

YOUR COURSE TO COLLEGE IN THE CLASSROOM



JUNIOR YEAR

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▶ GET STARTED

CONGRATULATIONS

You are a junior! You have been working hard, exploring career interests and researching colleges. Now is the time to focus and rev up your efforts.

Your junior year might be the single most important year in your college preparation. This might seem like a daunting process, but once you get started, it can be exciting and fun.

“College Knowledge” is a workbook to accompany “Your Course to College,” providing information to jump-start college planning and preparation. It addresses questions and concerns about how to select the right college, how to afford college and how to make a successful transition from high school to college. At the end of each chapter, you will find a “Next Steps” section to show you what actions you can take to move closer to your goals.

Yes! You can earn a college degree. Believe it! It is doable, attainable, affordable and within your reach. Don’t let money, time or employment be an excuse to keep you from going to college.

Get ready. This will be a busy year. Take advantage of the many resources available to help you succeed—teachers, counselors, online tools and alumni who have paved the way before you. Going to college is a family affair, so include your parents, grandparents, siblings and other loved ones in the decision-making process. Keep the lines of communication open.

Listen. Learn. Succeed.

Let’s get started! Print out and save the “Junior Year Timeline & Checklist” in your notebook, portfolio or any handy place where you can refer to it often and check off items as you complete them. These include short-term and long-term activities up to the beginning of your senior year. Study the timeline carefully, coordinate activities with your school-year calendar and begin prioritizing urgent items such as application deadlines, exam dates, class assignments and projects, extracurricular activities and social commitments.

**Yes, a degree is within
your reach! Help is
available so you can
get to college, afford it
and succeed.**

► JUNIOR YEAR TIMELINE & CHECKLIST

August

- Get test schedules and registration forms for the PSAT, SAT, SAT Subject, ACT and AP exams.

September

- Register for the October PSAT exams. They're a good indicator of SAT scores and can indicate success in specific AP courses as a senior.
- Set up your college search navigator (College Greenlight, Naviance, MAP, etc.) and online accounts.
- Continue exploring college search sites, visiting your counseling office and accessing online college resources.

October

- Take the PSAT.
- Create a list of colleges you want to visit. Use the Campus Visit Log in Chapter 2 to record notes.
- Review personality surveys or career interest inventories you took in 10th grade. If you haven't taken any, [Future Ready Iowa's Career Coach](#) is a great place to start.

November

- Go to a college event on campus or at your school (college fair, admissions visit, etc.).
- Research careers that fit your interest inventory and make a list.

December

- You will receive your scores from the October PSAT.
- Make sure you are working on ACT prep.
- If you haven't already, begin looking for scholarships.

January–May

- Start thinking about senior year classes. Consider taking AP and Dual Credit courses to enhance your transcript.
- Plan to take both math (at least Algebra II) and English during senior year to avoid investing time and money in college remediation courses that do not count toward your degree.

January

- Continue to search for college and career connections.
- Register for the February ACT if you plan to take it.
- Start thinking about a summer job or internship. Not only can you earn money for college, you can also learn valuable skills.

February

- ☐ Register for the March SAT if you plan to take it.
- ☐ Research admission deadlines and requirements for colleges that interest you.
- ☐ Register for AP exams. Contact your AP teacher, AP coordinator or counselor. Remember you can take as many AP exams as you want, even if you did not take the class.
- ☐ Create a Common App account and start working on your application.
- ☐ Take the ACT.

March

- ☐ Take the SAT.
- ☐ Register for the April ACT if you plan to take it.
- ☐ Keep working on your Common App. Make it a goal to finish three of the seven essay prompts.
- ☐ Line up at least one 11th-grade teacher to write letters of recommendation.

April

- ☐ Take the ACT.
- ☐ Register for the May SAT if you plan to take it.
- ☐ Begin researching scholarships and make a list of due dates.
- ☐ Finish two more essay prompts on the Common App.
- ☐ Do any of your schools require admissions or scholarship reviews? If so, do mock interviews with counselors, teachers, parents, friends and mentors.

May

- ☐ Take the SAT.
- ☐ Take the AP and SAT Subject exams if you're registered.
- ☐ Continue to request and collect letters of recommendation.
- ☐ Start writing your resume.
- ☐ Start applying for local scholarships.
- ☐ Finish the last two essays on your Common App.

June

- ☐ Take the ACT plus Writing, SAT, and SAT Subject exams if you're registered.
- ☐ Continue to research, rank and visit colleges.
- ☐ Update and revise your resume with summer jobs and volunteer experience.

► CHAPTER 1: WHY COLLEGE?

LEARN MORE, EARN MORE

HIGHER EARNING POTENTIAL

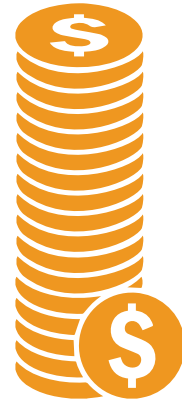
College graduates simply earn more. A worker with an associate degree earns 18% more than a worker with a high school diploma. A worker with a bachelor's degree earns 67% more than a worker with a high school diploma.



High School Diploma



Associate Degree



Bachelor's Degree

BETTER CHANCES OF EMPLOYMENT

The number of jobs for college graduates is growing, while the number of jobs for high school graduates is falling. More than 95% of the jobs created from 2010 to 2016 required at least some college education.

KNOWLEDGE

College teaches critical thinking, communications and problem-solving skills. A recent survey found that employers consider these skills more important than a potential hire's subject of study.

OTHER BENEFITS FROM COLLEGE

- Meet people from different backgrounds and cultures
- Discover your passion
- Learn new skills
- Build your confidence
- Get involved in clubs and activities
- Make your own decisions
- Learn more about yourself
- Challenge yourself and prove you can succeed
- Become more engaged in your community

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.

Nelson Mandela



WRITE IT DOWN

Think about why you want to go to college and how it will benefit you. Take five minutes to jot down your thoughts on the following questions. This is a good time to practice your essay writing skills!

Why do you want to go to college?

How will college benefit you personally?

TEST YOUR COLLEGE KNOWLEDGE

True or False

- | | | | |
|----------|----------|----------|---|
| T | | F | 1. Parents are always the best people to talk to about preparing for college. |
| T | | F | 2. Colleges want to help me get financial aid. |
| T | | F | 3. Working while going to school will hurt my academic success. |
| T | | F | 4. Colleges require two or more years of natural science classes in high school (earth science, biology, chemistry, physics, etc.). |
| T | | F | 5. The federal government provides most financial aid for students. |
| T | | F | 6. I can still get into a selective college if I did poorly in ninth or tenth grade. |
| T | | F | 7. If I apply for a student loan through a bank, I don't have to take it. |
| T | | F | 8. Extracurricular activities in high school will make up for poor grades. |
| T | | F | 9. Colleges require three years of English classes in high school (grammar, composition, literature, etc.). |
| T | | F | 10. Anyone can get into a public university, but it's hard to get into a private college. |
| T | | F | 11. Colleges require three or more years of mathematics in high school beginning with Algebra I. |
| T | | F | 12. College graduates earn two-thirds more than workers with just a high school diploma. |

How did you score?

- | | | | |
|----------|--|----------|---|
| T | | F | 1. If your parents did not go to college, talk to an adult in your life who did (teacher, counselor, mentor, etc.). Most would be happy to help you prepare for college. |
| T | | F | 2. The job of a college's financial aid officer is to make it possible for all students to attend college while staying within federal guidelines. |
| T | | F | 3. Research shows that students who work a moderate amount often do better academically. An on-campus job, especially if it is related to your career goals, is a good way to help pay college costs, get experience and create ties with the university. |
| T | | F | 4. All colleges require two or more years of natural science classes in high school if you're thinking about majoring in a related field. |
| T | | F | 5. Government grants make up only a moderate portion of available financial aid. Private colleges supply the largest portion of financial aid. |
| T | | F | 6. Colleges look for improvement in performance as a sign that you can and will do the work. In fact, a vast academic improvement as a junior and senior indicates to a college that you have settled down. |
| T | | F | 7. Families are not obligated to accept a loan if it is designated to them. You can turn it down and try to find money elsewhere. |
| T | | F | 8. Yes, colleges consider high school extracurriculars such as athletics, student government and music when they review an application, but colleges look at your academic performance first. |
| T | | F | 9. Because reading and writing are so important to success in college, most schools require four or more years of high school English classes. |
| T | | F | 10. Many public universities are highly competitive, while others are required to take nearly all applicants. Some private colleges are selective, but others accept students who may not normally be admitted to a public university. |
| T | | F | 11. You must take at least three years of math at the Algebra I level and higher to prepare for college. If you take classes that are more advanced, you might test out of basic college math classes. |
| T | | F | 12. A college degree increases average earnings by 67% over a high school diploma. |

+ NEXT STEPS

- **SET GOALS.** Set some short-term and long-term goals for your future.
- **FIND YOUR INTERESTS.** Collect information about your interests so you can start to narrow your search for colleges or programs.
- **GET READY TO HAVE A STRONG YEAR ACADEMICALLY.** Try new activities and look for volunteer opportunities to strengthen your resume.



▶ CHAPTER 2: GET ORGANIZED

TIME MANAGEMENT 101

FIND THE RIGHT TOOL

You have a busy year ahead, but don't let that overwhelm you. Finding a system that not only helps manage your time but also fits your personality is a good first step.

- An app on your phone might be the right tool for you. Just keep in mind that technology can have glitches.
- Your laptop and iPad are good resources for calendar and scheduling software, but you'll need to turn the device on every time you want to check a date or deadline.
- Sometimes the good old paper-and-pen method of writing things down in an agenda or planner is the way to go. Use the "Schedule Builder" on the next page to create a visual for your time commitments.

"It takes **as much energy** to wish as it does to plan."

Eleanor Roosevelt





SCHEDULE BUILDER

You might feel really busy, but what if you have more free time than you realize? Fill in this calendar to see what you have going on in a typical week. An example is provided on the next page.

Consider the following:

- Class schedule
- Athletic or performing arts practices
- Part-time job
- Mealtimes
- Club or organization meetings

And don't forget downtime activities:

- Must-watch TV show
- Video game time
- Hanging out with friends
- Sleeping in

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6–7 a.m.							
7–8 a.m.							
8–9 a.m.							
9–10 a.m.							
10–11 a.m.							
11 a.m.–noon							
Noon–1 p.m.							
1–2 p.m.							
2–3 p.m.							
3–4 p.m.							
4–5 p.m.							
5–6 p.m.							
6–7 p.m.							
7–8 p.m.							
8–9 p.m.							
9–10 p.m.							

Your weekly schedule might look something like this:

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6–7 a.m.	Choir practice		Choir practice		Choir practice		Sleep in
7–8 a.m.	Class	Class	Class	Class	Class		
8–9 a.m.						Soccer game	
9–10 a.m.							
10–11 a.m.	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch		
11 a.m.–noon	Class	Class	Class	Class	Class	Lunch	Lunch
Noon–1 p.m.						Work	
1–2 p.m.							
2–3 p.m.			Babysit siblings				
3–4 p.m.	Practice	Practice			Practice	Practice	
4–5 p.m.							
5–6 p.m.			Dinner				
6–7 p.m.	Dinner	Soccer game	Church	Dinner	Dinner	Work	Dinner
7–8 p.m.	Netflix						Football game
8–9 p.m.			Dinner				
9–10 p.m.	Study			Study			

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Do you have too much or too little white space? Many students have more free time than they think!
- Are you spending too much time on one particular thing? Class does not count.
- Are you spending time each week doing something you enjoy? If not, how can you make more time for it?
- How much time can you spend on college prep each week?



ORGANIZE U!

Organization is the key to success. Strong organizational skills are a common trait of successful leaders. Get in the habit of frequently reviewing your short-term plans for the week and long- term plans for the semester.

1. Use your planner or an app to make “To-Do” lists for each day of the week with urgent items at the top.

Pause for reflection: Do you like starting with the easy or difficult tasks on your list? Why?

2. Designate a binder or notebook for all your college materials this year. Include your “Junior Year Timeline & Checklist” as well as the following:
- List of scholarship and admissions application deadlines
 - Fliers and handouts from colleges you are interested in
 - List of colleges you want to visit this year
 - Your “Campus Visit Log” found below

ACCOUNT TRACKER

You will create multiple online accounts this year, and it might be hard to keep track of them. Use this "Account Tracker" to record important information as you establish e-mail accounts and save information electronically for easy reference and retrieval. Set up user names and passwords for all accounts in this section by the end of September.

E-Mail Account

This is your account for college use only.

Address: _____

Password: _____

College Greenlight

User Name: _____

Password: _____

Security Question: _____

ACT

User Name/ID: _____

Password: _____

Security Questions: _____

Common App

User Name/ID: _____

Password: _____

Security Questions: _____

College Board (SAT)

SAT/College Board User Name: _____

SAT/College Board Password: _____

Security Question: _____

Khan Academy

User Name: _____

Password: _____

Security Question: _____

FAFSA

Most students don't need an FSA ID until they are ready to complete the FAFSA in fall of their senior year of high school. You only get one FSA ID, so it is very important to record log-in details where you can find them later.

Student FSA ID: _____

Student FSA Password: _____

Save Key: _____

Parent FSA ID: _____

Parent FSA Password: _____

ORGANIZE YOUR E-MAIL

It's important to have a professional e-mail other than your high school e-mail account (which you will probably lose after high school). Step-by-step instructions to set up a Gmail account start on page 17. If you already have an e-mail account through another provider, you do not need to create one through Gmail. The advantage to Gmail is that you can use Google Calendar, Google Drive, Google Docs, etc.

Take Your Address Seriously

Some people like to create funny addresses, but imagine an admissions office or future employer receiving an e-mail from EvilGoddess@mail.com. It might be great for your friends who get the joke, but colleges and employers that don't know you may not draw the same conclusion.

Use Your Name or a Variant

If your name is Bob Hope, here are some examples of how you could create your e-mail address:

- bob.hope@mail.com
- bob.t.hope@mail.com
- bob.townes.hope@mail.com
- bob_hope@mail.com
- hope.bob@mail.com

More Tips

- When composing an e-mail message, be concise and use good grammar and sentence structure.
- Check your e-mail regularly. E-mail tends to be the primary mode of communication for colleges and employers.
- Organize your in-box frequently. Delete old e-mails and unsubscribe from any regular e-mail you no longer want. Check spam and junk folders so you don't miss important messages that were filtered.

How to Set Up a Gmail Account

- 1:** Go to gmail.com.
 - 2:** Click “Create account.”
 - 3:** Google will require you to enter some personal information, notably your first and last name. You will also need to pick your Gmail user name. This will be used to create your unique e-mail address (yourname@gmail.com).
 - 4:** If the user name you chose is already taken, Gmail will ask you to choose a different one. Unfortunately, many short and memorable user names are taken, so you might need to try a few times.
 - 5:** Keeping your account secure is very important. Choose a memorable but secure password. Do not choose a password like 12345.
 - 6:** Click “Next step,” and you will be asked to complete your user profile. You are not required to complete the profile section. If you upload a profile picture, use one that looks professional such as a senior picture.
 - 7:** Download the Gmail app to easily access your e-mail from your smart phone.
-

Organize Your Documents

As you work on college application materials at home and school, Google Drive is an easy way to store documents and access them anywhere you have Internet access. Google Drive serves as the hub for all Google document creation and office tools. You can even install apps into Drive to expand its functionality. Get the most out of Google Drive with this guide.

Accessing Google Drive

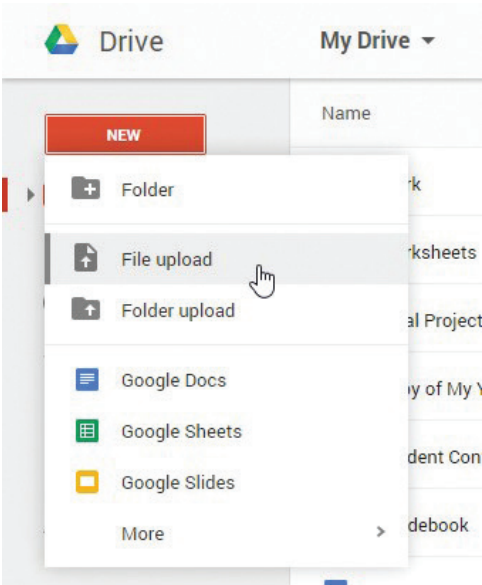
Once you have set up your Google account, you can access Google Drive at drive.google.com or by selecting the grid icon near the top-right corner of any Google page, then clicking “Drive.”

Using Google Drive

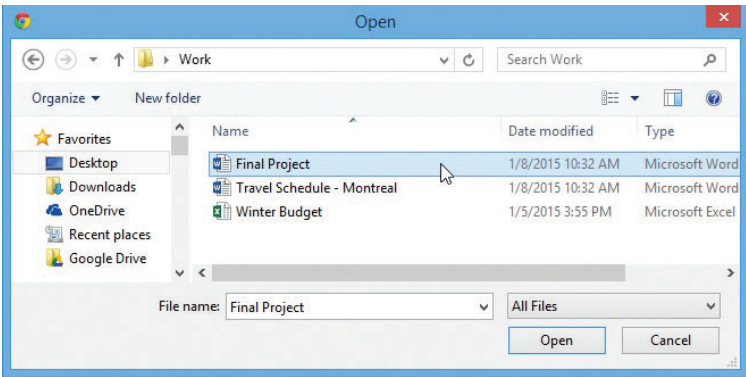
Your Google Drive might be empty right now, but as you begin to upload and create documents, you will need to know how to view, manage and organize them. Watch [a tutorial](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dbeuqQWNPHY) on using Google Drive (youtube.com/watch?v=dbeuqQWNPHY).

Uploading Files

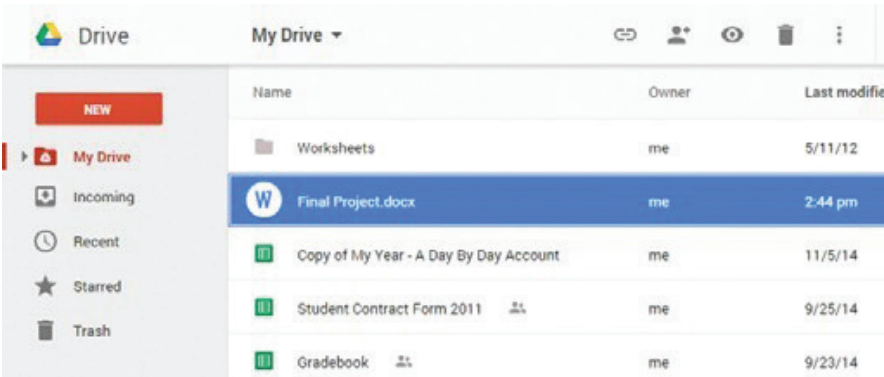
1: In Google Drive, locate and select the “New” button, then select “File upload.”



2: Locate and select the file(s) you want, then click “Open.”



3: The file(s) will be uploaded to your Google Drive.



ORGANIZE YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Now, it's time to discover some valuable resources that are closer than you think.

Let's start with the basics. Free, convenient college support resources are available through the people in your high school and in your community. Get to know them. Use them. Take advantage of the information, wisdom and services they provide.

Teachers: Get to know your teachers. Former and current teachers have great college experiences to share. They are sources of information, strong role models and your go-to support for letters of recommendation.

Example questions

- What did you like the most about college?
- How did you decide on a major?
- What were your college classes like?
- What tips do you have for juniors and seniors to stay motivated in high school?

Counselors: High school counselors will assist you and your family with researching schools, applying to colleges, completing the FAFSA and registering for exams. Take time to meet with your counselors to make sure you are on track.

Example questions

- How did you decide where to go to college?
- What classes should I take my senior year?
- How many colleges should I apply to?
- I like _____ college or university but I don't think I can get in. What do I do?

GEAR UP Iowa Coach or College Success Advisors: Your GEAR UP coach or advisor can answer questions about campus visits, college applications, scholarships, fee waivers, college exams, college essays and other things related to the application process. Schedule a meeting right away to begin an ongoing conversation. This is a critical step during your junior year.

Example questions

- What did you like most about college?
- How can I get a fee waiver when applying for college?
- Where would you recommend I go to find scholarships?
- What colleges should I apply to?

CAMPUS VISIT LOG

Keep track of your college visits so you don't forget them. Refer to this log as you narrow down your college list, and use it for essay and interview information.

College/University	Date	What did you find most memorable?

+ NEXT STEPS

- **GET ORGANIZED.** Set up college e-mail accounts with user names and passwords stored in a safe and secure location.
- **SET UP ONLINE ACCOUNTS.** Set up accounts with an e-mail platform, ACT, College Board, Khan Academy, the Common Application, FAFSA, Dropbox or using Google docs.
- **SAY HELLO.** Get to know your teachers, counselors, GEAR UP Iowa team, and other online and community resources. You will request letters of recommendation from them before the end of the school year.
- **PRIORITIZE YOUR TIME.** Take a close look at how you manage your time. Can you balance school and extracurricular activities while keeping your grades up? If not, consider what you can change in your schedule.



▶ CHAPTER 3: COLLEGE FIT RESOURCES

WHAT IS COLLEGE FIT?

What do you think of when you hear “college fit”? Why is it so important? College fit is how well a school suits your academic, financial and social needs. We all have a favorite pair of sneakers or jeans that perfectly fits our style, body and personality. You feel confident and comfortable when wearing them—as if they were made just for you. That’s how your college fit should feel.

The more you discover about yourself and potential college matches, the sooner you’ll be able to make an informed decision about your college and career.

Online college search and fit tools help you plan for your future. You’ll have the opportunity to discover what college opportunities exist in your community, in Iowa and across the nation. These resources can also help you keep track of your search process. A few college fit resources are mentioned in this chapter. Your visits with teachers, counselors, GEAR UP coaches and college campuses will certainly produce more so you can find the best resources for you and your family.

You have to be able to accept failure to **get better.**

LeBron James



RESOURCES AVAILABLE THROUGH YOUR SCHOOL

NAVIANCE

This college and career readiness tool helps schools align student strengths and interests to college goals. It also helps you create course plans and keep track of graduation requirements through your student profile. [Naviance.com](https://www.naviance.com)

KUDER NAVIGATOR

Many high schools use this career and education planning system. It has three career assessments to help discover your personal interests, skills and work values. You can also research financial aid and scholarships and save information to a portfolio. [KuderNavigator.com](https://www.kudernavigator.com)

CAREER CRUISING

This self-exploration and planning program helps people of all ages achieve their potential in school, career and life. You can learn about yourself—your interests, skills, preferences and aspirations—so you can explore the opportunities right for you. [CareerCruising.com](https://www.careercruising.com)

RESOURCES AVAILABLE DIRECTLY TO YOU

COLLEGE GREENLIGHT

From the information that you provide in your profile, College Greenlight helps you find colleges that could be a good fit. It also helps identify local or national scholarships and connects first-generation and under-represented students with scholarships and personalized advice. [CollegeGreenlight.com](https://www.collegegreenlight.com)

MY ACADEMIC PLAN (MAP)

This career exploration and decision-making system was created by Iowa State University for Iowa's middle and high school students. It guides you through a series of steps to identify your interests, explore career options, plan high school courses and research college majors. MAP also provides resources to improve your GPA, ACT scores, scholarship eligibility, college readiness and employability. [PlanYourAdventure.net](https://www.planyouradventure.net)

RAISE.ME

Get micro scholarships from colleges for your achievements in high school. Follow colleges and learn which ones are the best fit for you. Unlike other search sites, Raise.Me allows you to explore colleges that are not part of their micro scholarship program. [Raise.Me](https://www.raise.me)

START YOUR ACCOUNT

Once you identify the college search tool that works best for you, or the one used by your school, follow these steps to create your account and start searching.

1. Create your profile. Here's what you'll need to provide:

- The basics—your name, address, phone number, birth date, intended major and other high school or college questions
- High school academics—your GPA, academic honors, ACT/SAT scores and class rank

2. Set your search preferences.

- Locations—which ones you are considering, how far you are willing to go, etc.
- Activities—sports, visual/performing arts, leadership, volunteer and other extracurriculars
- More about you—your college and career aspirations, when you plan on going

3. Review your matches. Keep colleges in mind that appeal to you in the following areas:

- Academics
- Finances
- Social
- Culture

4. Save matches that interest you. Save at least three colleges to your list:

- A “safety” school where you can reasonably assume you will be admitted
- A “match” school where your academic credentials fall within or exceed admissions standards
- A “reach” school where your academic credentials fall slightly below admissions standards or where the acceptance rate is very low

+ NEXT STEPS

- **FIND COLLEGES THAT FIT YOUR NEEDS.** Use a college and career resource to identify colleges that meet your criteria.
- **CONSIDER YOUR PERSONALITY.** Take personality surveys and career interest inventories that connect your personality to potential majors and careers.
- **EXPLORE RESOURCES.** Explore additional online resources.
- **GET YOUR FAMILY INVOLVED.** Ask your parents or family members to create their own college and career search accounts so they can help you.
- **DISCUSS COLLEGES.** Talk to your school counselor and family about the three types of colleges.



► CHAPTER 4 BEST FIT! BEST MATCH!

CHOOSING A COLLEGE

Now that you have started using your school's college search and fit resources and the online resources provided in Chapter 3, it's time for research and reflection that will lead to the best college fit and match for you.

Did you know there are about 60 colleges and universities in Iowa and more than 4,000 in the United States? The possibilities are endless! Finding the right college can be stressful, but with the tools found in this section it can be fun and rewarding.

It might be easy to look at the sticker price for college first, but it is just as important to determine what really matters to you in an academic setting. Before you cross off colleges due to cost, finding what matters to you is the first step.



"College is a **match to be made**, not a prize to be won."

Frank Sachs (former president of the National Association for College Admission Counseling)



COMPILE A LIST OF POSSIBILITIES

Start by listing colleges that meet criteria you find important. Gather more information by talking to your school counselor, attending college fairs and visiting college websites. Ask yourself these questions before you begin your college search:

Question	Answer
Do I want to be close to home or move away?	
Do I want to live in a big city or a small town?	
Am I looking for schools with strong resources in my specific career pathway, or for a school with many potential choices?	
Which majors/career fields do I want to study?	
Do I prefer larger schools (public) where I am one of many students or a smaller school (private) where everyone knows each other?	
What can I afford?	
Am I interested in a college with a certain religious affiliation?	
What meal plans are available?	
What athletic opportunities are available?	

COLLEGE CONSIDERATIONS

Here are some things to consider while reflecting on what you want out of your college experience:

ACADEMICS: What academic programs interest you? Do you want a school with a liberal arts curriculum? Are you interested in academic research? What sort of academic atmosphere do you want during college? Would you prefer professors who are highly esteemed in their fields, or professors who are eager to sit and talk to undergraduates for hours—are there places for both? Do you prefer large classes or smaller seminars?

LOCATION: Do you want to be close to your family or far away? Do you prefer a rural, urban, or suburban setting? Do you care about the location's climate? Do you want to be near the mountains, the coast or both? The differences in lifestyle and extracurriculars in a snowy place versus a sunny place are remarkable.

SIZE: Do you want a close-knit college experience where everyone knows, or knows of, everyone else? Or do you want to attend a big school so you'll always have the chance to meet new people?

HOUSING: Do you want to live on campus all four years? Would living off campus in the surrounding area be affordable? Is it more expensive to be on campus, relying on the school's housing and meal plan?

SOCIAL LIFE: How do you like to spend your weekends? Do you want a school that has more of a social scene on campus or off campus?

DIVERSITY: Do you want your peers to come from similar geographic areas, share political/religious views or be of the same gender/race/ethnicity as you? Do you want to go to a place that prides itself on a diverse student body?

FOOD: Do you have specific dietary or religious needs? Does the quality of the school's dining halls make a difference to you?

ATHLETICS: Is a strong athletic program important to you? Do you want a lively, sports-crazed atmosphere? Do sports make a difference?

EXTRACURRICULAR: Do you want to join certain clubs or extracurricular activities? Do you want to play intramural sports? Do you want a campus with prominent Greek life?

COST: How much can you or your family realistically afford to contribute per year toward your college education? Before you decide on colleges that best match your family's financial preferences, consider the characteristics that match your ideal college experience. Then investigate the many financial resources available that could make your experience a reality.

DISABILITY SERVICES: Do you need any accommodations? Could learning supports help you succeed? If you think you need support, speak to the disability services coordinator on campus.

SAFETY AND SECURITY: Some colleges have security offices right on campus, and others might not. Is the college located in a safe neighborhood? Would you feel comfortable walking back from night class or work late in the evening?



WRITE IT DOWN

Think about your dream college. It could be fictional or real, but the goal is for you to visualize your ideal college. Take five minutes to jot down your thoughts on the following questions.

Where is your dream college located?

How large is it?

What program(s) or major(s) does it offer?

Can you see yourself living on or off campus?

What activities do you see yourself participating in?

BEGIN YOUR SEARCH

The search begins! Hopefully you have had an opportunity to visit at least one college or university before junior year. Your goal this year is to use the Best Fit! Best Match! Chart and College Survey Templates to research colleges and add them to your list by the end of this school year. With more than 4,000 in the United States, it's hard to know where to start! Use the College Search Timeline below to break your search into groups.

SEPTEMBER–NOVEMBER: COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN IOWA

	What college did you research?	What was interesting about the college?
Community college		
4-year private college/university		
4-year public university		

DECEMBER–FEBRUARY: OUT-OF-STATE COLLEGES

	What college did you research?	What was interesting about the college?
Research a college in a neighboring state		
Research a college that might require you to fly to get there		

MARCH–MAY: IVY LEAGUES AND TIER I UNIVERSITIES

	What college did you research?	What was interesting about the college?
Research an Ivy League		
Research a Tier 1 (ranked) university		

BEFORE SUMMER—NARROW LIST TO TOP 5

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

FORM YOUR LIST

The following activity is a way to start narrowing your interest list and focusing your search on your “optimal fit”. Use the following chart to narrow your college search, then include at least one from each category.

Selectivity	ACT Averages	Average HS GPA	Admission Rate
SAFETY COLLEGES/UNIVERSITIES			
Open admission	N/A	HS Diploma or Equivalent	All or nearly all admitted
Nonselective	17-23	3.2	90% admitted
MATCH COLLEGES/UNIVERSITIES			
Somewhat selective	20-27	3.4-3.6	80% admitted
Selective	22-30	3.6-3.7	70% admitted
REACH COLLEGES/UNIVERSITIES			
Very selective	28-32	3.7	25% admitted

SAFETY COLLEGES/UNIVERSITIES:

Where you are confident you will be accepted

- Open admission schools in Iowa are community colleges and trade schools like cosmetology/beauty schools that accept any student with a high school diploma or equivalent.
- Nonselective schools are 4-year colleges that are open to nearly all students. Graduates earn a bachelor's (4-year) degree.

MATCH COLLEGES/UNIVERSITIES:

A solid possibility based on your GPA and test scores

- Somewhat selective schools have higher admissions requirements but are open to the vast majority of students.
- Selective schools require higher test scores and high school grade point averages. Some schools in this category have what is called “test optional” admission—which means that students with high grade point average but lower test scores can apply without their ACT/SAT scores. This opens up more options for students who do not test well but excel academically.

REACH COLLEGES/UNIVERSITIES:

Might have a low admissions rate because it's hard to get accepted

- Very selective schools have the highest requirements for admission. Don't sell yourself short! Outstanding essays or letters of recommendation might nudge you onto the accepted list.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What do you notice about the percentage of students admitted in each category?

What are the options for a student with an ACT score in the low 20s?

How important is high school GPA in college admissions?

Knowing that the numbers on the table are averages, what do they tell you about the admissions rate?

Name three colleges in Iowa and guess their selectivity level.

- 1.

- 2.

- 3.

SELECTIVITY OF IOWA COLLEGES

Below is a list of some colleges in Iowa and their selectivity category. Research other colleges and add one more Iowa college to each category.

Selectivity	ACT Averages	Average HS GPA	Admission Rate
OPEN ADMISSION			
Iowa Community Colleges	Placement testing	Diploma	All/nearly all
Vatterott College	N/A	Diploma	
Iowa School of Beauty	N/A	Diploma	
Professional Cosmetology Institute	N/A	Diploma	
La James International College	N/A	Diploma	
NONSELECTIVE			
William Penn University	17-22	2.9	54%
Grand View University	19-23	3.2	92%
SOMEWHAT SELECTIVE			
Buena Vista University	20-25	3.4	78%
Simpson College	21-27		89%
Central College	21-26	3.6	65%
University of Northern Iowa	20-24	3.2	78%
SELECTIVE			
Iowa State University	22-28	3.6	86%
University of Iowa	25-28	3.6	78%
Drake University	25-30	3.7	66%
Luther College	23-29	3.7	70%
VERY SELECTIVE			
Grinnell College	28-32	4.0	35%

WHAT'S MY IDEAL COLLEGE?

DIRECTIONS

Place a ★ next to the criteria most important to you. Rate colleges based on how well they fit your criteria. Total the scores.

SCORING

4–5: Perfect match. 2–3: Kind of meets my criteria. 0–1: Doesn't have what I want.

COLLEGE 1: COLLEGE 2: COLLEGE 3:

★

I want a college that is located:				
a. Close to home				
b. As far away as possible				
c. Somewhere in between				
I prefer a campus size that is:				
a. Small (under 5,000)				
b. Medium (5,000–15,000)				
c. Large (15,000+)				
I want the college to be in the:				
a. City				
b. Suburbs				
c. Country				
I want to be able to live:				
a. On campus, in a dorm or apartment				
b. Off campus, in an apartment or house				
c. At home				
I would prefer a college that is:				
a. Private (not a public or state school)				
b. Single-sex				
c. Religiously affiliated				
d. Known for serving ethnic or racial minorities				
e. None of these are important to me				
I want to complete my degree in:				
a. 2 years or less (A.A.)				
b. 4 years (B.A., B.S.)				
I want to participate in the following activities:				
a. Sports (intramural, Division I, Division II or Division III)				
b. Student government				
c. Community service				
d. Greek life (sororities and fraternities)				
e. Other clubs and activities:				
I want to use the following student services:				
a. Tutoring/academic support				
b. Counseling and health services				
c. Study abroad				
e. Disability access				
f. Other:				
TOTAL				

	COLLEGE 1:		COLLEGE 2:		COLLEGE 3:	
School type						
Student body size						
School setting						
In state/out of state						
Distance from home						
Degree types offered						
Majors I'm interested in	1.		1.		1.	
	2.		2.		2.	
	3.		3.		3.	
Admissions contact						
Admissions requirements	ACT/SAT:		ACT/SAT:		ACT/SAT:	
	GPA:		GPA:		GPA:	
On-campus housing	Available	Not available	Available	Not available	Available	Not available
Deposit amount						
Deposit due date						
Estimated Cost of Attendance						
FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)	School code:		School code:		School code:	
	Deadline:		Deadline:		Deadline:	
Available federal and state financial aid: Grants, work-study, loans						
Other available financial aid: Institutional and private	Name:		Name:		Name:	
	Deadline:		Deadline:		Deadline:	
	Name:		Name:		Name:	
	Deadline:		Deadline:		Deadline:	
	Name:		Name:		Name:	
	Deadline:		Deadline:		Deadline:	

SERVICES FOR STUDENTS						
	Available	Not available	Available	Not available	Available	Not available
Career center	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Computer labs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Free tutoring	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Math center	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
On-campus health center	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Summer orientation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Writing center	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

UNIQUE COLLEGE FIT OPTIONS

Still don't know where to search? There are a few categories of colleges you may not know about but they might lead to an optimal fit.

COLLEGES THAT CHANGE LIVES

Colleges That Change Lives (CTCL) is an organization dedicated to the advancement and support of a student-centered college search process. CTCL was founded on a philosophy of building the knowledge, character and values of young people by introducing them to a personalized and transformative collegiate experience. CTCL provides information and the opportunity to pursue a best-fit college to all students regardless of race, color, religion (creed), national origin (ancestry), sex, gender, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, political affiliation, marital status, disability, military status or any other means by which a student could experience discrimination. CTCL schools tend to be small and offer a personalized experience that many students value. Many schools on the list are not familiar names, but they offer education of the highest quality in an environment where many types of students will feel supported. All students should include CTCL schools as serious contenders in their college research.

Colleges That Change Lives member institutions:

Agnes Scott College	Earlham College	Juniata College	Rhodes College
Allegheny College	Eckerd College	Kalamazoo College	Southwestern University
Antioch College	Emory & Henry College	Knox College	St. John's College
Austin College	The Evergreen State College	Lawrence University	Saint Mary's College of California
Beloit College	Goucher College	Lynchburg College	St. Olaf College
Birmingham-Southern College	Guilford College	Marlboro College	University of Puget Sound
Centre College	Hampshire College	McDaniel College	Ursinus College
College of Wooster	Hendrix College	Millsaps College	Wabash College
Clark University	Hillsdale College	New College of Florida	Wheaton College [Illinois]
Cornell College	Hiram College	Ohio Wesleyan University	Whitman College
Denison University	Hope College	Reed College	Willamette University

COLLEGES THAT MEET FINANCIAL NEED

The cost of college is one of the biggest concerns for students and families. Many colleges are committed to affordability by making sure a student's financial need is covered through grants, scholarships, work-study and, in some cases, federal student loans. On the following pages is a list of colleges that identify themselves as meeting 100% need. Keep in mind that colleges that pledge to meet 100% need are not free. Most students will still have an Expected Family Contribution that they are responsible for and might need to borrow to pay for their share of college costs.

Colleges that Meet Financial Need

College/University	Location	Undergrads	Majors	Acceptance Rate
Amherst College	Amherst, Massachusetts	1,795	46	14%
Barnard	New York, New York	2,573	70	21%
Bates	Lewiston, Maine	1,773	40	25%
Boston College	Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts	14,317	76	34%
Brown	Providence, Rhode Island	9,181	116	9%
Bryn Mawr College	Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania	1,709	57	40%
Bowdoin	Brunswick, Maine	1,805	44	15%
Caltech	Pasadena, California	2,209	40	9%
Carleton	Northfield, Minnesota	2,057	59	23%
Claremont, McKenna College	Claremont, California	1,324	68	11%
Colby	Waterville, Maine	1,847	63	28%
Colgate University	Hamilton Village, New York	2,888	62	26%
College of the Holy Cross	Worcester, Massachusetts	2,787	28	43%
Columbia University	Manhattan, New York	27,589	110	7%
Connecticut College	New London, Connecticut	1,900	60	38%
Cornell University	Ithaca, New York	21,679	138	14%
Davidson	Davidson, North Carolina	1,770	26	22%
Duke University	Durham, North Carolina	15,856	69	11%
Dartmouth	Hanover, New Hampshire	6,298	77	12%
Franklin & Marshall College	Lancaster, Pennsylvania	2,209	53	39%
Olin College of Engineering	Needham ,Massachusetts	305	3	12%
Georgetown University	Washington, D.C.	17,858	64	17%
Grinnell College	Grinnell, Iowa	1,705	27	25%
Hamilton	Clinton, New York	1,904	56	26%
Harvey Mudd College	Claremont, California	804	24	14%
Haverford College	Haverford, Pennsylvania	1,194	38	25%
Harvard University	Cambridge, Massachusetts	28,791	85	6%
Johns Hopkins University	Baltimore, Maryland	5,299	82	18%
Macalester College	Saint Paul, Minnesota	2,073	74	36%
Mass. Institute of Technology	Cambridge, Massachusetts	11,319	55	8%
Middlebury College	Middlebury, Vermont	2,533	62	17%
Mount Holyoke	South Hadley, Massachusetts	2,255	56	55%
Northwestern University	Evanston, Illinois	21,554	120	13%
Oberlin College	Oberlin, Ohio	2,978	63	33%
Occidental College	Los Angeles, California	2,040	43	42%
Pitzer College	Claremont, California	1,076	47	13%
Pomona College	Claremont, California	1,650	53	12%
Princeton University	Princeton, New Jersey	8,088	43	7%
Reed	Portland, Oregon	1,386	32	49%

Colleges that Meet Financial Need (continued)

College/University	Location	Undergrads	Majors	Acceptance Rate
Rice	Houston, Texas	6,621	60	15%
Scripps	Claremont, California	988	82	28%
Smith College	Northampton, Massachusetts	2,989	81	42%
Stanford University	Stanford, California	16,963	75	5%
Swarthmore	Swarthmore, Pennsylvania	16,963	75	5%
St. Thomas Aquinas College	Santa Paula, California	378	1	83%
Trinity College	Hartford, Connecticut	2,408	146	32%
Tufts University	Medford, Massachusetts	10,907	88	17%
The University of Chicago	Chicago, Illinois	15,097	66	9%
The University of Notre Dame	Notre Dame, Indiana	12,197	75	21%
University of Pennsylvania	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	24,806	125	10%
University of Richmond	Richmond, Virginia	4,182	92	32%
University of Southern California	Los Angeles, California	42,453	206	18%
University of Virginia	Charlottesville, Virginia	23,732	88	29%
Vanderbilt University	Nashville, Tennessee	12,686	101	13%
Vassar College	Poughkeepsie, New York	2,421	63	24%
Washington and Lee University	Lexington, Virginia	2,264	45	19%
Washington University	St. Louis, Missouri	14,348	153	17%
Wellesley	Wellesley, Massachusetts	2,323	80	30%
Wesleyan University	Middletown, Connecticut	3,224	58	24%
Williams College	Williamstown, Massachusetts	2,150	41	17%
Yale University	New Haven, Connecticut	12,336	99	6%

HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES OR UNIVERSITIES (HBCUs)

Historically Black Colleges or Universities found their origins in the time when African-American students were denied access to most other colleges and universities. Often, these schools receive extra funding to help African-Americans enter majors in which they have been traditionally underrepresented. In general, HBCUs can be excellent institutions for African-American students to gain an affordable, highly respectable education while also exploring their cultural heritage. Many African-American students choose to attend an HBCU because they want a supportive cultural environment and/or want to explore their cultural roots. Students who are not African-American are also welcome at HBCUs, and in many cases can find attending one to be an affordable and culturally rich experience. There are more than 100 HBCUs in the United States.

HBCUs near Iowa include:

Harris-Stowe State University, St. Louis, Missouri Lincoln University, Jefferson City, Missouri

Some of the top HBCUs around the United States:

Clafin University	North Carolina A&T State University	Hampton University
Jackson State University	Fisk University	Xavier University of Louisiana
Clark Atlanta University	Spelman College	Howard University
Morehouse College	Florida A&M University	
Dillard University	Tuskegee University	

HISPANIC SERVING INSTITUTIONS (HSIs)

Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) are defined as colleges, universities or systems/districts where total Hispanic enrollment constitutes a minimum of 25% of the total enrollment. Some Hispanic students choose to attend an HSI because they want to be certain that there will be a large community where they can be supported, they can relate culturally, and become involved.

4-year HSIs near Iowa include:

Dominican University, River Forest, Illinois	Donnelly College, Kansas City, Kansas
Dodge City Community College, Dodge City, Kansas	University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
Joliet Junior College, Joliet, Illinois	Alverno College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, Illinois	Waubensee Community College, Sugar Grove, Illinois

TEST YOUR IVY LEAGUE KNOWLEDGE

Almost everybody has heard of the Ivy League—eight colleges in the U.S. that are among the nation’s very best. How much do you know about the Ivies? Take the quiz below and find out!

1. Which of the following schools is not in the Ivy League?
a. Columbia b. Stanford c. Brown d. Princeton
2. What is the general location of all Ivy League schools?
a. Midwest U.S. b. Southwestern U.S. c. Pacific Coast d. Northeastern U.S.
3. The Ivy League was originally formed to consist of schools with what?
a. Excellent athletic teams; particularly football b. The best academic rankings
c. The wealthiest students d. More than 100 fine-arts majors
4. The Ivy League college located in Hanover, New Hampshire, is _____ ?
5. Which is the only Ivy League school founded after the American Revolution?
a. Univ. of Pennsylvania b. Brown c. Cornell d. Princeton
6. Which of the following Ivy League schools is known to be the most selective?
a. Yale b. Harvard c. Princeton d. Univ. of Pennsylvania
7. By what name is the Ivy League officially known?
a. American Premier Football League b. The National Organization of Top Universities
c. Council of Ivy League Presidents d. United States Assembly of Collegiate Success
8. When was the Ivy League founded?
a. October 1892 b. March 1978 c. June 1930 d. February 1954
9. True or False: All Ivy League colleges/universities are public schools.
10. How did these eight elite schools receive the name of “Ivy League?”
a. From the ivy growing on the historic buildings b. All eight had ivy plants as unofficial botanical mascots
c. The founder of the Ivy League was named Ivy d. The term was coined as a slang name but stuck

How did you score?

1. Which of the following schools is not in the Ivy League?

- a. Columbia ☒ b. Stanford c. Brown d. Princeton

(The eight are Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Dartmouth, University of Pennsylvania, Brown, Columbia and Cornell.)

2. What is the general location of all Ivy League schools?

- a. Midwest U.S. b. Southwestern U.S. c. Pacific Coast ☒ d. Northeastern U.S.

(Yale: New Haven, CT; Princeton: Princeton, NJ; Harvard: Cambridge, MA; University of Pennsylvania: Philadelphia, PA; Dartmouth: Hanover, NH; Columbia: New York, NY; Cornell: Ithaca, NY; Brown: Providence, RI)

3. The Ivy League was originally formed to consist of schools with what?

- ☒ a. Excellent athletic teams; particularly football b. The best academic rankings
c. The wealthiest students d. More than 100 fine-arts majors

4. The Ivy League college located in Hanover, New Hampshire, is Dartmouth College ?

5. Which is the only Ivy League school founded after the American Revolution?

- a. Univ. of Pennsylvania b. Brown ☒ c. Cornell d. Princeton

(Cornell was founded in 1865.)

6. Which of the following Ivy League schools is known to be the most selective?

- a. Yale ☒ b. Harvard c. Princeton d. Univ. of Pennsylvania

7. By what name is the Ivy League officially known?

- a. American Premier Football League b. The National Organization of Top Universities
☒ c. Council of Ivy League Presidents d. United States Assembly of Collegiate Success

8. When was the Ivy League founded?

- a. October 1892 b. March 1978 c. June 1930 ☒ d. February 1954

9. True or ☒ False: All Ivy League colleges/universities are public schools. (The Ivies are private schools.)

10. How did these eight elite schools receive the name of "Ivy League?"

- ☒ a. From the ivy growing on the historic buildings b. All eight had ivy plants as unofficial botanical mascots
c. The founder of the Ivy League was named Ivy d. The term was coined as a slang name but stuck

+ NEXT STEPS

- **CONTINUE YOUR RESEARCH!** Consider more than just GPA and test scores. Use the guiding questions and college considerations in this chapter to narrow college choices.
- **USE THE IDEAL COLLEGE CHART** to add colleges to your list:
 - ✓ September–November: Colleges and universities in Iowa
 - ✓ December–February: Out-of-state colleges and universities
 - ✓ March–May: Ivy Leagues and Tier I universities
 - ✓ Before summer: Narrow list to Top 5
- **MAINTAIN AND UPDATE YOUR COLLEGE PORTFOLIO** or binder with your Ideal College Fit worksheet, college application checklists, and other admissions information.
- **ATTEND A FAMILY NIGHT OR COLLEGE FAIR** in November. Meet with reps who visit your schools. Participate in all campus visits available to you.
- **HAVE YOU MET YOUR COUNSELOR?** Do this as soon as possible during the fall semester.



▶ CHAPTER 5: THE COLLEGE ESSAY

EVERYONE HAS A STORY...

What is yours? You just need the right tools to make your story come to life: being yourself, self-reflection, time, effort and thought. This might be a difficult part of the application process, but it does not have to be. In fact, writing can be an opportunity to reflect on how far you have come and where you see yourself going.

HOW DO ADMISSION DEPARTMENTS USE THE ESSAY?

- To evaluate your writing ability, specifically focusing on developing a logical and coherent essay structure with persuasive and well-written sentences.
- To learn more about you through the topic and content of the essay—to see what you as a student would contribute to the college's student body.

KEEP IN MIND:

- The essay is the first opportunity for the admissions committee to hear from you, not about you. Colleges do not just look at a list of accomplishments—they want to know who you are. This is your time to show them.
- Unlike other parts of the application (transcripts, test scores, extracurricular activities), which are set in stone by the time you get around to applying, you can tweak and improve your essay right up to the deadline.
- You know your story better than anyone else. No matter the question, the subject of your essay is always you.

While there are many ways to write a successful essay, each essay should engage with all the areas above. This section includes helpful tips and information on how to write an effective college essay. Let's get started!

“You get in life what you **have the courage** to ask for.”

Oprah Winfrey



TYPES OF COLLEGE ESSAYS

COMMON APPLICATION ESSAY

This essay is part of the Common Application and is strictly limited to 650 words. The Common App goes to multiple schools, so make this essay your best. Here are a few pointers:

- The Common App essay is the top brick of the pyramid that is your application. It should frame and give direction to your application by placing your scores, classes, references and grades within a single narrative—this is who you are and where you are going.
- The essay is often the first thing an admissions officer reads in your application. With that in mind, your Common App essay should be intriguing, persuasive and well-written. A thought-provoking essay will leave them eager to know more about you.
- The Common App essay is the place to be you.
- Your essay will be sent to every school where you apply through the Common App, so do not direct it at any specific school.

SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY

Some schools require a school-specific essay. This is an additional narrative about who you are as a person, expanding the profile you provided in your Common App essay. Remember, each component of the application should add to the snapshot of you. A few more pointers:

- Avoid significant overlap between your Common App essay and your supplements. Use the supplemental essay to show a different dimension of yourself.
- This is a great opportunity to highlight your specific interest in the college where you are applying. Become an expert about each college and communicate why you would be a great fit. Colleges accept applicants they believe will take great advantage of the resources they offer.
- Supplemental essays vary. Some colleges ask slightly strange questions to give students an opportunity to demonstrate their creativity, while others will ask traditional questions like “Why X College or University?”

THE PROMPT

Selecting the essay prompt is one of the hardest parts of writing a college essay. Consider the following:

- Read the essay prompts for each of your applications before you start to write. Think about whether, with a little fine-tuning, you can use the same essay for several applications.
- Make sure your essay answers the question that is asked.
- Start by thinking about topics you want to write about. These probably represent an important aspect about you. Even without words on the page, the topic of a part-time job as a youth soccer referee implies that a student is responsible. An essay about how you overcame an obstacle to achieve a goal indicates that you can conquer challenges. An essay about family might indicate that family values are an important part of your life.
- Select a topic that is meaningful to you rather than what you think an admissions officer wants to read.
- Write about a specific incident or event rather than something as broad as, for example, your childhood.
- Do not write about community service unless your experience is unique and shows initiative, an ongoing commitment, responsibility and leadership.
- Do not write about your love life, recreational drug and alcohol use or illegal activities.
- Avoid clichés and lofty topics.
- Have someone you trust proofread your essay (your counselor, advisor, English teacher, parent or sibling).
- Don't worry too much about what others are writing. There is no wrong or right way to write about a meaningful experience, role, person or reflection.
- Don't be afraid to abandon a topic and find something that works better. Often, the success or failure of an idea is revealed in the writing. It is completely natural and expected for your essay to undergo many shifts, changes and revisions before it is perfect.
- Successful essays won't necessarily add another bullet point demonstrating academic or extracurricular success. The activities and honors list will carry this burden. Instead, focus on deepening the image the admissions committee has of you and of your character.
- Compelling essays are written as stories. They might describe a relationship or a meaningful time in your life.

THE TONE

In addition to the topic, the tone is important to convey your “voice.” Winning college essays do not read like dry, academic papers you might write for an English class. Instead, the college essay is a chance to demonstrate to colleges that you can write, while presenting specific aspects of yourself through the essay. Be yourself and present in your own voice. Do not use long words from a thesaurus. Be you. Be sincere. Admissions officers read thousands of essays, so they can identify genuine, authentic writing.

THE PROCESS

The process of writing college essays can be challenging, to say the least. Essays are a weighty part of the application that might require weeks, even months, of planning. **An application essay is, in fact, the most important essay you will write in your high school career.**

Here are some tips excerpted from “The Guide: A College Admissions and Financial Aid Guide for All Students” produced by the Fair Opportunity Project, MIT:

- **Brainstorm.** Starting the essay can be the hardest part. Brainstorming about your personality traits and the characteristics you’d like the essay to highlight is a good place to begin. If you feel comfortable, talk about your brainstorming process with people (teachers, classmates, counselors, parents, etc.) who know you well to get their feedback and help.
- **Get words on paper.** After you have an idea of what to write about, create an outline to organize your essay and let the words flow. Don’t worry about making it perfect. The focus is on getting your ideas and thoughts on paper.
- **Keep it simple.** Sentences should be simple and communicate ideas clearly. Trying to embellish sentences or using fancy words is not the most effective use of space. Remember, this is a time to showcase you, not show how well you can look up words in a thesaurus.
- **Put yourself in the college’s position.** Ultimately, colleges want to accept students who are going to graduate and be successful after graduation. It is vital for you to present yourself as someone who can think critically, loves to learn and is passionate about something.
- **Show, don’t tell.** Convey your characteristics through experiences or reflection. It is better to describe an example of your intellectual curiosity than to openly state, “I am intellectually curious.”
- **Balance use of imagery.** Imagery can be important, but don’t go overboard. Vividly describing scenes furthers the first goal of the college essay—making it clear that you are a competent writer. Overwriting can negatively impact your essay.
- **Use the essay to say what your application can’t.** Colleges want to learn what makes you unique. The essay is a chance for you to communicate what test scores, lists of extracurriculars and awards cannot. Imagine sitting with the college admissions officer and responding to the question, “What else do I need to know?” The essay should reflect a thoughtful response to this question.
- **Stay humble.** Avoid drawing easy conclusions or forcing “satisfying” conclusions. You will probably have many different and complex feelings, questions and thoughts about the subject of your essay. Your essay does not need not resolve in one grand epiphany. The conclusion you reach is less important than the thinking—your thinking—that led to it.

REVIEW & REVISE

Start writing early! Once you think you've written everything, proofread it and proofread it again. Save copies of rough drafts and try different ideas in new copies. Then reread, revise and decide what draft you think is most effective at accomplishing the goals of a college essay. Use these tools to edit and improve your essay:

- **Use a spelling and grammar check.** Most word processing programs like Microsoft Word have a feature to review spelling and grammar. Use it!
- **Have the computer read the essay back.** Many computers have text-to-speech feature that can read an essay to you. This is an excellent way to catch errors and improve the flow of the essay. As an alternative strategy, read the essay to yourself in front of a mirror.
- **Print and review.** Print out the essay and hand-write edits. A hard copy of your paper can be great to read while on the bus, during extra time in class or any time that you have five minutes to review.
- **Teacher and counselor review.** Once you are satisfied with the essay, feedback from teachers and/or counselors can significantly improve your essay.

REQUIRED ESSAY PROMPTS

ESSAY PROMPT EXAMPLES

- What was the environment in which you were raised? Describe your family, home neighborhood or community and explain how it has shaped you as a person.
- Most students have an identity, an interest or a talent that defines them in an essential way. Tell us about yourself.
- You've got a ticket in your hand. Where will you go? What will you do? What will happen when you get there?

COMMON APPLICATION ESSAY PROMPTS

- Some may have a background, identity, interest or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
- The lessons we take from obstacles and encounters can be a fundamental element to success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
- Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
- Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma—anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could take to identify a solution.
- Discuss an accomplishment, event or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
- Describe a topic, idea or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?
- Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt or one of your own design.

+ NEXT STEPS

- **COMPLETE A DRAFT** of your personal college essay by the end of the fall semester of your junior year.
- **COMPLETE 3 OF 7 COMMON APPLICATION ESSAYS** by the end of March of your junior year.
- **COMPLETE 6 SCHOLARSHIP ESSAYS** by the end of April of your junior year.
- **REMEMBER THESE TIPS:**
 - ✓ Tell the admissions officers something they don't already know about you.
 - ✓ Choose a prompt or topic that you are familiar with and passionate about.
 - ✓ Be personal, honest, and heartfelt.
 - ✓ Be concise.
 - ✓ Avoid slang, clichés, and metaphors.
 - ✓ Fully develop the ideas in your story.
 - ✓ Show your drafts to people whose opinion you value, then revise, revise, revise!
 - ✓ Ask yourself, does the reader know you better after reading your work?
- **EVERYBODY HAS A STORY. WHAT'S YOURS?**



► CHAPTER 6: FINANCIAL AID

WHAT IS FINANCIAL AID?

Financial Aid is any grant or scholarship, loan, or paid employment offered to help a student meet college expenses. Financial aid is usually provided by sources such as federal and state agencies, colleges, foundations and corporations. The amount of financial aid that a student receives is determined through federal, state, and institutional guidelines.

WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF FINANCIAL AID?

- **Grants and scholarships** are free money and do not have to be repaid. They are awarded based on various criteria identified by the funding source. Federal and state grants are available for those who qualify.
- **Federal Work-Study** enables students to earn money during the school year while gaining valuable work experience, typically in part-time, career-related jobs on the college campus.
- **Loans** are money that a student borrows to help pay for college, and they must be repaid (with interest).
- **GI Bill** refers to any Department of Veterans Affairs education benefit to help service members and eligible veterans cover the cost of education or training.

You're off to great places! Today is your day!
Your mountain is waiting, so ... get on your way!

Theodor Seuss Geisel (Dr. Seuss)



FILING THE FAFSA

WHAT DOES FAFSA STAND FOR?

FAFSA stands for Free Application for Federal Student Aid. It is the form that will determine your eligibility for all federal and state financial aid, as well as many privately funded grants and scholarships.

DO I NEED TO COMPLETE IT?

If you are a U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident, you should complete the FAFSA at fafsa.gov. You can find filing tips at iowaCollegeAid.gov/FAFSA.

RESIDENCY STATUS	FILE THE FAFSA
I am a U.S. citizen.	✓
I am a permanent resident with an Alien Registration Card (I-551)	✓
I am a conditional permanent resident with visa type I- 551C.	✓
I am an eligible noncitizen with an Arrival/Departure Record (I-94) showing one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Refugee• Asylum granted• Parolee (for a minimum of one year)• Cuban-Haitian entrant	✓

DO I HAVE TO COMPLETE THE FAFSA EVERY YEAR?

Yes. Eligibility for financial aid does not carry over from one school year to the next. You will need to complete the FAFSA for each school year in which you plan to attend college.

IOWA APPLICATION FOR FINANCIAL AID

Each year when you complete the FAFSA, you will be directed to complete the Iowa Application for Financial Aid. You can also access the application directly at iowaCollegeAid.gov/IFAA. The Iowa Financial Aid application provides lowans with an opportunity to qualify for certain scholarships and grants offered through the state of Iowa.

WHAT IS AN FSA ID?

FSA ID stands for Federal Student Aid ID. Your FSA ID is your personal legal signature. If you are filing a FAFSA, you and your parents will need to create FSA IDs to electronically sign your application.

HOW DO I GET AN FSA ID?

You can create your FSA ID before you file the FAFSA at fsaid.ed.gov. Your FSA ID consists of a user name and password, which increases the security level when you access the system. You will need an FSA ID to log in to these websites: fafsa.gov, National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS) at nslds.ed.gov, studentloans.gov, studentaid.gov, Agreement to Serve (ATS) at teach-ats.ed.gov.

PIN numbers are no longer used to log into U. S. Department of Education websites. Students and parents who have a current PIN will be able to enter it to assist with verification of their FSA ID.

TO CREATE YOUR FSA ID:

Step 1: Log in to fsaid.ed.gov.

- ☐ Click "Start here."
- ☐ Choose whether you are a student or a parent.
- ☐ Click the link to create an FSA ID.

Step 2: Create a user name (for example: **jsmith4444**).

- ☐ Use the first letter of your first name, lowercase.
- ☐ Use all of your last name, lowercase.
- ☐ Use the last four digits of your Social Security Number.

Step 3: Create a Password (for example: **Snacks210**).

- ☐ The first letter is a capital S. All other letters are lower case; no spaces.

Step 4: Review the following sample challenge questions and answers.

- | | |
|---|----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> What city were you born in? | Response: Des Moines |
| <input type="radio"/> What is your school's mascot? | Response: Lions |
| <input type="radio"/> What is your zip code? | Response: 50009 |
| <input type="radio"/> What is your home state? | Response: Iowa |
| <input type="radio"/> What is a significant day in your life? | Response: 09/26/2000 |

Step 5: Review your information.

Read and accept the terms and conditions.

Step 6: Confirm your e-mail address.

Use the secure code, which will be sent to the e-mail address you entered when you created your FSA ID. Once you verify your e-mail address, you can use it instead of your user name to log in. Now you will be ready to complete your FAFSA in the fall of your senior year.

IMPORTANT!

- ☐ Your parents should not create an FSA ID for you, and vice versa. Doing so may cause issues with your financial aid. Your parent or guardian must follow the steps above to create an FSA ID.
- ☐ File your FSA ID in a secure location so you can find it every October when the FAFSA filing period opens.
- ☐ Only the owner of the FSA ID should create and use the account. Never share your FSA ID. Keep your online identity safe and secure.

+ NEXT STEPS

- **CREATE AN FSA ID** by the end of your junior year in preparation for filing the FAFSA in your senior year.
- **KNOW HOW** to apply for and receive federal and state student aid.

