



6 Steps to Admissions Success

U.S. Colleges, 2016

Introduction

College Inside Track's 6 Steps to Admissions Success is a concise, but comprehensive system to improve an applicant's likelihood of being admitted to college. This guidebook is for students, parents, mentors, and educators who need a simple way to access and organize the essential information needed to apply to college. This edition has been written specifically for students and parents to answer frequently asked questions and provide strategies for success with admissions. Each college has individual policies and deadlines for admissions that complicate this process, especially when colleges adjust these policies each year. This guidebook focuses on admissions to colleges in the United States, including undergraduate and graduate programs; however, there is not an American standard for college admissions, so each applicant will learn how to research and confirm deadlines and requirements for admission for each specific program.

What are the basic criteria for admission to college? There are three, key criteria that common sense says are needed: 1) good grades in rigorous courses, 2) high scores on standardized tests, and 3) demonstrated accomplishments in leadership roles. Highly selective colleges use more than 15 criteria; nonetheless, these three criteria are the primary factors in admission decisions. Grades and test scores are transparent, numeric indicators of whether an applicant meets the minimum requirements for admission, and these indicators also allow comparison of a student against other applicants from previous years. The greater challenge for most prospective college students is to demonstrate true leadership in organizations, whether inside or outside of the school setting.

Think of a college admissions officer, (or an employer), who seeks ambitious leaders. Should an applicant who has no experience in any career field, never held an internship, or done anything to take a step along a career path be admitted to college (or hired for a job)? The weight given to experience will vary significantly between colleges. Many colleges only care that an interested student can pay the bills while other colleges have substantial requirements to be considered for admission. College is a gateway for many professions and requirements to enter these professions vary significantly.

The majority of adolescents dream of becoming doctors, lawyers and entertainers; these professions vary significantly upon the kind of skills, talent, knowledge, degrees, credentials, and experience necessary. A successful applicant needs to take steps to become informed about specific admission criteria to colleges along potential career tracks. A successful applicant must be aware of the perspective of an admissions officer



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and also the perspective of a future employer; however, the greater challenge is often to take the first steps to gain leadership experience toward long-term goals aligned with greater purposes in life.

Step 1 is a self-evaluation of college readiness to begin planning for college. The planning in Step 2 may begin at any point along a college track. Younger students, such as an 8th grader, have time to plan for success in rigorous coursework, prepare for every test along a career track, explore summer opportunities, and take advantages of the College Inside Track. Applicants for international, transfer, graduate schools will need to verify additional requirements with the specific college, so does every applicant. The 6 Steps provide a comprehensive approach to the process of applying to college in the United States.

Each step includes instructions, guiding questions, tables, tools, and resources that are useful when applying to college. Step 1 shows you the basic criteria used by admission officers to select students. Step 2.4 includes the Step-By-Step Checklist that is useful for students, parents, and mentors throughout the 6 Steps. Step 4.6 includes more detailed checklists for the Essay Writing and Work Plan once your college list is complete. Applicants create a new college list for each step, adding colleges until Step 5 when the essays need to be written. The 6 Steps are complete when you have accepted an admission offer and financial package from one college.

The 6 Steps to Admissions Success are the foundation to understanding college applications, finding the perfect college, optimizing support from college counselors, and securing an acceptance with an ideal financial aid package. **The 6 Steps to Admissions Success are:**

1. Self-Evaluate with Basic Admissions Criteria
2. Plan a Work Calendar and Monitor Progress
3. Reflect and Envision a Track through College and Life
4. Research and Create College Lists with Requirements and Deadlines
5. Write Effective Personal Statements
6. Review Applications and Financial Options

Students walk the steps for admissions success. Family, educators, mentors, and counselors support a student through the steps with essential guidance along their track. Our hope is that this guidebook will make applying to college less stressful for you, and show you that a simple, steady, thoughtful approach will help you enter the school that is right for you while saving money on track to your career goals and life's dreams.



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Step 1: Self-Evaluate with Basic Admissions Criteria

The primary tasks of Step 1 are to record indicators of achievement along possible career tracks and to begin to collect transcripts, test scores, and other evidence. This is the initial step in your application planning, so an answer may be incomplete, but colleges will eventually need to verify that all information is accurate. Comprehensive answers will help you make informed decisions. Answer every question to the best of your ability.

Step 1.1 Articulate College, Career and Life Goals

Write what you know about at least 3 possible career tracks. This is not a career decision, but rather a time to test your general knowledge about where you could possibly go and what you could possibly do in the future. Examples include: lawyer, doctor, software engineer, nurse, financial analyst, etc. Explain what you know on how to become an expert or professional level along each career track and why this is a possible direction for you to pursue in life.

1.1	Possible Careers	Explain what you know and why this is a possibility	

List which colleges interest you the most and why they are of interest to you. It is more helpful to write detailed explanations about what interests you about each college than to worry about what college is at the top of the list.

1.1	College	Explain why this is a good choice for you	



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Write a list of goals and why they are important to you. Almost every high school student says, “I want to go to college to get a better job,” so this is time to write realistic goals and the reasons they matter to you. It is acceptable to be uncertain about a specific goal, but being informed about many possible tracks has advantages over ignorance about any track or possibility. Not seeking information is unproductive for college and career decisions, but uncertainty is expected. Spend time searching for possibilities online, so that you are more informed about your options before speaking to a college counselor.

This is an example of how a student described her college, career goals, and life goals.

1.1	Goals	Explain why this goal matters to you	
	Win a STEM Contest	I want to make it to Siemens Competition in Math, Science, and Technology . I like to do research projects and learn about science and technology. I heard Angela Zhang won money for her project.	
	Go to College	I have not made a decision about college, but my favorites are Bioengineering at UC San Diego and Harvey Mudd	
	Become a Scientist	I want to be a scientist and invent something, similar to 23andMe . I dream of a job at Genentech .	
	Support My Family, Buy a House. Retire	I want to get married, have children, a house, and take care of my parents.	
	Volunteer and Give Back	I admire what Bill and Melinda Gates do for malaria and the scientists trying to Cure the Third World	

Step 1.1 is time to articulate your college, career, and life goals. Write the most important goals in your near and distance future, and explain why they matter to you.

1.1	Goals	Explain why this goal matters to you	



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Step 1.2 Record Grades, Coursework, and Test Scores

Collect ALL transcripts for high school classes. Write the name and details of the school in the table below.

1.2	Name of High School	Contact and Website	
	Name of School	Counselor Name Email and Hyperlink	

List ALL the classes that you have taken in high school. Include the grade, units, and whether it is Remedial, College Prep, Honors, ESL, AP or IB in the column for weight. Also, include classes that you plan on taking before you enter college.

1.2	Name and Number of Class	Grade	Units	Weight	
	History				
	History				
	English				
	English				
	English				
	English				
	Math				
	Math				
	Math				
	Lab Science				
	Lab Science				
	Language Other than English				
	Language Other than English				
	Visual and Performing Arts				
	College Prep Elective				



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List ALL the colleges that you have attended in the table below. (May not apply to you)

1.2	Name of College	Website and Contact	

List ALL the classes, grades and units earned from colleges. (May not apply to you)

1.2	Number and Title for College Class	Grade	Units	

If you have taken additional classes, such as first aid, CPR, music classes, athletic training, and job training, list the title of the class and name of the organization below.

1.2	Class Title and Description	Name of Organization	

Collect all scores for standardized exams and list the results below.

1.2	Test	Date	Score	R	W	M	S	
	SAT							
	ACT							
	SAT Subject							
	AP or IB							
	TOEFEL							



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Step 1.3: List Participation and Leadership in Activities

List every activity that you have participated in during high school. Include school clubs, music, arts, athletics, academic tutoring and competitions, volunteer service, work for pay, internships, summer activities, and any activity that you feel is worthwhile for your life, career and preparation for college.

1.3	Name of Activity and Description of Your Role	Hours per Week	Years Involved	
	Examples: Theater Light Technician in School Production of Stomp and Hamlet	2-4	9,10	
	Activity Director of Red Cross Club. I organize a blood drive and recruit my classmates to volunteer at the hospital.	2-4	9,10, 11	



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List all awards and recognitions of academic and other achievements.

1.3	Awards and Recognitions	

Explain possible ways to increase your responsibility and leadership in the next year.

1.3	Activity	Explain specific actions of how you will take more responsibility toward leadership in the next year	

Do you have any other ideas or important things that you hope to do in life? Write them.

1.3	Idea	Explain how you could do or do action in this direction	



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Step 1.4: Specify Sources of Support, Inspiration, and Value Statements

List the names of 5 teachers, work supervisors, or mentors who could write letters of recommendation on your behalf.

1.4	Person	Contact Information	

List at least 5 people or organizations that you admire and why you admire them.

1.4	Person, Organization	Qualities to admire in this person and/or organization	

List a few statements that define who you are and what is important to you. Revise these statements until you feel passionate about at least one of the statements such that you feel motivated to pursue an education, career, and the greater purposes in life.

1.4	Statements of core values that define you	

One last thing! Is there anything else that is important to know about you?



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Step 1.5 Assess Your Financial Opportunities and Constraints

How do you plan to pay for college? Can your family pay in full? Will you need to take out loans? Will you need to rely on scholarships? Do you plan on working while in college? College websites often have a section that details standard fees and costs, and other living expense when you are at college. Take stock now of what you expect to pay for college and how you expect to pay for it. Use a separate spreadsheet to calculate and project expenses and income. Write your options in Table 1.5 to complete **Step 1.5**.

1.5	Projected Expenses	Amount	
	Examples: Stanford University annual Tuition plus Living Expenses	\$66,696	
	Foothill College Fees Plus Living Expenses	\$12, 714 \$20,301	
	Clemson University Tuition Out-of-State Tuition and Living Expenses	\$6,511 \$48,534	

1.5	Projected Income During College		
	Examples: Parents annual contribution Tennessee Promise or Georgia Hope Scholarship Elks Scholarship with Mr. Patrick Summer Job at City Parks	\$20,000 Cover Tuition \$5,000 \$3,800	



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Step 1.6 Schedule Time to Create a Work Calendar

The task of **Step 1.1** through **1.5** is to articulate life goals, leadership experiences, academic achievements, value statements, and financial resources and constraints. Use a folder, (both electronic and paper), to collect all of the documents requested in this step because these documents will likely be required for admission to college. You may return to Step 1 at any time during the process, but once you responded to the questions in Step 1, begin Step 2.

An accurate assessment of college readiness is necessary in **Step 1** to create a calendar and work plan in **Step 2**, and begin more detailed reflection in **Step 3** in order to research and create a final college list in **Step 4**. **Step 5** includes instructions on how to write and revise effective, personal statements when college lists are finalized and essay prompts are released. **Step 6** entails a final review for application and financial packages with admission offers.

The 6 Steps to Admissions Success are:

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The worksheets in each step include instructions, questions, tables, and decision tools that have been designed as working documents. These documents will be revised during conversations with parents, mentors, and counselors.

Plan ahead and schedule time to manage the process of college applications in Step 2. Complete Step 2 as soon as possible in order to effectively plan and prepare for college.

1.6	When will you complete Step 2?	To Do List	