

PREPARATION FOR THE

SAT*

8TH
EDITION

SCHOLASTIC APTITUDE TEST

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Let's begin by talking about the SAT. How you prepare for this test can greatly effect your scores.

Does the SAT really measure your aptitude for academic work, or your knowledge, or even your intelligence? Though the SAT is surrounded by controversy, we can safely say that it does none of these things. The authors of the test at Educational Testing Service are very careful in qualifying their claims. They state that the abilities tested on the SAT are "related" to performance in college, not that the test is an infallible measure of any inherent qualities of the individual. Some students who do not do well on the SAT do well in college; others who score highly on the exam do not. The SAT is not even designed to be an indicator of what you know about any particular subject. Psychologically, therefore, the best way to think about it is as a specially constructed multiple-choice "game," one that you want to play well to increase your chances of admission to your chosen college. Working with this book will enable you to understand the rules of this game and help you to play it better.

Effective SAT preparation is not done by magic. Rather, there are specific steps of acquiring knowledge and applying it to practice problems that you can take to ensure that you do as well as you possibly can. Broadly speaking, there are three kinds of knowledge important for optimum test performance. All of these are found within the pages of this book, along with material for timed practice.

First, there is the required substantive knowledge of mathematics, vocabulary, and reading of short passages. There are extensive reviews of these topics provided in this book. It is worth noting briefly here that no *advanced* mathematical or verbal knowledge is necessary. The mathematics is of the kind that all college prep high school students must study in order to apply to college, even if they intend to become art history majors—that is, basic arithmetic, basic algebra, basic word problem solving, and basic geometry without proofs. Therefore, you need to know the Pythagorean theorem and some special-case right triangles, but you do not need to know any of the 276 or so proofs of each principle! The vocabulary in the verbal sections of the SAT is largely that which is encountered in the literature read in high school English classes. It is sometimes difficult, but rarely *entirely* unfamiliar.

Second, there is information about the "nuts and bolts" of the exam. This includes the instructions for each question type, the timing of each section, scoring, subtractions for wrong answers, proctoring rules, and so on. These things you need to know "cold" before going into the test room and are provided here.

Third, there are concepts and methods needed to make you "test-wise," such as how the questions are structured and written by the test-constructors at Educational Testing Service. You need to learn something about how the test-writers think ("get into their minds") so that you can think like they do and sidestep their attempts to distract you from the correct answers. Information in this area will be found throughout this book, especially in the *Test Busters* section.

You have everything you need in this book to help you do well on the SAT. We have supplied the raw materials for your success. Now, it's up to you to make the strong effort required to do your best. Good luck and good studying!

TYPICAL FORMAT OF THE SAT*

The following is a schematic representation of a typical SAT examination. While the ordering of the sections might differ from test to test, the format will adhere to this basic scheme, as established by ETS.

SECTION	NUMBER OF QUESTION ^c	TIME ALLOWED
SECTION I: VERBAL ABILITIES	45	30 min.
Antonyms	15	
Sentence Completions	10	
Analogies	10	
Reading Comprehension	10	
SECTION II: MATHEMATICAL ABILITIES	25	30 min.
Standard Multiple Choice		
SECTION III: TEST OF STANDARD WRITTEN ENGLISH	50	30 min.
Usage	35	
Sentence Corrections	15	
SECTION IV: VERBAL ABILITIES	40	30 min.
Antonyms	10	
Reading Comprehension	15	
Sentence Completions	5	
Analogies	10	
SECTION V: MATHEMATICAL ABILITIES	35	30 min.
Standard Multiple Choice	15	
Quantitative Comparisons	20	
SECTION VI: EXPERIMENTAL SECTION	varies	30 min.
Verbal Abilities, Mathematical Abilities, or Test of Standard Written English		

* Although the SAT has six sections, all practice examinations in this book contain only five sections, since one of the six sections on the actual test is experimental in format and does not count toward your score.

CHOOSING AND APPLYING TO COLLEGE*

SELECTING A COLLEGE

"How can I possibly choose?" you probably ask despairingly when you realize that there are over 1,500 four-year colleges and universities in the U.S., each with its own individual character. Yet, by the fall of your senior year, your counselor has told you, you will need a list of between one and six colleges to which you will apply.

How can you do this? First, it helps to remember that high school students tackle this challenge every year, that many people experienced in college admissions stand ready to help you, and that most students are very happy with the choices they do make. The College Board publication *College Times* reported that data from the American Council on Education and UCLA show that about 76 percent of 1986 college freshmen were attending their institution of first choice and another 24 percent were attending their second choice institution. Even many of the top-ranked, selective colleges admit 40 percent of those who apply. Second, remember that every seemingly complicated process can be broken down into smaller steps you can take on one at a time – that's what this section is all about. It will show you what to do and when, and tell you why you should do it.

Most important piece of advice: *No one college is the only one for you.* Think of what you want from "ideal" colleges: don't have any one or two real institutions in mind. You have to be open to the exploration of lots of possibilities and you have to be willing to make compromises and set priorities. What is an excellent choice for you may be a poor choice for your closest friend, or have been a poor choice for a parent or older sibling. You've got to begin by considering yourself.

By all means, listen to what people have to say about colleges and collect information on colleges throughout high school. Early groundwork avoids later panic. But, before you can make a good match between you and one of those schools, you must consider what kind of person you are and what you would like to be and do in the future. *Throughout this whole process, it is essential to be honest with yourself and others.*

To ponder in all those spare moments between algebra tests and basketball games:

1. *What do I like to do? What am I good at?*

Do you like to work with people, ideas, machines, your hands, facts and figures?

Do you want to be involved with the arts? business? law? medicine? selling?

What do you like best in school? Least? Why?

Do you enjoy being out-of-doors?

What extracurricular interests do you wish to continue? to begin?

What frustrates you? worries you?

What do you look forward to?

2. *What are the strengths and weaknesses of my character and personality and how might they affect my choices?*

Are you organized, impulsive, aggressive, reserved, a leader, a follower?

Are you a self-starter or do you need structure?

Are you comfortable with new people and tasks or do you enjoy routine?

3. *Why do I want to go to college? What might be alternatives?*

Do you want to go to college because you want to learn to think critically and to analyze, to gain cultural perspective and historical information, to get a good job (personally satisfying, well-paying or both?), to have fun, to meet new people and make contacts, to participate in extra-curricular activities, to please your parents, to do what everybody else is doing?

4. *What kind of environment do I wish to live in for the next few years?*

Are you comfortable in a small, large area? Should students be homogenous? heterogeneous? Do you want to be near a city? in the country? near home? far away?

5. *What are my goals? And (realistically) what careers will be best suited to them?*

How highly do you value fame, fortune, creativity, intellectual challenge, security, helping others? How well do you know what kind of preparation leads to various careers? Which careers interest you now? How can I find out more about what careers mean in terms of lifestyle?

Answering these questions isn't easy. Your answers will change over the next few years and probably throughout your life. Many answers will involve a combination of ideas and reactions, but you might want to try to list your strengths and weaknesses and ask others to make a list for you and compare. Discuss

*by Karen Claggett, Lecturer in English, Boston College

these ideas with parents, teachers, peers. Think about the people you admire. Why do you respect them?

This self-assessment will help you decide such specific questions as whether you wish to attend a small liberal-arts college or a research-oriented university. You might learn that you would benefit from a year off to study abroad or work before college. You might want to explore vocational schools or the military. Almost anything you might choose to do, from applying to college to filling out job applications, will require that you present yourself and to do that you have to have a sense of who you are. The grappling you do with these admittedly difficult questions will help you in such specific tasks as interviewing and essay writing where a good knowledge of yourself is invaluable.

Of course, you know that you can't spend your four years of high school solely on philosophical considerations. What else should you do to prepare for application to college? What you also need to do – and the earlier in high school you start the better – falls into two areas. One specifically concerns research on colleges and universities, taking standardized tests, and writing applications. The other is what you can do as a student to enlarge your options by becoming the strongest possible candidate.

Let's take the second first. What can you do *right now* to make yourself a better applicant and your application a successful one?

1. *Make certain that your high school courses are challenging and appropriate.*

Sample a variety of courses, but be sure that reading and writing courses are an important part of your curriculum. Colleges know that success in further education requires good skills in these areas. And, don't forget math. Lots of career possibilities depend on confidence and ability in mathematics. Remember you will need to show to admissions officers that you are willing to take academic chances and to stretch your mind. A "B" grade in a demanding honors course, if you have been working hard, is better than an "A" in a less challenging class. If your interest and talent lie in one area – say the sciences or foreign languages – take additional courses. Work for a balanced program, too, that involves you in most disciplines. Be sure to follow through; don't stop a sequence of courses in a discipline you may later continue. Be aware, too, that colleges have minimum requirements. Your counselor and college catalogues can help you discover what they are. When you do well in a course for which there is an Achievement Test or an Advanced Placement Examination, arrange to take that test as near as possible to completion of the course.

2. *Keep your best work – whether done in or out of the classroom.*

Fantastic photographs, scorching editorials, prize-winning flower collections should all be documented. Some college applications will offer you a chance to submit supplementary material that demonstrates your achievement, and almost all admissions interviewers will be happy to discuss areas of real interest to you. Some colleges are now even requiring you to submit an essay you have written for a high school course. Be prepared.

3. *Read.*

If you like reading – you're off to a great start. Try to expand areas of knowledge by consciously making the effort to read about ideas and subjects that are new to you. Stay in touch with current events through newspapers and magazines. Take out and read a 19th-century British novel or two; there is no better way of enlarging your vocabulary to prepare for the rigors of college reading or for the vocab sections of the SAT.

If you think you don't like to read – don't despair. Reading is habit-forming. You need only the discipline to set up a reading plan. Start small. Begin by reading for fifteen or twenty minutes *every day* something that really interests you. There are magazines for almost every hobby and talent. Whether it is fashion or sports, photography or romance that interests you, with a little effort you can find reading material. As soon as you feel that you've established a pattern of reading, move to new fields. Weekly news magazines offer a variety of articles, have good vocabulary, and allow you to improve your general knowledge while you work on reading skills.

4. *Establish good study habits now.*

If you find it is difficult to get homework done with Mom supervising and daily quizzes threatening, imagine how tough it will be when your only check on yourself is you and that exam at the end of the semester. If you are not an organized person, begin to use lists and assignment books to get on top of things. Look ahead a week or more to prepare for tests and papers, keep neat and informative notebooks, and go to teachers for help before they come after you. *Ask questions.* You are responsible for your education. Asking good questions involves you in the class, makes it more interesting, helps you understand and remember what is going on, and impresses teachers favorably.

5. *Find time (somehow) for that one thing you do well or like best and pursue it.*

Colleges often have tons of "well-rounded" applicants, but someone who can play the French horn in the orchestra, direct a student performance, run for a

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touchdown, or organize campus events really adds to the college community—and admissions officers know it. Devotion to and achievement in one special activity demonstrate your self-discipline and your ability for sustained effort.

What is great about this list is that following it pays off twice. You'll get a better education and be a stronger applicant. Now, what do you need to do about that college list?

A Calendar for Selecting and Applying to College

Freshman and Sophomore years (and beyond)

1. *Begin by getting to know your teachers and counselors well.*

You needn't be teacher's pet or loiter around the Guidance Office, but let's face it, teachers and counselors are busy people. You need to make the effort so that communication is easier, so you'll be able to ask for help easily. The better others know you, the more they can help you, and, it must be remembered, the more fully they can write about you on recommendation forms. Always ask questions about anything that confuses you in the process of applying to college and try to anticipate problems. For example, an important question would be "Can I take every Achievement Test every time the tests are offered?" The answer is "No." If you want to take an Achievement Test in German or Hebrew or a number of other subjects, you need to know when they are given.

2. *Be a collector of all information about colleges.*

Talk with relatives, friends, alums of your school. Attend college nights and college fairs. Use football games or art shows or plays as an excuse to get on local campuses. Even if you want to attend college far away from home, a visit to a nearby campus can bring such issues as the best campus size, location, and curriculum offerings into perspective for you. Always keep in mind the source of your information; not everyone is objective or shares your concerns. Read newspaper and magazine articles on issues of higher education. Look at campus publications. Learn what resources your guidance office offers – computer software, catalogues, videos, viewbooks. Begin flipping through the pages on specific colleges and universities in this guide.

Junior Year

If you're reading this as a junior, you just have to work a little harder and more quickly. Don't neglect the suggestions under Freshmen and Sophomore years.

1. *Make an appointment with your guidance counselor or for your parents and you.*

You will want to discuss what you must do to improve your preparation for both college and college selection.

2. *Get a social security number.*

You'll need it to apply for college, financial aid, and jobs.

3. *Work conscientiously on your self-assessment.*

4. *List the college features you value. Consider:*

- A. In what kind of *environment* are you comfortable, challenged?
 - *Size* (small – under 2,500, medium – 2,500 to 8,000, large – 8,000 to 15,000, jumbo – over 15,000). Do you value individual attention or do you want a vast variety of course offerings?
 - What about *location*? Is this your chance for the big city? Green pastures? Suburbia? Do you want to put some distance between you and home or do you want to get home on weekends?
- B. Do you want to attend a liberal arts college, a business college, a university, a college for the performing arts, etc.?
- C. Will you consider a *single-sex institution* – what are the advantages and disadvantages? (You might wish to talk with alumni/ae here.)
- D. What *sports and other extra-curricular activities* do you want to find? What special programs (such as junior year abroad) are attractive?
- E. How important is *financial aid*?
- F. How *selective* a college do you want and are you qualified to attend? Be both frank and realistic with yourself here and encourage counselors, teachers, and admissions officers to be the same. Make lists and take notes.

5. *Make a note of the tests (PSAT – Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test, SAT or ACT, Achievements, etc.) that you should take and when they will be given so family activities may be planned accordingly.*

Your counselor may have this information and registration details and deadlines already gathered together for you. Be certain to find out from teachers and counselors when it would be best for you to take spe-

cific achievement tests. Remember if you are considering applying Early Decision or Early Action to a college, you will need to take tests early. Fill out the Student Descriptive Questionnaire on the SAT form so that you'll be able to receive information from colleges and so searches by colleges interested in you will find you.

6. *Write away for college catalogues and viewbooks when you become interested in an institution.*

A simple postcard is fine. This is the time to ask for specifics on financial aid or on majors and programs that are of interest to you. Take a box or a drawer of your desk and buy file folders for it. Use a folder for each college and for special topics such as "Deadlines" or "Financial Aid."

7. *In the spring develop a preliminary list of colleges.*

Write or call for information from any that are new on your list. Think about visiting colleges for viewing and interviewing in the summer – especially if you are considering colleges that are far from home. Write ahead to schedule interviews – popular colleges become booked early. You won't have much time to spare next year and high schools frown on absences due to college visiting. Visit and interview now even if you later decide not to apply.

8. *Consider participation in one of the many summer study programs and locate a summer job if you need to make money to help with college costs.*

Try to make the most of your summer through an interesting job, travel with an academic program, or summer study. This is a chance for you to do something that will distinguish you from the rest.

9. *If you think you may be an Early Decision or Early Action candidate, or if you are graduating early, you must have all required tests completed by July.*

10. *Know your grade average and class rank.*

Try to get a realistic picture of yourself as a candidate.

Senior Year

Let's assume you've followed through with the calendar. (If not, you need to review earlier years and do some quick catching up.)

1. Remember that the first semester of your senior year is seen by many colleges as the most current and best indicator of the type of student you will be in college. You will be busy this semester, *but do not neglect your school work.*

2. In early fall, narrow your list of colleges to between five and ten. One way of narrowing your list is to think about applying to one college that is a "reach" for you in its selectivity but that offers what you really want, one or two colleges at which you have a 50-50 chance of acceptance, and one "safety." You should be happy to attend every college to which you apply, including your "safety." Your counselor can help here. Be sure you have application forms and all other materials for each. If you have not visited colleges on the list and it is at all possible to do so without missing too much school, call and make appointments. Call early.

3. Familiarize yourself with all applications and forms. Make a note of all important deadlines (for tests, registrations, applications, interviews, etc.) You will probably have to write at least one essay for each application. Jot down topics and begin to think about ideas. Separate school report forms and teacher recommendation forms from the pile of material you will keep. Give report forms to your counselor when you have your final list. (Occasionally a university may ask for the whole application to be submitted together, and you will need to take your part to school to be sent with your transcript and recommendations.) Select those teachers who know you and your work best and for whom you have done well, and ask them to complete teacher recommendation forms. Supply teachers with a list of your interests, activities, and accomplishments. Give teachers addressed, stamped envelopes for recommendations. Keep track of who is writing where, and be sure to note deadlines on the recommendations. Send thank-you notes to teachers.

4. Keep track of which colleges will be sending representatives to your school and make arrangements to meet with those from institutions in which you are interested.

5. Through your own thoughts, and discussion with counselors, parents, and others, get your list into final form and begin filling out applications.

HOW TO COMPLETE THE APPLICATION PROCESS

STANDARDIZED TESTS YOU WILL TAKE

The words "SAT scores" loom large in the world of high school juniors. To a student, the idea of being compared with thousands of others, ranked and "quantified" is more than scary. The scores sometimes seem a measure of his worth. Parents can do a great deal to alleviate the counterproductive anxiety that surrounds these tests by understanding this and by refraining from adding, however subtly, to the already considerable pressure.

It may help to know that while standardized tests are taken into account by most admissions offices, they can be low on the list of factors that determine admission. What they do is provide a measure of a student's ability and achievement, but that reading must be given greater dimension by a knowledge of a student's environment and his school record. Usually tests are used in conjunction with a student's transcript to determine whether he is an overachiever (often good) or an underachiever (generally bad). An 800 score on a Math SAT can be damning if you are receiving a D in mathematics. A 550 in English coupled with a teacher recommendation that points to significant accomplishment and improvement, can demonstrate your motivation and grit.

In any case, you do need to know what tests you will take, when you will take them, and how to prepare for them.

Students are given standardized tests throughout their school careers, but the following tests are specifically related to the college admissions process. For all tests mentioned below, registration materials and sample test questions are available through high school counselors. The tests are listed in the order in which most students will take them.

1. PSAT/NMSQT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test). This test is given in October of each year. Some students take the test only as juniors. Other students take the test for practice as sophomores. The test functions as a trial run for the SAT, and junior PSAT scores are used as qualification for National Merit Scholarships. Black and Hispanic students can use the test to qualify for other scholarships as well. The test has verbal and mathematical sections. A booklet that accompanies test results helps students interpret their scores.

2. and 3. SAT or ACT? Most American students take the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test). Some midwestern and southern universities and colleges require the ACT (American College Testing Assessment). Check with your counselor about which test you should take.

The SAT. This is given a number of times throughout the year. Your counselor will let you know the dates it will be given at your school or in your area. Most students take the examination in late spring of their junior year and in autumn of their senior year. Some students also take the test early in the junior year for additional preparation. The SAT is a two-and-one-half-hour, multiple-choice exam measuring verbal and mathematical reasoning abilities. Vocabulary, verbal reasoning, and comprehension of reading material are tested in the English sections; arithmetic, elementary algebra, and geometry are covered in the math sections. The test is scored on a scale of 200 to 800, and a booklet useful in score interpretation accompanies the results.

The Test of Standard Written English (TSWE) is given at the same time as the SAT. It is a 30-minute, multiple-choice test that evaluates your knowledge of good grammar and correct expression.

The ACT. This test combines the ability orientation of the SAT with the accomplishment orientation of the Achievement Tests. The ACT measures educational development in English, mathematics, social studies, and the natural sciences. It tests a student's ability to reason and solve problems. It is a multiple-choice examination, and scores are reported on a scale of 1 to 36, 36 being the highest.

If you take the SAT, you will probably have to take several Achievement Tests, given in a number of disciplines. To determine which and how many tests to take, you should consult the catalogues of the colleges in which you are interested for their specific requirements. You should also check with your subject teachers especially in foreign languages and mathematics to be certain you are making the best decision. You will need, for example, to decide whether to take Mathematics Level One or Level Two and whether the number of years you have studied a foreign language makes the Achievement Test in that discipline a good choice for you. Your guidance or college counselor can also help here. Achievement Tests are given more than once a year, and your counselor can advise you as to the appropriate date. Some tests are given only *once*

a year. Often a series of Achievement Tests are taken twice. If you complete a course for which there is an Achievement Test—say biology in the 10th grade—you should arrange to take the test as near as possible to the date you completed the course.

You will be given an opportunity to fill out the Student Descriptive Questionnaire when you take the SAT. Completing this will insure that you receive mail from colleges.

Scores for these tests are reported on the same 200 to 800 scale as the SAT. The tests are one-hour, multiple-choice exams that measure knowledge in such areas as English, foreign languages, the sciences, history, and mathematics.

4. *AP* (Advanced Placement). The AP examinations given each year in May allow able students, who do well on the tests, to receive college credit and/or advanced standing for work done while in high school. The examinations are given in many fields, and a student's school does not have to have an established AP course for students to take the test. While the exams vary from discipline to discipline, most involve both objective and essay sections and are several hours long. The test is scored from 1 to 5, with 5 the highest. Each institution treats the examinations differently, but many will grant college credit for scores from 3 to 5.

5. *TOEFL* (Test of English as a Foreign Language). You will need to take this test if you have been in the U.S. only a few years and if English is not your native language. Consult your counselor for dates and information about this test.

6. *CLEP* (College-Level Exam Program). This series of examinations is designed to test knowledge gained by students through life experience as well as academic study. It involves a series of five examinations on general topics and several on specific subjects. Students and non-students interested in finding out more about these tests which allow college credit to those with demonstrated competency should check with the counselor at the nearest high school.

THE APPLICATION

Although applications differ from college to college, most consist of your part (data to be supplied, a personal essay, and the application fee), your high school's part (a secondary report form for grades and information about the school and a mid-year report form to keep you honest and keep you from coasting), and a part for teachers' recommendations.

The first section of your part of the application usually asks for specific information on your personal and school life. You may need to include your social security number, your class rank, and your school's College Board Code number. Often you must state whether you plan to live on campus, whether you are applying for financial aid, and what your tentative plans for a major and an occupation are. (Colleges don't require you to have your life completely planned, but want to have a sense of how many English majors or pre-med students they may have on campus. Don't feel you have to commit yourself to an area but do indicate any genuine interests.) There is a place to list the names of your parents and siblings. A request is often made for the names of colleges and universities they have attended.

Colleges want the names of all the schools you have attended during your high school years, including summer school. Besides providing a place for the schools' names and addresses, colleges may want you to arrange for a copy of your transcript from *each* institution be forwarded. Colleges often ask for the names of the teachers who will submit a teacher's recommendation for you, so that if a recommendation is delayed, you and the teacher can be easily notified. There is usually a place for SAT, ACT, Achievement Tests, Advanced Placement Tests, and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores. Some colleges will ask whether you have ever been suspended or expelled and provide an opportunity for you to explain the circumstances.

You may often have a chance to list academic and non-academic honors and to record extra-curricular, summer, and employment experiences in this part of the application. The application may ask questions about community service, your travel experience, and your foreign language abilities. Remember, when you have been given the opportunity to include lists of honors, sports teams, or countries visited, do not repeat your lists as part of your essay. Instead, treat one experience or activity in detail.

Institutions are, of course, interested in what you have learned. You may be asked to list books you have read, or to comment on your reading, and/or to evaluate an important educational experience. Colleges want to see that you are an interested and receptive student. Take care with such questions. Think and plan before you answer them.

Finally, you may be asked whether you wish to waive your right under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 to see interview notes and recommendations should you matriculate.

Each application is somewhat different from all others. The information above should, however, give you an idea of the elements and prepare you for the per-

sonal essay. Not all institutions require an essay, but most do, and it is a very important way of presenting yourself.

A few, simple suggestions concerning the whole application procedure are in order here:

1. **Apply early.** Many colleges and universities make their decisions as student applications are received. You don't want to risk having the freshman class filled when your application is received. Even at institutions that do not use a kind of rolling admission, applications are often read in the order in which they are completed. It is better to be early than late!

2. **Write your application yourself or type it yourself.** Do *not* have it professionally typed. Colleges want to feel that students are willing to take the time and care to do their own applications. The typing skills of your father's secretary do not impress them. Your application should present *you* as clearly and as *personally* as possible. Be certain, of course, that all information is as clear, accurate, and complete as possible.

3. **Standardized test scores.** These are often requested. You should keep your scores handy, but it is also your responsibility to have official scores sent to each college. You can do this when you take the tests or later. It is best to use the spaces provided on the tests and to obtain Additional Report Forms from your counselor only when needed. Remember, you must write your name and address exactly the same way each time you take a test, or your scores will not be combined.

4. **Ask teachers well in advance for recommendations.** They are time-consuming and a labor of love. Appreciate the work done. Teachers may certainly write one letter of recommendation that is appropriate for a number of colleges, that can be xeroxed and sent to each. It is better to ask the one teacher who knows you best to send off six copies than to ask six different teachers. Supply stamped, addressed envelopes for each recommendation. A list of your activities, accomplishments, and interests is often helpful to the teacher. Be sure to underline or point out the deadline for the submission of each recommendation. Keep a record of who writes which recommendations and send thank-you notes to teachers.

5. **You may want supporting material—photographs, drawing, tapes—if you are especially talented in one area.** Be honest, but not too critical when you assess how helpful these materials may be.

6. **Additional recommendations from others, outside of school, who know *you* well may be included, but don't overload.**

7. **You may be able to use your essay for several applications, but be certain that it is well-suited to each.**

8. **There is a Common Application that many colleges accept that allows you to take a short cut and avoid so many different applications.** If the colleges to which you are applying also have their own applications, you may want, however, to use the individual applications which are tailored to the institution.

9. **If a college to which you are applying does not provide a school report form, you should ask your counselor to send a transcript, school profile, and school letter of recommendation anyway.** If a college does not require a teacher recommendation, but you feel that you will have a good one, arrange for a copy to be sent to the college.

A short glossary of terms that pertain to the applications process follows.

Application Glossary

Deferred Admission. This is a term used to indicate that many colleges will allow an admitted student to postpone matriculation for a year for a number of reasons (financial, to be a foreign exchange student, etc.).

Early Action. The name of an admission program that allows a candidate who applies by a certain date, usually in the autumn, to receive early notification of the admissions decision. If a student is accepted under an Early Action Program, the student *is not obligated* to attend that institution.

Early Admission. A policy that allows extremely well-qualified students to enter college before graduation from high school.

Early Decision. This is similar to Early Action. An admissions decision is usually given in December for November 1 application deadlines. If a student is accepted under Early Decision, that student *is obligated* to accept no other institution.

Early Entrance. This is similar to Early Admission. A student matriculates at an institution without having graduated from high school. This type of admission is reserved for very few, extremely well-qualified students.

Early Evaluation. This provides an opportunity for students who apply by a specified date to be told whether their admission to a particular college is "likely," "not likely," or "possible."

Rolling Admission. Under this type of admissions system, colleges and universities admit students at various times in the year depending on the date of application and the qualifications of the student. When the upcoming freshmen class is filled, admissions close. It is naturally to your advantage to apply early to such institutions.

THE ESSAY

Just how do you show your talent, intelligence, humor, creativity, and writing ability in one short essay? Well, no one will say that it's easy. But, college isn't easy either and that is where a good essay will get you. The answer, though not easy, is simple: *You must be courageous enough to be you.*

Why courageous? Most of us feel our lives are too insignificant to appeal to someone else without window dressing. We're tempted to incorporate the thoughts of others, to take on earth-shattering issues—to do anything in short to make us seem better than we think we are. Unfortunately (fortunately?) a college admissions officer isn't interested in the ideas of your parents, counselors, or friends. Nor is he interested in what you think he will want to hear; don't second guess. He does not need to read another seventeen-year-old's solution to nuclear war. *He wants to get to know the student whose essay is in front of him—you.*

Everyone has in his life the stuff of excellent college essays; the trick is to find it. And, how do you locate this "stuff" and use it to show your best self? By thinking about the specific essay questions posed, by studying all other directions carefully, by reflecting on your own experiences, and by responding in clear, honest, and direct prose.

Essays too often sound exactly the same. Think of your reader. An admissions officer may be faced with fifty application folders to read in a day; certainly he will read thousands before the end of the admissions season. Stay away from traditional treatments of traditional topics; it's hard to grab an admissions officer's attention and interest with the twentieth travelogue of his day, a biography that begins, "I was born....," or the hundredth piece he has read in a week on "Why I would like to attend your college."

Instead of listing the countries you visited on a trip abroad or the pavilions at the World's Fair, select one experience that really had an impact on you and explore that experience in depth. Explain how it changed you and why. Don't try to impress, but do try to interest. And one of the best ways of interesting

someone else is to be interested in what you are writing yourself.

Your essay is your chance to show who you are. Try to be spontaneous and imaginative. Look for original approaches or viewpoints. For example, a failure that is well-described, has clearly shown your ability to cope, and pinpoints what you have learned from it is really more impressive than a list of ten accomplishments. In fact, problems, difficulties, or fears can often lead to interesting discussions. Think about all that has happened to you in your family, with friends, at school, in activities. Locate turning points in your life, analyze important relationships, consider family crises. Remember your subject should be a vehicle for showing your values and beliefs. Don't be afraid to be personal—that's what it's all about. You want to remain in the mind of your reader as a distinctive individual.

To find the best topic for you and to write well about it you will need time. Some can be gained by planning ahead. Some by disciplining yourself to cut out the agony: many students spend hours on the telephone commiserating with friends who are also struggling. This is counterproductive; it wastes valuable time and postpones your thinking about your purpose. To keep the bother to a minimum, start small. Jot down a few possible topics. Try to develop each. Look for the connections and conclusions that can be made. Try out a few paragraphs on what seem the likeliest topics. Remember, with enough time you can scrap one idea for another. Explore. When you are satisfied that your topic is personal, character-revealing, and interesting, write your rough draft. Let it sit for awhile and then try to revise it objectively, but don't water it down to rob it of spontaneity. Be sure to check for spelling errors and other problems with "mechanics." Colleges are not interested in sloppy efforts. Be certain you have followed all directions.

Here is a checklist that you can use to evaluate your essay. You may also want to ask someone else to check your essay against it after reading what you have written.

1. Is this interesting? Will it stand out because it shows who I really am? Is it about something that is important to me?
2. Do I analyze, conclude, offer observations, present theories? In other words, *do I show I can think?* Do I get every bit that is possible out of my issue, experience, story?
3. Is my presentation logical? Do I support my contentions?
4. Is there good transition between ideas?

5. Do I have a conclusion rather than a summary at the end?

6. Is all the information relevant? Is everything stated as clearly and effectively as possible?

If you ask for the opinions of others, be certain it is you who do the rewriting and devise solutions to problems. You are ultimately responsible for your essay's vision and revision. Decide whether you will type or write out the final copy. Be as neat as possible. Mail your essay off on time. Take a deep breath and give yourself a hand.

APPLYING FOR FINANCIAL AID

When financial aid is an important consideration in your acceptance of a college—and these days it is for just about everyone—please remember to consider the “award package” (which consists of loans, student work, and scholarships) can vary greatly from college to college. This means that you must consider the award in relation to the cost of each college. You may find that the small expensive college you thought you could never afford is well endowed and can offer you far more aid than the state university, making the smaller college actually cheaper! This is one of the reasons why, though aid or the lack of it may determine your final college decision, you shouldn't allow concerns over money issues to keep you from considering colleges in the beginning. You just have no way of knowing what may happen; hence, work to keep money worries apart from the initial decisions.

Federal Financial Aid—Most federal financial aid is based on your financial need as determined by subtracting what you (and your parents, if you are dependent) can reasonably be expected to contribute toward your educational costs (known as the Expected Family Contribution, or EFC) from the cost of attendance at a specific school. Probably the most important part of this simple-looking formula is the calculation of your EFC. This is done by completing one of several possible need analysis forms. These include, but are not limited to, the Financial Aid Form, the Family Financial Statement, and the Application for Federal Student Aid. To find out which one you should use, contact the financial aid office at the school or schools you are considering attending. Once you have the right form, fill it out completely and carefully. Errors can cause delays in the financial aid process.

Although these forms ask many different questions,

the most important ones relate to income, and require specific information directly from your or your parents' federal tax returns. After you have completed the form, mail it as soon as possible—deadlines are important throughout the entire financial aid process! You should try to apply for financial aid in January or February preceding the next academic year, but you may apply at any time. Be sure to make a photocopy of your application and have copies ready of any of the documents you used to complete your application, in the event your financial aid administrator requests them. Do *not* send them with your application.

The completion of one need analysis form is usually enough to have your need determined for all the federal aid programs; however, your school may have supplemental forms that you will need to complete as well.

If you or your family have special circumstances that are not covered by the questions on the form, be sure to explain those circumstances fully and clearly in the appropriate section or provide a separate statement directly to the financial aid administrator. He or she will then be able to make a much more accurate assessment of your need for financial aid. Note that all information used in determining need will be kept confidential by the financial aid office.

While all the details of applying for student financial aid seem to be a bother, the rewards in terms of the assistance you receive can be great. If you read and follow all application instructions, meet deadlines, and provide additional documentation when necessary, the application process is easier than it may first appear. However, don't get lazy and assume that your financial aid is taking care of itself. The result can be disastrous. When you have any doubts or questions, contact a professional financial aid administrator for assistance. He or she will be happy to help you.

State Financial Aid—After federal aid, the second most commonly known type of assistance comes from your state. Generally, you must be a resident of the state in which you are enrolled in school to qualify for these funds; however, some states have reciprocal agreements which allow you to use the funds outside your home state. To inquire about this, as well as how to apply, you need to contact the appropriate agency for your state.

Merit Scholarships—While many colleges do earmark the largest percentage of scholarship money to needy students, merit scholarships are having a resurgence. Greater competition among colleges means that some are trying to attract good candidates through financial incentives. If you are a good student, be sure to inquire about the possibility of merit scholarships at each of the institutions to which you apply.

Co-op Education—Check out the possibility of entering a co-op (cooperative education) program. Schools that have such programs, and there are many, allow you to work while you study. The financial and career benefits are great, though you may need some extra time to earn your degree. Read the special section on Cooperative Education.

Local and Employment-related Awards—Almost every community, service organization, and large company has special scholarships available. Check with your school counselor, employers (yours, your parents'), personnel offices, churches, etc. Look in your local newspapers for announcements of application dates for community scholarships and competitions.

Private Sources of Financial Aid—The merit, local, and employment-related awards mentioned above are really a part of this broader category of student financial aid. Because individual programs are too numerous to mention, we will simply point you in the right direction so that you may research these alternative sources of assistance if you wish. While there are firms that will do this type of research for you (for a fee), you will generally have as great a success or better by going to the public library and doing the work yourself. You will find many reference books that list these private sources. You need to determine the specific programs for which you may qualify, request any application materials, and complete them accurately within required deadlines. Funds from these sources may generally be used in combination with any aid you receive from state or federal sources, or may be an alternative if you do not qualify for need-based financial aid. Like any research project, searching for these funds is time-consuming, but the pay-off can be just what it takes to cover any remaining need you have that is not met by aid from another source. It's worth looking into.

While financial aid is intended to help you cover your educational costs, remember that the government still maintains that the primary responsibility to pay for an education lies with the student and family. If all of your need is not met, make sure that you have contributed your share. If there is still a gap, don't just give up. A school has usually invested sufficient time and money in you, and would rather find a way to help you stay than to allow you to withdraw. Whether this involves a regular payment plan, or counseling to take fewer courses to reduce your costs, "sticking it out" is better than wasting the time you've already invested. So, be a good student aid consumer, seek help when you have problems, and financial aid will help you achieve your educational goals.

COOPERATIVE EDUCATION: FINANCIAL AID ALTERNATIVE

When financial aid is not enough to pay spiraling college costs, an important option you should consider is using a cooperative education program. In fact, because advantages of "co-op education" go well beyond allowing you to finance your college education while receiving it, students for whom financial considerations are not a factor might also do well participating in a co-op.

Cooperative education is the name given to a variety of plans in 900 colleges and universities in the United States and Canada which allow students to integrate academic study with work experience. Students have the opportunity while still in college to earn money, test career options, gain work experience, and participate fully in the "working world." Institutions offering co-op plans vary in admissions selectivity and include both four-year and two-year colleges. Cooperative programs can be found in the fields of agriculture, arts, business, computer sciences, education, engineering, health professions, humanities, natural sciences, behavioral sciences, and vocational arts. Not all participating colleges and universities offer co-op in all fields, however, so you should ask about the possibility of combining work and study, in your areas of interest, when you make preliminary inquiries.

Some institutions offer parallel study and work programs while others alternate several months of classes with work opportunities. Student commitments to athletics and other interests can often be accommodated by local placements. There is usually a chance for several different placements during your college career should you wish to experiment with career possibilities. Campus Cooperative Education Coordinators help locate positions, provide counseling, and monitor student performance.

The National Commission for Cooperative Education offers a sampling of previous co-op assignments: library assistant at the Library of Congress, copy person at the *New York Times*, shuttle resources assistant for NASA, physical therapy aid at a Denver hospital, assistant to the General Director of Banque Franco-Portugaise in Paris, accounting assistant for Arthur Andersen & Company, traffic analyst for Continental Forest Industries, programmer for an observatory in Northern Ireland, nursing assistant at Johns Hopkins, and industrial engineering analyst. Even such a short

list suggests the great variety of opportunities, here and abroad, and the potential for valuable entrees into professional fields.

Some 200,000 students are now a part of cooperative education programs with a combined wage of one billion dollars a year. Statistics on career decisions and job placement for co-op students are impressive. According to the Commission for Co-op Education, 40 percent of students continue to work for their co-op employers after graduation, 40 percent upon graduation find work in their field of interest, and 15 percent decide to remain in school to earn professional degrees.

For free information concerning co-op education and a comprehensive list of participating colleges and universities including the areas in which each institution participates in co-op, write The National Commission for Cooperative Education, 360 Huntington Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts 02115.

THE CAMPUS VISIT AND PERSONAL INTERVIEW

The interview is one of the scariest aspects of the college process. Many students feel shy speaking about themselves or unsure about what questions they should ask. The interview may even come relatively early in the selection process, before you are really set to think about college. It doesn't have to be horrific, however, and may be useful and fun if you follow a few suggestions.

As is said about so much in the college selection process, start early. Otherwise, if you are interested in highly competitive colleges, you may not even obtain an interview. Whenever possible, make arrangements by letter or phone several months before you plan to visit. Try to get as much as possible of your campus visiting and interviewing done in the summer between junior and senior year. Senior year is a hectic round of academic responsibilities, extra-curricular activities, and college application duties. It is hard to do much traveling then. You must also learn your school's policy about absence from classes for visiting colleges. Many schools discourage such absences during the fall of your important senior year. Abide by the rules; adhering to policy will save you and everyone else a lot of hassle. If you visit in the summer and a campus doesn't seem very lively or if you simply want to check it out again, there is the possibility of a return visit. Get started early.

Some colleges seem too far away for a visit. This may be true, but there are a few points you should consider before you give up the idea of a campus visit. First, would you buy a \$50,000 car without a test drive? That's what many four-year colleges will cost. Maybe you should get there, somehow. It is extremely difficult to discover the character and personality of an institution without a visit. Second, if it is really impossible to visit, at least arrange for an alumni/ae interview. Most colleges and universities have alumni in all areas of the country and will set up an interview for you. Second-hand information is better than none, but do consider whether the alumnus attended the institution recently or is up-to-date about it.

When you make your appointment, find out if the interview will be *evaluative* or *informative*. The first is a part of the admissions selection process and will be used to help determine how good a candidate you are. The second provides an opportunity for you to learn about the institution and is *not* a part of the selection process. You should know how the interview will be used before it begins.

How important is the interview? Well, as you can see, interviews are used differently by different colleges. In general, however, an evaluative interview that goes well will help keep you in the mind of the interviewer when decisions are made in the spring. Often interviews that do not go well are not held against students. Admissions officers are aware of the pressures involved and the natural tendency to be nervous. Still, it is obviously to your advantage to do as well as you can.

How can you have a good interview? Know something about yourself and about the institution before you arrive. Think about your strengths and weaknesses, your accomplishments and interests. Try to present yourself as confident, but not overly aggressive. Ask interesting questions (questions that do not cover material answered in the college's catalogue!). Dress neatly, but don't overdress. Sit up, show you are interested and interesting, and look your interviewer in the eye. This is not the time to hold back; you want to show who you are. Do not try to "psych out" the interviewer and give him what he wants to hear. He is a professional who interviews many students a day during the interview season. He will quickly see through any facade you present. Instead, try to encourage a real conversation. Colleges are looking for students who have a sense of themselves and where they may be heading. Through their selections, college admissions officers must create the community for the college. They need to feel you will