

4. College Confidential – A website that offers anonymous forums for students to ask many questions about colleges and get answers from fellow students.
5. Just Ask! – A workbook by the American Federation of Teachers to evaluate colleges and find out which college is the best fit to your situation and preferences.

When you're making a college list, make sure to have a balance between safety, match, and reach schools. Safety schools are schools where you're likely to get accepted. A reach school is a school that is a stretch to get accepted, meaning it might be hard to get into or has admission standards (GPA, test scores, etc.) that are a bit above yours. A match school has standards between the safety schools and reach schools. Use the average SAT/ACT scores and GPAs of admitted students for each college as a guide for whether the school is a safety, match, or reach. Importantly the schools that interest you will have varying acceptance rates. Viewing schools as difficulty levels, you should strive to get a variety of acceptance rates so that if your more difficult schools don't work out, you still have options about which you are excited. By diversifying, you won't have all your eggs in one basket. We recommend having one or two schools on your college list where you know you can gain acceptance, some match schools, and a couple of reach schools. It is important not to count yourself out from any school because you think the difficulty level might be too high. We can't stress this enough. You're guaranteed to not be accepted to the colleges you don't apply to, and even if you get a rejection letter – we all got our fair share – you can know you challenged yourself.

For confirming affordability of a school, see Section III for more details.

Chapter 5: Organizing the Application

Throughout the college application process, it is critical that you stay organized to stay on top of deadlines and requirements. You also need sufficient time to prepare applications. Here are the tools that our writers found the most helpful:

- Spreadsheet or Table. Use a spreadsheet or table to keep track of the colleges you are applying to, the requirements, and the deadlines. In the spreadsheet, make sure to note the dates things need to be submitted and cross them off or highlight them when you do – it'll save you a lot of time in the long run. Some writers of this guide used an Excel spreadsheet, others used a large poster board that they taped to a wall in their rooms, while others relied on Google Calendar. Figure out what works best for you. Remember, it's important to keep the spreadsheet updated. During the summer before your junior year, you might take a look at your spreadsheet once or twice a week, but during the middle of the application season, you should be looking at your table once a day or a handful of times per week. Remember, you don't want to miss a deadline for your dream school! Applying to college is something that takes time and effort, so a daily check is a must.

Table 1: Example Spreadsheet

College	Deadlines (Highlighted = Completed)					
	Common App	Supplement	Recommendations	Tests	Financial Aid	Merit Scholarship
University of Maine	12/30	12/30	12/30	1/15	2/1	11/20
Harvard (Early)	11/12	11/12	11/30	11/15	11/15	NA
Bard College	12/30	12/30	12/20	1/15	2/1	11/15
Florida International University	1/01	11/01	1/15	1/15	3/1	10/15

- **Planner.** In addition to having a higher-level spreadsheet or table, you should use a planner to keep track of deadlines and break the college application process into small chunks. Try to do something everyday, including tasks from ‘take one full, timed SAT practice test’ to ‘schedule meeting with college counselor to review scholarship and college list’ to ‘complete the second draft of the common app essay’. Planners and calendars more generally are a great way to reduce procrastination. Physical planners – especially small ones that you can use to catch fleeting ideas – are great and there are also free online planners like [Google Calendar](#). Find out what works best for you.

Examples of Planner Entries:

- Spend Thursday night completely running through a practice ACT
- Finish the financial aid portion of the application by Friday of this week
- Write draft of college essay on Wednesday night

Chapter 6: Letters of Recommendation

The letter of recommendation is another chance for colleges to learn more about you as a person – similar to your college essays – but this time from a second-hand perspective. The recommendation should either deepen and complement an existing element of your application or add an entirely new element into the mix.

Most colleges require two recommendation letters from faculty along with a letter from your representative counselor. *Make sure you’re getting your recommenders all the information they need and are setting them up for success.* In the preceding version of the Common App, the company allowed the submission of a resume or an activities sheet – a sheet that detailed all of the things that you did in school. While the Common App now has no place to upload an activities sheet, creating one allows you to detail the honors, awards, and accomplishments that