

What Are the Steps of the College Application Process?

There's more to applying for college than just filling out a form. A little advanced planning can go a long way. There are steps you can take throughout high school to make sure you're prepared.

¹Use this checklist as your guide before, during, and after the college application process.

Before

- **Build Your Career List.** Take [career assessments](#) to find out what interests you. Then, find and favorite [careers](#) you think might be a good fit. It's important to keep your career goals in mind as you look at colleges and majors.
- **Build your College List.** Find and favorite [colleges](#) that seem like a good fit for you. Make sure they offer [programs or majors](#) that'll help you reach your career goals. When the time to apply gets closer, figure out your safety, reach, and match schools.
- **Understand admission requirements.** Talk to your counselor about your goals. Make sure you're taking the right classes in high school and earning good grades.
 - Learn what you need to do to be eligible for [CSU](#) or [UC](#).
 - Use your **Academic Planner** in **My Plan** to track your courses and grades.
- **Keep track of deadlines.** Go to the **College Applications** tab in **My College Plan** and enter the deadline for each school on your list.
 - The CSU application opens on October 1 and closes on November 30.

¹ <https://www.californiacolleges.edu/#/college-application-checklist>

- Due to [COVID-19](#), several CSUs have extended the fall 2021 application deadline. Most of the extended deadlines are in mid-January. Some are as late as March 2. [See which CSUs are still accepting applications](#).
 - The UC application opens on August 1 and closes on November 30.
 - Private colleges all have different deadlines, so be sure to check their websites.
 - California Community Colleges (CCC) don't have specific deadlines. Try to apply by January. That way, you'll have plenty of time to complete the steps for [priority registration](#).
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- **Learn about financial aid**, like grants, scholarships, work-study, and loans. Follow the [Financial Aid Checklist](#) to make sure you're ready to apply by **March 2**.
 - **Talk to your family early** about [college](#) and [how to pay for it](#).
 - **Go to college planning events**. Watch for announcements about college fairs, presentations, and application workshops. These can be great opportunities to meet college representatives and ask questions.
 - **Take the SAT or ACT**, if you need to. Your high school might offer practice tests, and there are free resources to help you study.
 - **Get started on your college essay**. Leave yourself lots of time to write, get feedback, and revise.
 - **Ask for letters of recommendation**, if you need them. Give your recommenders at least four weeks to write your letter. Put together a [Brag Sheet](#) to show off your talents, skills, and accomplishments.
 - **Set up an email address** for college applications and life after high school. Make it simple. Don't use inappropriate language or anything that might be embarrassing later. You can get a [Gmail account](#) for free.

During

- **Start your application as soon as you can.** The UC Application and the Common Application open on **August 1**. Cal State Apply opens on **October 1**.
- **Launch your application from CaliforniaColleges.edu.** [Sign in](#) and hover on **College**. Then, click the application you want to fill out.
- **Send your ACT or SAT scores** to colleges that ask for them.
- **Follow up on your letters of recommendation.** Make sure the people writing your letters have everything they need to send them in on time.
- **Ask questions.** Don't be afraid to talk to your counselor or contact the college admissions office.

After

- **Keep track of your applications.** Go to the **College Applications** tab in **My College Plan**.
 - If you launched your CCC or CSU application from CaliforniaColleges.edu, you'll be able to see your application status. Students at some high schools can see their UC application status, too.
 - Enter the date you submitted each college application if it doesn't show up in the **Submission Date** column.

- **Check the online portal and your email often.** Most colleges will have you set up an account so they can communicate with you. They'll let you know if they need more information or paperwork. Respond to requests or emails as soon as you can.
- **Fill out the [FAFSA](#) or [CA Dream Act Application](#) between October 1 and March 2.** If you apply to a college you didn't list on your financial aid application, be sure to log in to your FAFSA or CADAA account and add it. Learn what steps to take [after you apply for financial aid](#).