



# College Knowledge

**T**he years after high school are an exciting time—you're going out into the world and figuring out what your adult life is going to look like. Some people will go to college right after high school, and some will take different paths. If you've decided that college is the best choice for you and your family, you may be feeling both excited and overwhelmed. Simplify the college preparation process by tackling it step by step, and you'll be ready to start your next chapter in no time!

## Steps

1. Explore your options
2. Start the admissions process
3. Make a financial plan
4. Get set for success
5. Build healthy habits

## Purpose

When I've earned this badge, I'll understand the steps in the college admission process and be prepared to attend the school of my choice.



**THE RIGHT FIT**

**THE RESEARCH**

**OPEN MIND**

**GUIDANCE COUNSELOR**

**LOCATION**

**MATCH INTERESTS**

**RANKINGS**

**STAY OVERNIGHT**

**CAMPUS TOUR**

**COMPARE PROGRAMS**

**TYPE OF SCHOOL**

**COMPARE COSTS**

**TEST PREP**

**FINANCIAL AID**

**COLLEGE WEBSITES**

**TALK TO STUDENTS**

**EXTRA-CURRICULARS MATTER**

**THE VISIT**

**THE APPLICATION**

**THE ESSAY**





## STEP

# 1

## Explore your options

The first step in applying to college is figuring out where you might like to go. If you have a school—or group of schools—that you’re interested in, you’re already on your way. If not, that’s just fine! You can start by looking online at [www.bigfuture.org](http://www.bigfuture.org), where you can search for schools all over the country, find detailed information about each one, and build lists to help you compare schools. Talk to your parents or guardians about anything non-negotiable that will guide your search: maybe your future school needs to be close enough that you can live at home, or affiliated with your religion.

Choose at least three schools that interest you and meet your family’s needs, and compare them in this step.

### CHOICES—DO ONE:

- ☐ **Find your place.** The location of a school plays a big part in the experience you’d have there. Do you plan to live at home while you attend your school, or go home on weekends? Do you want to be in a major city, or do crowds stress you out? Do you love warm weather? Look into the places that are home to your chosen schools and compare them. Think about the cost of living, entertainment options, and access to public transportation. Talk about your findings with family and friends or see the schools in person to help narrow down your choices, if possible.

OR

- ☐ **Investigate your interests.** Yes, you’re going to college to further your education—but you want to have fun, too! Activities and groups will help you get plugged into college life and make new friends. Are you an athlete? Passionate about politics? Do you want to join a sorority? Sing in an a cappella group? Research the activities and groups offered by your chosen schools and compare them. Talk about your findings with family and friends or see the schools in person to help narrow down your choices, if possible.

OR

- ☐ **Compare your program.** Many people start college without any idea of what subject they’d like to specialize in. (And many change their minds along the way!) That’s totally fine—college is all about self-discovery. But if you’re passionate about a particular subject or career path, you’ll want to make sure your college can guide you to your goals. Research your potential focus of study at your chosen schools, and compare the options. Is the school known for having a solid program in your field? What kinds of classes are offered? Are there student clubs or groups (Computer Science Club, Pre-Law Society)? Talk about your findings with family and friends or see the schools in person to help narrow down your choices, if possible.

You’ll choose ONE option in each step to earn this badge. However, all of the choices can help guide you in the process. Feel free to do them all!



## How Many Applications?

You've probably heard the expression "Don't put all your eggs in one basket." This is especially true when applying to college. If you've always dreamed of going to one particular school, great! Do everything you can to give yourself the best chance of acceptance, and go for it. But since there are no guarantees in life, you'll want to give yourself some backup options. Talk to your guidance counselor about where s/he thinks you'd have the best chance of being accepted and where you'd fit in well. Acceptance rates can vary widely by region: if a lot of people from your high school apply to the same college nearby, it can be more competitive. Alternatively, schools that are farther away may be more likely to accept students from your region.

Applications can be expensive to submit—your counselor should be able to help you put together a plan that will increase your odds while staying within a budget.

## STEP 2 Start the admissions process

Each college and university has its own process for accepting students. In addition to the application, many schools ask for specific test scores (such as the SAT or ACT), personal essays, and face-to-face interviews. Get prepared for the college admission process in this step.

### CHOICES—DO ONE:

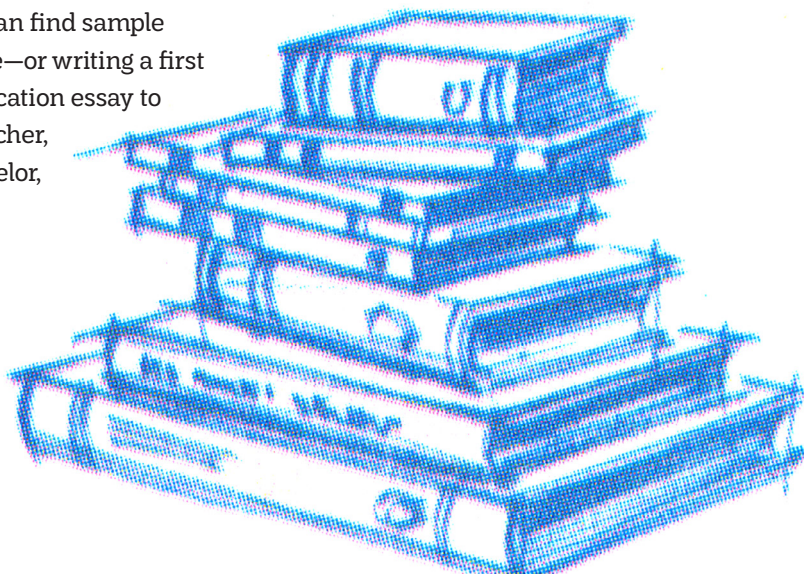
- ☐ **Apply yourself.** The first step in the application process is the application itself! College applications can look overwhelming, but don't be intimidated. Look at the application for one of the schools you're interested in, and practice filling it out. (Alternatively, you may be able to use the Common Application for multiple schools—go online to read about it and see if it's used by the schools you're interested in.) Have a guidance counselor, teacher, or another adult review your practice application and give you suggestions for improvement before you fill out the final draft.

OR

- ☐ **Do your best on the test.** If you've been dreading the SAT or ACT, now's the time to face your fears. How do you improve your test-taking skills? *Practice.* There are lots of practice methods available: you can check out a book from the library, take online practice tests, sign up for a prep class, or work with a tutor. Whichever method (or methods) you choose, keep working at it until you see improvement in your results.

OR

- ☐ **Share your story.** Colleges and universities want to see more than just a list of grades and activities—they're interested in who you are as a person. Admission essays and interviews give you the chance to show your best self: you can share what makes you stand out from the crowd, why you'd be a good fit for a particular school, and how your personal experiences have made you who you are today. Sharpen your storytelling skills by taking part in a mock interview with a friend or family member—you can find sample questions online—or writing a first draft of an application essay to share with a teacher, guidance counselor, or another adult.







# your story







## STEP 3 Make a financial plan

Higher education is exciting and beneficial in many ways, but it can also be very expensive. The full “sticker price” of a four-year college or university, whether public or private, is out of reach for many, many families in the United States. The good news is that some schools cost less than others—and there are ways to save money and help pay for tuition and other expenses. In this step, look into the cost of higher education and find out how you might receive financial assistance.

### CHOICES—DO ONE:

- ☐ **Research in-state and out-of-state tuition costs.** If you’ve just started thinking about the cost of your college education, you may not have compared the expenses between in-state and out-of-state schools. The base tuition cost for state schools is often much higher for out-of-state students. Choose one state school in the state where you are a resident, and one state school in a different state. Compare the base tuition costs of each, and think about how you might be able to save money while attending both out-of-state and in-state schools. Talk about your findings with your family or guidance counselor.

OR

- ☐ **Find out about scholarships.** The cost of a college education can look overwhelming at first—but there are many options available for financial assistance, including scholarships. Are you highly ranked in your class? Are you an athlete? Are you the daughter of a veteran? Can you make a prom dress out of duct tape? (Seriously—look it up!) There are special scholarship opportunities available just for Girl Scouts, too. Visit [www.girlscouts.org/en/our-program/scholarships.html](http://www.girlscouts.org/en/our-program/scholarships.html) to see the latest offerings, and be sure to check with your local council as well. There are many other websites where you can search for different types of scholarships, too. Once you’ve researched your options, apply for at least one scholarship. Have a family member, teacher, or guidance counselor look over your application before you submit it.

OR

- ☐ **Compare the costs of public, private, and junior college.** People often assume that public schools are cheaper than private schools, but sometimes—depending on the location and financial aid received—they’re similarly priced. Junior college (also called community college) can also be a great way to further your education at a significantly reduced cost. Choose the subject or career path you’re most interested in and compare the cost of pursuing it at a public institution, private institution, and a junior college. Share your findings with your family, a teacher, or a guidance counselor to get their feedback.



# Financial Aid 101

“Financial aid” is a blanket term used to describe money that can help pay for college. It includes money that comes from the government and other organizations in the form of grants, scholarships, loans, or work-study programs.

**\$ Grants** do not have to be paid back. This money comes from the state or federal government or the college itself. The amount is usually need-based, meaning it is awarded based on a student’s financial circumstances.

**\$ Scholarships** are awarded by governments, colleges, or private organizations. Like grants, they do not have to be paid back. They may be given to students who excel in academic or athletics or are part of a particular organization or demographic. Scholarships may be a one-time gift, or ongoing throughout your education.

**\$ Loans** are borrowed money. When you take out loans, they must eventually be paid back—with interest. (That means you end up paying back more than you borrowed.) Students with financial need may be awarded low-interest loans from the federal government.

**\$ Work-study programs** are paid part-time jobs (typically on campus) provided to students based on financial need. These funds are usually shared directly with the student as a paycheck.

Regardless of your family’s financial circumstances, you’ll want to start the financial aid process by filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov). You can submit it starting October 1 of the year before you’ll be attending college. This application covers state and federal grants, work study, and loans. Individual colleges and universities may have their own forms that you’ll need to submit, too.







## STEP 4 Get set for success

Maybe you're an honor student who always prioritizes studying over fun, or maybe you have some room for growth in the study habits department. Either way, you'll be starting with a fresh academic slate on your first day of college, and the changes in your environment can challenge you in unexpected ways.

### CHOICES—DO ONE:

- ☐ **Study, buddy.** College courses can be quite different from high school courses. Your classes might be much larger than you're used to, and subjects that you found easy in high school may be more challenging at the college level. How do you face those challenges? Study! Make a plan for when, where, and how you will study at college. Start by looking at potential study locations at one of the schools you're interested in, keeping in mind how you like to study. Visit them in person, if possible. Do you prefer quiet or do you like to study to music? Public or private spaces? If you'll have a roommate, how will that affect your habits? If you'll be living at home, how will you step up your game to meet the increased time and effort you'll need to put in? Talk to your family members, teachers, or guidance counselor about their tips for studying in college, and share your thoughts with them.

OR

- ☐ **Plan for academic integrity.** As a Girl Scout, you know all about being "honest and fair." However, college academic demands and deadlines may tempt even the most honest student to cut corners. Academic integrity means *never* plagiarizing, cheating, or misquoting information. Colleges and universities take this very seriously. Choose one of the schools you're interested in and review their Academic Integrity Code (some schools may use a slightly different name, such as Academic Honor Code). Talk about what you've read with a teacher, guidance counselor, or another adult. Was any of the information new or surprising to you? How would you handle it if you saw a fellow student—or new friend—going against the code of your new school?

OR

- ☐ **Prevent procrastination.** We've all been there: one more hit of the snooze button, one more episode of that amazing TV show, my paper's not due until Friday so I'll just pull an all-nighter later this week . . . Procrastination can take many forms. When you put off assignments or studying, it almost always adds to your stress level and reduces the quality of the final product. Research techniques for fighting procrastination, either online or in books you can take out from the library. (Just make sure you're not doing it when you should be doing something else!) Try a few different techniques until you find what works best for you. Talk about your findings with a family member, teacher, or guidance counselor, and get their input. How do they address procrastination in their own lives?



## Professionalism

As you take your first steps out into the adult world, it's important to think about the kind of impression you want to make. Now's a good time to create a professional-sounding email address to include on your applications and correspondence, and remember that college admission officers—and potential employers—may check out your social media presence before making decisions. That doesn't mean you need to stop posting online, but you do want to think about how your words and photos may be interpreted.

For in-person college interviews, you'll have a short period of time to put your best foot forward. Practice saying hello and shaking hands beforehand. Wear clothes that you feel comfortable in, but dress neatly. The "dress code" may vary depending on the school or program (you might see students dressed differently for art school and business school, for example), but when in doubt, business casual is a safe bet.



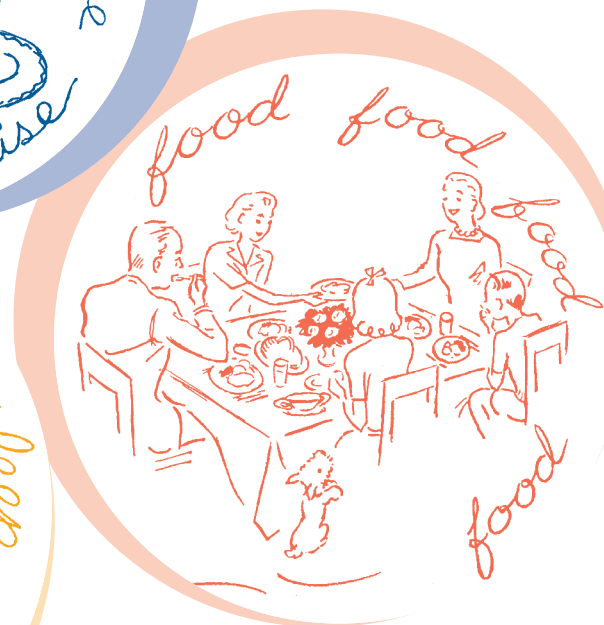


## STEP 5 Build healthy habits

When you start college, you'll take your first step into an independent adult life. You'll be juggling classes, homework, friends, family, finances, and extracurricular activities. It can be challenging to balance it all and still find time to *breathe*—but you've got this!

### CHOICES—DO ONE:

- ☐ **Be a self-starter.** In high school, you may have a block schedule or the same classes each day. Your teachers may push you to turn in your assignments on time. In college, you may have a class as little as once a week. And your teacher may not even know your name, let alone ask where your homework is! It's all up to you—and some students can struggle to stay motivated. Plan to succeed by creating a practice calendar. Look at a traditional freshman student course load at one of the colleges or universities you're interested in. Then create a mock calendar for



Source: Senior Girl Scouting, 1952



yourself. Schedule in study time, meals, rest, and personal things that are important to you (like exercise, phone calls home, or that one TV show you *can't* miss). If you'll have a job on top of classes, be sure to include it, too. Then go over your calendar with your family, a teacher, or your guidance counselor to see what they think.

OR

- ☐ **Balance school and socializing.** You're going to make a lot of new friends in college—and it's going to be so much fun. If you're living on campus, you're not going to have any adults saying it's time to go to bed, go to class, or write a paper. That means it's all up to *you* to find a balance between spending time with your new friends and getting your work done. Talk to a current college student and ask how she balances her social life with schoolwork, then come up with your own plan. Discuss your plan with your closest friends, and see if they have other suggestions—remember, you'll want to carve out time for old friends, too!

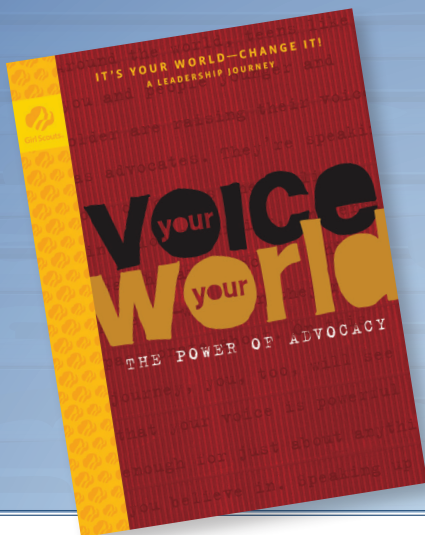
OR

- ☐ **Manage stress.** College can be a lot of fun, but it can be stressful, too. Academic pressure may feel more intense when it's layered on top of a poor diet, lack of sleep, or homesickness. Along with at least one of your friends, pay attention to your stress level over the course of several weeks, and take notes about it. When do you feel the most stressed? Do you notice a difference when you're tired or hungry, or when you've been looking at a screen for a long time? Does exercise make a difference? Caffeine? Do your hormones seem to factor in? Try at least three different healthy ways to prevent stress before you feel it, or push back against it when you do. Compare your ideas and results with your friends, and talk about what worked best. Then talk about times when you think you may feel stressed or anxious at college—maybe finals, writing papers, meeting your new roommate for the first time—and how you will manage it in a healthy way.



## Coping with Setbacks

As the number of students applying to college increases, it's important to arm yourself with the understanding that you may not get in everywhere you apply. In most cases, this has *nothing* to do with who you are as a person. Schools are looking to create classes of students who are different from one another in all sorts of ways, and there's really no way to predict who will get accepted to a school and who won't. The best you can do is highlight the subjects and extracurricular activities you're truly passionate about, keep your options open, and trust that you'll connect with a school that's just right for you. Wherever you go, college is what you make of it: go in with an open mind and you're guaranteed to find inspiring teachers and amazing new friends.



## Going on a Journey? Do some badge work along the way.

On the *Your Voice, Your World* Journey, you'll find an issue you care about and learn how to advocate for it. As you work through this badge, think about issues relating to education at the local, national, and global levels. Does anything spark ideas and inspire you to get involved?

### Now that I've earned this badge, I can give service by:

- Showing younger Girl Scouts how they can manage stress in a healthy way
- Setting up a weekly SAT or ACT study group for friends
- Teaching my siblings a new procrastination-prevention method



I'm inspired to:

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