

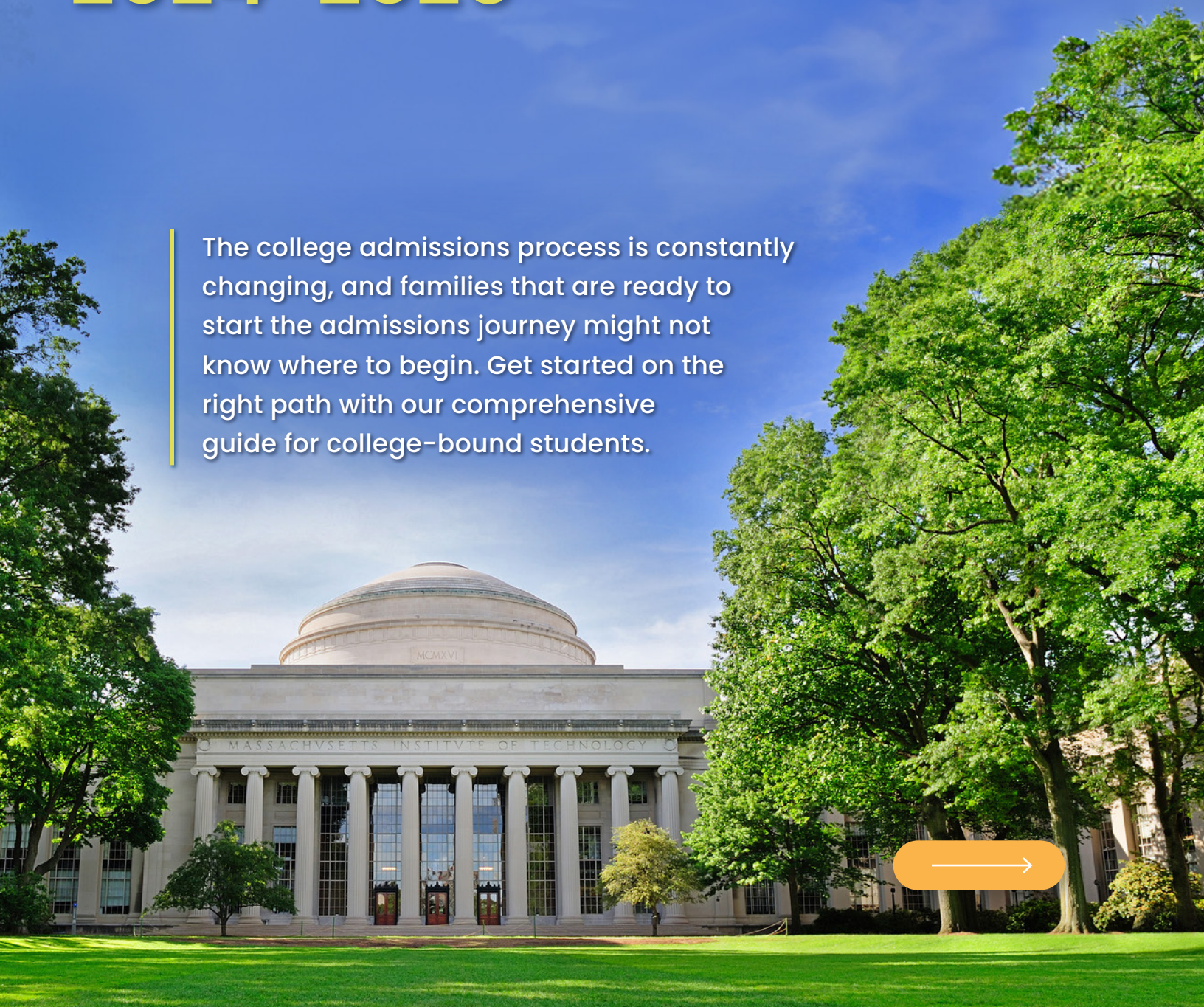


ivywise

# COLLEGE ADMISSIONS GUIDE

## 2024-2025

The college admissions process is constantly changing, and families that are ready to start the admissions journey might not know where to begin. Get started on the right path with our comprehensive guide for college-bound students.





# IvyWise Admissions Guide

Applying to college can be complex, especially when considering how much the admissions process has changed since parents applied. There's a lot to consider!

- What are admissions officers looking for?
- How should I build a balanced college list?
- What is the Common Application and how do I use it?
- What is Early Decision, and how do I know if I should apply early or in the regular round?
- Which standardized tests do I need to take?

These questions are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to preparing for your college admissions journey. Because the process can be so overwhelming, the expert admissions counselors at IvyWise have written this guide to provide you with basic information that will help you find and apply to colleges where you will thrive and be successful.



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# College Admissions Trends

The 2023-24 college application cycle saw record-high application numbers and record-low acceptance rates. With changing testing policies and the increasing availability of early application rounds, students navigated a complex and extremely competitive admissions process — a trend we expect to continue for 2024-25.

## EARLY APPLICATION NUMBERS INCREASE

Overall, early applications to some of the most highly selective schools increased for the 2023-24 admissions cycle, sustaining a trend we've seen over the past several admissions cycles. One notable exception to this is Harvard, which saw a [17% drop](#) in early applications — a four-year low.

## WAITLISTS WILL GET LONGER

Due to rising application numbers at some of the country's top schools and concerns over enrollment numbers, colleges have been utilizing waitlists more frequently over the past few years as more students apply to a higher number of colleges. And now, with increased pressure to hit enrollment targets, it's likely that admissions officers will increasingly opt to waitlist applicants.

## TEST-OPTIONAL PERSISTS FOR NOW

Many schools that went test-optional because of the pandemic have adopted these changes permanently, including some bigger-name schools like Columbia. However, other elite schools, like MIT and Dartmouth, have gone back to requiring test scores.

## COLLEGES SEE AN INCREASE IN INTERNATIONAL APPLICANTS

According to the [November 2023 Common App report](#), there has been an 87% increase in international first-year applicants since 2019-20.

## AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IS GONE, LEGACY ADMISSIONS UNDER REVIEW

This is the first admissions cycle since the Supreme Court gutted affirmative action, forcing schools to come up with strategies to maintain diversity without breaking the law. Cornell made the choice to [accept fewer students Early Decision](#) in order to be more equitable in admissions decisions. Other schools used supplemental essay prompts to help diversify their incoming classes. Many schools are also examining their policies regarding legacy admissions. Several prestigious schools have already done away with legacy admissions, including Amherst College, Pomona College, Wesleyan University, and MIT.

## APPLICANT TRENDS SHOW MORE DIVERSITY

According to the Common App, there has been an uptick in first-year domestic applicants who identify as underrepresented minorities and first-generation students. The [November 2023 Common App report](#) shows an overall increase since the 2019-20 admissions cycle.

## PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS ARE BECOMING MORE POPULAR

Large state universities are growing in popularity. According to the Common App's recent data, applications to its public member institutions have increased 82% since the 2019-20 cycle, while private member institutions have only seen an increase of 47% in the same time period.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



### ARTICLE

2024 College Admissions Trends and Insights from the Experts



### BLOG POST

The Essential Guide to Acing the College Application Process

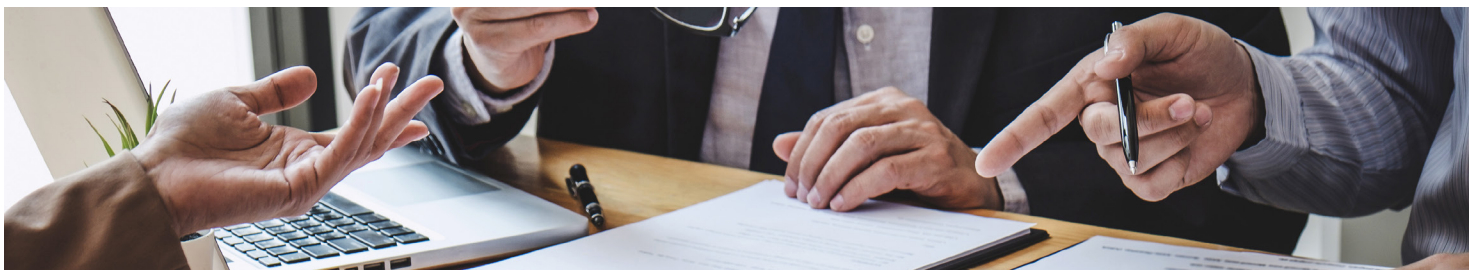


### WEBINAR

Insights from the 2022-23 College Admissions Cycle

# Understanding Admissions Committees

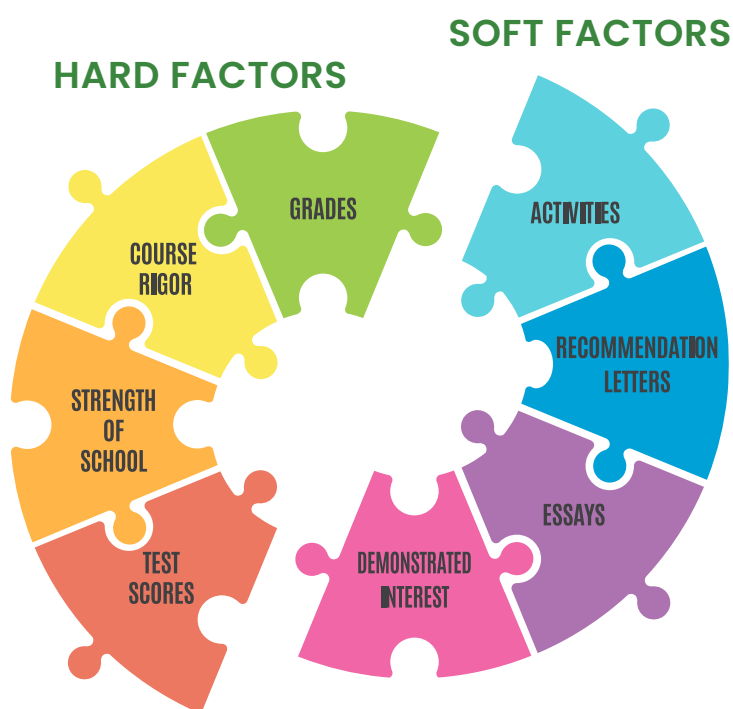
Admissions committees consider many factors, including quantitative “hard factors” such as the high school transcript (coursework, grades, GPA, and class rank) and standardized test scores. However, colleges will also further evaluate applicants based on the student’s personal record, or “soft factors,” which includes letters of recommendation, essays, extracurricular activities, and more.



This is called the “holistic review” process — meaning admissions officers place emphasis on the applicant as a whole person, not just their academic achievements.

Many schools publish the median GPA and test scores of admitted applicants so prospective students can get an idea of the grades and scores they will need to be considered for admission. The goal should be to submit an application with components equal to or above these standards.

College-bound students should keep in mind, though, that colleges aren’t looking for “well-rounded” students. In reality, colleges are looking for “pointy” students to build a well-rounded class. This means that students need to prioritize exploring their interests in order to develop a specialty — something colleges look for when building a well-rounded class. Colleges want students who will come to their campus and leave a lasting impression — influencing the campus culture for the better.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



### ARTICLE

How College Applications are Evaluated



### PODCAST EPISODE

How Important Are Transcripts and Course Rigor?



### WEBINAR

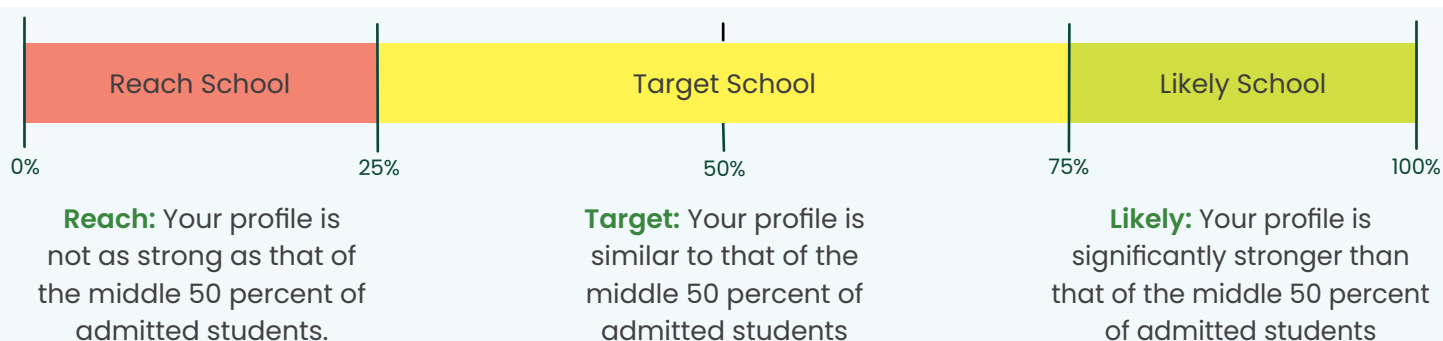
College Admissions 101 Series: Bringing the College Admissions Rubric to Life with Case Studies

# Building A Balanced College List

One of the most crucial pieces of the application process is formulating a balanced college list. There are many factors to consider when creating your college list, like the school's location and size, the specific programs and professors you would want to study with, the tuition, room and board fees, the availability of clubs and sports that interest you, social offerings, and more.

Your college list is the compass for the rest of your college preparation going forward, so it's important to start refining your priorities, evaluating where your profile falls relative to other applicants, and working towards finalizing the list of colleges to which you will apply.

Ideally, your balanced college list should include a total of no more than 10-15 best-fit likely, target, and reach colleges (three-five of each.)



***Applying to any more than 15 schools will likely lower the quality of the applications and essays, thus reducing your chances of admission.***

## CONSULT WITH YOUR COUNSELOR

Once you start to build your list, meet with your college counselor to evaluate and narrow down your list of schools. College counselors often visit colleges, communicate with admissions reps, and participate in professional events and conferences, making them great resources for feedback on your college list and suggestions for other colleges to consider.

## RESEARCH, RESEARCH, RESEARCH!

Learn everything you can about the schools that have piqued your interest, then look for other schools you may be unfamiliar with that also meet your personal, academic, and financial needs and goals. On each school's website, research courses, majors, minors, professors, activities, research opportunities, and other factors that are important to you.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



### ARTICLE

How to Build a Balanced College List



### PODCAST EPISODE

Is the "Reach, Target, Likely" List Becoming More of a Spectrum?



### WEBINAR

How to Build Your College List and Find Hidden Gems



# Deciding When to Apply

Each school varies in the admissions cycle(s) it offers, and each student should decide when to apply based on their individual needs and goals. To find out which admissions options a college offers, check the school’s website or speak with an admissions officer at the institution. You will want to consider the following application timelines, including their pros and cons.

## EARLY DECISION (ED)

Early Decision applications must be submitted in their entirety, usually on November 1 or November 15. Students may only apply to one school ED and the application is binding, meaning the student must attend if admitted. Early Decision applicants are usually notified of their decision in December and can be either accepted, denied, or deferred to the Regular Decision round.

## EARLY ACTION (EA)

Early Action applications must be submitted in their entirety, usually on November 1 or 15 but sometimes later. Students who apply Early Action will hear in December if they have been accepted, denied, or deferred to the Regular Decision round. EA is non-binding, so an offer of admission doesn’t mean you must enroll.

## SINGLE-CHOICE EARLY ACTION (SCEA) OR RESTRICTED EARLY ACTION (REA)

With the SCEA restriction, students cannot apply early to any other school, be it EA or ED, until they have heard back from their SCEA school. This is a good option for students who are ready to apply to a school they really like but don’t necessarily want to be bound by the decision.

## REGULAR DECISION (RD)

Regular Decision means that applications must be submitted by a set date in your senior year, usually January 1 or 15, or February 1. Notification dates are in the spring of senior year, usually around April 1. If accepted, you must notify the college by May 1 of your intent to accept or decline their offer of admission.

## ROLLING ADMISSION

Colleges that use Rolling Admissions assess and act on an application as soon as the application file is submitted in its entirety. The deadline for this type of admission is usually May 1, and these schools will usually continue to accept students until they reach their enrollment capacity.



APPLICATION ROUND	APPLICATION DEADLINE*	NOTIFICATION DATE
Early Decision (ED)	November 1 – 15	Mid-to-Late December
Early Action (EA)	November 1 – 15	Mid-to-Late December
Single-Choice Early Action (SCEA)	November 1 – 15	Mid-to-Late December
Restricted Early Action (REA)	November 1 – 15	Mid-to-Late December
Early Decision II (ED II)	January 1 – February 1	Late March
Early Decision III (ED III)	By March 1	Late March
Regular Decision	Ranges from November 30 – March 15	Usually by April 1
Rolling Admissions	Between September 1 – May 1	Within a few weeks of receiving the completed application

*\*Deadlines can vary by institution and program*

# Tips for Students Applying to College

## MAINTAIN A STRONG ACADEMIC RECORD

Your grades and GPA are the most important factors colleges will consider when evaluating your application. Colleges want to see an upward grade trend, meaning that your grades continue to improve as you take more challenging courses. This shows you'll be able to handle a college course load.

## DO INFORMATION SESSIONS AND VISITS (IN-PERSON OR VIRTUALLY!)

In recent years, colleges have been offering virtual information sessions and virtual tours of their campuses. If a college on your list is offering virtual or in-person information sessions, register for one! Many applications have some version of a "Why do you want to attend this college?" essay. Firsthand impressions of a school will allow you to best answer this question and demonstrate your interest to the admissions committees at the schools on your college list. Some colleges also track interest, so by signing up for the tour and information session, scheduling an interview, and following up with a thank-you note, schools will have a record of you on file even before you apply.

## CONTINUE TEST PREP

College-bound students should start their test prep by taking diagnostic tests of both the ACT and SAT in order to determine which one is the better fit for them, and then proceed by preparing for the more appropriate exam. Utilize practice tests and free online prep materials to stay on track with reaching your goal score — and consider working with a tutor if you need additional help.

## GET GOING ON COLLEGE APPS

Create your Common App account and become familiar with the platform. Take a look at the activity section and start to think about how you want to present your extracurriculars. The Common App currently has a COVID-19 section, so consider if you want to use it and what you might say. Remember, college application essays are an opportunity to tell your story and share what sets you apart. Start brainstorming topics early, and give yourself time to draft, edit, and finalize your personal statement as necessary. In addition to the required Common Application personal statement, many universities have separate supplements with additional essay questions. Keep these requirements in mind as you begin to build your balanced college list.

## EXPLORE EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Admissions officers want to see what you're doing in your free time and how you're impacting your community. Schools will look at your extracurricular activities, your level of involvement, and how those activities relate to your interests or intended course of study.

Don't be afraid to get creative with your extracurricular pursuits! If you can use this time to further explore your academic interests, then you should! If you're interested in literature and the arts, get through that reading list you've been putting off. If you're interested in the environment or sustainability, start a community garden and distribute those goods to your local food bank. You could also design and develop an app that allows users to virtually explore U.S. national parks. Whatever your passion is, find a creative way to engage with it.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

*Looking for more resources on all aspects of the college admissions process? From monthly webinars to daily tips on TikTok, IvyWise has you covered! Check out these additional IvyWise resources for in-depth guidance.*



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**COLLEGE PREP  
CHECKLISTS**



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# Why IvyWise?

At IvyWise, we help students identify and apply to colleges that will fulfill their needs and goals. How? By guiding students to explore their interests and reach their full potential inside and outside of the classroom. We understand the nuances of the college admissions process, what colleges are looking for, and how students can best position themselves to gain admission to their top-choice, best-fit schools. Whether it's helping a student identify and thoughtfully explore their passions, build a balanced college list, or brainstorm compelling essay topics, our team of experts has done it all.

IVYWISE STUDENTS ARE **4 TIMES MORE LIKELY** TO GAIN ADMISSION TO TOP COLLEGES IN THE U.S. AND ABROAD.

## OUR EXPERIENCE IS UNMATCHED

IvyWise counselors are all former Deans and Directors of admission at top institutions like Princeton, Yale, Stanford, MIT, Georgetown, UChicago, Johns Hopkins, Boston College, Vanderbilt, and NYU, to name a few. Collectively they have over 375 years of experience in admissions, as well as close to 100 years of experience in college guidance roles at top independent and private schools. Every member of our expert team has evaluated tens of thousands of college applications and sat in committee — so, they know how applications will be read and what it takes to stand out.

## Contact us today!

*Want to learn more about how IvyWise can help you reach your college admissions goals?*

*Our dedicated enrollment team can help you identify the IvyWise services that are the best fit for your needs and goals.*

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