Assessment

Use resources like career assessments, personality tests, and guided self-reflection to identify your interests, strengths, and values. Write down your findings.

## Categories of Admissions Selectivity

**“Reaches”** are the most competitive schools on the College List. They are schools that are typically somewhat above where your academic credentials fall. Acceptance at these schools would be difficult, but still possible. Though sometimes intimidating, Reaches are important to apply to, and we encourage you to strive for them! Applying to Reaches also provides applicants



the satisfaction of having given it their best shot. Ivy League schools (and other schools with single-digit admit rates) are Reaches for ALL students, regardless of grades, test scores, class rank, etc. These schools are so competitive and unpredictable. A list of the most highly selective colleges can be found here: [Highly Selective Colleges and Universities](#) .

“**Targets**” are the schools on the College List that are most closely aligned with your academic credentials. Acceptance at these schools is in no way guaranteed, but you should be competitive at all of them. Targets are crucial because they make the most sense, and they likely represent the best match for you.

“**Likelies**” are the schools on the College List where your academic credentials are typically above the school’s range. They are the schools where you have the greatest likelihood of admission. Whereas these may not be your top choices, it is crucial to have them on your list. Think of them as your insurance policy. Everyone must have Likelies!

## Researching Colleges & Finding the Right Fit

Begin researching colleges based on your goals and self-assessment. We recommend 3-4 reaches, 3-4 targets, and 3-4 likelies. It’s perfectly fine if you prefer a smaller list, as long as it’s balanced with a minimum of 3 likelies. As your interests develop and you get a firmer sense of what you want in a school, modify your list accordingly.

### Exercise 3:1: College Comparison

Explore colleges that align with your goals in Exercise 1:1. Create a spreadsheet to compare colleges you’re interested in, listing factors like tuition, majors, extracurriculars, and application deadlines.

### College Criteria to Consider

- Size preference
- Geographical preference
- Setting preference (rural/suburban/college town/urban)
- Academic area(s) of interest/possible major(s)
- Type of curriculum (open/flexible vs. a core curriculum with specific requirements)
- Atmosphere/vibe/type of students (conservative, liberal, mainstream, artsy, Greek emphasis, rah rah, party scene, intellectual, etc.)
- Religious affiliation/presence or lack thereof
- Financial aid and whether cost and/or merit money will be a factor



- Any other criteria or characteristics the student or family identifies as important
- Legacy status

## Preparing for Standardized Tests

### SAT vs. ACT: Which is Right for You?

Learn about standardized tests and decide whether you'll take the SAT or ACT. We recommend that you take a diagnostic test in each. Colleges don't have a preference for ACT vs SAT, so it's best to choose the test for which you have the stronger baseline.

**When:** You should plan to take your first test in the fall or winter of eleventh grade. This way, you will have ample time for retesting in the spring of eleventh grade or fall of twelfth grade. We recommend taking tests once or twice, but no more than three times.

#### Exercise 4.1: Test Prep Plan

Set a test date, choose study materials, and create a study schedule. Track your progress.

There are also great online resources to prep on your own for free (or low cost):

- [Official SAT® Practice | Khan Academy](#)
- [The ACT Test for Students](#)
- [UWorld SAT Prep](#)
- [UWorld ACT Prep](#)
- [Free SAT Practice Tests and Events | Princeton Review](#)
- [Free SAT Practice Test & Questions | Kaplan Test Prep](#)

## Extracurricular Activities

Ninth and tenth grades are a great time to dabble and explore interests and opportunities that interest you. Focus your interests more in eleventh and twelfth grade based on what you enjoy the most. As we look to the latter two years of high school, you'll want to think about how you can show some initiative, take on a leadership role or two and also show deep intellectual curiosity.

Use this chart draft your Activities Section of the Common Application (Be sure to make a copy before editing this document): [!\[\]\(0fb13ad0bfa3d86868cdd3883e5665b3\_img.jpg\) Extracurricular Activities Chart](#). On the Common Application, you'll be asked to list your 10 most important or meaningful activities. Note that



you only get 150 characters to describe each activity, so you'll want to be strategic and focused with your wording.

Here are a couple of samples of excellent Common App activities sections.

**Sample 1:**

<b>Activities</b>	
<b>Community Service (Volunteer)</b>	
9, 10, 11	Daycare Teacher's Assistant, APPI
Break	Supported lead teacher in supervising/assembling daily art/lunch supplies for children, 6 mo-3 yrs in Lisbon daycare. Spoke in native Portuguese.
4 hr/wk, 2 wk/yr	
Continue	
<hr/>	
<b>Community Service (Volunteer)</b>	
11, 12	Co-leader and ESL Instructor, H.A.N.D.S
School	Facilitated weekly online ESL sessions for Bronx church. Taught English reading/grammar fluency to 2-10 participants & encouraged self-confidence.
2 hr/wk, 20 wk/yr	
Continue	
<hr/>	
<b>Work (Paid)</b>	
11	Day Camp Counselor
Break	Created safe, fun, structured environment for 14+ students ages 4-5. Oversaw daily lesson plans/art activities. Trusted to teach class alone for hours
35 hr/wk, 2 wk/yr	
Continue	



Sample 2:

## Activities

### Work (Paid)

11, 12  
Year  
20 hr/wk, 50 wk/yr  
Continue

#### Barista, Starbucks

Local Starbucks store Barista; employed communication, leadership, teamwork, and customer service skills; held training assistance responsibilities.

### Community Service (Volunteer)

9, 10, 11, 12  
Year  
3 hr/wk, 30 wk/yr  
Continue

#### Volunteer / Group Leader / Band Member, [REDACTED] Church

Host and serve as storyteller for children's ministries, worship band member for middle and high school services.

### LGBT

10, 11, 12  
School  
6 hr/wk, 35 wk/yr  
Continue

#### President, Secretary, [REDACTED] Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA)

Plan and implement several pride events, host regular club meetings for 40-50 members, work to build community within the club and school.

### Community Service (Volunteer)

9, 10  
School  
4 hr/wk, 35 wk/yr  
Continue

#### Member and Small Group Leader, YMCA Leaders Club

Leadership development through guest speakers, faith-based activities, and completion of at least 100 hours of community service each year.

### Academic

9, 10, 11, 12  
School  
4 hr/wk, 35 wk/yr  
Continue

#### Co-President, Board Member, [REDACTED] Creative Writing Club

Schedule and host meetings and workshops; participate in national writing competitions; write, design and publish a yearly literary magazine.

### Music: Instrumental

9, 10, 11, 12  
Year  
7 hr/wk, 48 wk/yr  
Continue

#### Pianist, Piano Lessons

Year-round participation in private piano instruction at local music school; numerous concerts, local events, and national competitions.



## Building a Strong Resume

A college admissions resume is a brief synopsis of your high school experiences and a visually logical way for you to highlight your key activities and achievements. Creating your resume can be one of the most helpful things you can do to prepare for the college admissions process.

### Exercise 5.1: Extracurricular Brainstorm

List all of your activities, awards, achievements, interests, hobbies, jobs, travels, and summer experiences since the very first day of 9th grade. Include in-school and out-of-school activities, sports, clubs, visual and performing arts classes and performances, volunteer opportunities, cultural/ethnic/religious activities, and so on. Cast a wide net at first, then focus on the key important activities and achievements that define your high school experience. Reflect on your leadership roles.

**Formatting:** It's important to have a properly formatted resume. Bad formatting can take away from the content of your resume and leave the reader focusing on the wrong things.

Here is an example of professional formatting:





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(323) 555 1435 TRIXIEARGON@GMAIL.COM

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**EDUCATION**

UCLA Anderson School of Management 2011–13

- Cumulative GPA: 3.98
- Academic interests: real-estate financing, criminal procedure, corporations
- Henry Murtaugh Award

Hartford University 2003–07

- B.A. *summa cum laude*, Economics
- Extensive coursework in Astrophysics, Statistics
- Van Damme Scholarship

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**BUSINESS EXPERIENCE**

Boxer Bedley & Ball Capital Advisors 2008–11

*Equity analyst*

- Performed independent research on numerous American industries, including:
- Steelmaking, croquet, semiotics, and butterscotch manufacturing
- Led company in equities analyzed in two quarters

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**OTHER WORK EXPERIENCE**

Proximate Cause 2007–08

*Assistant to the director*

- Helped devise fundraising campaigns for this innovative nonprofit
- Handled lunch orders and general errands

Hot Topic 2004–06

*Retail-sales associate*

- Top in-store sales associate in seven out of eight quarters
- Inventory management
- Training and recruiting



## Letters of Recommendation

### Selecting the Right Recommenders

We recommend that you request two letters of teacher recommendation. It is best to have one letter written by an English, history or foreign language teacher and the other from a math or science teacher.

#### Exercise 6.1: Identifying Recommenders

Choose teachers, mentors, or supervisors who know you well and can write strong recommendations.

#### Exercise 6.2: Requesting Recommendations & Thank You

Ask for recommendations politely and provide necessary information. Help jog their memory of what you did and what you loved about their class. After you ask your teacher if they would be willing to write a recommendation, send them an email thanking them and offer to provide some information about what you most enjoyed and found most valuable in their class.

## Crafting Your Personal Statement

### Writing a Memorable Essay

The essay is one of our favorite parts of the application process. It affords students the opportunity to do some great self-reflection and really tell their stories. Additionally, essays comprise one of the most important components of the college application. The essay process is designed to maintain student agency, while also welcoming parental input at appropriate junctures.

Typically, you need a personal statement for all of your applications, and then individual colleges have the option of requiring their own supplemental essays. These supplemental essay prompts can usually be found on the individual college's website, or on their unique section of the Common App / Coalition App.

#### Exercise 7.1: Brainstorming

Reflect on personal experiences and draft essay topics.



Exercise 7.2: Draft Your Essay

Start drafting your personal statement and seek feedback from teachers or counselors.

## Completing the Application

### Common Application vs. Individual College Applications

Understand the application types and how to fill them out accurately.

Exercise 8.1: Application Checklist

Use the application workbook to keep track of your applications, activities and financial aid.

## Financial Aid Applications

### FAFSA and CSS Profile

For need-based aid, the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) is required for all schools. Many schools also require the College Board CSS Profile, and some schools require their own financial aid forms. Schools set their own deadlines, so you will need to monitor this closely once you know your final list.

The FAFSA is a free form created by the Department of Education. Its primary use is for the disbursement of federal and state grants and aid, as well as student loans and work study. Even if you do not think you will qualify for need-based aid, it can often be advantageous to submit the FAFSA, as some schools require it for merit-based scholarships and all students are eligible for up to \$5,500 in federally protected student loans. Many families are able to link their application with the IRS Website and upload the information directly from their previous year tax returns.

The **CSS Profile** is not free to submit, but is also not required by all colleges. Its primary use is for the disbursement of institutional aid, so it is primarily used by private colleges and universities. You can check which schools participate at this link: [CSS Profile Participating Institutions and Programs](#)



Merit-based scholarships are available directly through colleges as well as through independent organizations. Some colleges will automatically consider students for merit-based scholarships based on their admissions applications; other colleges will have separate scholarship applications. [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com) and [www.bigfuture.collegeboard.org](http://www.bigfuture.collegeboard.org) are also great resources for merit-based scholarships.

## Interview Preparation

### Preparing for College Interviews

Interviews can be offered on campus, as well as remotely and locally with alumni, admissions counselors or current students. Alternatively, some colleges have turned to video submissions as an alternative option or replacement for interviews.

There are so few places in the college application process for a student's voice to be truly heard. What makes a college admissions interview such a valuable opportunity is the chance to talk about yourself in a less structured and less formal way. It's an opportunity to share your story the way you want it to be heard. Whether it's before you decided to apply, or after you submitted an application, colleges use interviews to help build a more complete picture of you as a person.

#### **College Interview Basics:**

1. Be on time!
2. Do not underdress: no sandals or sneakers, no shorts or tanks, no rips, tears or stains.
3. Turn off your phone.
4. Do not talk too little; however, silence is okay to take a moment to think about an answer. It is okay to say, "That's a good question... I need to think about it."
5. Make eye contact, and have a firm handshake when you introduce yourself and when you leave.
6. Parents should not be present in an interview.
7. If you want, bring an up-to-date resume. This is optional. Be prepared to answer questions about your school, interests and activities.
8. RESEARCH the college BEFORE the interview and have questions ready to ask that can't be readily found on the website. If you have concerns, don't hesitate to express them. Show that you know the school well and really want to go there.



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9. Practice questions (see below) out loud with your Premium Prep counselor, family, or friends.
10. Write a thank you note after the interview. Email is fine, as it can be linked to your future file.

## Exercise 9.1: Mock Interview

Using the basics outlined above, practice with a friend or family member and receive constructive feedback. Try again.

Blog post: [7 Tips for Acing Your College Interviews - Premium Prep](#)

## Acceptance and Decision

### Comparing Financial Aid Packages

Learn how to evaluate and compare financial aid offers from different colleges.

#### Exercise 10.1: Aid Package Comparison

Compare aid offers, factoring in both financial and non-financial considerations.

## Conclusion

Congratulations! You've completed your Premium Prep College Preparation Workbook. Remember, this journey is about self-discovery and growth. Stay organized, stay true to your goals, and believe in yourself. **You've got this!**

Good luck, and may your college dreams become a reality!

## Contact Us

For personalized college counseling and expert guidance, don't hesitate to contact Premium Prep College Counseling at [info@premiumprep.com](mailto:info@premiumprep.com). Our team is here to support you throughout your college application process.