

Both the ACT and SAT provide score submission options, where test takers can write in colleges where they'd like to send scores before they take the test, sometimes for free or reduced cost. The free side of this is great. That said, the danger is that if you bomb a standardized test, that score is sent straight to the college you want to impress; if you don't select the college then it won't, but you'll have to pay for submitting your score later via the online tool where you also registered.

In summary, see what tests your schools ask for, write them down in a spreadsheet (see Chapter 5), and then start studying for the tests that you need to take, one subject at a time. Your goal in testing is to get these tests out of the way with good scores ASAP so that you can devote time to the more nuanced portions of the application instead of having to be worried about retaking your standardized tests.

## Chapter 4: Creating a College List

As the timeline stated, students should start finalizing their college list by the beginning of their senior year. The 'fit' of what a student wants from college and what the college provides is a huge part of a fulfilling college experience. College rankings can be helpful in finding colleges to which you may want to apply, but there is no 'fit' element to them. Thus, it would be unwise to simply rely on college rankings to apply to schools. The first step in creating a college list is to reflect on what you want out of the college experience. Make a list and write this down. We had you ask some of the important questions surrounding your ideal college experience in Chapter 2.

Now it's time to match your ideal college experience to what different colleges have to offer. Think about what you want and then use the following resources to find out where you'll find the best college fit. Dive deeply into learning what each college is like and figure out whether it matches what you want from your college experience. In addition to the resources below, the Additional Tools section includes a brief questionnaire created by Roy Gamse and published by the Washington Post to help you think about what type of schools interest you.

1. [The College Board College Search](#) - A college search engine in which you can apply filters to a list of colleges to find ones that best match your preferences.
2. [The Fiske Guide to Colleges](#) - A guide of over 300 colleges that provides a straightforward insider look into colleges. If purchasing the book is difficult, we'd recommend skimming or reading the book at a bookstore over several days.
3. [Niche](#) - A website that allows you to get ratings on dorm quality, food, and social life through students submitting their own feedback. As students submit the scores, you will get imperfect information, since students will likely be biased. With that in mind, you might still get some useful insight.

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.