

College Planning 101

A Guide for High School Seniors

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Foreword

About this Document

I find that after completing a large accomplishment or feat, I look back on the process I just went through and reflect. While it's important to look at the "positives" through any journey, it's also imperative to take note of the "negatives" while theorizing "What would've happened if I did things differently?"

After I completed the entire, rigorous process of applying, waiting, and deciding regarding college applications, I did just that. I spent most of my summer and the days leading up to starting at the University of Florida (UF) wondering what would have happened if I focused attention on different schools or knew information that I would learn after completing the program.

One thing you learn about college is that you can make the best of any school that you attend; it's something I didn't fully realize until I had almost graduated with my Bachelor's. Having now graduated, I don't regret my decision in attending UF. But still reminded of the difficult application process, I decided to use what I learned to help high school seniors make better-informed decisions about the application process.

This document has been reorganized and edited to best apply to seniors at College Academy at Broward College. The information in this document is based on information I gathered in 2017 for students I mentored with one of the Office of Engineering Outreach Programs (OEOP) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.¹ Please utilize the Table of Contents and the "Find" function to search for keywords.

As a disclaimer: while I try to be as impartial as possible when producing information and facts, this is ultimately coming from my perspective. As you'll read in the following section, I have an engineering background and attend a school in Florida. I am similarly fortunate to have two parents who also attended college. With these statements alone, note that my experiences may not apply directly to yours. The advice in this document is something that comes from my unique background as well as advice received/given to many of my peers across different disciplines, and thus may come with unconscious bias.

All 20 pages of this document were written in the hope that you don't make the same mistakes I did with my process. I hope that you read/skim through it and take what you need to be the best college applicant you can be. Congratulations in advance!

¹ I definitely don't want to take credit for these students' accomplishments (they're honestly incredible) but they ended up reading this document, asked plenty of questions, and ended up at schools like Berkeley, Tufts, Harvard, and MIT! So even if you chose not to use this guide, make sure you ask plenty of questions and use ample resources for this process!

About the Author

Hello!

My name is Nathalie Thelemaque, an alumna of the College Academy Class of 2016.

After graduating with my associate degree from Broward College, I received my bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering and minored in Sustainability and the Built Environment. During my undergraduate career, I was involved with the National Society of Black Engineers, American Society of Civil Engineers, and Black Student Union.² I had one internship with The Boeing Company where I worked as a structures engineering intern on the 777x Major Test Team. Similarly, I researched with the Bob Graham Civic Scholars Program (Barometer Florida: a climate change study) and the MIT Summer Research Program (National Research Priority Study: hydraulic fracking and groundwater.) At the time of this document's completion, I will be a Ph.D. student at the University of Washington where I will be researching at the intersection of civil engineering, climate resiliency, sustainability, and social justice.

I have various experiences working with younger students through mentorship programs, non-profit organizations, and with the previously mentioned OEOP at MIT (so clearly, I'm pretty big on volunteering and, hopefully, advocating for younger voices!)

If you have any questions about the information in this document or have any questions specifically about engineering, The University of Florida, or any of the hobbies and interests I mentioned, feel free to connect with me through my email: thelemaquen@gmail.com. I'm more than happy to give additional insights.

Best regards,

Nathalie



*2016 Nathalie, outside of
Building 19, CA@BC*



2020 Nathalie

² Pro-tip: Join organizations, even now in your senior year, and especially in college! You don't need to be on executive board for everyone, but it's a great way to make friends and connections. My rule of thumb was always to join one or two social organizations (cultural/heritage/hobby) and one or two professional organizations (major specific/honor society)

So, You're Applying to College

Congratulations! You have finally made it to your senior year.

For all of you, generally speaking, it will be the last time that you're going to school in your respective neighborhoods and hanging around the same community of students you've been around for quite some time. I'll save the nostalgic talk for later because before you get to that point you have the college application process to worry about. The next five months will go by faster than you think, and it honestly might be one of the most stressful periods of your life thus far, but it won't be too difficult if you start early and make sure to not stress out (completely!)

This is an attempt to give you guys some advice on what to do during this turbulent time! I know I made some mistakes during my application process and I hope that you guys won't make the same ones.

General Pointers

I'm sure that some of you have had schools you've wanted to apply to for years, while some of you may still be confused about what colleges are good for you. And that's completely okay! During the next few months, you're going to be changing your mind a lot (or you might be super concrete in your decisions too). Essentially, it's going to be a wild ride so here are some pointers:

- **Don't go overboard.** There's a certain rush that comes with applying to colleges, which is weird. Sometimes, you don't think clearly and end up applying to 15+. It happens to the best of us... but don't do it. "Too many schools" is a phrase that's subjective to each person. But these application fees aren't cheap, so just keep the number in mind. (If you do get fee waivers, then take this with a grain of salt. Just be warned though: too many acceptances can make for an awfully difficult "decision" phase.³)
 - Also, you can reduce the number of schools you're applying to by researching the culture of the school. Do you want to go to a school that has sports programs? How is the dorm culture? What's diversity like at the campuses? These are all important questions to ask, and you can find the answers online via YouTube videos, Reddit posts, and college websites.
- **Have a backup.** Emphasis on the "a". While backups are a good idea if you feel like your other schools are "reaches", I wouldn't suggest having more than three. This piggybacks off of the "don't go overboard" point.
- **Your college decision is *your* decision.** Apply to a college because you want to go there. It should be holistically your decision, and not made to appease other people (i.e.

³ I have an absolutely brilliant friend who applied to nearly every Ivy League/Public Ivy school for a meme (not a good one) and got into all of them. He had an incredibly hard time afterwards trying to figure out what school to actually go to... Don't be like him.

parents or friends or significant others.⁴) I mean, keeping them in mind is great, but at the end of the day, you want to apply to the school you're going to be the happiest at and that you're going to love. And *please* don't apply to a college just because of a significant other.⁵

- **Early decision? Early action? Regular?** There are different ways of applying to colleges, as you know. It honestly depends on what you're looking for in a college. If you feel like there's only one school for you and you don't want to completely weigh your options elsewhere, maybe early decision is better for you. Early action is great if you want to have more time deciding on what college to choose. Regular action is beneficial if you have more projects/things you want to talk about in your application. It all depends on what you want.
- **Money is important but "It is what it is."** If you didn't know already, college is expensive. But don't let that fact keep you away from applying to places with a seemingly hefty cost of attendance. Loans are a thing, and while we often hear about the looming debt crisis in this country, they can be paid back. Also, applying to external scholarships if financial assistance is not given directly from the school.
- **Learn from this experience.** For many of you, this is the first time you will be applying for something at this large of a scale, but it certainly won't be your last. You'll find that you'll be applying to a lot of things in the future (jobs, graduate school, scholarships, programs, credit cards, etc.) It can be daunting at first and you might stumble along the way, but this is all a learning process! You won't get it perfectly the first time and that's okay.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will my CA credits transfer over?

Most universities have their own credit transfer policies. I encourage you to visit the websites of the schools to which you are applying to determine their policies. I can say with some certainty that any Florida public, in-state school will allow you to transfer credits and enter directly into your major's coursework. But just to be certain, make sure to hold on to any syllabi you might have from these classes. If you no longer have them, take time to reach out to professors for them, or find them online! It will help if there's any institution that gives you trouble for credit transfers.

How do you get recommendation letters?

By asking nicely, and early! Hopefully, by now you have made some connections with faculty members at CA and BC. If there was a class you did well in and spoke to the professor in or even worked with an advisor or professional in an extracurricular activity, they would be the person you would ask! Ideally, you don't want someone who barely knows you. I've found that when asking someone to write the recommendation letter (usually through email, so you can follow

⁴ Again, grain of salt comment. Coming from a very hands-on household, I know that sometimes it's easier to go with what's told. Knowing what you want, independent from whatever anyone else wants for you, is what really matters. Please keep that in mind!

⁵ Please.

up when necessary), reminding them of who you are/your achievements would be a great idea (if you have a resume, send it to them!)

What's the most daunting thing about the college application process?

The deadlines! I recently went through an application process so it's all fresh in my mind – you can have great momentum in the beginning, but if you don't pace yourself correctly you might be overwhelmed from all the essay writing, test-taking, and scholarship applying. While the next couple of months might be stressful, you got this! Make sure to take breaks, set hard (and soft) deadlines, and push through – you're so close this next chapter of your life!

How long should I take to complete my Bachelor's?

It depends. I know many CA alumni that finished their degree in the two years and went off to do great things. And then there are people like me and a couple of others who decided to do the complete four years. Taking more than two years allows you to become more involved with organizations, take on a minor or another major, have a reduced schedule (12 credit semesters instead of 15), or take a semester off to do a co-op/internship. Not to say that it's impossible to do that in two years; it depends on the major and the person! You'll find what's best for you once you start undergrad.

How will I know if I made the right decision?

This is a tricky one because you might know as soon as you accept, or you might figure it out when you step foot at the school.⁶ Ultimately, after you weigh the pros and the cons, have researched student life at the school, and received your financial aid package, whatever school you believe to be the decision that makes you the most content is the right decision. And honestly, it's a bit difficult to make a "wrong decision" with it comes to college decisions; as corny as it may seem, your college experience is what you make it. So even if you're not 100% content with your decision (me before starting undergrad), you can find ways to ultimately make it one of the best decisions you've had (me after completing undergrad.) You'll know in due time.

Is college hard?

Oh definitely. But you guys are CA students; you're already used to the pace of college study.⁷ The most difficult thing about college, in my opinion, is having to deal with the freedom of being on your own (read: no 7:30 am to 3:30 pm schedule) while taking hefty class schedules. As CA students, you've dealt with this for two years and will have a better time transitioning. You guys are definitely honing on skills that you'll need when you enter this next stage of your life; without a doubt, you'll be more prepared than some of your counterparts.

That being said, don't think that just because you graduated from CA that college will be a breeze! Make sure to make connections with your classmates, join study groups, and visit professors in office hours. Don't forget to still balance your time effectively!

⁶ Hopefully not in a virtual format.

⁷ In fact, I remember taking some classes at CA that were harder than classes at UF! I'm looking at you, Calc 2.

Learning the Terms

Before making informed decisions about where you will be spending the next two+ years, it's important to be familiar with the different classifications and terms used when describing different institutions. This is something I wish I was cognizant of when I applied, so hopefully, this helps!

Liberal Arts Colleges

Liberal arts colleges are smaller institutions that possess a large focus on undergraduate study. Not to be confused with the name, these institutions offer degrees in liberal arts and sciences. While some are exclusively undergraduate, some offer graduate programs. Many of the faculty at these schools focus primarily on teaching more than research and students often have an easier time being more personable with their professors and classmates. (Follows the ideology that smaller class sizes = more opportunity for connections with others.)

Examples include Davidson College, Amherst College, Bowdoin College, and Vassar College

Women's Colleges

The concept of women's colleges and schooling has been around since the 18th and 19th centuries, with the first true women's college, Wesleyan College, chartered in 1836. As described in the title, these schools are intended for female applicants and tend to be liberal arts colleges. Many of these colleges have taken steps to address transgender and non-binary students; for more information research the school you are particularly interested in.

Examples include Mount Holyoke College, Wellesley College, Smith College, and Barnard College

Men's Colleges

As we know, colleges and universities in the United States were originally male-only and since the 1800s, they have been undergoing coeducation changes. There are still several men's only colleges that are traditional and independent liberal arts colleges, but the majority of them today are religious vocational institutions. Similar to women's colleges, there have been new policies set in place regarding transgender and non-binary students; for more information research the school you are particularly interested in.

Examples include Wabash College, Saint John's University, Divine Word College, and Mirrer Yeshiva Central Institute

Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU)

TCUs are minority-serving institutions located primarily on or near reservations. These colleges provide access to traditional post-secondary education, accredited degrees, and vocational training while also serving as a means to pass down culture and preserve language. Currently, there are 32 fully accredited institutions in the United States. They accept both indigenous and non-indigenous students.

Examples include Diné College, Haskell Indian Nations University, Navajo Technical University, Northwest Indian College

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

HBCUs are institutions that have the intention of primarily serving the African American/Black community and are concentrated in the southern United States as they were established after the Civil War. These institutions are open to all identities and backgrounds, with some that are men-only and women-only institutions. Several of these institutions have joint programs with neighboring schools (i.e., Spelman College and Georgia Institute of Technology)

Examples include Howard University, Morehouse College, Spelman College, North Carolina A&T State University, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University

Technological Colleges and Universities

Opposite of liberal arts colleges are technological and polytechnic colleges and universities, which have a focus on engineering and technical education (STEM). While these institutions have mostly STEM-related degrees, several offer degrees in some liberal arts coursework and minors. These schools are generally larger in population than liberal arts colleges but may not be as large as many public universities.

Examples include Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Colorado School of Mines, Florida Polytechnic University, Harvey Mudd College, Olin College of Engineering

National Universities/United States Service Academies

United States service academies educate and trained commissioned officers for the United States Armed Forces. Those who graduate from these institutions receive a Bachelor of Science degree. Truthfully, this is the type of school I know the least about, and likely if you are interested in attending them, you would have done ample research already, seeing how competitive they are to get in!

Examples include the United States Military Academy, United States Naval Academy, United States Air Force Academy, United States Coast Guard Academy, United States Merchant Marine Academy.

Private Universities

Private universities are (get this) privately funded institutions that are usually not operated by governments but may receive tax breaks and grants. These institutions may be funded in part by tuition, endowments, and donations which is why the cost of attendance is generally higher than public schools. Despite this, private universities may offer ample financial aid that rivals in-state tuition for public universities.

Examples include the University of Miami, Stanford University, Duke University, Rice University

Ivy League

Ivy League schools are the first eight, private institutions in the United States (hence, they're all in the northeast.) These schools include Brown University, Columbia University, Harvard University, Cornell University, Dartmouth College, University of Pennsylvania, Princeton University and Yale University. So YES, this means that Stanford and MIT are NOT Ivy League schools! These schools are viewed as some of the most prestigious universities in the world (but don't get caught up in the blinding lights! You can get a great education from any school and end up working at the same place as someone who went to an Ivy League – it happens more than you think!⁸)

Public Universities

Public universities are funded directly by the state government and tend to be larger than private schools. Due to their funding, these schools tend to charge higher tuition for out-of-state students (make note of this! This is extremely important if you want to go to a public school outside of Florida.) There is a grouping called "Public Ivy" which includes public institutions that compete with Ivy League schools in academic rigor.⁹

Examples include the University of Florida, University of California Berkeley, University of Washington, University of North Carolina: Chapel Hill

Application-Specific

Early Action

By submitting an early action application, you apply early and receive admissions decisions early. With this plan, you can easily apply to other colleges and universities.

Early Decision

By submitting an early decision application, you submit an application early and receive an admissions decision early. If accepted, you and your parent and counselor sign a binding agreement and you are expected to enroll. It is advantageous to pursue ED, but very difficult to reject the commitment if you decide not to go.

Regular Decision

By submitting a regular decision application, you apply by a listed time (usually November/early-December) and receive an admission decision likely by March or April timeframe.

Rolling Admission

Rolling admissions refer to schools that may have a set deadline to apply by but do not have a set date to receive a decision. These institutions "roll out" admissions decisions in a rather

⁸ This was brought to you by the Anti-Ivy League Gang. (I'm kidding... kind of.)

⁹ Constant comparison to Ivy League schools is not cute! But yes, I have definitely said that UF is the Ivy of the South at least once. (Note: don't let me banter regarding Ivy League schools dissuade you – they are great institutions that have ample resources for their students. I have several friends who have gone, loved it, and have done great things. The name definitely carries weight, but not they are not exempt from problems you would find in any higher institution!)

approximately one month after you apply. Apply early, before November 1st, for better scholarship considerations.

Florida Colleges and Universities

If I remember anything from my class at College Academy, the majority of students ended up going to schools in Florida. If I had to guess that we had a class of approximately 175 students, I would assume that about ~120 stayed in-state (with about 40-50 going to UF!¹⁰) This isn't to say that we didn't get into any schools out of state; we just found ourselves in situations where Florida schools were the best option.¹¹

There are about 158 four-year colleges and universities in the state with approximately 29 on The Common App (more on that later). It would take a considerable amount of time to go through all of them, so I won't. But here are some highlights of schools that most people apply to!

[Barry University](#)

Institution Type: Private, Roman Catholic

Location: Miami Shores

On the Common App: Yes

What I Know About It: I know fairly little! It's a school with about 8,000 or so students. It's one of the largest Catholic universities in the Southeast.

[Bethune Cookman University](#)

Institution Type: Private, HBCU

Location: Daytona Beach

On the Common App: No

What I Know About It: One of the smaller schools on this list with about 4,000 students. They have D1 Athletics. The people I know there enjoy it and have great pride in their school.

[Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University](#)

Institution Type: Private, Space-grant

Location: Daytona Beach

On the Common App: No

What I Know About It: SPACE! If you like Space, this is the school for you. The school has two locations (Daytona and Prescott, Arizona) and focuses on aviation and aerospace. Pretty competitive (just imagine it: all of your classmates essentially want to work in the same companies, for the same positions.) They have a very strong program!

[Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University](#)

Institution Type: Public, HBCU

¹⁰ These are ballpark numbers; I really don't remember who went where but there were a lot of us at UF.

¹¹ I really, REALLY, did not want to stay in state. But at the end of the day, I didn't want to spend at least \$45k a year to be in the Midwest (much love to Purdue). Now I can confidently say that I'm so glad I went to UF – honestly the best years of my life, minus COVID.

Location: Tallahassee

On the Common App: No

What I Know About It: One of the more well-known HBCUs outside of Howard, Spelman, Morehouse, and NC A&T. They have a bridge program between the school and Florida State University; depending on the department, you can take classes at either school. They do a lot of stuff with sustainability which is cool and has a great pharmacy and law program. They do research primarily in areas of agriculture and healthcare. Everyone who I knew who goes there/went there has a great sense of pride for their school.

[Florida Atlantic University](#)

Institution Type: Public

Location: Boca Raton

On the Common App: Yes

What I Know About It: I have a lot of friends who went here, some from CA and some from other schools. They have a lot of different programs and degrees with over 30,000 total students (undergraduate and graduate). A lot of people commute to this school, but they do have some on-campus dorms. Good business school. They had an architecture program I liked as well.

[Florida Gulf Coast University](#)

Institution Type: Public

Location: Fort Meyers

On the Common App: Yes

What I Know About It: I have fairly limited knowledge about this school. I know it's very pretty (a result of being one of the "newer" schools in the state. Don't choose schools solely based on aesthetics but if you're into that Florida-Modern-Resort-Aesthetics, this is it.)

[Florida Institute of Technology](#)

Institution Type: Private, Space-grant

Location: Melbourne

On the Common App: Yes

What I Know About It: Relatively smaller school with about 6,500 students. It has four colleges: Engineering and Science, Aeronautics, Psychology and Liberal Arts, and Business. It is a technology school though, so most of the students are in the College of Engineering. There are lots of research opportunities and is a good option if you're heavily set on tech but want to stay in Florida.

[Florida State University](#)

Institution Type: Public

Location: Tallahassee

On the Common App: Yes

What I Know About It: Not a good football team. (I had to get a rivalry joke in there, forgive me.) Pretty looking school if you're a fan of red brick. They've been around for a long time. 18th best public university in the country. From my understanding, they have a good criminology department.

[Stetson University](#)

Institution Type: Private

Location: DeLand

On the Common App: Yes

What I Know About It: Relatively small school (3,000 or so student) with quite a bit of history. It has a pretty acclaimed School of Music.

[University of South Florida](#)

Institution Type: Public, space-grant

Location: Tampa

On the Common App: Yes

What I Know About It: Not a good football team. (This will be a trend.) Pretty big school with like 50,000 students. Don't choose a school based on its colors, but I do like the colors (green and gold? It works.) Known for health, sustainability, urban transportation research, and materials research. They rank pretty well if I remember correctly.

[University of Central Florida](#)

Institution Type: Public, Space-grant

Location: Oviedo

On the Common App: Yes

What I Know About It: Relatively okay football team. UCF is the second biggest school, population-wise, in the country with over 68,000 students. Truthfully, it feels like UCF stands for Under Construction Forever – which can be a good or bad thing depending on how constant construction affects the school. But with that, comes beautiful new buildings and dormitories. For example, the school's Student Union recently got redone! Due to their proximity to the space coast, the aerospace program is pretty strong. The same can be said about its engineering program, college of medicine, and college of hospitality management. They also offer great financial aid packages, in addition to Bright Futures.

[University of Florida](#)

Institution Type: Public, land-grant, sea-grant, space-grant

Location: Gainesville

On the Common App: Yes

What I Know About It: Top 7 public school in the nation, need I say more?¹² But besides that, this is the school I know the most about, as I attended the school, but it's fairly strong in most departments. A strong engineering program, competitive business school, great veterinary medicine, and pharmacy program. It has about 55,000 students in total. The school has admittedly become more selective in recent years (according to Wikipedia, 29.4% acceptance rate, which I feel like is the smallest in the Florida public schools.) Has an Honors Program, as do most schools but NOTE: you do not have to be in the Honors Program to have a very successful undergraduate community. Also, the best football team.¹³

[University of Miami](#)

Institution Type: Private

Location: Coral Gables

On the Common App: Yes

¹² Ivy of the South or whatever.

¹³ I will not be taking any criticism to this.

What I Know About It: I actually like their football team. They have a great music program and has quite a few scholarships for undergraduates (because it's a private school, tuition is high.) Has a very strong law school and school of medicine.

Take everything written here with a grain of salt. No matter what school you go to, your experience is defined by what activities you participate with and who you participate with. While I mostly enjoyed my experience at UF, there are likely many that didn't – the same can be said about any school (in-state and out!) At the end of the day, it really depends on how you spend your time. No school or program is without its faults; ***make sure to do ample research!***

The Common App (and Applications in General)

Common App is great! And when I mean great, it's the worst... but it does have its perks. Having a generalized location for all of your college application proves to be a beneficial idea, especially when it comes to submitting things in a timely matter. However, there are still some universities that don't use it. It's important to stay on time and be on top of your deadlines -- they might come quicker than you think.

- **Don't let deadlines ruin your life.** Deadlines are important, but you know what's more important? Your sanity. Try your best to get things done on time, but pace yourself so you're not doing everything at once.
- **Get your recs on time.** Make sure to ask for recommendations early! For the most part, you're going to be getting your recommendation letters from teachers you're (hopefully) close to, guidance counselors, and even employers. Make sure to ask them to write you letters two-three months (& no later than one month) before the deadline; that way they can take their time if they need and the process isn't rushed.
- **Google Drive is the best.** I personally use Google Drive for everything, but I'm aware now that Teams has gotten better with their software. I suggest keeping a google doc/Microsoft Online doc for all of your essays -- while there is the personal statement that is shared between all universities in the college app, sometimes the schools have individual essays. However, they usually all end up having the same general theme and you can reuse the same general ideas! Just make sure to label each copy to avoid confusion.
 - (fun story: my friend copied the same essays for different schools as one would do, but he was very dumb and forgot to erase the wrong college's name when applying to two schools. He didn't get into those two schools. Don't be like my friend.)
- **Make sure your info is accurate.** Besides the essay part, you're basically just filling in a normal application. It won't take too long to get all of that completed (unless you have like 200 extracurricular activities, if so, good luck), but make sure that the information best reflects who you are and what you have achieved. And for the love of all that is good... don't lie.
- **You have to prioritize.** I don't doubt that you guys have done some amazing things in your high school careers. That being said, not everything you do can fit in your

application. Try to prioritize activities that you had an administrative role in, worked in a group on, or have been in for a long period. Not to say that being, for example, a member of the ping-pong team for two years isn't cool (@me), but if there are other things you can list that show your academic/professional skills, that might be better.

Testing¹⁴

You all are smart and know this already. But in case you didn't, let me first say that standardized testing can never be a true display of your intelligence.¹⁵

That being said... it's still *mildly* important when it comes to college applications. You don't need a perfect 1600 to get into Harvard, nor is a 1000 too low to get into UF. You'll find that scores run the gambit, and while they are important to some degree, schools are more interested in who the student is rather than how easily a student can answer purposefully confusing questions.

With all that in mind... You still have to take them. And it's important to know what resources you have for each one.

ACT

Out of the two, ACT is my favorite. It's a multiple-choice test that tests in four areas: English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science. Despite its different subject areas, I feel like is an examination of your reading capabilities more than anything else (even in the science section!) There is an optional writing section that, if I remember correctly, has no weight on your score. The maximum you can get is a 36.

Test Breakdown

Cost: \$46, \$60 with essay

English: 75 questions in 45 minutes

Math: 60 questions in 60 minutes

Reading: 40 questions in 35 minutes

Science: 40 questions in 35 minutes

Writing: 1 prompt in 40 minutes

Free Resources

https://www.powerscore.com/sat/help/content_practice_tests.cfm

- Four complete practice tests with answer keys

<https://uniontestprep.com/act/practice-test>

¹⁴ Note: I took these tests in 2015, back when the SAT was still out of 2400. I'm not sure what has changed exactly since then besides the total scores, but the resources provided should be for the most recent versions of the tests.

¹⁵ Brought to you by the Anti Standardized Test Gang.

- Practice tests with links to flashcards

SAT

Boo. I don't like this one... But from what I remember, this one was more challenging to me because it seemed to test more of your reading comprehension rather than capabilities (it's hard to explain, but the way I remember describing it is: the ACT has questions that are easier to understand, and the SAT you have to double-check to make sure they're not tripping you up with the questions. Does that make sense? Probably not.) There are two sections, Mathematics and Evidence-Based Reading and Writing. There is also an optional writing section; some schools require it. The maximum score you can get is 1600.

Test Breakdown

Evidence-Based Reading: 52 questions in 65 minutes

Evidence-Based Writing: 35 questions in 44 minutes

Math: 58 questions in 80 minutes

Writing: 1 prompt in 50 minutes

Free Resources

<http://sat.tyrannosaurusprep.com/>

- Vocabulary practice

<https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/practice/full-length-practice-tests>

- Eight different practice tests with answers

SAT Subject Tests

There isn't a school, to my knowledge, that requires these tests but several use terms like "Recommended" or "Optional" on their applications. Note, although no college/university requires them, some programs within these colleges or universities might (For example if you're applying to the Biochemistry program at the University of Miami, you need a Math Level 1 or 2 and Any Science).

These subject tests are meant to demonstrate your knowledge on a specific test and are more difficult (meaning, these are higher-level courses than just Algebra for example) than the normal SAT.

Please note that some schools may have specific requirements or may not even require standardized testing scores! Chances are, at least one school you apply to will still make them mandatory. Just make sure you get all your tests done in a relatively timely manner so you're not focusing on too many things at once!

Scholarships

There are a lot of them. And when I say a lot, I mean it. While I can't ramble out every single one there is, here is a list of generally noteworthy ones:

- The Gates Scholarship
 - Link: <https://www.thegatesscholarship.org/scholarship>
 - Deadline: September 15th, 2020
 - Award: 300 students will be awarded funding for the full cost of attendance that is not already covered by other financial aid and the expected family contribution (you'll know what that means once you've done FAFSA)
- Questbridge
 - Link: <https://www.questbridge.org/>
 - Deadline: September 29th, 2020
 - Award: Helps outstanding low-income high school seniors gain admission and full four-year scholarships to selected colleges in the US
- Coca-Cola Scholarship
 - Link: <http://www.coca-colascholarsfoundation.org/apply/#programs>
 - Deadline: October 31st, 2020
 - Award: 150 scholars are selected each year to receive a \$20,000 scholarship
- Elks National Foundation Scholarships
 - Link: <http://www.elks.org/scholars/scholarships/mvs.cfm>
 - Deadline: November 15th, 2020
 - Award: First place winners will receive \$50,000. Second place - \$40,000. Third place - \$30,000. Fourth place - \$20,000. Runners up - \$4,000
- Posse Foundation
 - Link: <https://www.possefoundation.org/recruiting-students/the-nomination-process>
 - Deadline: Not sure
 - Award: A leadership scholarship that awards full tuition. Students are responsible for room and board, books, etc. Recipients receive full tuition towards their school of choice (a liberal arts college). You have to be nominated to be a part of it – make sure to reach out to CA faculty if you're interested!

You can also look into banks that you and your parents have accounts with, local businesses, and large restaurant chains! There's a lot of money that's being given out there, and for the most part, people sometimes don't even know about it. A thing to note is that these applications seem to be open throughout the entire school year. So, all though you might be done with applying for colleges in December, there are always scholarships you can apply for. And remember: a lot of your previously written essays can be reused!

For more scholarships, here are some helpful websites:

<https://www.unigo.com/scholarships>

<https://www.scholarships.com/>

<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/scholarship-search#>

Note on Funding

As you may know, Bright Futures has a pretty great scholarship for students who decide to remain in-state. With the funding that they give, depending on if you have the Florida Academic Scholarship or the Florida Medallion Scholarship, tuition can be completely/almost completely paid for with a stipend for textbooks.

Outside of Florida, make sure to look at what scholarships the schools offer. As I mentioned before, out of state public schools are generally more expensive for out of state schools, but they may offer merit-based or financial-aid based scholarships. Out of state private schools do the same. Make sure to look into the specific school to ensure what will apply to you. And don't forget to do your [FAFSA](#)!

Essays

Writing for college applications is kind of similar to the format of writing your AP Lang assignments. (Granted, we have never taken that class [thanks CA] so I'm sure that's a bad comparison.) Hopefully, you guys don't write in that standardized, five-paragraph essay format that we were taught in elementary school.¹⁶

Essays are the way for college recruiters to know who you are, or at least have an insight on what type of energy you would bring to their campuses. It's your chance to demonstrate your voice and prove to them why you deserve to be accepted. While test grades and extracurricular activities are definitely important, I know I'm not alone in believing that essays really are the dealbreakers.

- **Be yourself.** I feel like I mentioned it before, but don't lie in your papers! From an ethical and moral standpoint, it's just not the right thing to do and it's just easier writing in your voice than in someone else's. The essay is college admissions opportunity to see who you are as a person; it's okay to be honest about challenges you've gone through and what you're truly passionate about.
- **Sometimes you'll need help.** Every essay poses its difficulty, whether it be confusing like UChicago's various prompts or personal like a lot of universities' topics. It'd be beneficial to bounce off ideas with someone else. If you need help with word choice or the writing process in general, I would also suggest talking to an English teacher. Not only would they likely love to help you out, but they're also very knowledgeable!
 - Another point to add here: Know that no matter what other people say about your essay, you have the final say in what you write. You can go to as many people as you want for advice, but at the end of the day, you're not forced to consider everyone else's words. In summary: ensure that you won't lose your voice if other people edit your stuff.

¹⁶ I don't mean to shade anyone who writes like this but it's important to note: the five-paragraph format is very robotic and removes your natural voice from your writing. It's okay to write in five paragraphs! Just as long as it's not the whole "In this essay I will tell you why I deserve to go to this school."

- **Grammar is hard.** Let's face it: English is a difficult language, even if it's your native language. Even with all the reports I write for school, I still get tripped up on certain things! To help catch any mistakes, I'd suggest downloading the [Grammarly](#) plugin to either Google Chrome or Microsoft Word! It'll save you from making silly mistakes.
- **The sooner the better.** For some people, writing is second nature and instantaneous. For others, it can take a while. Completing your essays early not only keeps you stress-free but also gives you time to worry about other things (like actually sending in the application and passing your final year). That being said, don't rush your writing!

Honestly, there are so many things that can be said about the writing process, but I'm sure you guys know the drill. If you need any additional help in any of that, feel free to contact me! (This is a little-known fact, but I used to write a lot in my day [you can ask the teachers that were at CA in 2015-2016]. I might be busy with school but I'm more than happy to give pointers, if I'm not swamped.)

Final Words

The college application phase is truly a hectic part of your senior year. You all honestly might be making one of the biggest decisions of your lives so far in just a couple of months. To some of you, time may seem to be passing by so slowly but in reality, it's going by quicker than you think. Despite the actual headache that is applying to college, I hope you guys enjoy your senior year. I don't mean to be a Debbie-downer, but it may be the last time you guys will be able to do all of those things with the same people and in the same environment for a while.

Specifically, to the Class of 2021, make the best out of the situation that you're in (easier said than done, right?) I'm not sure what the future will bring in these really confusing times, but I hope that you all will be able to reunite safely and in-person to reminisce over your accomplishments so far, and what you'll accomplish in the future.

Speaking as someone who's witnessed firsthand the accomplishments of my fellow alumni, I know you guys have done great things, are doing great things, and will do great things. You got this!