



Tips to prep a college application

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The college admissions race just got real: The Common Application, or Common App, an online form students can use to apply to hundreds of colleges, opened Aug. 1 for students seeking admission in the fall of 2019. Here's how to become the best applicant you can be on any budget.

1 Test prep

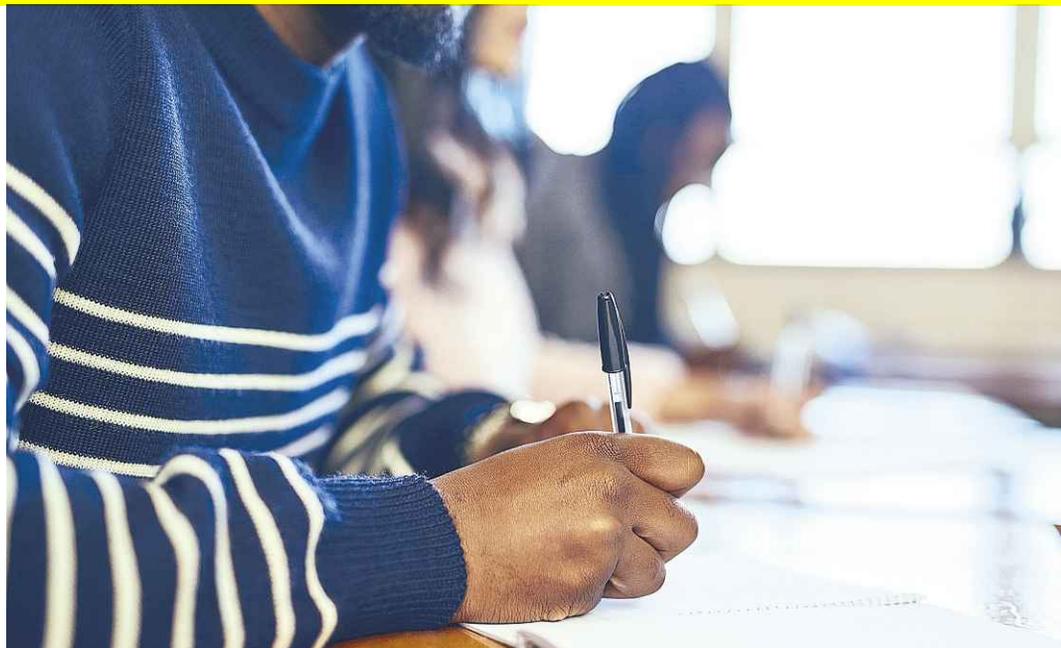
Making the cut on the SAT or the ACT, the two main college entrance exams, can mean the difference between whether your application gets read or rejected unseen. That's why some families shell out big bucks for test prep. Private instruction at test prep firm Kaplan starts at \$2,599 for 12 hours and group classes at locations across Long Island start at \$899.

DO IT FOR LESS Use technology to maximize the value you're getting out of test prep. Chase Mudd of Varsity Tutors says students who use the firm's online service can cover the same amount of material in about half as many paid hours as traditional test prep. The base rate at the St. Louis-based company is \$110 an hour; the hourly rate goes down as the number of hours goes up.

FREE RESOURCES College Board, which administers the SAT, has partnered with khanacademy.org, a nonprofit educational organization, to provide free tools online or through a mobile app.

2 College advising

A private college consultant can help a student set goals and create a detailed plan to achieve them, overseeing everything from high school course and activity selections to the college search and application process. A college consultant's insights may even save money in the long run, says Fern Gold, a partner in Setauket-based CollegeMasters NY, a college consulting firm. The average fee U.S. college consulting firms were charging was \$200 an hour in 2017, and comprehensive packages ranged from \$850 to \$10,000, according to the Independent Educational



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College Board, the organization that administers the SAT, has partnered with a website to provide a range of free tools, including testing tips and strategies, online or through a mobile app.

Consultants Association. **DO IT FOR LESS** Some college advisers offer more affordable options, such as webinars and online workshops. On Sept. 18 and 20, CollegeStarter.org, a college admissions counseling firm, will hold a live online program, four hours of guidance over two evenings, for \$97. **FREE RESOURCES** New York State created a system called CareerZone, a free tool for career and college planning. Students can access CareerZone online at home or through their school counseling office to explore their options with tools such as interest inventory, career search and occupational outlook.

3 Essay coaching

A well-crafted essay may be a student's best shot to stand out from similarly qualified applicants. That's why Lisa Landsberg, 51, of Jericho has enlisted essay coach Stacey Brook twice so far to guide two of her three kids through the essay process.

Families pay hundreds of dollars an hour for a highly qualified private essay coach who can be responsive on students' schedules and provide individualized attention, insights and communication skills, says Brook, a Melville native and the founder and chief adviser of Manhattan-

based College Essay Advisors. **DO IT FOR LESS** Try a group setting: Best College Fit, a Lancaster, Pa.-based provider of college planning solutions, recently offered a four-hour essay workshop for \$300 at Holiday Inn Express Stony Brook. Or look online for guidance; College Essay Academy offers a range of online packages starting at \$9.99 per lesson. **FREE RESOURCES** BigFuture, a free site run by The College Board, offers sample essays, writing tips and videos of admissions professionals explaining what they like — and don't like — to see in an essay. A free essay workshop at a library or college fair can go a long way.

4 Demonstrated interest

Some colleges state that a student's demonstrated interest in the school will be considered in admissions decisions. The ultimate way to show you're serious about a school is

Can't visit a campus?

Attend a college fair. Representatives from hundreds of colleges will be on hand at the Long Island National College Fair from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sept. 23 at NYCB Live's Nassau Coliseum. Free.

to apply through its Early Decision plan. You'd be making a binding agreement to attend that school if accepted — a potentially costly choice, because it would preclude you from waiting to compare financial aid packages from other schools.

DO IT FOR LESS Rather than risk locking yourself into a higher-than-necessary annual tuition bill by committing to Early Decision, show your interest with a one-time expense: Visit the campus for a tour. Be sure to check in so they'll know you were there. Also, you can apply early through a nonbinding Early Action plan; meeting the earlier deadline will show you're motivated, while leaving you wiggle room to accept a more affordable offer.

FREE RESOURCE If a campus visit is beyond your budget, try to set up an interview with a representative at a free college fair, or via phone or video chat. You can call or email an admissions office, but do your research; while some schools may appreciate frequent contact, others may not, cautions educational strategist Elizabeth Wissner-Gross of Great Neck.

5 Extracurricular activities

There are entire industries that market themselves as a way for students to make their applications stand out through

College application timeline

Each college sets its own deadlines. Some accept applications on a rolling basis, while others may have several plans with different deadlines, such as Early Decision (ED), Early Action (EA) and Regular Decision (RD). A list of requirements, deadlines and fees was released Aug. 1, when The Common Application opened and will be updated regularly as colleges add information. Students also can use the Common App onTrack mobile app to stay on top of deadlines. The following timeline is based on 2017 deadlines:

Aug. 1 The Common Application opened for fall 2019 admissions.

Oct.-Nov. Most ED and EA application deadlines

Dec.-Jan. Most RD application deadlines; ED and EA decision notifications

March-April RD decision notifications

May 1 National Decision Day; students must send a deposit to their chosen school

SOURCE: THE COMMON APPLICATION

summer programs, such as enrichment camps, pre-college programs and far-flung service trips. Adventure tour operator GoBeyond invites teens to earn service hours tagging sea turtles in the Caribbean — for \$4,870. Pre-college programs at Adelphi University range from \$1,200 for a one-week, non-credit commuter course to \$3,500 for a two-week residential course for college credit.

DO IT FOR LESS Be judicious. A strategic splurge on a particular course or experience can help a budding interest blossom into a passion. But beyond that, colleges would rather see students apply what they've learned to make real contributions or discoveries, says Wissner-Gross.

FREE Make a real impact with meaningful service. "It's not about manufacturing experiences," says Wissner-Gross. "The world is filled with need, and people who can respond to those needs are the kinds of people that colleges want."