



# The LifeLaunchr College Admissions Handbook

Practical Tips To Help You Succeed  
in College Admissions and Career Planning

## Introduction

For high school students and their families, the college admissions process can be unpredictable, opaque, and complicated. The process can create a lot of anxiety and stress, making navigating and planning for the future challenging. But it doesn't have to be that way. With the right tools and guidance, students can take ownership of the process and make it work for them.

This handbook demystifies the college admissions process and makes it more transparent. We understand that the process can be overwhelming, but our goal is to provide you with the information you need to feel empowered and confident in your college search. By following the expert tips and advice from experienced professionals and college admissions experts, you can create a roadmap for success and take control of your future.

So, whether you're just starting to think about college or are in the midst of the application process, we encourage you to use this handbook as a resource to guide you along the way. With the right mindset, preparation, and support, you can achieve your goals and find the college that best fits you.

Through this handbook, we'll explore the different components of the college admissions process, including standardized testing, application materials, extracurricular activities, and essays. We'll discuss the importance of demonstrating academic and personal achievement and provide tips on creating a balanced college list. We'll also guide you in developing a college admissions strategy, including early planning and crafting a solid application.

We'll delve into the financial aid and scholarship application process, discussing the different types of financial aid available and providing guidance on how to research and apply for scholarships. We'll also discuss the importance of understanding the actual cost of college and how to create a realistic budget.

We'll provide a detailed timeline for the college admissions process, including critical deadlines and milestones. We'll discuss the importance of staying organized and on track throughout the process and provide tips on handling admissions decisions and deciding which college to attend.

By using this handbook as a resource, students and parents will gain the knowledge and confidence needed to navigate the college admissions process and achieve their goals. So, let's get started on this exciting journey towards your future!





## Understand Each College's Priorities and Match Them to Yours

LifeLaunchr's tools and process help you understand your values and interests and develop a profile that leads to success in college applications and beyond. We do this through several approaches:

- **Administering Interest, Aptitude, and Character Strengths Tests:** Our tools and [Self-Discovery](#) course include tests to help you understand your motivations, aptitude, and character strengths. As part of our coaching packages, our coaches discuss the results of these tests with you and what that means in choosing colleges, majors, and careers.
- **Using College Profiles to Understand College Priorities:** This chapter's list of admissions factors is general, but different colleges evaluate applicants differently. Our [college profiles](#) provide detailed guidance on what factors colleges consider and how. That helps as you plan your college list and think through applications.
- **Using College Research to Match Your Values and Interests to Colleges:** Our college research process is systematic and careful and focuses on helping you build a list of colleges where you'll be a good fit.

## CHAPTER 1: Understanding the College Admissions Process

The college admissions process is a multi-faceted journey that can seem overwhelming to students and parents alike. To succeed, you must understand the different components of the process and what colleges are looking for in their applicants. In this chapter, we'll explore the essential elements of the college admissions process and provide tips on creating a well-rounded application.

To get a sense of what's essential in college admissions, look at [LifeLaunchr's profile for the University of California, Berkeley](#). The profile offers a representative list of questions applicants can ask themselves if they want to attend a selective university:

- "Do I have a **strong academic foundation**? UC Berkeley expects its students to have achieved at a high level in challenging coursework. Consider your grades and coursework in high school and any standardized test scores you have taken.
- "What **extracurricular activities or leadership experiences** do I have? UC Berkeley values students who are involved in their communities, display leadership skills, and pursue their passions outside of the classroom.
- "Do I have a **desire to make a positive impact on the world**? UC Berkeley has a strong commitment to social justice and community service, and looks for students who share these values.
- "Do I have a **track record of overcoming challenges**? UC Berkeley values students who have persevered through difficult circumstances and come out stronger on the other side."

### These items form the core of a college application:

- **Academics**, including GPA (and, in some cases, standardized tests). At some universities, standardized tests, such as the SAT and ACT, play a significant role in admissions. These tests help colleges assess a student’s academic aptitude and potential for success. It’s essential to understand the different types of tests, what they measure, and how to prepare for them. LifeLaunchr offers comprehensive guidance on course selection in high school and standardized testing, including tips on choosing the best test, test-taking strategies, and test preparation resources.
- **Extracurricular Activities:** Extracurricular activities, such as sports, clubs, and volunteer work, can play a significant role in college admissions. These activities help colleges assess students’ interests, passions, and leadership potential. It’s critical to understand how to choose the best extracurricular activities for you, showcase them on an application, and discuss them in an interview. LifeLaunchr offers guidance on selecting the most appropriate extracurricular activities and presenting them effectively.
- **Letters of Recommendation:** Many selective universities will ask for—or at least consider—more than one letter of recommendation. While you’ll need to get one from your counselor or principal, you can get the others from teachers or coaches who know you well. What your recommenders say about you is a crucial decision factor.
- **Effective Essays:** Your personal statement (also known as the CommonApp essay) and the answers to supplemental questions can be difference-makers when being evaluated compared to many students with similar grades and test scores. Essays help put your application in context, explain your story, and demonstrate writing skills.
- **Character and Resilience:** College is a significant change from home life. Students who know how to seek help and grow through the process will do much better.
- **Passion and a Track Record in Your Chosen Field:** If you focus your extracurricular activities—whether chess, martial arts, volleyball, or machine learning—on a few areas and devote time and attention to them, your chances are better than someone with a scattershot set of interests and activities on their résumé.
- **Demonstrated Interest:** When a college offers you admission, they are giving up something precious to them: a spot in their incoming class. They are more likely to make this offer to you if they believe you’re likely to say yes. Colleges track this by using a measure called “demonstrated interest.”

Students can create a well-rounded application that showcases their academic and personal achievements and interests by understanding the different components of the college admissions process and what colleges are looking for in their applicants. In the next chapter, we’ll explore how to develop a college admissions strategy that sets students up for success.

## Use LifeLaunchr's Tools to Develop Your Timeline and Plan

LifeLaunchr's tools and process help you create a detailed timeline and find colleges that fit your profile. We do this through several approaches:

- **Developing a Detailed Timeline Based on Intensively-Researched Templates:** Each student's member dashboard contains a detailed, categorized list of tasks to complete for the college admissions process. You and your coach can set deadlines and timelines for each item, and you will receive reminders via email and text message.
- **Using College Match to Find Colleges That Fit You:** You can use our tools, including [College Match™](#), to research colleges based on over 35 criteria, including cost, location, academics, culture, and more.
- **Planning for Standardized Tests and Extracurricular Activities:** Our coaches can help you develop a standardized testing plan and timeline and suggest resources to help you prepare. They will also discuss your extracurricular activities and help you focus your time and attention so you build a thoughtful, balanced profile for admissions.

## CHAPTER 2: Developing Your College Admissions Strategy

Developing a college admissions strategy is essential to a successful college application process. It helps students stay organized, set realistic goals, and create a plan to achieve them. In this chapter, we'll explore how to develop a college admissions strategy that sets students up for success.

- **Understand Your Goals:** The first step in developing a college admissions strategy is to understand your goals. That includes understanding your academic interests, personal passions, and future career aspirations. It's essential to consider factors such as location, campus culture, and academic programs when researching colleges that fit your goals.
- **Create a Timeline:** A timeline helps students stay organized and meet application deadlines. A timeline should include critical dates such as test registration deadlines, test dates, and application deadlines. LifeLaunchr offers guidance on creating a timeline and staying organized throughout the college admissions process.
- **Develop a Test Prep Plan:** Depending on where you apply, [standardized tests such as the SAT and ACT](#) play a significant role in the college admissions process. It's crucial to develop a test prep plan that fits your schedule and learning style. That may include taking practice tests, attending a test prep course, or working with a private tutor.
- **Develop a Budget and Research Financial Aid Options:** College can be expensive, and it's essential to create a budget so students don't apply to colleges they can't afford to attend and understand the financial aid options available. Those options include scholarships, grants, and student loans. Researching financial aid options early in the college admissions process also allows you to plan for scholarship applications.

- **Plan Your Extracurricular Activities:** Extracurricular activities can significantly affect college admissions. Choose activities that fit your interests and showcase your leadership potential. That may include sports, clubs, or volunteer work. LifeLaunchr offers guidance on planning your extracurricular activities and finding opportunities to get involved in your community.

By developing a college admissions strategy that includes understanding your goals, creating a timeline, developing a test prep plan, researching financial aid options, and planning your extracurricular activities, you can set yourself up for success in the college admissions process.

Finally, it's helpful to understand the difference between different application plans. These plans, including Early Decision, Early Action, and Regular Decision plans, differ in their rules and can impact your chances. Early Decision is a binding agreement to attend a college if accepted, Early Action is a non-binding agreement to apply early and receive an admissions decision early, and Regular Decision is the traditional application process with a later deadline. LifeLaunchr offers guidance on understanding Early Decision, Early Action, and Regular Decision admissions and how to choose the right option for you.





## Use LifeLaunchr's Tools to Build a List and Create a Compelling Application

LifeLaunchr's tools and coaching help you build a well-researched list and create an effective application:

- **Researching Colleges to Build a Well-Balanced College List:** LifeLaunchr's [College Match](#) can help you work with your coach to create an initial list of up to 20 colleges to research based on multiple criteria, including likelihood, cost, culture, academics, and more. You can then use our [College Research tool](#) and [college profiles](#) to research colleges, get answers to questions, and discuss the results with your coach to shortlist 10-12 colleges to create a balanced list that meets your goals.
- **Brainstorming, Drafting, and Revising Essays That Work:** You can use our essay courses – including our [CommonApp/Coalition Application personal statement course](#) and the [University of California Personal Insight Question course](#) – to develop effective essays told in your voice. You can also use our essay dashboard to track every supplemental essay and work with your coach to create effective responses.
- **Using Your Activities List to Communicate Accomplishment and Passion:** Our tools and coaching can help you craft an activities list that communicates your unique qualities and accomplishments and the strengths that will make you a valuable addition to any college campus.

## CHAPTER 3: Building a Balanced List and Creating a Strong Application

Once you've developed a college admissions strategy, the next step is to build a balanced college list and create an application that stands out to admissions officers. This chapter guides you on creating a standout application that showcases your achievements, skills, and personality.

- **Building a Balanced List:** A list of ten to twelve colleges, each of which is an excellent fit for your goals but that vary in terms of your likelihood of admission, is very important. To create a list like that, you'll need to research colleges carefully to understand their academic strengths, culture, and programs. This research is critical for success, so don't shortchange it. [Relying on rankings can produce a list that reflects someone else's priorities, not yours.](#)
- **Crafting Effective Essays:** The college essay is one of the most critical components of your application. It's an opportunity to showcase your writing skills, personality, and values. [In this article from the LifeLaunchr blog](#), you can find tips on how to write a compelling college essay that will impress admissions officers.
- **Getting Strong Letters of Recommendation:** Letters of recommendation are another vital part of your application. They provide admissions officers with insight into your academic abilities, character, and potential. It's essential to find recommenders who know you well, build relationships early, and [ask for recommendations in a thoughtful and timely way.](#)
- **Showcasing Academic Achievement, Extracurricular Activities, and Leadership Experience:** Your application should also showcase your academic achievements, extracurricular activities, and leadership experience. Create your activities list and resumé in a way that helps admissions officials understand your accomplishments and values.

Finally, it's essential to be authentic and honest throughout the application process. Admissions officers can spot insincerity and dishonesty from a mile away.

## Use LifeLaunchr to Help Create a Budget, Research Aid, and Find Scholarships

LifeLaunchr's tools and coaching help you understand the cost of college and find ways to pay for it:

- **Building a Budget:** Every student, as part of our plan, uses tools like the Department of Education's [Student Aid Estimator](#) to understand what their family's cost of college might be, and we use that to [help create a realistic financial plan for college](#).
- **Maximizing Financial Aid:** You can use our [webinars](#) and [coaching](#) to help fill out the forms for financial aid, including the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#) and the [College Board's CSS/Profile](#). Accurately filling out these forms can significantly affect the amount of aid a student receives.
- **Find Colleges That Meet Your Financial Goals:** [LifeLaunchr's College Match](#) and our coaching can help you find colleges where you can receive merit and need-based aid to meet your budget.
- **Find Outside Scholarships:** [LifeLaunchr's Scholarship Match™](#) and our coaching can help you find outside scholarships that meet your criteria and track deadlines and application requirements for each.

## CHAPTER 4: Financial Aid and Scholarships

College can be expensive, but there are ways to offset the cost through financial aid and scholarships. In this chapter, we'll discuss the different types of financial aid available and guide you on how to apply for them. We'll also discuss how to research and apply for scholarships, as well as the importance of understanding the true cost of college and creating a realistic budget.

### Building a Realistic Budget

Having a clear sense of what's affordable is very important since college can be expensive. It can cost upwards of \$80,000 a year to attend some universities. So take the time to research your options and build a budget. There is no value in applying to colleges you can't afford to attend.

It's essential to understand the actual cost of college, including not just tuition and fees but also room and board, textbooks, and other expenses. By creating a detailed budget and taking advantage of financial aid and scholarships, you'll be better prepared to finance your education and achieve your academic goals.

### Types of Financial Aid

There are [several types of financial aid](#) available to help pay for college:

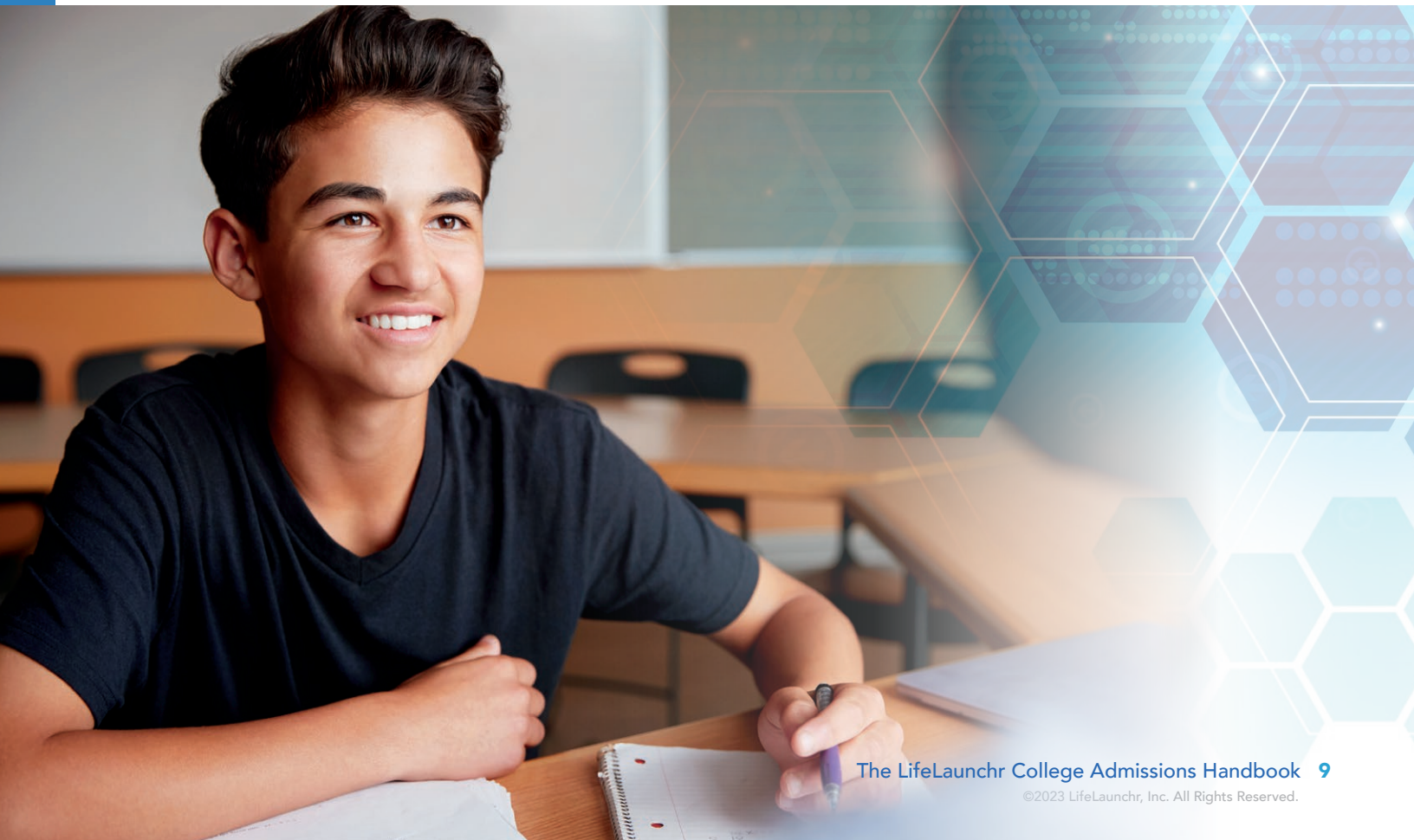
- **Grants:** Grants are typically need-based and do not need to be repaid. The most well-known federal grant is the [Pell Grant](#), but there are also state and institutional grants available.



- **Loans:** Loans can come from the federal government or private lenders. Students need to repay them with interest. Federal direct loans are generally the most affordable, but students and parents can also receive private loans. It's essential to understand your options and know the costs of each.
- **Work-Study:** Work-study programs provide part-time employment to students, typically on-campus. The money earned can help pay for educational expenses.

### Researching and Applying for Scholarships

Scholarships – also called merit aid – can be an excellent way to offset the cost of college. The most money you will get for colleges comes directly from colleges, so the first step is to find colleges where students with your profile can get merit aid if that's important to you. Besides that, you can also find outside scholarships that will help offset the cost of college.



## LifeLaunchr Coaching and Tools Can Help You Stay Organized

With so many tasks and deadlines to manage, it's crucial to stay organized throughout the college admissions process. LifeLaunchr's tools help you stay organized throughout the process.

- Your **Member Dashboard** provides a timeline and task list to keep track of deadlines for applications, tests, and financial aid.
- Your **LifeLaunchr college list** tracks application requirements and factors for each college.
- Your **LifeLaunchr essay and activity list** tools help you track every essay for every college on your list.
- Your **LifeLaunchr scholarship list** tracks deadlines and requirements for colleges.

At every step of the way, your coach can help you stay on track and discuss your choices. And our blog, webinars, and other tools provide information and guidance.

## CHAPTER 5: Navigating the College Admissions Timeline

The college admissions process can be overwhelming, with many deadlines and tasks to keep track of. However, with careful planning and organization, you can manage it effectively. In this chapter, we will provide a detailed timeline for the college admissions process and offer tips on how to stay on track and make informed decisions.

### Understanding the Timeline

The college admissions process typically begins in the spring of a student's junior year of high school. However, many tasks in the timeline, such as researching colleges and preparing for standardized tests, can and should be done earlier. Here's a general timeline for the college admissions process:

- **Freshman and Sophomore Year:** Start thinking about college and exploring potential majors and careers. Build a solid academic record and consider extracurricular activities that align with your interests and goals.
- **Junior Year:** Research colleges and start preparing for standardized tests like the SAT or ACT. Attend college fairs and visit campuses to get a feel for different schools.
- **Summer Before Senior Year:** Finalize your list of colleges and begin working on your college applications. If you haven't already, take standardized tests and request letters of recommendation from teachers. Draft essays and start work on filling out applications.

- **Fall of Senior Year:** Submit college applications and complete financial aid applications as necessary. Keep track of deadlines and follow up with schools as needed.
- **Winter and Spring of Senior Year:** Receive admissions decisions from colleges and decide which school to attend. Submit any necessary deposits and finalize financial aid packages.

### Handling Admissions Decisions

After submitting applications, it's time to wait for admissions decisions. Waiting can be an anxiety-inducing process, but it's important to remember that there are many excellent colleges out there, and any college's decision does not define your future. Here are some tips for handling admissions decisions:

- Celebrate your acceptances and acknowledge your rejections. It's okay to feel disappointed, but remember that admissions decisions do not reflect your worth.
- Wait to receive financial aid packages before making a final decision on which school to attend. Consider factors like cost, location, and fit when making your decision.
- Be respectful when communicating with admissions offices, even if you're disappointed with their decision.

By following a detailed timeline and staying organized throughout the process, you can confidently navigate the college admissions process and make informed decisions about your future.





## Conclusion: Taking Control of Your College Admissions Journey

Congratulations, you've reached the end of this handbook! We hope that you found the information helpful and informative. By reading through the tips and strategies, you've already taken a big step toward success in college admissions.

As you prepare for this exciting and challenging journey, remember the following key takeaways:

- **Start Early:** Develop a strategy for the college admissions process as early as possible. Use the resources and tools available to you, such as LifeLaunchr's platform, to stay organized and on track.
- **Create a Compelling Application:** Make sure your application represents you in the best possible light. Use your essays, letters of recommendation, and extracurricular activities to showcase your skills, experiences, and unique qualities.
- **Understand Costs and the Financial Aid Process:** College can be expensive, but many resources are available to help you afford it. Take the time to research financial aid options, including scholarships, grants, and loans.
- **Stay Organized and On Track:** Keep track of important deadlines and stay on top of your applications. Use checklists, calendars, and other tools to help you stay organized.
- **Take Ownership of the Process:** Remember, you control your college admissions journey. Be proactive, ask questions, and take advantage of the many resources available.

We wish you the best of luck as you embark on this exciting journey toward college and beyond. Remember to use this handbook as a resource throughout the process, and don't hesitate to reach out to the LifeLaunchr team for additional support and guidance. With hard work, dedication, and a little luck, you can achieve your dreams and create a bright future.





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