

2020-2021 College Counseling Handbook



Santa Catalina School

Names & Numbers

The following names and numbers are frequently requested on college applications.

Santa Catalina School Information

Head of School: Margaret K. Bradley

Head of Upper School: Julie Lenherr Edson '88

School address: 1500 Mark Thomas Drive, Monterey, CA 93940

School telephone: 831.655.9300

School fax: 831.649.3056

School website: santacatalina.org

Santa Catalina CEEB/school code: 052045

College Counseling Office Information

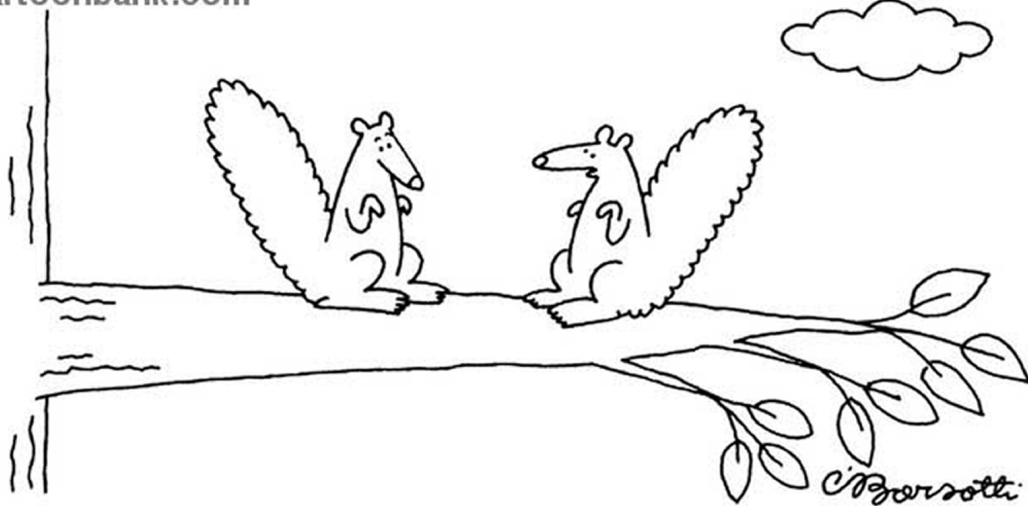
Director of College Counseling: Fred White

Director Emerita of College Counseling: Betty Van Wagenen

College Counseling telephone: 831.655.9339

College Counseling e-mail: fred.white@santacatalina.org

© Cartoonbank.com



"How will you ever know whether you're a flying squirrel if you don't give it a shot?"

©2003 The New Yorker Collection from cartoonbank.com. All rights reserved.

Contents

Names & Numbers	inside cover
Early College Planning	1
Calendar of Events	2
Glossary of Terms	3
Overview of the Process	5
Getting Started	6
College Kickstart	7
Naviance Family Connection	7
Independent College Counselors	8
Campus Visit and Interview Tips	8
College Visitors to Santa Catalina	10
Can I Get In?	11
Applying	14
SAT and ACT Registration	15
SAT Subject Tests	16
About Sending Test Scores	16
California State University Information	18
University of California Information	19
Activities Record/Résumé	20
The Application Essay	22
Recommendations	24
Financial Aid Overview	25
International Students/TOEFL	26
Athletic Recruitment	26
Portfolios for Admissions	27
The Role of Parents	27
Final Thoughts	28

Early College Planning

On the one hand, the be all and end all of a secondary school education is not college admission. The most important goal of freshman year is to be a good freshman; the most important concern of sophomores should be to be successful as sophomores. On the other hand, the early planning that can be accomplished will make a less anxiety-inducing and more productive college application process during the junior and senior years.

There are many factors involved in getting into position to be a good candidate at the selective college level, and many of these benefit from—and indeed cry out for—early planning. A strong senior academic record, for example, is built on the foundation of good course selection and academic achievement in ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades. “Late bloomer” is a term that appears often in college recommendations, but the reality at the highest levels of college competition is that there are too many “early bloomers” around to leave much room for the tardy.

Since admission to a selective college is not simply a matter of grades but also of personal attributes, building a strong extracurricular record should begin early as well, based more on the quality of contribution to activities than on mere quantity. Beyond measures of academic achievement, genuine passion is the trait that competitive colleges find most appealing in applicants, and it tends to be the best guarantor of the quality of their contributions to extracurriculars. Therefore, we encourage students to let their sincere interests determine the activities they sign up for.

And since private colleges, as well as many publics, are getting more and more expensive, families should begin to build a strong financial foundation early on in order to help pay for it all. This should include making savings plans, keeping eyes open for various scholarship opportunities, and attending financial aid information programs.

Some means by which to get early information on colleges are to:

- Attend presentations by any of the dozens of college representatives who visit the school or the Central Coast area each year. A good early bird project might be to sit in on the presentation of a small college and one by a large university to get a sense of the differences. Or go to a regional college fair or a college night at a local high school to ask questions and pick-up materials.
- Take advantage of family trips to other regions of the state or to other parts of the country to take a quick spin through a college campus or two to see what they are all about.
- Check “yes” on the PSATs to the question about giving them permission to refer your name and address to “colleges interested in students like you.” This will start anything from a trickle to a flood of often informative mail.
- Surf the Web, which is overflowing with college information sites.
- Utilize the Supermatch and Scholarship Match features of Naviance. In Supermatch, students can enter any number of search criteria specific to them, from size of school, to major, to affinity groups, to you name it, and quickly get a large menu of schools to consider. Scholarship Match

is also tailored to each student's profile and reveals that there really is a substantial amount of scholarship money out there to be had by those who take the time to apply.

- Take the time to read Santa Catalina's bi-weekly digital newsletter, *News and Views from College Counseling*, which contains a wealth of information on emerging trends in the college admissions landscape, upcoming events, scholarship and summer enrichment opportunities, and much besides. You will often find that the newsletter anticipates and answers your questions.

Calendar of Events

Sophomore Year

October Take PSAT.

May - June Consider taking SAT Subject Test in any subject area not likely to be taken again (e.g. Chemistry). There is no American college or university that any longer requires applicants to submit SAT subject tests. However, some remain that "recommend" them. If you are unsure whether it will ultimately benefit you to take SAT subject tests, please speak with the Director of College Counseling.

Take advantage of any opportunities to begin familiarizing yourself with what is out there in terms of colleges and career paths you may be interested in. Ideally, when you begin the explicit phase of our college counseling program your junior year, you will have a clear sense of where your strengths lie, at least a general idea of what you are looking for in a college, and how what you will do in your college years should prepare you for what comes afterward, whether that be the beginning of your work life or additional schooling.

Summer Consider visiting the campuses of three colleges: one that might wind up being a reach, one a target, and one a safety. Be prepared to share your impressions when you begin meeting with your college counselor as a junior.

Junior Year

October Take PSAT/NMSQT.

Fall Attend selected college presentations during free periods. Identify whether the ACT or the SAT will best capture your strengths (strong math students will tend to be best served by the SAT). Enroll in a test-preparation course.

December Register for January SAT or February ACT. Retest as needed, but consider limiting it to three times, mindful that testing beyond that may be counterproductive.

January-April Attend Journey meetings led by college counseling. Make individual appointments with your college counselor to prepare preliminary college lists. Identify scholarships for which you may be eligible and prepare to apply for them. Think about teachers to ask for recommendation letters and make requests after receiving guidance from college counseling.

February Register for March SAT or April ACT.

March Register for May SAT, SAT Subject Tests, or June ACT. See earlier caveat about SAT subject tests. Write a first draft of your Common Application essay and have it edited by your college counselor.

May Fine-tune and polish your Common Application essay draft before final exams.

Ideally, this task is complete when summer vacation begins so that you can turn your attention to supplemental essays and UC personal insight questions (if you are applying to UCs) in the fall. Select teachers to write recommendations and give them the required materials so they can begin writing their letters while their impressions of you as a student are fresh in their minds. Update your POINTS Portfolio and, in particular, your activities spreadsheet. Create your college résumé.

Spring/Summer Write/phone/e-mail colleges to request information. Visit colleges, and schedule interviews where available.

Senior Year

- Individual meetings with the Director of College Counseling to refine college lists and get help with any related matters.
- Weekly Journey class meetings with the Director of College Counseling.
- Attend appropriate college representative presentations.
- Register for and take SAT/Subject Tests/ACT/TOEFL as needed.
- Ensure that your family completes the FAFSA as soon as possible after it opens on October 1, remembering that some financial aid will be offered on a first-come, first-served basis. Complete any other scholarship applications that may be needed.
- Complete and submit Early Decision / Early Action applications by the pertinent deadlines.
- Complete and submit University of California / Cal State applications by the November 30 deadline.
- Complete and submit regular applications by the pertinent deadlines.
- May 1: Select a college to attend.

Glossary of Terms

College	A two or four year institution granting undergraduate degrees in one main area, e.g. a liberal arts or a business college; a division of a university, as in a college of agriculture or of arts and sciences, or as in the undergraduate division of a university (e.g. Harvard College of Harvard University); a generic term meaning institution of higher education.
University	Usually an institution composed of several divisions (often called colleges or schools) granting degrees at several levels: BA, MA, Ph.D. There are institutions that don't fit these exact models, e.g. Boston College is more like a university, Denison University is more like a college.
SAT	The Scholastic Assessment Test, as in SAT (critical reading, math, and writing) and SAT Subject Tests available in many subject areas. SATs are administered by ETS (Educational Testing Service) of the College Board (CEEb).
PSAT	The Preliminary or Practice SATs. The entry for juniors into National Merit competition through the NMSQT (National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test).
ACT	A variation of standardized testing, in a certain sense combining SAT and

Subject Tests. Accepted by all colleges in place of the SAT and by many in place of Subject Tests as well.

AP	Advanced Placement. Describes a level of course offered as well as the tests themselves by which students receiving a score above a specified level may get credit from the college which they enter.
AT	Advanced Topic. AT courses are highly demanding and are intended to be the most academically challenging offerings in these departments, with syllabi and requirements equivalent to college coursework in the subject area.
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language. The most commonly accepted test of English for students whose first language is not English.
Early Decision (ED)	Program under which a student, her parents, and her high school commit to her attending a college if she is accepted, in return for early notice of admission. A student may apply ED to only one school. ED typically confers a quantifiable advantage in the admissions process. ED contracts are, however, serious obligations and should not be entered into if, for example, families wish to compare competing financial aid offers from an array of schools.
Early Action (EA)	Similar to ED except that the student is not committed to attend if she is accepted, so there is no limit to the number of schools she can apply to EA. Neither does EA necessarily commit colleges to making an early admissions decision. EA applicants may find themselves “deferred” and waiting until the April 1 notification deadline for regular applicants. That said, some colleges take a significant percentage of their freshman classes from the EA pool, so the decision on whether or not to apply EA should be made on a college-by-college basis. College Kickstart, a data-crunching tool available to your college counselor, will help clarify where it will be advantageous for you to apply EA.
Single Choice Early Action (SCEA)	A system used by a handful of mega-selective colleges wherein students are allowed to apply to only one institution EA. Normally one may apply EA to more than one place.
Rolling Admission	No specific due date, and often available the summer after junior year. Decisions generally received within four weeks of applying. We do not encourage students to apply to any school they are not sincerely interested in attending. That said, students often find it reassuring to obtain acceptance to a rolling admissions school before the fall of senior year.
Application Deadline	The date the application must be postmarked or received.
Qualification/	

“Cauliflower: Nothing but cabbage with a college education.”

-Mark Twain

Eligibility	Admission review process based on specific requirements in which all applicants meeting the minimums are accepted, i.e., 4 years of English, 3 years of math, 2 years of social science, etc.
CEEB/ACT/ School Code	A six-digit number for all high schools in the U.S. For Santa Catalina, the number is 052045 .
Common Application	A standardized application form accepted by nearly 900 (and counting) colleges and universities in the U.S. and abroad. The Common Application is available August 1, after junior year.
FAFSA	<u>Free Application for Federal Student Aid</u> . Federal financial aid form used to determine eligibility for government financial aid. Available in October of senior year.
CSS Profile	Financial aid form administered by College Board and required by many private schools. A list can be found here . A key difference between the CSS profile and the FAFSA is that the former includes home equity in its calculation of a family's expected contribution to the cost of attendance.
NCAA Clearinghouse	Nationwide process by which the eligibility of Division I and II athletes is determined; Division I or Division II prospective athletes should register after the end of the junior year.

Overview of the Process

As juniors you begin the serious phase of planning for college. This is a lengthy and sometimes tedious, but ultimately rewarding task. With careful thought, the whole process should go smoothly. From the start, GET YOURSELF ORGANIZED. There will be many details and deadlines to keep in mind. Throughout the spring semester of this year and the first term of your senior year, we will meet from time to time in groups to discuss various topics. In addition, you will have many opportunities for individual conferences with your college counselor. Junior year is also the time when students undertake intensive test-preparation courses for the SAT or ACT.

Your “college record” really began with your first grades at Santa Catalina or wherever you were in ninth grade; for some of you it started before that. In addition to the grades that are already a part of your record, you have taken the PSAT and perhaps one or more SATs. Through our *Journey* program, you have developed a POINTS Portfolio, carefully recording reflections, saving examples of your work (i.e. your English essays); you have participated in athletics and extracurricular activities and had experiences in and out of school that are also important for your “record” and that are logged in your POINTS Portfolio activities spreadsheet.

Self-Evaluation

At this point, if you haven't done so earlier, you should BEGIN TO ANALYZE YOUR REASONS FOR WANTING TO GO TO COLLEGE. Ask yourself what you expect of a college education. What do you think you would contribute to a college community? Is your chief interest intellectual? Athletic? Social?

The prestige associated with a college’s “brand”? Are you going to college simply because it is expected of you or because you see it as an important part of your life? If, up to now, you have assumed you would go to college as a matter of course, you might find it a useful exercise to formulate and jot down your own reasons. If nothing else, it will get you thinking about the subject, might help you make informed decisions later on, and it will give you a head start in case you are asked these questions in college interviews or on application essays.

Picking Colleges

The foundation of your college search is a candid discussion about family finances. You will minimize the possibility of being disappointed later on if you and your family have a clear understanding about what will be affordable. Will where you go to college ultimately be your decision, purely based on where you get accepted and which school you like best, or will it be your parents’, based on the financial aid you are offered? Will you need to take out loans to pay for college? If so, how much debt do you anticipate being able to repay given your intended career path?

With the financial question resolved, some of you may already think you know where you want to go to college, perhaps through parents or friends. This can be a good starting point, and you may, in fact, have identified the school that will be just right for you. Remember, however, that there are over 3,000 accredited four-year colleges and universities in this country (over 4,000 if we count two-year colleges), and there are wide distinctions among them. In making an intelligent list of colleges you should consider such factors as:

Size	Small, medium or large;
Type	Public or private; single-sex or coed; religious or nonsectarian; service academy
Location	Rural, suburban, or urban
Part of the U.S.	East Coast, Northeast, South, Midwest, Mountain West, West Coast, nowhere but California, anywhere <i>but</i> California;
Academic programs	Liberal arts, engineering, business, fine arts, etc.
Extracurriculars	Greek life, R.O.T.C., or affinity groups that may be important to you

Where Can You Find the Answers to These and Other Related Questions?

- Check out college/university websites.
- Use college guide books in the College Counseling Lounge at Santa Catalina.
- Talk to your college counselor.
- Talk with friends, parents, relatives, Catalina alumnae, and teachers about their college experiences.

Getting Started

During the spring or summer of junior year, start communicating with colleges via e-mail, online or

“When you get to a fork in the road, take it”

-Yogi Berra

by phone to ask them to send you information and to get on their mailing lists for applications. The material should be useful as you begin planning college visits and interviews. It will also help you focus your interests as you enter your senior year and make it possible for you to use your time more productively in the fall.

College Kickstart

Beyond the information you glean from talking to college reps, visiting campuses and websites, reading guidebooks, and talking to your college counselor, an indispensable ingredient in developing a strategic and balanced college list is analyzing admissions data for the schools you are interested in. To a sometimes bewildering degree, college admissions these days is very data-driven. American colleges are generally very forthcoming about things like the average GPA and standardized test scores of students they admit—and many quantifiable factors besides. Most participate in an initiative known as the [Common Data Set](#), which you can peruse to get an idea of the range of things colleges consider and track when they are deciding whom to admit. Analyzing all of it piece by piece would be a very time-consuming and tedious process. Fortunately, Santa Catalina, like many of the nation's premier independent schools, has adopted the data-crunching tool [College Kickstart](#) to expedite it.

College Kickstart will help ensure your college lists are balanced with the right mix of reach, target, and likely schools. It will also optimize your college lists to help you do the following:

- Meet the application deadline that will give you the best shot at admission to each of your schools.
- Avoid wasted motion (i.e., sending out applications you may not need to send out if you get an early acceptance from one of your top choices).
- Ensure that your list is responsive to your family's financial situation if that is important to you.

One question we can anticipate is, “Does College Kickstart take the place of Naviance?” (More about Naviance anon.) And the answer is no, it complements Naviance. College Kickstart takes an upload from Naviance of the historical admissions data for Santa Catalina students. It adds those to all the national admissions data that it collects from sources like the Common Data Set. We use Naviance to store data and to send documents. We use College Kickstart to build college lists using the latest national data combined with Santa Catalina historical admissions data. We ask students to work on their list strategy inside College Kickstart from the time they receive their accounts until it is time to start submitting application materials to colleges in November, at which point we enter their finalized lists in Naviance and begin using it to transmit documents.

Naviance Family Connection

Family Connection is Santa Catalina School's online college counseling website. *Family Connection* is a valuable resource for parents and students as they navigate the college application process.

To log in, please visit <http://connection.naviance.com/santacs>.

A personal password is required to access *Family Connection*. Seniors, juniors, and their parents have received their passwords. You may also login as a guest. The guest password is: Cougar. If you are unable to locate your password, please contact Fred White, Director of College Counseling, at fred.white@santacatalina.org.

Do not share Naviance information with any person outside Santa Catalina School. **This information is proprietary (“owned” by Santa Catalina).** Independent college counselors who are reputable will not ask for this and should not ask for this information.

More About Independent College Counselors

As the Varsity Blues scandal made clear, there are unscrupulous actors in the world of independent college counseling. Moreover, it is an essentially unregulated profession, even if the existence of associations such as HECA and IECA belie that reality. Certainly, the overwhelming majority of independent college counselors are honest, well-intended, and sometimes quite experienced professionals, and we would never want you to feel hesitant to tell us if your family has decided to contract with one. Sometimes parents, for a variety of perfectly understandable reasons, feel that employing “an independent” is something they must do in order to be completely confident that they have fully supported their children—or to feel fully supported themselves—in the college application process. To the extent that the ethical code of our profession permits, we are happy to cooperate with an independent should you choose to use one. That said, it is important for you to understand that there is no legitimate service independent college counselors can provide that is not already included in the cost of tuition at Santa Catalina and that every student here is not offered. There is no information available to independent college counselors that is not available to us; in fact, there is less, because they do not have access to historical admissions data for our school. There is no skill they offer that your Catalina college counselor lacks. Independent college counselors are not able to advocate for students with college admissions officers directly, whereas that is a key duty of your Catalina college counselor. To be sure, there is a population that benefits greatly from the services of independents: students in large public schools where guidance counselors have case loads too large to permit them to adequately serve the college-bound. Students at Santa Catalina, by contrast, receive very personalized support in every facet of the college application process.

Campus Visit and Interview Tips

A campus visit can be a very important part of college selection. You wouldn’t buy an expensive car without a test drive. A campus visit should be as close to a test drive as you can make it. Depending on your time and travel resources, you should try to visit as many of your college choices as possible, or, at a minimum, at least several different types (small/large, urban/rural, etc.) so that you can get a sense of what suits you best.

During a visit you should, if possible:

- Take a tour to get a feel for the campus atmosphere. Is it compact or spread out? Is it contiguous or divided by sections of the town/city?
- Talk to students (if any are around besides the tour guide). Visit the student center. Check bulletin boards to see what’s going on.
- Ask for a copy of the college newspaper or “Activities This Week” flyer.

“...the greatest thing since they reinvented unsliced bread.”

-William Keegan

- If classes are in session, see if you can sit in on one.
- If you are a serious athlete, ask if you can meet with a coach. The same is true for musicians and a music faculty member, biology with science, etc.
- Have a meal on campus if appropriate. What dining options are available?

Interviews

There is only a relative handful of colleges at which interviews remain a significant factor in admissions decisions, and those colleges will most often assign local alumni the task of conducting the interviews. Coaching on handling these interviews successfully will be provided by your college counselor as needed.

Interviews at most colleges these days are chiefly of the informational variety. They may nonetheless be worth arranging. Remember, though, that it is the overall visit to the campus that is more important for your understanding of a college than an informational interview. Confidently and enthusiastically engaging with your campus tour guide will accomplish the goal of putting your best foot forward with the college. In any case, make sure that the Admission Office knows that you have been there (they will usually have a visit card for you to fill out) so that they have documentation that you have “demonstrated interest” in their school.

Miscellaneous Tips

Make the appointment by phone so your interview time can be coordinated with campus tour schedules, etc. You will almost always be talking to a secretary or receptionist, so don't be afraid to ask about getting to or from other colleges, especially if you're planning to visit more than one in a day. There is nothing wrong (or new), for example, in asking Colby College to help coordinate your appointment there with one you already have at Bates. Ask for directions if you need them. Cancel if you can't make it. **Don't be a no-show.**

Get there in a timely manner so you have a chance to unwind from your trip, use the restroom, etc. When possible, call if you're going to be late.

Learn as much as possible about the college before you go so you can ask useful, intelligent questions. “How many books are in the library?” and “What percentage of the faculty have PhDs?” are **not** examples of useful, intelligent questions. These can be looked up in the catalog.

Dress comfortably but appropriately. Summer tends to be less formal than fall. Some places are stuffier than others. Wear good walking shoes for the tour.

Be prepared to answer as well as ask questions. Know your scores, latest grades, senior year courses, etc., in case they come up. Don't exaggerate but don't make things sound worse than they are. Be yourself.

Be flexible. You never know what an interviewer may ask. One might start out with “Tell me about yourself.” Another might ask, “If you were a vegetable, what would you be?” Yet another might begin with “What have you learned about this college so far?”

Listen to answers. Prepare some questions in advance if you wish, but don't get so preoccupied with the brilliance of your next question that you lose the flexibility to react if the interviewer takes the conversation in a different direction.

Don't enthuse about (or badmouth) other colleges you have visited. Don't go into a verbal data dump mode. Don't gush, but don't be catatonic. Avoid nervous habits like hair twisting, leg bouncing, and so on. Smile. Look your interviewer in the eyes. Demonstrate confidence and approachability.

Don't feel the need to reveal your innermost college secrets. Dartmouth doesn't need to know that you're thinking about applying ED to Brown; Pomona won't be thrilled to learn that Stanford is your life's dream.

Show interest even if it's a practice interview. Signs of indifference or boredom will be noted in the interview report.

Don't use the interview as an occasion to complain about teachers you don't like, courses you hated, this school, other schools, other students or (heaven forbid) your college counselor. It's impolite and unbecoming.

Remember that, in almost all cases, one purpose of an interview is to leave you with a nice warm glow about the college. **It is important not to confuse a good interview with an actual offer of admission.**

Sending a follow-up thank you note to the interviewer is not necessary but is a tremendously thoughtful touch, and one of which interviewers take note.

College Visitors to Santa Catalina

Each year, representatives from many colleges and universities visit Santa Catalina, primarily in the fall. In most cases, they are here to give a presentation and answer questions for any interested students. Most do not have time to do interviews, since they are usually visiting five or more schools each day.

Seniors or juniors who are free that period (or seniors who have permission from the teacher to miss a class) are welcome to go to the session. In general, students can count on teachers' support for attending college rep visits as long as they do not conflict with tests. If a college that is on your list visits, it is important for you to go, since you will have the opportunity to meet the representative, who will frequently end up being the first reader of your application. If you can't make it, be sure to let the college counselor know so he can put in a good word for you, as in "She really wanted to come, but she had a biology test."

Following is a representative, but by no means exhaustive, list of colleges that have visited Santa Catalina in recent years:

American University of Paris, Babson, Bard, Barnard, Bates, Bennington, Boston College,
Boston University, Bowdoin, Brown, Bucknell, Cal Lutheran, Chapman, Claremont McKenna,

"Be sure your safety net isn't a trampoline."

-Anonymous

Colby, Colgate, College of the Holy Cross, Colorado College, Columbia, Connecticut College, Cornell, Dartmouth, Davidson, Denver, Dickinson, Dominican, Drew, Duke, Emerson, Fordham, Franklin (Switzerland), George Washington University, Gonzaga, Goucher, Grinnell, Hamilton, Harvard, Haverford, Hobart/William Smith, Holy Cross, Johns Hopkins, Lafayette, Lehigh, Lewis & Clark, Linfield, Loyola-Chicago, Loyola-New Orleans, Macalester, Middlebury, Mills, Mount Holyoke, New York University, Northeastern, Notre Dame, Oberlin, Occidental, Pepperdine, Pitzer, Pomona, Portland, Princeton, Puget Sound, Redlands, Reed, Regis, Rice, Rochester, University of San Diego, Santa Clara, Sarah Lawrence, Scripps, Seattle University, Skidmore, Smith, USC, SMU, Stanford, St. Andrew's (Scotland), St. Mary's, Trinity (CT), Trinity (TX), Union, University of Arizona, University of Chicago, University of Colorado, University of Oregon, University of the Pacific, University of Pennsylvania, University of San Francisco, Vanderbilt, Vassar, Villanova, Washington University in St. Louis, Wellesley, Westmont, Wheaton, Whitman, Whittier, Willamette, and Yale.

Can I Get In?

Now, the all-important question of admission: Can I get in? This is a hard one to answer. At the most popular colleges, applications outnumber places 9 or 10 to 1. Hence, as a practical necessity you must **think not only of where you would like to go to college, but also of where you are likely to get in.**

What counts most in admissions? Rarely is it simply a matter of grades; consideration is given to many other factors, although colleges differ widely in how much weight they attach to each. Academically, colleges want to be certain that candidates, on the basis of past achievement and native ability, will be able to be successful (to “thrive”) at their particular college. But over and above this, they are looking for dynamic personalities, people with initiative and leadership, people who are involved in their school and/or community, people who will “add something” to a student body.

The chief factors that determine admissions decisions are these:

1. Academic Achievement for the Four High School Years

This is invariably the most fundamental consideration, and if you do not at least fit into the middle 50% of the applicant pool on this one for a given college, you are unlikely to pull much weight with the others. Academic achievement includes courses taken and grades received. Colleges look not only at your GPA and class standing but also at your academic program. Have you taken advantage of opportunities for advanced courses? Have you demonstrated “stretch” by going beyond minimum course requirements? In what direction do your grades seem to be headed? Did you get off to a slow start but get better each year? Or did you save your sophomore slump for your junior or senior year (a bad idea)?

Note that in addition to your transcript, a document known as the “school profile” will also be considered by admissions officers in assessing the overall rigor of the curriculum you have followed. The school profile explains just what it sounds like: the overall rigor of the school you attend as measured by

things like colleges where students from Catalina have matriculated over the past five year, their average standardized test scores, and a complete list of courses that are available here.

2. Standardized Tests

Most colleges require the SAT or ACT. Many require SAT Subject Tests. If you take a test more than once, colleges will usually take your highest individual scores or (like UCs) your highest combined from one test. The impact of scores on the admission decision varies by college. There are hundreds of colleges that are now “test optional,” which don’t require standardized tests. At this writing, because of the vagaries of the COVID-19 pandemic, test-optional policies have become the rule rather than the exception. It remains to be seen how many schools will keep those policies in place when the pandemic is over. Let us emphasize, in any case, that “test optional” does not mean “test blind.” Historically, even at test-optional schools, applicants who have submitted test scores have been more likely to receive offers of admission.. That said, we may be at an inflection point with the use of standardized testing in college admissions decisions, every student is unique, and there are circumstances in which it might be advantageous to apply to a test-optional school without test scores. Students who are contemplating going this route should discuss their thinking with us beforehand. We can help them identify such opportunities as there may be to profit from test-optional (and test-blind) policies.

3. Essays

For better or for worse, by the time you are a senior, your GPA and your test scores are fairly set. The writing samples you submit with your college applications, however, are one area in which it remains possible for you to really “move the needle” on how admissions officers evaluate you. It is, therefore, important to make sure each of them tells a compelling story about you. The foundation of these writing samples for most students will be the Common Application essay, but most colleges that use the “Common App” will also have supplemental essays, with the most usual variety being the “Why us?” essay. Students who are applying to campuses within the University of California system will need to respond to four of the UC “personal insight questions.” Assume that all will be read very closely. Take full advantage of the editorial support your college counselor can provide. The goal here is to make sure you are telling the best possible truth about yourself. Remember that what colleges are asking you, essentially, is not so much “Can you write an essay?” as “What’s your story?” So, regardless of the form the essay prompt takes, what they are looking for is a compelling story, one that leaves them wanting to spend more time with you, one that enables them to see you making a constructive contribution to the freshman class they are trying to build.

4. Recommendations

These come from individual teachers and from the college counselor. In both cases, the colleges are interested in how those who know you regard you as a student and as a person. Teacher recommendations describe your performance as a student in particular classes. The college counselor letter aims to capture you as a whole person in relation to the school community. The college counselor letter is typically the best place to offer any context that may be critical in understanding the rest of your application, like the impact of a major life event or a health condition.

5. Extracurricular Activities

Here the emphasis is upon quality over quantity, upon genuine contributions to an activity. A top leader, athlete or artist should make out very well if she is academically competitive. Too much is sometimes made of being “well-rounded.” As a general rule, colleges are looking for a “well-rounded” freshman class, but everyone in that class is not expected to be a microcosm of the whole; it is better to be a real contributor in a couple of areas than unremarkable in many.

6. Miscellaneous Factors

At most colleges, “legacies,” which is to say children (and sometimes grandchildren) of alumni are given special consideration, though this may vary depending on just how involved with the college the alumni have been since graduation. Nationality, ethnicity, geography, being a first-generation college applicant, and other aspects of your identity, can also serve as “hooks” that factor into an admissions decision.

Philanthropy also has the potential to influence admissions decisions, especially at private institutions. Please note, however, that in order for philanthropy to influence an admissions decision at a highly or mega-selective school, the gift generally needs to be transformational in nature (e.g., the donation of a building). Development officers at colleges welcome direct approaches from potential donors of this magnitude; no mediation by a student’s college counselor or any other third party is required.

7. Demonstrated Interest

Though it is hard to offer an airtight generalization for all schools about how large a factor “demonstrated interest” is in admissions decisions, the tendency is for private institutions to track it very closely and lend it a certain amount of weight--and for public institutions not to. There are a variety of ways for students to demonstrate their interest in a college: visiting their website, visiting their campus, meeting with their rep if they send one to Catalina, arranging an interview (if offered), and so on. It may be worth observing at this point that colleges these days are so adept at mining data that they frequently have a profile of each potential applicant before she has even sent in an application. The reason for this comes down to one word, “yield”: colleges want to avoid offering any more acceptances than they absolutely have to so that they can appear as selective as they possibly can. Therefore, they benefit from having as clear a sense as they can of whether or not a student would accept an offer of admission were they to extend it.

8. The Application Forms

We hope it goes without saying that these need to be filled out fully and conscientiously.

9. Your Professional Background and Aptitude

If you are applying to a career program such as business, education, architecture, nursing, communications, physical therapy, etc., the college will want to know how well-suited for and serious about the field you are.

Building the College List

A balanced college list generally consists of 6-12 schools with roughly equal numbers in each of the following categories:

1. Reach: a long shot. A “reach” is a college at which you may be aiming high, but at which we can nonetheless identify a pathway by which you can be admitted. Note that a “reach” is not the same as an “unlikely”—a school at which the odds of your being admitted are so slim as to make your applying inadvisable.

“I can answer you in two words: im-possible.”

-Samuel Goldwyn

2. Target: a college at which you are very much in the running with a 50-50 chance or better of gaining admission. You will fit squarely within the middle 50% of the applicant pool in terms of GPA and test scores.
3. Likely: a college where your chances of admission are excellent, where your not being admitted would be a surprise.

It is crucial that as much attention be given to selecting the colleges in the “target” and “likely” categories as to those in the “reach” category. And this attention should come from the beginning in your planning. The longer you put it off, the greater a problem it will become. When you are making plans for college visits, make sure that you have included institutions in each of the above categories. And remember, there is no point in applying to any college at which you cannot genuinely see yourself thriving. Fortunately, there is no shortage of schools to choose from.

Applying

In the spring of their junior year and the fall of their senior year, Santa Catalina students have regular meetings through weekly Journey classes to go over specific procedures for filling out applications (including the UC and Cal State forms), writing essays, arranging teacher recommendations, handling campus visits and interviews, and all other aspects of the college application process. You should begin going online, calling or e-mailing for information this spring or over the summer. This will usually get you on the mailing list.

Except for Early Decision (ED) or Early Action (EA), most applications are not due until January or February. That said, it is now the norm for students at Catalina to apply early to at least some schools on their lists. (UC and Cal State applications must also be submitted in November.) Early Decision plans, offered by many colleges, are for students who are absolutely sure of their first-choice college and who guarantee that they will accept an offer of admission if one is offered. Early Decision offers a quantifiable advantage to students who use it, generally enabling them to meet a slightly lower threshold for admission than they would have to meet otherwise. Early Decision, however, is **binding**, involving contracts signed by the student, her parents, and her college counselor; the only licit escape from an Early Decision contract is an inadequate offer of financial aid, but this is very unlikely to happen. A college to which you are admitted under an ED contract may not offer you the best financial aid award you could possibly get, but it will be one that is workable. Early Action can also confer an admissions advantage on applicants, depending on how large a percentage of its incoming class a college intends to fill from the EA pool, but the applicant makes no binding commitment to attend. Neither does it require colleges to provide an early decision; they may defer the EA applicant to the Regular Decision (RD) applicant pool. ED/EA applications are normally due around November 1 or 15, though there are some—for instance, the ED II round of applications—that are due later. As a general rule, students whose applications will require their first-semester, senior-year grades as evidence of academic improvement, should not apply early.

“No! Try not! Do, or do not! There is no try.”

-Yoda, Star Wars: *The Empire Strikes Back*

There are also many fine institutions, though typically not the most selective ones, which use Rolling Admission (RA or “first come, first served”). We encourage any student who is genuinely interested in a school that uses RA to apply there during the summer between her junior and senior years. If she is accepted, the knowledge that she has a solid option to fall back will often make the remainder of the college application process a bit less stressful.

A couple of tips:

- Keep copies of everything. Accidents happen and things can get lost in transit, even in an age when almost all documents used in the college application process are electronic.
- Be aware of approaching deadlines. Don't wait until the last minute on anything. Plot out the entire process for yourself on a calendar.
- See your college counselor for an application or test fee waiver if you receive financial assistance at Santa Catalina.
- Summer after junior year:
 - Complete the Common Application before school starts in August. It is available August 1.
 - Start the UC application if you are applying to UCs. It is available August 1.
 - Start the Cal State application if you are applying to Cal State schools. It is available August 1.

Important Things to Remember When Registering for SAT and ACT

The address for the SAT is www.collegeboard.com. The address for the ACT is www.actstudent.org.

- Use the name on your passport.
- Use the same login and password for everything related to college.
- Use your Santa Catalina e-mail for everything related to college.

It is important to include the Santa Catalina School code - **052045** - otherwise the school will not receive your scores.

Most of you will be taking the tests at Seaside High School. The test center code is **05798**.

Please be sure to register by the deadlines otherwise you will have to pay a penalty fee. Early registration will also ensure a better chance of getting your first choice test center.

Students requesting extended time need to talk with the academic dean and registrar to ensure that they meet the requirements for getting it.

Registration for non-standard testing is coordinated through the Upper School Office and must be completed well prior to the deadline date.

Once you have your admission ticket check it immediately. Make sure that all the information is accurate and that you've been assigned to the correct test center. If you have any problems with registration or

admission tickets, please see your college counselor.

For the ACT, the online registration address is www.actstudent.org. Paper registration forms are also available in the College Counseling Center. The local ACT test site is usually Watsonville High School, test center code **053722**.

SAT Subject Tests

Tests include the following academic subjects: History, Science, Math, English, and World Languages. They are one-hour long. Talk to your college counselor about these tests before registering for them.

Do all colleges require SAT subject tests?

No! In fact, there are no longer any American colleges that strictly require them but there remain some that “recommend” them (usually two) for admission or for placement when you enroll. Mega- and highly-selective colleges will tend to give particular weight to these tests. Overseas universities, for instance in the U.K., may require them. For the best advice about SAT subject tests, talk to your college counselor. Many schools that recommend them will accept the ACT in lieu of SAT subject tests. Other colleges say they will “consider them if presented.” Again, talk with your college counselor about whether or not it is advisable for you to take the SAT subject tests.

About Sending Test Scores

This will be explained to you again in your Journey classes, but instructions are below. A trend among

SAT website:

www.collegeboard.org

ACT website:

www.actstudent.org

It is the student's responsibility to send her official test scores to each of the colleges she will apply to. Students do not need to send official AP scores as part of the application process.

Sending SAT and Subject Test Scores:

- Log into your student account at collegeboard.org.
- Signing up for Registration Score Reports when you register for the SAT sends up to four colleges your results once that sitting of the test is scored, for no additional fee.
- To send results after you've completed your testing, select Send Available Scores Now. This will send a report of all of your completed SAT results (including Subject Tests) for \$11 per college.

- **Do not use ScoreChoice.**

- For UCs, you need only send a score report to a single UC campus; they will share your scores with the other UCs you applied to.
- For CSUs, you need only send a score report to the CSUMentor code 3594. Your scores will be distributed to all the CSU campuses you applied to.

You can list CSUMentor as an SAT score recipient. The SAT institution code for CSUMentor is 3594. CSUMentor will then store your scores for ALL CSU campuses to utilize. If you have not yet sent your scores to either a CSU campus or CSUMentor, you can request this at www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/reg.html.

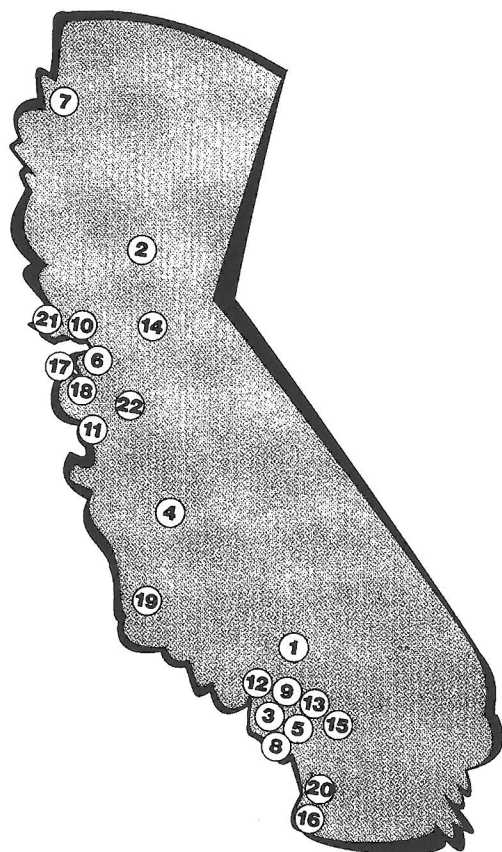
Sending ACT Scores

- Log into your student account at actstudent.org.
- As with SAT, you may select up to four colleges to receive a score report at the time you register, for no additional fee.
- Click on Send Your Scores under the test date you wish to report. Unlike SAT, an ACT score report contains only a single test date. Each report costs \$12.00 per test date per report. You will receive an email confirmation.

If you have listed a CSU campus as an ACT score report recipient, you can use the ACT Scores Manager to release your score to additional campuses. Before you can use the ACT Scores Manager, you must first have arranged for your scores to be sent to at least one CSU campus.

If you have not yet arranged for your ACT scores to be sent to a CSU campus, you can learn how to request this at www.actstudent.org/scores/send/index.html.

California State University Campuses & Impacted Programs



- 1 California State University, Bakersfield
9001 Stockdale Highway, Bakersfield, CA 93311-1099
(661) 664-3036 • www.csusbak.edu
- 2 California State University, Chico
1st and Normal Streets, Chico, CA 95929-0722
(530) 898-6321 • www.csuchico.edu
- 3 California State University, Dominguez Hills
1000 East Victoria Street, Carson, CA 90747
(310) 243-3696 • www.csudh.edu
- 4 California State University, Fresno
5150 North Maple Avenue, Fresno, CA 93740-0057
(559) 278-2261 • www.csufresno.edu
- 5 California State University, Fullerton
P.O. Box 6900, Fullerton, CA 92834-6900
(714) 278-2300 • www.fullerton.edu
- 6 California State University, Hayward
25800 Carlos Bee Blvd., Hayward, CA 94542-3035
(510) 885-2624 • www.csuhayward.edu

CSU Undergraduate
Impacted Programs
see
www.calstate.edu/AR/impactioninfo.shtml

- 7 Humboldt State University
1 Harpst Street, Arcata, CA 95521-4957
(707) 826-4402 • www.humboldt.edu
- 8 California State University, Long Beach
1250 Bellflower Blvd., Long Beach, CA 90840-0106
(562) 985-5471 • www.csulb.edu
- 9 California State University, Los Angeles
5151 State University Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90032-8530
(323) 343-3901 • www.calstatela.edu
- 10 California Maritime Academy
200 Maritime Academy Drive, P.O. Box 1392, Vallejo, CA 94590
(800) 561-1945 • www.csum.edu
- 11 California State University, Monterey Bay
100 Campus Center Drive, Seaside, CA 93955-8001
(831) 582-3518 • www.monterey.edu
- 12 California State University, Northridge
1811 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330-8207
(818) 677-3700 • www.csun.edu
- 13 California State Polytechnic University, Pomona
3801 West Temple Ave., Pomona, CA 91768-4003
(909) 869-2000 • www.csupomona.edu
- 14 California State University, Sacramento
6000 J Street, Sacramento, CA 95819-6048
(916) 278-3901 • www.csus.edu
- 15 California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, CA 92407-2397
(909) 880-5200 • www.csusb.edu
- 16 San Diego State University
5500 Campanile Drive, San Diego, CA 92182-7455
(619) 594-6871 • www.sdsu.edu
- 17 San Francisco State University
1600 Holloway Ave., San Francisco, CA 94132-4002
(415) 338-1113 • www.sfsu.edu
- 18 San Jose State University
One Washington Square, San Jose, CA 95192-0009
(408) 283-7500 • www.sjsu.edu
- 19 California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo
San Luis Obispo, CA 93407
(805) 756-2311 • www.calpoly.edu
- 20 California State University, San Marcos
Office of Admissions, 333 S. Twin Oaks Valley Road
San Marcos, CA 92096-0001
(760) 750-4800 • www.csusm.edu
- 21 Sonoma State University
1801 East Cotati Ave., Rohnert Park, CA 94928
(707) 664-2778 • www.sonoma.edu
- 22 California State University, Stanislaus
801 West Monte Vista Ave., Turlock, CA 95382
(209) 667-3151 • www.csustan.edu
- 23 California State University, Channel Island
One university Drive, Camarillo, CA 93012-8584
805-437-8520 • www.csci.edu

University of California System



“A-G” SUBJECT REQUIREMENTS

“a” HISTORY/SOCIAL SCIENCE — 2 years required.

Two years of history/social science, including one year of world history, cultures and geography; and one year of U.S. history or one-half year of U.S. history and one-half year of civics or American government.

“b” ENGLISH — 4 years required.

Four years of college preparatory English that include frequent and regular writing, and reading of classic and modern literature. Not more than two semesters of ninth-grade English can be used to meet this requirement.

“c” MATHEMATICS — 3 years required, 4 years recommended.

Three years of college preparatory mathematics that include the topics covered in elementary and advanced algebra and two- and three-dimensional geometry. Approved integrated math courses may be used to fulfill part or all of this requirement, as may math courses taken in the seventh and eighth grades that your high school accepts as equivalent to its own math courses.

“d” LABORATORY SCIENCE — 2 years required, 3 years recommended.

Two years of laboratory science providing fundamental knowledge in two of these three core disciplines: biology, chemistry and physics. The latter two years of an approved three-year integrated science program may be used to fulfill this requirement. Not more than one year of ninth-grade laboratory science can be used to meet this requirement.

“e” LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH — 2 years required, 3 years recommended.

Two years of the same language other than English. Courses should emphasize speaking and understanding, and include instruction in grammar, vocabulary, reading, composition and culture. Courses in language other than English taken in the seventh and eighth grades may be used to fulfill part of this requirement if your high school accepts them as equivalent to its own courses.

“f” VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS (VPA) — 1 year required.

One year of visual and performing arts chosen from the following: dance, drama/theater, music or visual art.

“g” COLLEGE PREPARATORY ELECTIVES — 1 year required.

One year (two semesters), in addition to those required in “a-f” above, chosen from the following areas: visual and performing arts (non-introductory level courses), history, social science, English, advanced mathematics, laboratory science and language other than English (a third year in the language used for the “e” requirement or two years of another language).

colleges currently is to permit self-reporting of test scores. If a college on your list allows this, by all means take advantage of it and save the money required to send official scores. If the college accepts you, and you decide to enroll, they will then request official scores to confirm that your self-reporting was accurate and finalize the offer of admission, so remember to be completely honest in your self-reporting on your application.

Activities Record/Résumé

As previously mentioned, competitive colleges and universities look well beyond the academic record in making admissions decisions. Having good grades and scores gets you up the front steps; what helps swing the door open is everything else about you that makes you distinctive. Again, whether your strengths lie in athletics, the arts, leadership, community activism, publications or whatever else, what counts is quality over quantity – the depth and importance of your contributions, not how many organizations you belong to. Competitive colleges are looking less for well-rounded students than they are for well-rounded classes made up of a mix of significant contributors.

Most college application forms provide space for you to list your activities. A handful will, in the instructions, ask you to list these activities on the form and not attach or enclose separate sheets of paper. Other than for these few, many students find it easier to prepare an activities sheet or résumé, which can be fine-tuned with a word processor, and to write “see attached” in the spaces on the form.

The exact format you choose (if any) is up to you. The key elements that most colleges look for are the following:

- The activity, in terms they can understand. For example, listing "Mosaic" doesn't help them unless you say what "Mosaic" is, i.e. "Annual School Arts Publication." The sample applies to our Santa Catalina lingo for "STAR Intern" or "Gold Cord." If there is any question about a term, provide a generic description (such as "high honor roll" for Gold Cord).
- The years/grade levels (10, 11-12, etc.) when you participated in the activity.
- For many colleges, "The order of their importance to you."

"If you wish in the world to advance,
your merits you're bound to enhance.
You must stir it, and stomp it and blow
your own trumpet, or trust me you
haven't a chance."

-W. S. Gilbert, Ruddigore

"I yam what I yam."

-Popeye

- Positions or offices you have held, such as "captain" or "Assistant Features Editor."
- Awards you have won; specify what they are for (if there is a question).

As always, if you tailor your résumé for each college, make sure the right one goes to the right audience. Feel free to use the following template.

College Counseling Handbook

SHIRLEY U. JEST

Westchester High School
Los Angeles, CA
Grade 9

Santa Catalina School
Monterey, CA
Grades 10 – 12

ACTIVITY RECORD

ATHLETICS

V. Softball Team - Most Improved Player Award (10)	10 – 12
J.V. Soccer Team	10
V. Soccer Team	11, 12 (Captain)

PUBLICATIONS

<i>Lamplighter</i> - School Newspaper	
Reporter	10, 11
Editor of Arts and Entertainment	12
<i>Mosaic</i> - Publication of the Arts	
Poems	10 – 12

ARTS

Chorus	9
Choir	10 – 12
Musicals	
Roles in: <i>Annie, Bye Bye Birdie</i>	10, 11
Shakespeare Festival	10 – 12

COMMUNITY SERVICE

National Charity League – hospital volunteer	9
Salvation Army Day Care – weekly volunteer	11, 12

STUDENT GOVERNMENT

Class Representative – Senate	11
-------------------------------	----

CLUBS

Current Events Club – President (12)	10 – 12
Amnesty International – Secretary	11, 12
STAR – Admission Tour Guide	10 – 12

AWARDS AND HONORS

Outstanding Student Award in Religion	10
Courtesy Award	11

"I got thrown out of college for cheating on the metaphysics exam. I looked into the soul of the person seated next to me."

-Woody Allen

SUMMER ACTIVITIES AND EMPLOYMENT

Costa Rica – 3 week home-stay and language study 10

Retail clothing store clerk – 30 hours per week 11

The Application Essay

Here are a few tips on handling application essays. There are no absolute answers, no “right” essay for every college, and no magic formula for pleasing every admission officer. But below are some of the things most college admission officers will say they look for. Many fall under the heading of common sense, but reiteration never hurts.

- **Be positive about yourself.** Make your essay positive and forward-looking. Don’t use it to describe all the bad things that have happened to you. You are trying, however subtly, to sell yourself to a college on the basis of your achievements and future promise. You want them to like and admire you, not feel sorry for you. Go with your strengths, not your weaknesses. This is not the time for “I am the sad, forlorn product of an unhappy childhood” or “My grades would be better if all my teachers weren’t so unfair to me.” Applications usually provide space for “factors which have impacted your record,” if you wish to use it, but it shouldn’t be your main essay topic unless you can make it a tale of real triumph over adversity and leave the reader confident you are not still processing a misfortune. Discussion of hardships, if it is relevant, is often best left for the college counselor letter.
- **Be mindful of the image you create.** What you write forms an image of you in the reader’s mind. For example, if you choose as your topic the anguish you felt going away to school and how scared and uncertain you were and how you called home every night and burst into tears at the drop of a hat, you’ve created an image. Or “the most significant experience” you’ve ever had was totaling your car after being dared by friends to drive down 101 with your eyes closed. Or you would contend that “the primary issue facing your generation as it enters the millennium” is in any way centered on the angst of young love. There must be contexts more beneficial than these in which to have your candidacy for college evaluated.
- **Make the image you create vivid.** Use concrete detail frequently to conjure up a three-dimensional picture of you and the world you inhabit. Again, the question colleges are asking you here is “What’s your story?” Remember that concrete detail is a vital feature of good storytelling.
- **Get off to a good start.** Grab their interest right away with a good opening line. Leading off with “I was not an easy baby, colicky and wakeful” or “Let me tell you about my horse” are good examples of what **not** to do.
- **Be interesting.** Admission people read thousands of essays, year after year, so utter originality is hard to achieve, but try to make what you say interesting. If you are writing about your unforgettable grandfather, for example, it will inevitably be one of many grandfather essays, but do your best to make him come across as more unforgettable (and better written about) than the others.
- **Follow instructions.** If it says “Confine your essay to the space below”, don’t write a four-pager. It will impress them less with your ability to write than with your inability to read. If there is a specific

essay topic given, try to some extent to follow along, although you may certainly tailor an essay you write for one college to fit the topic of another. You don't need to start from scratch each time.

- **Be positive toward the college.** Even if the college is your safety school, put the same care and effort into their essay and application as you do with your first choice. Colleges are sensitive about being taken for granted, which is how it may appear if your essay reads like an afterthought and the application is a mess.
- **Use humor with care.** Humor in an application essay is a wonderful but risky tool. Unlike with face-to-face humor, you can't make a quick adjustment if your attempt is falling flat or offending. You're stuck with it.
- **Remember your audience.** Don't be afraid to take a stand, but keep in mind that being highly opinionated about a controversial topic might make the issue, not you, the focus, and that you may risk coming across as intolerant. Show that you can and do think but aren't close-minded. Particularly in an age of increased campus unrest, colleges are very interested in enrolling students who can show they are capable of civil disagreement and otherwise accommodating people who are not like themselves.
- **Be honest.** Unless your essay is an obvious effort at creative writing, don't say or imply what you're not or what isn't backed up by the facts. A deeply moving essay about your desire to serve humanity, for example, will have a hollow, insincere ring if you've given minimal time to any volunteer effort. Also, do your own work. Getting help and advice from a teacher or counselor to polish and proofread your essay is expected, but finally, the essay is supposed to reflect you, not someone else, so it needs to feel plausible to the audience that you are its author. Admission people read essays in context: a super essay backed up by A's in English class, a rave rec from the English teacher, a 720 Writing score and lots of work for school publications will have a greater impact than the same essay with a less obvious frame of reference.
- **Be careful.** How you write, along with what you write, is important. Poor grammar, mechanics or phraseology make a bad impression that can undermine the impact of your message. There is no such thing as a typo; a typo is an uncorrected mistake, so proofread your application carefully. If you use a word processor to make your essays college-specific, don't forget to change the names everywhere they appear, or else you might end up telling Pomona how badly you want to go to Stanford. Watch spelling—misspelling the names of colleges or academic majors won't impress your reader. Remember that spell-check only tells you that a word is spelled *right*, not that it is the *write* word or the *rite* usage. By the same token, make sure auto-correct isn't making unnecessary corrections.
- **Supplementary writings.** A piece you have written for any purpose can be a nice addition to an application with two basic caveats: 1) The shorter it is, the more likely it will be read and 2) have someone whose opinion you respect tell you if it is good on a real world scale, as well as being dear to

"Whence came the intrusive comma? It did not fall from the sky."

-A. E. Housman

your own heart.

- **Take advantage of this exercise.** It is normal to look upon these essays as a pain, and yes, to a certain extent they are. But selling yourself is something that, in one way or another, you will have to do periodically for the rest of your life, and this is as good an opportunity as any to practice. Your admission file will be full of what others say about you. The essay is one way to add your own voice to the chorus.

Recommendations

Unless you are applying exclusively to UCs, Cal State or a few other large state universities which don't want them, recommendations are an integral part of the competitive college application process. The most common forms of recommendation are 1) teacher, 2) counselor, and 3) additional.

One or two **teacher recommendations** are required by most colleges. The instructions with each application will specify what they want: only junior or senior year teachers, only "major subject" teachers, and so forth. You should put some thought into your choice of recommender(s). Your college counselor will help you with this by doing some research for you beforehand and letting you know which of your teachers are a) likely to advocate for you the most enthusiastically and b) best suited to the impression you are trying to make on colleges. Who gave you the highest grade may not be the best choice. Another may know you better or be more enthusiastic about you. Also, if you have a specific college major in mind, getting a teacher who has taught you in a relevant subject is essential, e.g. Biology or Chemistry for "pre-med," math for "computer science," etc.

Note that it would be extremely rude for you to ask a teacher for a recommendation and then not use it. Teachers put a great deal of time and energy into their recommendations, so do not ask for one if you will not use it for at least some of your applications. Similarly, in the rare case where it makes sense for a student to ask more than two teachers for recommendations and vary, it is critical that she be transparent about her intentions. Do not mislead a teacher into thinking you will be using her letter for all of your applications if you are really using it only for one or two.

In short: one or two **teacher recommendations** are required by most private and some public colleges. Talk with your college counselor about the best choices for teacher recommendations for you.

The **counselor recommendation** is essentially a summary appraisal weaving together personal knowledge of each student, teacher comments and key information gleaned from your POINTS Portfolio, your résumé, your brag sheet. Most colleges expect a counselor rec of some sort, especially for students from a school such as Santa Catalina.

Additional recommendations are rarely required, but might be of value. Some colleges ask for a "peer"

"A bank is a place that will lend you money if you can prove that you don't need it."

-Bob Hope

recommendation. Others ask for recs from employers, graduates of particular colleges, parents, persons of consequence, or what have you. Their value to your candidacy depends primarily on how well the person writing knows you: the “I’ve never met her but her father is a great guy to do business with” genre of letter is of little use. Talk to your college counselor about “additional” recommendations. These usually work best as addenda to the counselor letter.

Financial Aid Overview

There are two basic forms/online applications used for applying for financial aid. The first is the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). The Cal Grant program for California residents attending college in California keys off the FAFSA.

The second is the College Scholarship Service (CSS) Profile, which is not required by all colleges. This is usually available in September and is filed only for colleges that require it and by the appropriate deadline, normally in November for ED/EA, January or February for regular decision.

A key distinction between the FAFSA and the CSS Profile is that the former does not include home equity in its calculation of a family’s ability to pay, while the latter does. If your family does not want their home equity regarded as a potential source of funding for your college education, you will want to avoid applying to colleges that use the CSS Profile. [A complete list can be found here.](#)

There are two basic systems under which financial aid is awarded: NEED and MERIT (or a mix of the two).

- NEED-BASED AID means it is derived from the amount you “need,” a figure that the FAFSA, CSS Profile and the college’s own financial aid office come up with in a process called “need analysis.” This is based on family income, assets, how many children the family has in college at the same time and other variables. At colleges which meet “full need,” that’s what you get.
- MERIT-BASED AID goes beyond simple “need” and gives you scholarships (ranging from a token amount to a “full-ride”) to induce you to enroll. The amount of merit aid you receive depends on the college and where you stand in their applicant pool. For the most part, colleges use merit aid as a way to attract students who will raise the academic caliber of their incoming class (and students who will be able to pay at least a substantial amount of the stated cost of attendance, if not quite all of it), so the colleges from which you get the largest merit aid awards will usually not be the most selective ones on your list.

Applying for financial aid at a time of rising college costs and shrinking college and government resources means that you have to take this into consideration when you select the colleges to which you plan to apply. It is not enough merely to be admissible; you also have to be competitive for financial aid.

There are many sources of information on financial aid, scholarships related to individual colleges, outside scholarships (local and national), etc. Generally these sources are free (for example via the internet) or of minimal cost, such as a resource book. Great places to start online are the scholarship

search feature in Naviance and fastweb.com. Naturally, your Santa Catalina college counselor will be sure to publicize any local scholarship opportunities for which you may be eligible. These are typically for smaller amounts, but the student who is persistent and disciplined about applying for these may find she is able to accumulate a sizable pile of scholarship money by cobbling many of them together.

Be very wary of any individual or agency offering to find you scholarships for a fee. Services of this sort should be entirely unnecessary and they are frequently scams.

International Students/TOEFL

Procedures for international applicants are to a large degree the same as for U.S. citizens and residents. There are some additional twists, however.

The biggest challenge regards the availability of financial aid. Though financial aid for international students exists, **it is relatively limited and hard to get**. Many colleges require a “statement of financial resources” before they will accept or enroll you or, in some cases, even mail you an admissions application form. There are also visa forms that they will send you once you have been accepted and have decided to enroll. (International students at Santa Catalina will, of course, already be familiar with the procedure for getting a U.S. student visa.)

Most colleges require a satisfactory score on the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) if you are not a native English speaker. It is internet-based, and like the SAT and ACT, offered only on certain dates during the school year.

That said, check with colleges to verify their TOEFL requirements. Many will waive the TOEFL for international students who have attended high school in the U.S. Also, other test scores (SAT, ACT) can sometimes be used to demonstrate English proficiency. Talk with your counselor about the TOEFL.

If you are applying to a university in your home country, make sure that you know the requirements and calendar of events (interviews, tests, application timeline, etc.) and share these with us so we can help you meet any deadlines and provide the proper documents and recommendations. Students from Santa Catalina routinely matriculate to universities in Mexico, the U.K., and Ireland, and we are familiar with admissions protocols in those countries, but occasionally one wishes to apply further afield—say, to a university in Japan—and we benefit from as much lead time as possible to ensure we are up to speed on what a successful application there will require.

Athletic Recruitment

Athletic ability, like prowess in the arts or any other extracurricular area, can be a big boost to your chances of being admitted to a competitive college. Every college or university has its own procedures, but in general the following applies:

- **If you are applying to a Division III institution**, athletic scholarships will not be involved. Financial aid is based on need or other “merit,” but not specifically athletics. In most cases, applicants will have to take the initiative in contacting college coaches, due to more restrictive

recruitment rules. Writing to a coach late in junior or early in senior year, introducing yourself and asking for information is a good start. If you know the name, write “Dear Coach Smith.” If you don’t, then a letter addressed to “Field Hockey Coach” with the salutation “Dear Coach” works fine (assuming you want field hockey, of course).

- **With Division I and II**, it’s a bit more formalized. If you are a real blue chip athlete, colleges will probably find you, although a pro-active role on your part, as with Division III, is essential. But with Division I and II, there is one additional element - **the NCAA Eligibility Center**, a central office which validates GPA and standardized test score reports for all athletes to determine their eligibility. You must fill out forms, which you can get from the Upper School Office, and send them in.

Portfolios for Admissions

Sometimes sending extra “show and tell” materials with your application can be of great benefit, provided it is of genuinely high quality and is relevant. Follow the instructions (if any) with each application to see how they want such materials handled. Be sure to put your name and social security number on whatever you send in case it gets separated from your application (or if you mail it separately). And, as a rule, if you want it back eventually, you’ll need to enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

If you are applying to a specialty institution (such as Rhode Island School of Design, Lawrence University Conservatory of Music, Tisch School of the Arts at NYU, etc.), a portfolio or audition will be a required element of the process. But even if you are applying to a liberal arts college as a pre-med, having talent of any kind beyond the classroom is a good thing. Just because you send slides of some of your artwork or a recording of you singing your favorite Mozart aria doesn’t mean you’re necessarily going to be an arts major. So, let them see your talent—but first, make sure someone you trust confirms that it’s likely to have the intended effect on your audience.

The Common Application has chosen SlideRoom as their exclusive partner to handle arts supplements. This means that colleges hosting an undergraduate admissions process that requires a creative portfolio can use SlideRoom and the Common Application together. This works perfectly for schools of music, art, architecture, theatre, film, and even non-art schools.

The Role of Parents

- Establish any broad limitations early in the process (e.g. no college east of the Mississippi, the Rockies, the California border; no college that costs more than \$XX; that has co-ed bathrooms; etc.). In truth, the point of departure for any student’s college applications should be a frank discussion about family finances. In the end, who will decide where your daughter goes to college? You, based the best financial aid package she receives, or she, based purely on which one she likes the most? Answering these questions up front can prevent heartbreak later on.
- Educate yourself. Do not hesitate to ask questions of colleges (admissions, financial aid, coaches, whoever) and expect answers. You want to be sure that your information is up-to-date. Knowledge is power. Remember to take much of what you read and hear from colleges with a grain of salt.

© Cartoonbank.com



"He appears to have eaten some homework."

©2003 The New Yorker Collection from cartoonbank.com. All rights reserved.



Santa Catalina School

1500 Mark Thomas Drive | Monterey, CA 93940
831.655.9300 | santacatalina.org