



#COLLEGE

A mini guide to help you get to college

 **RISLA**
College
Planning
Center

PREPARING, PLANNING & PAYING
FOR YOUR EDUCATION JOURNEY

FREE RESOURCES

» RISLA College Planning Center

Free one-on-one assistance with college searches, essays, financial aid forms and comparing financial aid award letters. Book your appointment at collegeplanningcenter.org.

Attend a free seminar or workshop. Check with your high school for dates. Assistance available in Spanish.

» rischolarships.org

Find scholarships to help you cover college costs.

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 **RISLA**
College
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Center

(401) 736-3170
collegeplanningcenter.org



#SHOULDIGO?

COLLEGE ISN'T FOR ME, BUT I WOULD LIKE TO EXPLORE A TRADE EDUCATION.

I WANT TO SURROUND MYSELF WITH INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS.

I CAN HELP PAY FOR COLLEGE WITH FINANCIAL AID OPTIONS.

I LIKE MEETING NEW PEOPLE AND TRYING NEW THINGS.

EARNING A HIGHER SALARY IS FOR ME!

Is the mini guide too mini for you? Get all of the college planning and financial aid details you need in the full **GUIDE TO COLLEGE PLANNING**.

Download at:

risla.com/big-guide

TEST PREP!

Sites like Khan Academy can help you prepare and can even help you increase your scores.

Wednesday
18

Thursday
19

Friday
20

REGISTER

for the fall SAT/ACT.

ASK
teachers to
write you
recommendation
letters.

DRAFT
your college essay.

SEPTEMBER

MEET

with your counselor to review your college plans.

ORGANIZE

a list of admission and financial aid deadlines.

ATTEND

the RISLA College Planning Center college fair.

APPLY

for an FSA ID at studentaid.gov. You will need this in order to complete the FAFSA. The FAFSA is required in order to apply for federal financial aid.

TALK

to your parents and keep them in the loop.

FINALIZE

your college list.

CREATE

an account on commonapp.org.

OCTOBER



BOOK

an appointment with the
RISLA College Planning
Center for help completing
your financial aid forms @
collegeplanningcenter.org.

SEND

your test scores to the colleges you are
applying to.

ATTEND

regional college fairs, if
available.

EDIT

and re-write your college essay.

SUBMIT

early decision or early action
applications, if desired.

PREPARE

to apply for financial aid by making
sure you know which forms you
are required to complete: FAFSA,
CSS PROFILE, or the college's
own financial aid application.

ATTEND

a financial aid information night
at your high school.

PROOFREAD

your application and essay before
you click submit.

COLLECT

recommendation letters
from your teachers.

ASK

your school counselor to send your
transcripts to colleges.

APPLY

to URI by Dec 1 if you want to be
considered for the Centennial
Scholarship. Apply to RIC by Dec 15
if you want to be considered for the
Presidential Scholarship.

SUBMIT

admission applications.



NOVEMBER



DECEMBER

SUBMIT

regular decision
applications.

COMPLETE

your college applications
prior to winter vacation.

CALL

admissions if you haven't
heard yet on your early
decision applications.

JANUARY

KEEP IN
TOUCH

with guidance about
your applications.

SEARCH

for more scholarships
that can help reduce
your total college costs!

FILE

the FAFSA if you haven't
done so already!

ENTER

to win RISLA's Knowledge
for College Scholarship
at risla.com/fin-lit-quiz!



APPLY

for more
scholarships at
rischolarships.org.

MONITOR

your applications to make
sure that all materials are
sent and received on time.

CHECK IN

with guidance
and admissions.

love

FEBRUARY

Smile

MARCH

If you have not decided on a favorite school,
arrange a second visit to the schools in
which you are most interested.

SIT in on a class.
READ a campus newspaper.
TALK to students.
EAT in the dining hall.

Hello



APRIL

REVIEW your financial aid award letters with your parents. Be sure that you understand the terms and conditions that apply to each type of aid offered.

DECIDE on the college that you will attend and send in your tuition deposit.

SEARCH rischolarships.org for additional outside scholarships and grants.

CONTACT the RISLA College Planning Center for assistance with any decision making at collegeplanningcenter.org.



MAY

SEND

your deposit to
the school you will
attend by May 1.

RESEARCH

ways to finance the "gap."

FIGURE OUT

how you'll pay for college. Contact
the RISLA College Planning
Center to discuss options.

DETERMINE

how much of the total cost is covered
by your financial aid package.

Is the mini guide too mini for
you? Get all of the college planning
and financial aid details you need in
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REMS

READ any info from the college, especially requests for additional info from you.

APPLY for a summer job and save your earnings for college.

BUDGET with your parents for books, tuition, supplies, and living expenses.

CONTACT your roommate to prevent duplication of big room items.

GATHER the things you'd like to bring to school in preparation for packing.

COLLEGE APPLICATION CHECKLIST

HOW DO I KNOW WHAT
I DON'T KNOW?

Ask! Make sure you read through each school's instructions thoroughly. If you are not sure about something, call the school's admission office or the RISLA College Planning Center for some quick clarification. You should never be embarrassed to ask about something that could affect your future!



☐ COLLEGE LIST

Narrow down your list of schools (we recommend 4-8). Make sure there is at least one safety school on your list. “Safety” means you know you will get accepted and can afford to attend.

☐ APPLICATION

For each school you are applying to, take note of the following: Do they accept the Common Application? Are there additional supplements or essays? How many recommendation letters do you need? What is the application deadline & fee?

☐ RESUME

This can be used to help you complete the activity portion of the application as well as for any job interviews.

☐ RECOMMENDATION LETTERS

Find out the policy at your high school but make sure you ask teachers in advance. It is also a good idea to give them a copy of your resume so they can personalize the letter for you.

☐ STANDARDIZED TEST SCORES

Request your SAT/ACT scores be sent to the schools you are applying to. If a school is a “test optional” school, you do not need to send these scores, but can do so if you feel it will help with your application.

☐ ESSAYS

Complete your college essays, remembering to use your unique voice.

☐ TRANSCRIPTS

Transcripts will be needed for each application. Check with guidance on your school’s policy.

☐ APPLICATION FEE/FEE WAIVER

Without sending in your application fee or fee waiver, your application will not be processed by the college!

☐ DEADLINES!

Make sure you meet all deadlines!

DEVELOPING A COLLEGE LIST

When you are deciding where to apply to college, you need to ask yourself some important questions: What will make you most comfortable at college? Do you want to go to a big or small school? Would you be happier close to home or exploring new territory? What academic programs do they have available and what is the quality of those programs?

Your final college list should be comprised of no more than eight schools and no fewer than three including "good value schools." Good value schools are those that have a very good reputation for the major you are considering with a more reasonable cost (think RIC for teaching!).

Before making an enrollment decision, consider the amount of money you will have to borrow to attend. Think about debt in relation to salary. What is the return on investment for the career you are planning to pursue?

Your college list should have schools in these three categories.

REACH

At a reach school, your credentials may not be as strong as those of students previously admitted or the school has a low acceptance rate making it hard for any student to be accepted. You should limit the number of reach schools on your college list.

POSSIBLE

Your credentials for admission are truly competitive and you are qualified for admission. This is a school where you have at least a 50/50 chance of admission.

SAFETY

These are schools where your credentials are very competitive and it is highly likely that you will be admitted. It is extremely important for students to find several safety schools where they truly believe they can be happy and productive.



MAKING *the* MOST OF COLLEGE VISITS

- Pick up a copy of the latest campus newspaper.
- Read the course catalog and check out the list of faculty and the courses they teach.
- Meet a coach if you are interested in a sport.
- If you have a particular interest that you want to pursue in college, arrange to meet with the person in charge of the activity.
- Talk to a student you meet on campus about his or her experiences at the college.
- Go to the financial aid office and ask questions about the financial aid process. You might want to call ahead for an appointment to ensure that they will be able to spend time with you. What percentage of need does the school meet?
- Investigate the quality of the career services office. Ask about the percentage of graduates who are employed in their area of study (for example, how many education majors are actually teaching today and what is their average starting salary?).
- If you are undecided about two schools, arrange to spend a night in the dorm and sit in on several classes. This will help you get a better feel for what a typical day is like.

SAT VS. ACT

The SAT and ACT are standardized tests that help colleges assess you in comparison to other applicants. But how do you know which test you should take? For starters, most colleges will let you know if they require one test or the other so be careful to review application requirements at each school. However, some students find that one test helps show their strengths (or weaknesses) more than the other test. Which test is best for you?

ACT

- The test is split into five main sections:
 - **English** - Includes punctuation, grammar & usage, and sentence structure. 75 questions in 45 minutes.
 - **Math** - Includes pre-algebra, algebra, geometry, and trigonometry. 60 questions in 60 minutes.
 - **Reading** - Includes readings based on four topics: social studies, natural science, prose fiction, and humanities. 40 questions in 35 minutes.
 - **Science** - Measures the interpretation, analysis, evaluation, reasoning, and problem-solving skills required in the natural sciences. 40 questions in 35 minutes.
- Scores in each section range from 1-36. Your total ACT score is your average score on all sections.
- If you take the test more than once, you can choose which set of scores to send colleges.
- Register and learn more at actstudent.org.

SAT

- The test is split into two main sections with an essay. The essay is required by some colleges and optional at others.
 - **Math** - Divided into two parts - with calculator and without. Delves into algebra, problem solving & data analysis, and advanced math. Max score is 800. 58 questions, 80 minutes.
 - **Evidence-Based Reading & Writing** This section is separated into two tests. Max score for entire section is 800:
 - **Writing & Language** - Read passages, find mistakes and weaknesses, and answer questions about how to fix them. 44 questions, 35 minutes.
 - **Reading** - Multiple choice questions based on reading passages. Topic specific knowledge is never tested. 52 multiple choice questions, 65 minutes.
 - **Essay** - Optional essay for some schools but required by others. 50 minutes to read a passage and build an argument essay to persuade your reader. Visit collegeboard.org to determine if schools you are applying to require it.
- Your total score will be between 400 and 1600.
- Register and learn more at sat.collegeboard.org.

COLLEGE ESSAY TIPS

➡ GETTING STARTED.

- Make sure you answer the essay question.
- Write as if you are brainstorming and then go back and revise and edit.
- Think about what you are going to write about for as much time as you actually spend writing.
- If you get stuck, brainstorm with someone you are close with.
- Don't ask yourself, "What should I write about?" Instead ask, "What are they asking and how can I best tell them about me?" Have someone read your essay to see if your point comes across.

➡ CHOOSE A THEME.

Avoid creating a list of your activities and accomplishments. Tell the reader something about yourself that isn't evident in the rest of your application. Think about your best personal trait, your interests, values, and goals. Focus on one of these qualities and make it the theme of your essay. For example, your best trait might be determination, creativity, or compassion. Tell a story that makes that trait clear to the reader. Provide evidence by citing specific instances from your life.

➡ BE CLEAR *and* CONCISE.

Be clear about the theme of your essay from the first paragraph. Grab the reader's attention with a compelling opening sentence. Keep your essay around 500 words, unless otherwise specified in the application.

➡ TYPE YOUR ESSAY.

Unless otherwise directed in your application, type your essay.

➡ MAKE IT UNIQUE.

Many students write about similar topics in their college essay: family, loss, vacations, sports, and career goals. Your job is to make your essay unique. One of the best ways to do this is to use imagery and sensory details. Be creative. Your essay will surely stand out.

➡ USE YOUR VOICE.

The college essay may be your only opportunity to show your personality to the admission office. Avoid writing it like a research paper. Let your personal voice shine through. For example, if you are witty, show the reader your sense of humor. (Just be cautious! What you think is funny, someone else may not.)

➡ ACCENTUATE *the* POSITIVE.

Even if you are writing about a painful experience, focus on what you learned from it, and how it changed you for the better.

➡ PROOFREAD *and* EDIT.

You may have a beautifully crafted essay or a wonderful story to tell, but if you don't take the time to proofread, your essay may be overlooked and end up in the rejection pile. Spelling errors are unacceptable. Careful proofreading shows the reader you care and you aren't sloppy. Before you send your essay to colleges, have someone you trust read it and provide feedback.

"We saved for college, so we won't qualify for aid."

Reality: Saving money for college doesn't mean you won't qualify for aid if you need it. Only a portion of your assets is included in your Expected Family Contribution (EFC). File the FAFSA to find out if you qualify.

"We were not eligible for aid when my sibling went to college, so we won't be now."

Reality: If both kids are in college at the same time, your EFC will have to cover costs at two schools. This may mean you are now eligible for financial aid. Apply each year to find out if you qualify.

FINANCIAL AID MYTHS

"Our family just can't afford college."

Reality: Billions of dollars in financial aid are available to help families pay tuition bills. Most aid is based on your family's financial need, meaning the less money you have and make, the more aid you may be eligible for.

"The FAFSA form is too hard to fill out!"

Reality: The web application provides step-by-step instructions on how to complete the form and allows you to skip questions that are not relevant to your family. Free assistance is also available through the RISLA College Planning Center. Make an appointment today!

"Only straight 'A' students get aid!"

Reality: A good academic record can help students qualify for merit-based scholarships. However, most federal financial aid is awarded based on need and many private scholarships are available based on qualities other than grades.

"Private schools are too expensive for our family."

Reality: Some offer more aid to attract students from all income levels.

"It doesn't matter how much money my parents make because they won't pay for college."

Reality: EFC is based off of both parent and child income, regardless of whether the parents are willing to pay for college, as long as the child is not considered "independent," according to the federal definition of independence.



NCAA ELIGIBILITY CENTER

The NCAA has established an Eligibility Center for recruiting and eligibility purposes for student-athletes in divisions I and II. This does not apply to division III applicants. All students with an interest in division I or II programs, but especially those interested in making official visits (expenses paid) in the fall of their senior year, should register with the Eligibility Center. You can register online at ncaa.org and follow the links to register to become a student-athlete.

The Eligibility Center certifies that you have completed a core of courses that may be different from your high school's graduation requirements, including two years of natural or physical science. Also be aware that the NCAA core requires four years of English. Check with your guidance counselor if you have any questions or concerns about these requirements.

For more information, please refer to the NCAA web site at ncaa.org.

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NEED HELP?

Book a free one-on-one
counseling appointment at
collegeplanningcenter.org.

The RISLA College Planning Center is a free service provided by RI Student Loan Authority, a non-profit state authority.



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