



MEFA's College Admissions Toolkit

Application Deadline Manager

Directions: Use this worksheet to keep track of deadlines and requirements for your college admissions applications.

College: _____

User ID _____

Password _____

Application Deadlines

Early Action _____

Early Decision _____

Regular Admissions _____

Rolling Admissions _____

Common Application Accepted

Yes No

Application Fee: \$ _____

Test Required

SAT

SAT II Subject Tests

ACT

Other _____

Letters of Recommendation

Number Required _____

People to Ask _____

Essays

Topics _____

Financial Aid Deadlines

FAFSA _____

Federal School Code _____

CSS/Profile _____

Institutional Form _____

Other _____

College: _____

User ID _____

Password _____

Application Deadlines

Early Action _____

Early Decision _____

Regular Admissions _____

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Common Application Accepted

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Test Required

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Letters of Recommendation

Number Required _____

People to Ask _____

Essays

Topics _____

Financial Aid Deadlines

FAFSA _____

Federal School Code _____

CSS/Profile _____

Institutional Form _____

Other _____

Password Manager

YourPlanForTheFuture

User Name: _____

Password: _____

Common Application

User Name: _____

Password: _____

College Board (SAT, CSS/Profile[®])

User Name: _____

Password: _____

ACT

User ID: _____

Password: _____

FastWeb Scholarship Search

User Name: _____

Password: _____

FAFSA

Parent PIN: _____

Student PIN: _____

Password: _____

Other

User ID: _____

Password: _____

Other

User ID: _____

Password: _____

Activity/Experience Log

MEFA recommends keeping a log of your important activities and experiences throughout high school. You can refer back to this record when it's time to prepare for college interviews, write essays and gather recommendations. There are no rules for what is and isn't important enough to write down. Focus on what you gained from the experience and the impact you had on others.

Date(s)	Time Spent	Activity/Experience	Role	What I Valued About This Experience
Monday June 22, 2010	6 Hours	Community Clean-up Day	Group Leader	Provided a clean, safe outdoor environment for elementary school children to use at school.
Junior Year	4 Hours/Week	National Honors Society	Vice President	Helped to develop community outreach program to senior citizens at local retirement home.

College Preference Questionnaire

What Matters to You?

What's important to you in a college? The more you know about the kind of college you'd like to attend, the more you'll be able to focus on your college search. You can also use these questions to communicate with your family about what kind of college you're looking for and discuss any differences. **Your answers to these questions can help you develop your list.**

For an interactive college preference questionnaire, go to www.yourplanforthefuture.org.

What are my post-secondary goals?

What am I most looking forward to about college?

What are my academic credentials?

(grades, GPA, class rank, test scores)

What academic opportunities are important to me?

(majors, travel abroad, internships, independent study)

What off-campus opportunities are important to me?

(volunteering, museums, outdoor recreation, public transportation)

How will college help me meet my goals?

What resources can I use to learn about colleges?

What non-academic strengths do I have to offer?

What extracurricular and social opportunities am I interested in pursuing?

(clubs and organizations, fraternities and sororities, athletics)

What other aspects of a college are important to me?

(distance from home, campus size, student body composition)

Campus Visits

Visiting a college campus gives you an initial impression of a college, including the physical setting and a sense of the campus life. Students often determine whether or not they will apply to a school by spending only a short time on campus.

MEFA advises scheduling a visit at all colleges and universities to which you apply. This usually involves a campus tour and an interview or group information session. The tour provides a good overall picture of what the school has to offer, showcasing residence halls, academic buildings, athletic facilities and student centers. You can also get a sense of student priorities and outlooks.

- 1 Contact the college's admissions office well in advance** of your intended visit to ensure that appointments are available.
- 2 April vacation is prime time for juniors to visit colleges**, and many schools host open houses, special information sessions and extra campus tours during this very busy week. Call early!
- 3 College students—especially tour guides—are very willing to offer their opinions** to visiting families. Take advantage of their availability and ask questions.
- 4 Note the condition of campus buildings and grounds** and how well equipped academic and technology buildings and labs are.
- 5 Pay attention to what students talk about.** Are they genuinely excited about certain classes, professors or an upcoming internship or semester abroad? It's important to find a college where students share your enthusiasm and values.
- 6 Ask students about the availability of faculty and academic advisors.** Many colleges boast about close faculty/student interaction, but it's more true at some places than others.
- 7 Try to see typical housing**, including both the nicest housing options as well as some of the less desirable options—often reserved for freshmen.
- 8 Tours often highlight a college's strengths.** Make sure you probe students to point out some of the college's weaknesses as well.
- 9 Make some brief notes about each visit.** Try using the College Comparison Worksheet on the next page.
- 10 Enjoy this phase of your life.** College visits can be fun and memorable.

Don't forget about college fairs.

College fairs are an effective way to learn about multiple colleges and universities in a short period of time, in one convenient location. At a college fair you can talk with representatives from each school, ask questions and collect materials. Ask your school counselor or career office for information about upcoming college fairs in your area.

College Comparison Worksheet

Directions: Use this worksheet to evaluate the different colleges you are interested in. You can also build and edit your college list at www.yourplanforthefuture.org.

Rating Scale: 4 = Great fit for me 3 = Pretty close 2 = I'm neutral 1 = Not quite right 0 = A deal breaker

College Name				
Distance from Home				
Size of Student Body				
Academic Offerings				
Extracurricular Activities				
Housing Options				
Social Live/Community				
Cost and Financial Aid				
My Custom Categories				
My Custom Categories				
My Custom Categories				
My Custom Categories				
Overall Impression				
Chances of Getting in				
Total Score				
My Notes				

Essays

Many colleges require students to write an essay as part of the application for admission. This essay is an opportunity for you to share something that is important to you and to give the reader a glimpse of what makes you unique as a person.

- 1 Keep the easy focused on you, not on someone else.** The college wants to learn more about you, not one of your friends or relatives. Use the essay to tell them something about the person behind the grades and test scores.
- 2 Content is as important as composition.** Make it interesting and informative. Every year many well-written but boring essays are submitted. Grab the reader's attention with a strong opening sentence or two, and follow up with an essay that is direct and compelling. This is easier when you pick a topic that you care about.
- 3 Be willing to try a less obvious approach.** While gimmicks for their own sake should be avoided, independent thinkers are often appreciated by the admissions reader.
- 4 Don't waste the essay writing about information already available** in other parts of your application. This is an opportunity to tell admissions something they don't already know about you.
- 5 Stay within the required length.** A college admissions officer probably has hundreds of essays to read from applicants. Respect the time they've allotted to you and get the point of your essay across within the guidelines.
- 6 The key to an effective essay is to focus on the message** you wish to tell the reader, not just the story. Balance the narrative structure with your main point, and make sure your essay doesn't get bogged down with details.
- 7 Don't use twenty words when eight will suffice.**
- 8 Avoid writing generic or cliché statements** that many other students could have also composed. Make the statements personal, sincere and specifically about you.
- 9 Leave yourself time to edit.** After you've finished writing, set the essay aside for a few days, then look at it with fresh eyes. What would a stranger learn about you by reading it? Correct grammar and typos, but also fine-tune it to deliver your specific message to the reader.
- 10 Make sure the essay is your work.** Feel free to get feedback from parents, friends, teachers and counsellors, but make it your essay. When you finish, you should be the one who is most proud.

Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation give other people an opportunity to tell colleges about you. Choose adults who know you well, and ask them to focus on how they know you best.

Keep track of the requirements at each college and give your recommenders plenty of time to write thoughtful letters. **MEFA's Letter of Recommendation Request Form** may be a helpful resource for you to complete and provide to your recommenders.

- 1 Ask your school counselor** about your high school's policy for requesting letters of recommendation.
- 2 Read each application carefully for recommendation requirements.** Some colleges require a certain number of recommendation letters or request a standard form in addition to the letter.
- 3 At the least, ask a teacher and your school counselor to write letters of recommendation.** Together, they are able to give admissions offices a full picture of your academic achievement.
- 4 Select a teacher from an academic subject who can thoroughly address your classroom experience.** Colleges want to know about your intellectual abilities, curiosity and classroom participation.
- 5 If an application asks for a non-academic recommender, choose an adult who knows you well,** such as a coach, employer or religious or community leader. Most colleges do not accept recommendations from family members.
- 6 A good third choice for a recommendation might be from a person who observed you working or volunteering** in a position related to your intended career or field of study.
- 7 Explain to your recommenders what you plan to study in college** and why you are interested in a particular college or colleges. This information can help your recommenders highlight qualities that you want to emphasize in your college applications.
- 8 Request letters well in advance.** If your application is due in January, approach your recommenders in the fall.
- 9 Make two copies of any required forms for your recommenders -** for a rough draft and a final draft. Offer to provide a pre-addressed, stamped envelope.
- 10 Send a thank you note** to show your appreciation.

Letters of Recommendation Request Form

Directions: Complete this form and provide a copy to each teacher and/or counselor who will be writing your letters of recommendation. You may also wish to attach a list of your extracurricular activities, honors, hobbies and employment history.

Student Name: _____

College 1: _____

Application Deadline: _____

College 2: _____

Application Deadline: _____

College 3: _____

Application Deadline: _____

Adjectives That Describe Me:

Subjects I'd Like to Explore in College:

My Proudest Accomplishment:

My Proudest Personal Accomplishment:

My Career Goals:

My Most Significant Contribution to This School:

Things I Care About:

Something Unusual or Special About My Family:

Interviews

Some colleges offer an interview as part of the admissions process. If an interview is recommended, it is usually something you should try to arrange.

Some colleges, especially very large ones, are unable to offer individual interviews for every applicant, but may offer group information sessions.

Interviews are often conducted by members of the admissions staff or by trained alumni interviewers. Either way, it is a great opportunity for the college to learn more about you and for you to learn more about the college.

- 1 Be prepared.** Think about what you want the interviewer to learn about you and prepare some questions that you can ask about the college.
- 2 Be yourself.** You're a high school student: it's okay to look like one, dress like one and act like one. Appropriate casual dress is recommended. Be friendly, focused and sincere about your interest in the college. And be self-confident about what you have accomplished so far in life.
- 3 Talk about why you are interested in this particular college.** In your opinion, what makes this college a better fit for you than other colleges? Don't forget, fit is an important consideration in the college search.
- 4 Talk about why you are considering a specific major.** If you are undecided about majors, which is completely acceptable, talk about some of your areas of interest and how you plan to explore your options in college.
- 5 If there are specific clubs, organizations, sports or opportunities** at the college that interest you, discuss your interest and ask about how you might get involved.
- 6 A successful interview has the given-and-take of a natural conversation.** Avoid one-word responses, but don't monopolize the time either.
- 7 Tell the interviewer about what you hope to gain from pursuing your education.** Discuss your short-term and long-term goals.
- 8 Don't shy away from talking about what you can contribute to the college.** Many other applicants will have similar grades and test scores. What makes you an attractive addition to the classrooms, the residence halls and the overall campus community? Everyone has something to contribute.
- 9 It's also important to bring up any questions you have about attending the college.** If you are accepted, you will have to decide between this college and any others that also accept you.
- 10 Always thank the interviewer.** It's also recommended that you send a follow-up thank you note. You want to be remembered in a positive way.

Interview Prep Sheet

Directions: Complete this form in preparation for each college interview you do.

College: _____

Interviewer: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____ Location: _____

Programs/Features That I Like About This College

Questions That I Have About This College:

Things About Me That Aren't Obvious in My Application:

Accomplishments I'm Most Proud Of:

Mistakes I've Made and What I've Learned From Them:

Things I'm Hoping to Learn and Do in College:

Things I'm Hoping to Learn and Do in Life:

Things I Enjoy Doing in My Spare Time:

People, Ideas, Events, Books That Have Had an Impact on Me:

Other:
