



# Impact your future

Get Set for College

Make plans  
with good advice  
from ACT.

1. THINK
2. CONSIDER
3. COMPARE
4. APPLY
5. PLAN
6. DECIDE

**ACT**<sup>®</sup>

# 1. Think

## THINK ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR COLLEGE NEEDS

- Do you start things on your own or do you need others to motivate you?
- Do you like large groups or do you prefer to be on your own or in small groups?
- Is it important to be close to home?
- Do you want to participate in extracurricular interests and activities?

Knowing what's important will help you select a college that's right for you.

## WHY COLLEGE?

- Do you want to increase your earning power?
- Do you want new learning opportunities?
- Do you want to meet interesting people?

Statistics show that people with four-year college degrees more than double their

earning power over someone who holds a high school diploma. High school graduates have a lifetime earning power of about \$1.3 million compared to college graduates, who can expect to earn \$2.2 million or more during their careers.

Think about what you want for the future.

## PREPARING FOR COLLEGE IS PREPARING FOR THE ACT

The ACT tests what you've learned in high school core courses. So use what you know to get into college.

Many colleges use ACT results to make decisions about college admission, course placement, career counseling, and scholarship awards.

Take the ACT in your junior year so you can meet deadlines for admission and scholarships. Your test results may influence which courses to take in your senior year to improve your readiness for college. You'll also have time to retest if you feel your scores don't accurately reflect your ability.

## HIGH SCHOOL COURSES ACT recommends

### Courses

English  
Mathematics  
Science  
Social Studies  
Other

### ACT Recommends

Four years  
Three years (including Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II)  
Three years (including Biology, Chemistry, and Physics)  
Three years  
Foreign language, visual and performing arts, computer science, etc.

Check with the colleges you are interested in to see if they require additional courses. Colleges will look at your performance in high school core courses when you apply for admission.

- If you are the first person in your family to attend college, the *Family Firsts* booklets ([www.act.org/education/family.html](http://www.act.org/education/family.html)) will give you and your family additional information to navigate the college planning process.

- The ACT measures knowledge and skills in English, math, reading, and science. ACT also offers an optional Writing Test. Check the ACT student website at [www.actstudent.org/writing](http://www.actstudent.org/writing) to see if your preferred college requires the Writing Test.

- Sign up for your ACT student web account early to prepare for college, explore career options, and more at

**[www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org)**

# 2. Consider



## CONSIDER COLLEGE CHARACTERISTICS

Going to college involves a lot of time and money. Think carefully about the type of academic program and majors that interest you. Then rank other factors based on your personal preferences and needs. Decide what matters the most to you so you identify colleges with the best fit—location, size, academic programs, activities, cost, etc.

## TYPES OF SCHOOLS

A college offers curriculum leading to a four-year bachelor of arts or bachelor of science degree. A university usually has four-year degree programs and often has graduate programs in liberal arts, business, engineering, education, medicine and other fields.

Community and technical colleges offer two-year career/technical education programs. They also provide transfer programs that are similar to the freshman and sophomore offerings at four-year colleges and universities.

Area career centers (vocational-technical schools) offer career-oriented postsecondary programs that may last from a few months to a couple of years.

## ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Understanding admission requirements will give you some idea of how likely you are to be accepted.

Admission policies range from Open (all high school graduates are accepted until the school's enrollment is at capacity; average ACT score is 16–21) to Highly Selective (the majority of freshmen who are accepted are in the top 10 percent of their high school graduating class; average ACT score is 25–30). Look for the admission standards on the college websites or talk to the admissions office staff.

## COST

If cost is a concern for you, don't automatically pass over an institution that appears too expensive. Check into available financial aid and scholarships.

Keep your options open. If you are undecided about your major or career direction, look for colleges that provide flexibility and options to change your mind. Get advice from your parents, school counselors, or other advisors. Compare notes on schools with your friends.



## LARGE COLLEGES may offer—

- more areas of specialized study
- more courses in each area
- more anonymity
- greater range of extracurricular activities
- larger libraries
- more laboratory facilities
- graduate programs

## SMALL COLLEGES may offer—

- more personal atmosphere
- small classes, more discussion, and fewer lectures
- greater chance for participation in athletics, clubs, leadership positions
- less distance between students and faculty
- more flexible programs

# 3. Compare



## COMPARE COLLEGES

Identify colleges where you want to apply for admission. Gather information from as many sources as possible. The more information you have, the more likely you are to make a good decision. These resources can help.

- [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org)
- College websites and college reps
- High school counselors
- Family
- Professionals in your field of interest
- College fairs

## PLAN A COLLEGE VISIT

Fill out a form on the college website or contact the school's admissions office to schedule a visit. Try to make arrangements in advance so you can talk to as many people as possible. See if you can meet with faculty, coaches, or students involved in your areas of interest—both academic and extracurricular.

Timing for your visit is crucial to get an accurate impression of the school. For example, if you plan your trip during a college break or a big event like homecoming, you probably won't experience the typical campus atmosphere.



## CHECKLIST for a campus visit

- Meet with an admissions counselor.
- Ask about admissions requirements. Does the school require or recommend the ACT and the ACT Writing Test?
- Discuss your chances for success in certain programs.
- Find out how to apply.
- Ask about costs, financial aid, and scholarship opportunities.
- Meet with faculty in the department of your intended major.
- Ask questions about academic requirements/offerings.
- Ask about housing and transportation options.
- Attend a class to get an idea of typical size, teaching style, and academic atmosphere.
- Ask about the career placement record for graduates in the field you plan to study.
- Identify career planning services for undergraduates.
- Tour the campus and check out the residence halls, dining options, and library resources.
- Talk to students about the environment and the amount of studying necessary for success.
- Find out about student activities, campus life, and social activities.
- Meet with coaches, music directors, and other faculty and staff about your areas of interest.

**NOTE ABOUT COLLEGE MAJORS** It's ok to be undecided about a major—most colleges provide services to help students select a major during the first or second year.



# 4. Apply



## APPLY FOR ADMISSION AND MEET ALL DEADLINES

Narrow your college choices. Consider each school's educational programs, your likelihood of getting admitted, and the possibilities for financial aid. If your first-choice college fits your financial resources and there is no doubt about your admission there, you may need to apply only to that school. If this is not the case, you will want to apply to one or more second-choice colleges. If possible, include at least one that's a "sure thing" for you in terms of admission standards and costs because you probably won't receive a definite decision on a financial aid package until the spring of your senior year.

Know the application process, deadline, and fee schedule for each school you're considering. Complete the applications and return them to the admissions offices as early as possible. Keep copies for your records.

Ask your counselor to have all necessary transcripts, records, test scores, and applications sent to the schools. If a college asks you to identify references (teachers, counselors, principal, employers), select people who know you well and always get their permission to use them as references.



## TOP COLLEGE application mistakes

- Misspellings and grammatical errors
- Applying online, but not submitting the application
- Forgotten signatures
- Not reading carefully
- Listing extracurricular activities that aren't activities
- Not telling your school counselor where you've applied
- Not giving references much time to submit letters of recommendation
- Using an email address that friends might laugh about, but colleges won't
- Not checking your email regularly
- Letting Mom or Dad fill out the application for you



# 5. Plan



## PLAN TO PAY FOR YOUR EDUCATION

For most students, college costs are a big factor in the planning process. Check out college websites or contact their admissions or financial aid office to get estimated costs for attendance.

- Calculate direct costs (tuition and fees, room and board)
- Determine indirect costs (books and supplies, transportation, clothing, laundry, and entertainment)
- Add up your estimates, but don't panic when you see the totals. Remember that many colleges offer financial aid and scholarship funds.

## WAYS TO FINANCE YOUR EDUCATION

You may have already started saving for your college education with money from part-time or

summer jobs, family gifts, and other resources. But it's likely you are going to need more help. Talk with your family about their willingness and ability to pay some college costs. And remember that many students receive financial aid and merit-based scholarships. Don't assume that you're ineligible for funds. Explore all your options.

## FUNDING SOURCES

**SCHOLARSHIPS**—Awards based on merit or merit plus need that you don't repay.

**GRANTS**—Awards based on need that you don't repay.

**LOANS**—Funds available through private lending institutions, colleges, and the federal government that must be repaid.

**WORK-STUDY PROGRAMS**—Jobs funded by the school and often related to a student's program of study.



## FREE FINANCIAL AID RESOURCES on the Web

[www.studentaid.ed.gov](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov)

Federal Student Aid Homepage

[www.ed.gov/finaid.html](http://www.ed.gov/finaid.html)

US Department of Education's comprehensive resource on student financial aid

[www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)

FAFSA—Free Application for Federal Student Aid

## STEPS TO APPLY for financial aid

### 1. Apply for admission as well as financial aid.

Many colleges require both an application for admission and for financial aid before your financial aid eligibility can be determined. Deadlines vary, so develop a calendar of important dates and meet all deadlines for admissions and financial aid.

### 2. Submit required financial aid forms.

File all forms for the colleges you are considering, including the FAFSA (Free

Application for Federal Student Aid). Go to [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov) to fill out the form or request a paper version.

*Note: You only need to complete one FAFSA, which includes a section for you to list colleges that should receive your information. In your senior year, complete the FAFSA as soon after January 1 as possible. The FAFSA calculates your Expected Family Contribution (EFC) and determines your eligibility for federal Pell Grants, other federal financial aid programs, and many state programs.*

### 3. Apply for scholarships and grants.

Ask about state scholarship, grant, and loan programs. Also look for institutional, community, foundation, and corporation program funds.

### 4. Keep track of progress.

Monitor the information you receive from colleges regarding fees, payment schedules, etc. Include this information in your college planning.

[www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org)

**ACT**<sup>®</sup>



# 6. Decide



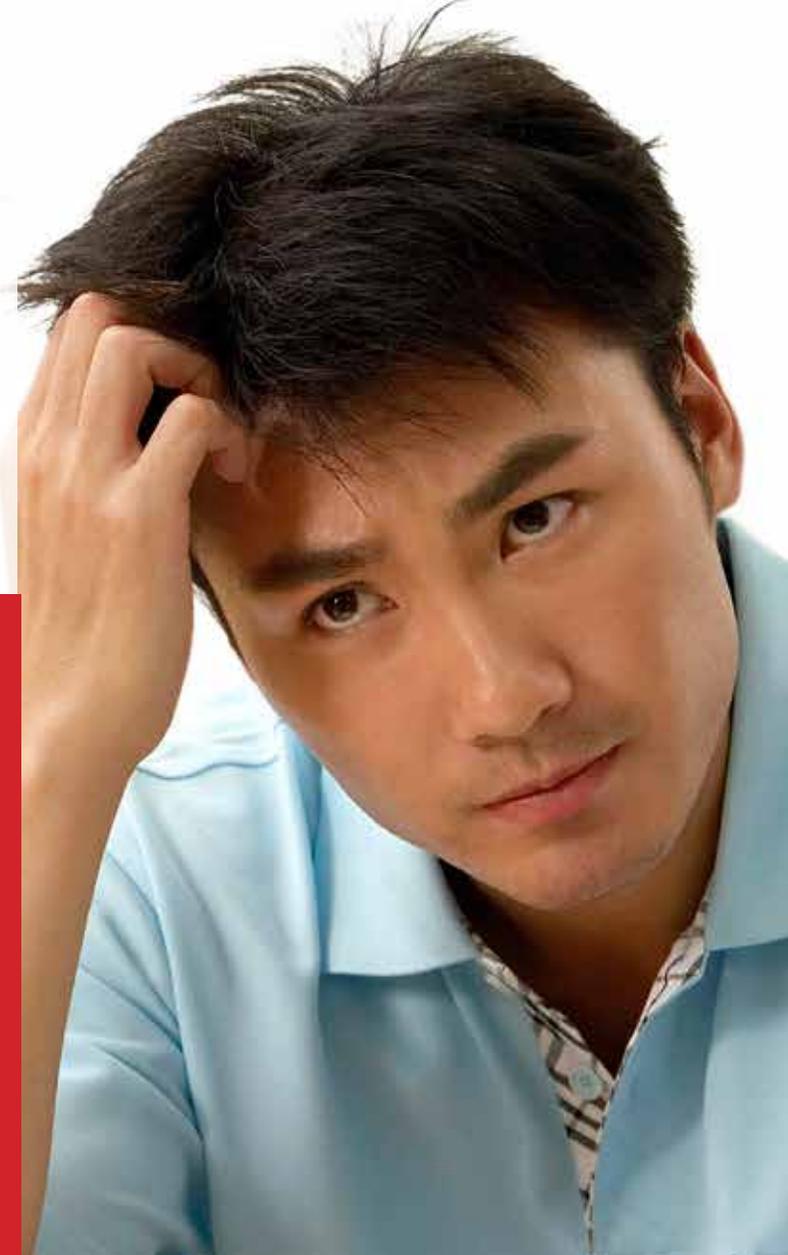
## DECIDE WHAT YOUR FUTURE HOLDS

As you move through your senior year, you will have to make a final college choice. Talk more with the people you trust for advice and weigh your options.

Once you make a decision, and your college confirms your enrollment, notify all the other colleges you applied to that you will not

be attending so they are not holding a place for you.

Start thinking about the many opportunities college will offer you. Look to the future with enthusiasm! Curiosity, hard work, and perseverance will make the difference as you enter an exciting new phase of your life.



## Additional College Planning Websites

**[www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)**—US Department of Education's website with information for students and parents.

**[www.bls.gov/ooh](http://www.bls.gov/ooh)**—Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook—includes employment training, earnings, projections, publications, etc.

**[www.actstudent.org/college](http://www.actstudent.org/college)**—The ACT guide to planning for college and career.

**[www.ed.gov/gearup/](http://www.ed.gov/gearup/)**—Resources from GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) to help low-income students prepare and succeed in postsecondary education.

## Sources for your financial assistance:

- the federal government
- private foundations
- professional and service organizations
- colleges and universities
- state agencies