



# How to be a Competitive College Applicant

## Helpful resources include...

MHS Webpage- <https://mhs.murrayschools.org/>

College Board- <https://www.collegeboard.org/>

You Science - <https://www.youscience.com/>

Keys to Success- <https://www.ktsutah.org/>

ACT- [act.org/](https://act.org/)

College Credit Transfer Guide- <https://ushe.edu/utah-transfer-guide/>

## Murray High School

- Honors Diploma
- Murray Medallion
- Sterling Scholar
- PSAT
- Biliteracy Seal
- Ways to Earn College Credit  
(Concurrent vs AP- and How  
Classes/Credit Will Transfer)
- Extracurricular Activities and Clubs
- College Day (Junior Year)

## Colleges/Universities

- ACT
- College Admissions and Merit  
Scholarships Index Scores
- Campus Visits
- Check out webpages and admissions  
for top 5-8 Universities of interest.
- Safety Schools, Match (On Target)  
Schools, Reach (Dream) Schools
- The Big 5
  - ACT, GPA, Challenging Courses,  
Extracurricular, Commitment to  
Serve

# 1. Explore Careers

Deciding on a degree can be daunting before going to college. However, if you start early this may save you money and time in the future. There are many resources available to you. There are many websites that offer information on different careers, academic requirements, salaries, and employment growth.

If you have not taken a career test yet, it is highly encouraged. This will give you a starting point to narrow down your chosen field or gain more information in an area you think you may want to study in college. Whatever you do, make sure you also take your time and research the career or careers you may be interested in. It is advantageous to check out the growth rate and salary as well when doing this.

# 2. Get Good Grades

This seems obvious, but your GPA is by far the most important factor an admission office looks at when you are applying for college. It is vital to focus on getting good grades. Junior year is very important since it's the last chance to raise your GPA before you apply to colleges in the fall of your senior year.

There are a few tips to help you get good grades. Start big assignments sooner rather than later and this will help you manage your time better which often leads to better grades. You can also set aside time for homework with no distractions and ask for help if you do not understand something. It is important to get a good night sleep as well so you can learn more effectively while at school.

# 3. Research Colleges

When trying to decide which college to attend, research what that school's requirements are, the application deadlines, and take a tour before you make your decision. Most high school students apply for more than one school to ensure they get accepted.

# 4. Look for Scholarships

There are a variety of scholarships based on academics, leadership, talent, financial need and other personal characteristics. In addition, there may be grants available as well. Both of these provide money that does not need to be paid back and can be used towards housing, books, materials, college classes, and even living expenses while you are attending school.

## **5. Standardized Assessments for College Entrance**

Most colleges and universities require students to take the American College Test (ACT) or Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). SAT and ACT standardized assessments are the most often requested scores. These tests are designed to determine a student's college readiness and potential for academic success.

There are prep courses that can help you study and even prep tests, such as the pre-SAT and pre-ACT tests. These prep tests give you an idea for the test itself and how well you are tracking. Taking these prep tests can be especially useful for those of you that may have test anxiety. Colleges do not see your Pre-ACT or Pre-SAT-scores, so take advantage of this opportunity prior to taking the real test. You can also take the 'real' tests more than once, but make sure you schedule wisely so you do not miss the deadlines.

## **6. Extracurricular Activities**

When applying for college, admission offices often look not only at your academic record, but also at what other activities you are doing. Their goal is to ensure their student population has people with various interests and backgrounds. This means that they look at extracurricular activities such as clubs, performances, sports, internships, volunteer opportunities, or community service projects. These activities demonstrate that you are able to balance academics and leisure at the same time showing colleges your determination and time management skills.

## **7. Recommendation Letters**

College applications often request letters of recommendation. Your letters of recommendation can be from teachers, coaches, or mentors that you have had throughout high school. It is important to plan to collect these letters by the application deadline. Ask for recommendations from teachers you have a good rapport with and know you. Asking early gives them an opportunity to do a good job. Often, they may need to send the letter of recommendation to the college or submit it online. Make sure to give them the correct address and information. These letters often describe your character as a student during high school and may list some accomplishments.

## **8. College Essays**

Some colleges may require you to write an admission essay. It is their way to capture your characteristics beyond just grades and assessment scores. Write your own essay but have others proofread it. You also want to be careful not to use the exact essay for every college application.

Make small tweaks to ensure it is relevant to that particular school and double check the address or college name if you included it in your essay.

## 9. Filling Out the Application

Each school has an admissions process. Always check the deadlines, requirements, and additional items that need to be included. Most colleges have gone to online applications that allow students to create online accounts. This allows you to come back and complete it prior to submitting the final draft. Essays, transcripts, personal information, declaring a major, and additional information is often required.

If a college application provides you the chance to include optional materials, always try to include something when possible. This could give you an edge over someone who does the minimum amount of work and gives you an opportunity to include information not found on the rest of the application. Admission representatives will review grades, test scores, letters of recommendations, essays, and extracurricular activities to see if you are a good fit for their school.

## 10. College Prep Classes

College prep classes are a good way to gain skills to be successful in college. Many colleges or universities offer summer programs that prep high school students for college success. These programs offer career exploration, study skills, and academic tools that may be useful when transitioning into college. There are even college readiness courses offered at some high schools for junior and seniors. These are very similar to the ones offered at colleges and may help guide you in researching schools, applying to colleges, and writing admission essays.

