



## Ready, SET, College

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### **When should I start?**

The summer before your senior year is the best time to start. Most students do the majority of their application work in the fall of their senior year.

#### **How do I begin?**

Find out what goes into the application and begin collecting the materials you need. Create a folder for each college you are applying to. At the front of each folder, put a checklist of what you'll need for the application and when it's due.

#### **How many colleges should I apply to?**

Five to eight colleges is the recommended number. They should all be colleges you'd be happy to attend. It's good to apply to some colleges that are a bit of a stretch for you and some that you feel will likely admit you. But most should feel like good, realistic matches.

#### **Should I apply early?**

It depends. If you are sure about which college you want to attend, early decision or early action might be the best choice for you. If you're not sure, keep in mind that some early application plans require you to commit early. You may want to keep your options open.

#### **What are the Coalition, Common, and Universal College Applications?**

These are examples of college application services that provide standardized applications which allow you to apply to multiple schools with a single application. Instead of filling out eight different applications, you can simply fill out one and submit it to each college.

The Coalition Application is accepted by more than 90 institutions. The platform includes "The Locker," a private space for you to collect and organize materials throughout high school that you might want to share with colleges and universities.

The Common Application is a standardized application used by nearly 700 colleges. Each year, nearly a million students use the Common Application to submit over 4 million applications.

The Universal College Application is accepted by more than 30 colleges and universities. You can register as an applicant in order to start applying.

Be aware that you may need to submit additional or separate documents to some colleges. You also still need to pay individual application fees for each college.

## **Does the University of California university system use the Common Application?**

**NO!** The UC system has their own application and process. The application opens on August 1<sup>st</sup> and keep in mind that the UC system requires the essay writing / component with either the ACT or SAT.

Here's a link to the UC system website with an excellent calendar to keep track of dates and deadlines.

<http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/dates-deadlines/index.html>

## **Should I apply to colleges if my admission-test scores or grades are below their published ranges?**

Yes. The admission scores and grades that colleges show on their websites are averages or ranges — not cutoffs. There are students at every college who scored lower (and higher) than the numbers shown.

Remember that colleges consider many factors to get a more complete picture of you. For example, they look at the types of classes you take, your activities, recommendation letters, your essay and your overall character. Colleges are looking for all kinds of students with different talents, abilities and backgrounds. Admission test scores and grades are just two parts of that complete picture.

## **Should I even bother applying to colleges I don't think I can afford?**

Absolutely. Remember that after financial aid packages are determined, most students will pay far less than the "sticker price" listed on the college website. You don't know if you can afford a college until after you apply and find out how much aid that college will offer you (if you're accepted). Fill out the FAFSA as early as possible after Jan. 1 to qualify for the most aid.

## **Is there a difference between Early Decision and Early Action?**

Yes, and it is a significant difference. One is binding and one is non-binding – let us explain. Early Decision is a binding agreement between the family and the college (parents and students sign an agreement) that states the student will enroll at that college if he/she is accepted. Students apply early (usually November 1) and hear back from the colleges on their decision in early to mid-December. Students can only apply to one school via the Early Decision process. Early Action is when a student applies under an early deadline and hears back from the college early, but it is not a binding contract. Students accepted under Early Action are free to still enroll at a different college. Students can apply to multiple schools via the Early Action process. We can give input to students on both and help them understand how best to utilize these application strategies.

## **What's better, an A in a regular course or a B in an AP?**

We get this question often and the general rule of thumb is that the B in an AP would trump the A in a regular course. The most important thing to the majority of colleges is the rigor of the coursework that the student has taken. They want to see that the student has challenged her- or himself and that they can be successful. Students should challenge themselves appropriately, however, and not take on what's too much to handle. At SET, we offer both Honors classes as well as self-study AP classes to allow for each student to demonstrate personal accomplishment and a rigorous coursework. Of course, the entrepreneurial focus of our school is also differentiated from most high schools.

## **Does freshman year count?**

**Yes!** Any position counter to this is bad advice. Getting off to a great start is extremely important for a variety of reasons. Academically, many private universities are making their admission decisions without seeing any senior year grades, so the freshman year results are 33% of the academic record. Although the public universities in California do not use freshman-year grades in their GPA calculations, they will still ask to see them. Separate and apart from academics, the freshman year is critical for the establishment of great habits, increasing emotional intelligence, fostering of social skills, and building a mindset of personal accomplishment.

## **We are trying to plan our summers and our student's extracurricular activities. What looks better for a college?**

The answer to this question is always, "Choose the option that the student has a genuine interest in." A student will always put more effort in and be more successful when doing the things they love. There is no one activity that looks better than the others. The college wants to get to know the individual, so stick to what you love and show off your strengths. Many, many students and families attempt to "check boxes" to broaden the appeal to leading universities. We feel that a concentrated and purposeful focus on an area of passion is far superior to a scatter shot approach that fills up a resume with activities but lacking in purpose and focus.

## **When should I take the SAT or ACT? Should I take both? How many times should I take it?**

For most students, it is best to take the ACT or SAT for the first time in the late winter/early spring of junior year. While students can take both exams, it is only necessary to take one. They are very different exams, and students are oftentimes better at one over the other, so knowing your strengths can help determine which test to do. Our students take the PSAT exams in October of junior year followed by an optional mock ACT in November, which helps us determine which exam you should stick to. If a student has done some test preparation, he or she should not have to take the exam more than twice.