

College Prep 101

This packet is assembled to assist you as you consider what college/university is the best fit for you and how to give yourself the greatest opportunity to be successful. It will hopefully answer some questions you (and your parents) may have about the application process for admittance to the school of your choice. It also includes information for you on how to become a music major, or simply participate in a music ensemble that interests you.

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Applying for College / University Admission (U.S. Department of Education)

Applying to college, career school, or graduate school means more than just filling out forms. For a successful college application, you first need to understand each school's admission requirements, gather information, meet deadlines, and pay any necessary fees. Plus, each school has different application requirements and deadlines, so it is important to get organized.

While the application process may seem a little overwhelming, you can use the following step-by-step information to get ready.

I. Narrow your Application Choices

There is no magic number when it comes to how many school applications you should submit. One is not enough, because that school might not admit you. More than 10 might be too many because applications take a lot of work and you need to do a great job on each one. Also, most schools have application fees, so costs can add up. (Many schools waive fees for low-income students.)

The bottom line: applying to a few schools that really interest you is better than applying to as many as you can.

II. What type of Schools are there?

There is a wide array of schools available for higher education. Options include two- and four-year colleges and universities, vocational, trade, and career schools, online schools, and graduate schools. Understanding your career goals and options (and their earning potential) will help you find a college or career school that meets your needs.

Remember that financial assistance programs and requirements can vary from school to school. Not all colleges and career schools participate in federal student aid programs. Always check with your school to find out what financial aid is available.

III. Consider Applying Early

If you are confident that you are academically prepared and want to get into a particular school, you might want to consider early application programs for undergraduate admissions. When you apply early to a school, you are speeding up the entire application process. Instead of submitting your application in November or later in your senior year, applying early usually means you need to begin the application process in September.

Applying early can sometimes give you an advantage. At some schools, a higher percentage of early applicants are accepted. If you do get early acceptance, you can skip a couple of months of stress and uncertainty. You also can get a head start preparing for your freshman year.

While procedures at individual colleges may vary, the two most common procedures are early decision and early action. Some schools have both procedures. Another option is called dual enrollment.

Early Decision

If you have a particular school in mind that is your “first choice,” early decision might work well. If you are accepted under early decision, you must attend that school, unless the financial aid package is too low for you to attend. (If you are not sure whether the school’s financial aid offer will be enough, make sure to submit applications to other schools.) Usually, you can apply to only one school for early decision. You can still apply to other schools at their regular application deadlines.

Early Action

Early action is similar to early decision, but you are not “locked in” to attending a school that accepts you. Some schools allow you to apply for early action multiple schools at the same time, but some do not. Know the rules. In addition, under early action, you can still apply to other schools at their regular application deadlines. Keep in mind that there is less incentive for an early action college to accept you because you are not committing to attend the school.

Dual Enrollment

A third option, dual enrollment, is typically for high school juniors who have most of the credits needed for graduation. If this applies to you, then you may want to consider taking college-level courses during your senior year. After you graduate high school, you could continue your college education at that college, or you could transfer the credits to another college. Work with your high school guidance counselor to see if this would be a good option for you.

Considerations When Applying Early

If you are thinking about using the early application process, consider the following tips:

- Sit down with your guidance counselor, who can explain the pros and cons of applying early to certain schools.
- If you are truly interested in a particular school, contact that school well ahead of September to discuss its early application procedures and to see if applying early is the best option for you.
- Ask yourself: Am I ready to make up my mind about where I want to go to college by October or November of my senior year? Will I be able to complete my applications, along with essays and recommendations, by late October or November?
- Make sure you have thought about your career goals and whether the schools you are considering will help you reach those goals. For example, School A has an excellent journalism department, but School B has an outstanding mix of cultural and academic offerings.

Remember: Early applications are not always first-come, first-admitted. There are no “sure things,” so take time to do your best on your application.

IV. Develop a Timeline or To-Do List

Careful planning will help make the college application process less stressful. The following checklists are for all students who are considering a post-secondary education.

Students

10th Grade:

- Meet with your school counselor or mentor to discuss colleges and their requirements.
- Consider taking a practice Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT), or check out the ACT Aspire exam.
- Plan to use your summer wisely: Work, volunteer, or take a summer course (away or at a local college).
- Go to career information events to get a more detailed look at career options.
- Research majors that might be a good fit with your interests and goals.

11th Grade:

(All Year)

- Explore careers and their earning potential
- Start to create a basic resume and treat it as a working document. You can add and delete information to this document throughout the remainder of your high school career.
- Go to college fairs and college-preparation presentations hosted by college representatives.

(Fall)

- Take the PSAT/NMSQT. You must take the test in 11th grade to qualify for scholarships and programs associated with the National Merit Scholarship Program.

(Spring)

- Register for and take exams for college admission. The standardized tests that many colleges require are the ACT (American College Test), the SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test), and the SAT Subject Tests. Check with the colleges you are interested in to see what tests they require.
- Talk to your academic counselor or use various search tools to find scholarships for which you might want to apply. Some deadlines fall as early as the summer between 11th and 12th grades, so prepare now to submit applications soon.

(Summer before 12th grade)

- Create a username and password called an *FSA ID* that you will use to confirm your identity when accessing your government financial aid information and electronically signing your *federal student aid* documents. Note: You must create your own FSA ID; if your parent creates it for you, that will cause potential confusion later and will slow down the financial aid application process.
- Narrow down the list of colleges you are considering attending. If you can, visit the schools that interest you.
- Contact colleges to request information and applications for admission. Ask about financial aid, admission requirements, and deadlines.

- Decide whether you are going to apply for admission under a particular college's early decision, early action, or regular decision program. Be sure to learn about the program deadlines and requirements.
- Use the *FAFSA4caster* financial aid estimator, and compare the results to the actual costs at the colleges to which you will apply. To supplement any aid *FAFSA4caster* estimates you might receive, be sure to apply for scholarships. Your goal is to minimize the amount of loan funds you borrow so you have less to pay back later.

12th Grade:

(All Year)

- Work hard all the way to graduation—second-semester grades can affect scholarship eligibility.
- Stay involved in after-school activities and seek leadership roles if possible.

(Fall)

- As soon as possible after its Oct. 1 release, complete and submit your *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA®), at fafsa.gov, along with any other financial aid applications your chosen school(s) may require. You should submit your FAFSA® by the earliest financial aid deadline of the schools to which you are applying, usually by early February.
- After you submit the FAFSA, you should receive your *Student Aid Report* (SAR) within three days to three weeks. This document lists your answers to the questions on your FAFSA and gives you some basic information about your aid eligibility. Quickly make any necessary corrections and submit them to the FAFSA processor.
- If you haven't done so already, register for and take the standardized tests (ACT, SAT, etc.) required for college admission. Check with the colleges you are interested in to see what tests they require.
- Apply to the colleges you have chosen. Prepare your applications carefully. Follow the instructions, and PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO DEADLINES!
- Well before your college application deadlines, ask your counselor and teachers to submit the required documents (e.g., transcript, letters of recommendation) to the colleges to which you are applying.
- Complete any last scholarship applications.

(Spring)

- Visit colleges that have invited you to enroll.
- Review your college acceptances and compare the colleges' financial aid offers.
- Contact a school's financial aid office if you have questions about the aid that school has offered you. In fact, getting to know your financial aid staff early is a good idea no matter what—they can tell you about deadlines, other aid for which you might wish to apply, and important paperwork you might need to submit.
- When you decide which school you want to attend, notify that school of your commitment and submit any required financial deposit. Many schools require this notification and deposit by May 1.
- If offered scholarships from multiple schools, notify the school where you have decided to attend that you accept the scholarship and notify the other school(s) of your intent to decline the scholarship offer. Follow deadlines as noted in the scholarship offer letter(s).

Parents/Guardians

(10th grade students)

- Find out whether your child's school hosts college nights or financial aid nights. Plan to attend those events with your child.
- Help your child develop independence by encouraging him or her to take responsibility for balancing homework with any other activities or a part-time job.

(11th grade students)

- Create your own FSA ID if you do not have one yet. (The FSA ID is a username and password that you will use for such purposes as signing your child's *Free Application for Federal Student Aid*.) Note: You must create your own FSA ID. If your child creates it for you, or if you create your child's, that will potentially cause confusion later and will slow down the financial aid application process.
- Take a look at your financial situation, and be sure you are on the right track to pay for college.
- Talk to your child about the schools he or she is considering. Ask why those schools appeal to your child, and help him or her clarify goals and priorities.
- Attend college fairs with your child, but do not take over the conversation with the college representatives. Just listen, and let your child do the talking.
- Take your child to visit college campuses, preferably when classes are in session.
- Make sure your child is looking into or already has applied for scholarships.
- Ask your employer whether scholarships are available for employees' children.

(12 grade students)

- Work with your child on filling out and completing the FAFSA.

V. Application Tips

Here are some final tips for completing college or career school applications:

- Keep it real. Do not exaggerate accomplishments or claim things that are not true.
- Give recommendation letter-writers time. If you are asking teachers, coaches, or counselors for letters of recommendation, ask several weeks before the letters are due.
- Beat the deadline. Reduce the chance your application will get lost in the shuffle: submit it well before the deadline.
- Apply online. It is easier and faster.
- Emphasize your uniqueness. Colleges like to have students with different viewpoints, backgrounds, and experiences. If you can add to that mix, let them know.
- Keep it clean online. Remove anything from your social media pages that you would not want a college admissions officer to see.
- Submit one application for many schools. Some colleges and universities share common online applications. Once you complete the application for one school, you can submit copies of it to other schools. It will save time.
- Protect your hard work by keeping complete copies of everything you send to each school.

College/University Admissions “Top 10”

Top Ten Things College/University Admissions Officers Look For In Applicants

1. High School Grades: The higher your high school grade point average, the more it will help you when it comes time to apply to college. If your overall GPA is not as high as you would like, it can also be helpful to show an improving trend in your grades over the four years of high school.
2. SAT or ACT Scores: More than two million students take the SAT each year, and most colleges use the SAT to help them make admissions decisions about their applicants. More than one million students complete the ACT college entrance exam each year and this is the preferred test in the state of Kansas. A good score on these tests can make an application stand out, while a poor score can damage your chances for admission and scholarship opportunities.
3. SAT Subject Test Scores: The SAT Subject Tests are not as common, but compliment the SAT college entrance exam. These exams are hour-long tests that cover a particular subject, such as biology, literature, US history, foreign languages, and more.
4. AP and IB Courses and Test Scores: Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate tests and courses are high school courses that cover collegiate material. Students who take these courses and perform well on the AP tests distinguish themselves from other high school students and in some cases actually earn college credit while still in high school.
5. College Essays: If requested, it is important to write a college application essay that will showcase your unique personality, passions, and writing skills.
6. Extracurricular Activities: Extra-curricular activities are the clubs and summer programs that you participate in during high school. Colleges are interested in the extra-curricular activities you pursue precisely because they are “extra.” Involvement in such groups demonstrates the boldest declaration of your interests, your passions, your drive, and your initiative. In addition, if you rise to the leadership position over a number of years in an extracurricular team or organization, it shows both your dedication and potential leadership skills. These are all traits colleges look for in applicants.
7. Recommendation Letters: When you apply to colleges, you will be asked to send in recommendations written by people who know you: employers, teachers, coaches, etc. Good recommendations can really tip things in your favor, while a bad recommendation could hurt your application. It is very important to choose the right people to write your recommendation letters.
8. Interview: The interview gives you the chance to show a college all the intangibles that may not come across in your written application: your charisma, leadership abilities, social skills, and your interest in life, learning, and the school.

9. Answers to application Questions: The application is filled with questions that ask for answers ranging from a word or two to a full paragraph. Do not look at these questions as something to speed through in order to spend more time, for instance, working on your essay. Instead, treat the entire application the way you would treat your essay. Make sure to be neat, concise, and thoughtful. If handwritten, be sure everything is legible for readers.
10. Personal Factors - race, gender, background: Few topics are as controversial today as the role that race, gender, and background play in college admissions. As an applicant, you have to deal with them. Quite simply, here is the way the preferences tend to work: if you are a person who is underrepresented in a particular college or area of study, your chances of getting into that school or field are boosted (and potentially with financial assistance). As a college applicant, you may be able to use these factors to your advantage. To what extent personal factors are used during the admission process varies from school to school.

Preparing for the Music Audition Day

(Items to Consider)

1. Get to know the applied teacher of your instrument or voice. Most applied teachers will offer a free lesson to prospective students. This will benefit you as you prepare to audition at the school and will probably assist in making you more comfortable around them when it comes time for the audition. Meeting the teacher before will also give you an opportunity to see if you are compatible with his/her teaching style. If you go to school there, you could potentially work with them every semester for four years.
2. Schedule the audition date as early in your senior year as possible, but ensure you have adequate time to be prepared. Many schools have set audition dates and others will work with your schedule. Do not be afraid to ask to audition on a day that is not designated as an audition date. This may provide you with more individual attention and an opportunity to sit-in / observe other classes.
3. Selection of Audition Repertoire: If given the option, be sure to select music you perform well. Be careful to select music that is not too easy, but also not above your abilities. In some cases, music you perform for solo and ensemble festival or an all-district/state audition will work well. A few other items:
 - a. Check with the applied teacher to see if they have an required music list for you to choose from
 - b. Select music with contrasting features and sections
 - c. Scales (instrumental)
 - d. Sight-reading
 - e. Excerpts are usually acceptable, but make sure they are appropriate to what you are trying to demonstrate in your abilities
4. Should you use an accompanist? For vocalists – accompanists are typically provided by the school where you are auditioning. For instrumentalists, this is typically not necessary, but if you have a qualified accompanist that is willing to travel to the audition, absolutely bring them along!
5. If given the option, start with the music you perform best – you may run out of time. Do not be surprised (or assume the worst) if the audition panel stops you prior to you finishing what you prepared. A typical audition is often 15-20 minutes (including the interview).
6. Dress professionally!
7. What to bring to the audition:
 - a. Instrument (if applicable)
 - b. Music (with copies for the panel)
 - c. Resume / curriculum vitae / activities list (if you have several items, create a small portfolio that includes items listed in c, d, and e of this section)
 - d. Letter(s) of support from music director, other teachers, coach, etc.
 - e. Photograph

- f. Pen and paper to take notes
 - g. A list of questions to ask
8. Know what the audition panel is listening for
 - a. Quality of sound / tone
 - b. Potential
 - c. Basic skills / fundamentals
 - d. Musicianship
 9. Don't underestimate the importance of the interview portion of the audition. Not only is the school interviewing you, but more importantly, you are interviewing the school. In the end, you must ask yourself – is this school the right place for me? Possible questions from the panel to you might include:
 - a. Why do you want to major in music?
 - b. Why do you want to attend this university?
 - c. What are your potential career plans? / Where do you see yourself in 5 or 10 years?
 - d. Do you have any questions for us? (and you should!)
 10. Is a video-recorded audition acceptable? In some cases, video-recorded auditions are acceptable, but not preferred. It is always best to audition in person so they can meet you and you can meet them. If a video-recorded audition is your only option, send a high quality recording.
 11. Apply to the school of interest prior to playing the audition (if possible). This shows your interest/seriousness and the admissions office has final say regarding your acceptance; not the music department.
 12. Try to see and do as much as possible during your visit to the college campus, but make sure not to schedule so much that you are rushed when it is time to perform your audition.

Basic Music Skills and Theory Practice

There are many great apps and online sites to assist you with improving your basic music skills and music theory knowledge prior to enrolling in college. For students majoring in music, many schools require a music theory placement exam. This is used to assist with the process of placing you in the appropriate section of the theory sequence. This test is typically given at the very beginning of your first semester, or during your audition day visit. It is recommended you look at / review a couple of the following options. This will allow you to understand some basic concepts and realize there is more than one approach to teaching/learning any given concept.

1. Musictheory.net – This site contains lessons, trainers, and utilities to teach many of the basic music theory skills. It allows you to select the topic you want to learn about and then takes you step-by-step through the program. It is user friendly and begins at a very basic level. Some of the items covered include: staff, note durations, key and time signatures, intervals, scales, chord construction, and more. Excellent site!
2. Auralia (app) – Learn to identify music intervals by ear with the Auralia Interval Recognition
3. Tenuto (app) – Tenuto is a collection of 24 customizable exercises designed to enhance your musicality. From recognizing chords on a keyboard to identifying intervals by ear, it has an exercise for you. Tenuto also includes six musical calculators for accidentals, intervals, scales, chords, analysis symbols, and twelve-tone matrices.
4. Stand of Excellence “Music Theory & History Workbook” (books 1-3) – These workbooks are published by Neil A. Kjos Music Company and are excellent for basic music skills. Answers are not provided (in the student editions), but they include several examples and illustrations. Teacher editions are available and do include blank worksheets and answer pages. As an added bonus, you also get information about some of the major points in music history.
5. Look at the music website of the school you are considering to see if they have posted any music theory preparation/practice suggestions.

Sight-reading Improvement:

1. Sightreadingfactory.com – makes practicing the important skill of sight-reading easy, effective and fun! This cloud-based service allows you to customize and generate unlimited sight reading examples.
2. Music Tutor (app) – Learn to read music and improve your sight-reading skills with Music Tutor. Develop your speed and accuracy in reading music by identifying music notes in timed sessions. You can choose to practice with treble clef, bass clef or both for a duration of 1, 5 or 10 minutes. Music Tutor also helps with ear training and practicing your listening (aural) skills.

Ensemble Participation (for non-music majors)

1. Do I have to be a music major to perform in an ensemble? Typically, the answer is no. Most colleges/universities have ensembles that are open to any student regardless of major (auditions are sometimes required).
2. Do I have to be in concert band to be in marching band (or concert choir to be in chamber singers)? Most ensembles at the college/university level are independent of one another. Students can typically audition/participate in the ensemble(s) that interest them and fit their schedule. One exception to this policy is often students must participate in marching band in order to perform with the smaller pep-bands (basketball, volleyball, etc.).
3. Are music scholarships available if I am not a music major. Some schools do offer scholarship money to non-music majors, but these are frequently less available than scholarships offered to students majoring in a music degree program. Some schools also offer a stipend for participating students. These are fairly common with athletic bands and are different than a scholarship in that all participants receive the stipend and it is usually paid in the form of a check (or credit to your fees) following your commitment to that ensemble.
4. Will I have time? This is a question only you can answer. When you are a college student, you will have many opportunities to fill your “free time.” In most cases, ensembles often fill a need to be a part of something you enjoy that is not part of your degree program. College/university ensembles typically require less rehearsal time than what you experience in high school; usually only meeting 2-3 times per week.
5. Do I need to audition to be in the ensemble of my choice and if so, when? Most ensembles do require some type of audition (admittance, part assignment, etc.). You should check with the director of the ensemble you are interested in to find out what the requirements are and when you will need to audition. It is common for these auditions to occur just prior to or at the beginning of each semester.
6. Do I have to pay extra to be in an ensemble? Generally, there are no fees associated with college/university choral ensembles. You are often responsible for purchasing your performance attire. Instrumental ensembles often follow this same policy, but you might have a small fee to participate in the marching band (to purchase various items you will need). This amount will usually be less than you paid in high school.
7. Do we fundraise? Only in special situations will you find fundraising to be a part of participation in a college/university ensemble.
8. Can I take private lessons for credit? Most schools offer lessons for non-music majors. These are sometimes in the form of private lessons or a class setting. This is often left to the discretion of the applied teacher and if there is space in his/her teaching load (or if a graduate student is available to teach the lessons).
9. What types of ensembles exist? Numerous types of large and small ensembles are found in many college/university settings. Some smaller schools are limited in the number of musical offerings. At most mid-sized to larger schools, if an ensemble is

offered at your high school, there will be a similar ensemble available at the college/university.

10. What if I have a class conflict with an ensemble? First, talk to your academic advisor and try to rearrange your schedule (again, consult your academic advisor when doing this). If this is not possible and there is a conflict, it is usually left to the discretion of the ensemble director to determine if the conflict is small enough to still allow you to participate. Always communicate possible conflicts with the director as soon as possible.
11. Does the school provide instruments I can use? Similar to your high school band/orchestra program, most colleges/universities have some school owned instruments. These are typically those instruments not easily purchased by the individual (again, similar to what your high school would have). If you are planning to participate in an ensemble, just contact the ensemble director to see what might be available.
12. Other questions? When in doubt, contact the ensemble director at the college/university where you plan to attend and participate.
13. Am I good enough to perform with a college/university ensemble? Generally, the answer to this question is yes! If you participated in your high school ensemble and have basic music reading skills, most schools have ensembles appropriate to your playing/singing ability. Many schools have ensembles intended for non-music majors and the only audition is for part placement. If you perform at a high level, you could earn a place in a more advanced collegiate ensemble.