



Self-Assessment

I love the patterns and complexities of numbers.

I love painting and drawing people and objects.

I love writing stories and analyzing literature.

I love building things and I love the physics of rollercoasters.

I like helping people with their problems.

How would you describe yourself? Are you creative, a problem solver, an analytical person, a planner, a motivator, a teacher? Where do you see yourself in 5, 10, or even 20 years? How do your family and friends describe your personality? Before you even consider applying to college, it's worthwhile to take a step back and take a good look at yourself.

What are my strengths and weaknesses?

Do you excel in math, science, art, music, social science, or humanities courses? By learning more about yourself, your interests, and your preferences, you will be able to make a more informed decision about which colleges best meet your needs.

Some high schools require that you formalize a self-assessment by taking a career or interest inventory before meeting with a guidance counselor, usually in your junior year, to discuss prospective colleges. Most of these inventories evaluate your personality style and assess your preference (not whether or not you'll be successful) for different types of careers. Many of these assessments are based on the works of psychologist Carl Jung and the mother-daughter team of Katharine Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers, developers of the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI).

Some states offer students free services, which combine self-assessment tools with college and career searches, along with opportunities to develop a resume. For example, the New York and California Web sites have links to "The Interest Profiler," a 20–30 minute online personality assessment tool with potential career matches. The federal government also offers many resources that allow you to explore potential careers, obtain salary information, and identify

jobs in high demand in the future. One very useful Web site is www.online.onetcenter.org, which offers detailed career information that is linked to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Another useful Web site, www.dwya.com, is based on the very popular career book, *Do What You Are* (Little, Brown & Co., 2001), and is a great resource for determining your personality type.

Checklist for taking inventory

Students sometimes take interest inventories and say, “Oh, it didn’t work for me; the test said I was going to be a bank teller or a hairdresser.” What these instruments do is assess your preferences (not strengths) in dealing with people, processing information, making decisions, and organizing your life. They are not foolproof, but they are useful in gaining data about yourself. The checklist below can be used to highlight your strengths and areas for improvement. Getting to know who you are will assist you in writing essays and forming a list of potential colleges.

In the checklist below, use a ✓ to indicate your agreement.

Self-Assessment: Taking Inventory			
Area of Assessment:	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
PERSONALITY			
I describe myself as an extrovert (I prefer to be around people; I don’t mind large crowds; I am outer-directed).			
I describe myself as an introvert (I prefer to be alone; I am quiet and inner-directed).			
I prefer to process information through the use of my five senses; I am detail oriented; I like facts and figures.			
I prefer to process information through my intuition; I look for the big picture; I am an “ideas” person.			
I prefer to make decisions based on logic and rational thinking; justice and fairness are important to me.			
I prefer to make decisions based on my feelings and how decisions will affect people.			
I prefer to plan activities ahead of time; I am decisive and I like to finish projects that I start.			
I prefer to be spontaneous; I am flexible and don’t always finish tasks but I like to start many projects.			

Area of Assessment:	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
ACADEMIC HISTORY			
I am an above-average student.			
I am an average student.			
I am a below-average student.			
My grades are consistent.			
I have challenged myself with honors, Advanced Placement (AP), or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses.			
I am an active participant in the classroom.			
I have worked hard and tried to improve my grades.			
EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES			
I am very involved in school clubs and out-of-school activities.			
I perform community service.			
I have held a part-time or full-time job.			
I have had an unpaid or paid internship.			
I have had challenging summer experiences.			
TALENTS/ABILITIES			
I have a special talent (art, music, singing, and writing).			
I play a sport.			
I would like to play a sport competitively.			
I have a learning disability and require support services.			
I have good writing skills.			
I can communicate well verbally.			
COLLEGE PREFERENCES			
I would like to commute to college.			
I would like to live in a dorm room at college.			
I would like to attend a college within a 2-hour drive from home.			

continued

Area of Assessment:	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
I would like to attend a college within a 4-hour drive from home.			
I would like to attend a college more than 4 hours away from home.			
I am not opposed to taking a plane ride to and from college.			
I prefer a city environment.			
I prefer a suburban campus environment.			
I prefer a rural campus environment.			
I want to attend a same-sex college.			
I want to attend a parochial college.			
I want to attend a diverse campus.			
I want to attend a Historically Black college.			
The cost of my college education is a major concern.			
I want to attend a small university (2,500 students or less).			
I want to attend a medium university (8,000 students or less).			
I want to attend a large university (20,000 students or less).			
I want to attend a super-sized university (more than 20,000 students).			

What are my family's values and desires?

What your parents and other family members think can greatly influence your choice of college. Some parents prefer that their children follow in their path and attend the college where they went. This option is referred to in admissions jargon as a *legacy admission*, and in some selective institutions legacy admits are given preference in the admissions process, especially if their parents have given substantial amounts of money. Other parents want their children to follow their own path and have opportunities that they didn't have. Parents who attended a commuter college may want their child to have the "full college experience" as an on-campus student.

There may also be financial and family constraints, which will dictate where you will go to college. It is important to discuss financial, geographical, and family-related (divorce, illness) issues up front so you know what your options are during the college search process. I know of students who applied to and were accepted to the college of their dreams, only to be told later that they couldn't attend that college because their parents couldn't afford it or because they needed to be closer to home for family reasons. It's important to have an honest and open discussion early on about factors which could take certain colleges out of the picture to avoid miscommunication and disappointment. Taking into account the wishes and desires of families is a key element of the college search process.

Should I choose a major on the application?

Every college application asks you to "select a potential major" or to indicate an "area of concentration." How should you answer this question? The answer depends on the individual. Approximately 50 percent of students applying to college answer that they are an "undecided major," because they really have no idea what career path to choose and they don't have a particular strength in one area, such as science. The other 50 percent of students have been able to focus on a particular area in high school. They may know people (especially parents, family members, or friends) in a certain field or they may have had a part-time job or an internship and have been able to narrow the list down to a field of study, such as business, and even more specifically, accounting. Others may have taken a career assessment, which indicates the types of job categories in which they would prefer to work. If you are in the group where you do have an area of interest, then there could be an advantage in applying to a particular major in a university.

TIP: I know two students who applied to a large public university. One applied as an "undecided" major and the other student applied as a math major. Their grades and standardized test scores were similar, but the student who listed math as her major was accepted, whereas the other student was not accepted. This example may be extreme, but it could happen.

The major you have selected could be an "under-represented" major, where there is a low volume of students and therefore a college may accept more students into this major. Also, sometimes colleges add new programs of study or they hire new faculty members to expand an existing major. If they are looking to accept students into this major and you can demonstrate an interest in these areas, you may have a slight advantage in being accepted.

The best advice is to be true to yourself and to remember that even if you do select a major, in most cases you can change your major when you arrive on campus or later on. Most colleges don't require you to select a major until at least the second semester of your sophomore year. It is likely though that you will be assigned an academic advisor in the field that you designate as your major. My daughter applied to college as an anthropology major, and she has had the same advisor since freshman year. She has been able to forge a strong bond with him, which is a definite advantage.

Applying with a Stated Major versus an Undecided Major: Views from Our Admissions Counselors' Panel

“A stated major is regarded only as a statement of preliminary interest. Being undecided is not a problem at all; at Grinnell, exploring new possibilities is expected. Interest in a major not offered raises questions about any potential match with the College and the applicant’s understanding of the College.”—Nancy J. Maly, Director of Admissions, Grinnell College

“Rensselaer operates ‘low walls’ between our academic units, and does not employ different admissions criteria among majors. Anyone who is admitted to Rensselaer is admitted, regardless of major, and can switch majors with ease. Ultimately, if a student is not sure which major they want, they should apply ‘undeclared’ and allow Rensselaer’s Advising and Learning Assistance Center to help them select a major once they have arrived.” —Raymond Lutzky, Director of Outreach, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

“Some students apply to Binghamton knowing what they want to major in. We encourage those students to apply to the appropriate professional school (i.e., engineering, nursing, business) because each has specific admissions requirements. However, some of our students do not apply to Binghamton with a stated major. That’s perfectly fine. After all, college is the chance to explore different studies, career paths and professional and personal interests.”—Cheryl Brown, Director of Admission, Binghamton University, State University of New York

“Every student is viewed based on the same standards, regardless of major. It doesn’t help or hinder a student to declare a major. If a student isn’t sure what he/she wants to major in, we offer ‘exploratory’ as an option on the application. Exploratory students can test the waters by taking classes in a wide variety of topics and won’t be required to declare a major until the end of sophomore year. Students who have decided on a major and list this on their application could be offered direct admission to their programs freshman year. We have seven different schools on campus offering direct admission to freshmen. Direct admission is competitive, and only about 10 percent of freshmen will be directly admitted to their intended program freshman year. The other 90 percent are offered general admission to IU and will need to apply to their school at the end of freshman year once they complete the necessary requirements. Students considering majors in the Jacobs School of Music [however] should list music on the application as their intended major. Direct admission to the Jacobs School is a two-tier process that will require a second application to the music school and an audition or interview for prospective students.”—Lauren Kay, Assistant Director of Admissions, Indiana University

What should I do now?

At this point, you should have been able to answer some questions about your personality, your academic history, your extracurricular activities, your talents and abilities, and your preferences in the type of college you are looking for. The college search is time consuming and you may feel overloaded with deadlines and all of the small and large tasks you need to complete. The planner on the next several pages will help you keep track of the many deadlines ahead.

Monthly Planner				
Month	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade
September	Take challenging classes	Take challenging classes	Take challenging classes	Take a full load of classes
	Take every class seriously	Take every class seriously	Take every class seriously	Take every class seriously
	Attend a club fair featuring clubs and organizations offered in your high school	Attend a club fair featuring clubs and organizations offered in your high school	Attend a club fair featuring clubs and organizations offered in your high school	Meet with your guidance counselor to finalize your college list
	Join clubs, begin activities	Join clubs, begin activities	Join clubs, begin activities	Continue your activities
	READ!	READ!	Take on leadership positions	Prepare for fall SAT/ACT exams
	Remember, every grade counts!	Remember, every grade counts!	Remember, every grade counts!	Send SAT/ACT scores to colleges
	Study in advance for exams	Study in advance for exams	Study in advance for exams	Recheck your academic transcript
	Set small goals	Set small goals	Set small goals	Apply to rolling admissions colleges (see Chapter 3), spaces fill up early
	Try to increase your class participation	Try to increase your class participation	Try to increase your class participation	Visit college campuses
	Review class notes in between classes	Review class notes in between classes	Review class notes in between classes	Check your Facebook and other online profiles and delete any inappropriate material

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Monthly Planner, continued				
Month	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade
October	Get tutoring and attend extra help sessions as needed	Get tutoring and attend extra help sessions as needed	Get tutoring and attend extra help sessions as needed	Check on teachers' letters of recommendations
	Start thinking about possible careers	Take the PSAT exam, if your school offers it	Take the PSAT exam, if your school offers it	Establish a neutral e-mail to put on college applications (discussed in Chapter 6)
	Manage your time wisely	Manage your time wisely	Manage your time wisely	Apply to rolling admissions colleges
	Use an agenda book	Use an agenda book	Use an agenda book	Take SAT/ACT again, if necessary, and send your scores
	READ!	Take the PLAN (pre-ACT) if your school offers it	READ!	Visit college campuses
	Every grade counts	READ!	Every grade counts	Meet with admissions officers visiting your high school, if appropriate
	Set small goals	Start thinking about possible careers	Start thinking about possible careers	Avoid senioritis, stay engaged in school

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Monthly Planner, continued				
Month	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade
November	Visit your guidance counselor	Visit your guidance counselor	Visit your guidance counselor	Early decision and early action application deadlines
	Review your report card/evaluate your performance	Review your report card/evaluate your performance	Review your report card/evaluate your performance	Take the SAT/ACT again, if necessary, and send your scores
	Take appropriate steps if your grades are not where you want them to be: talk to teachers, cut down on computer time	Take appropriate steps if your grades are not where you want them to be: talk to teachers, cut down on computer time	Take appropriate steps if your grades are not where you want them to be: talk to teachers, cut down on computer time	Work on special talent portfolios (art, music, drama, and writing)
	READ!	READ!	Research colleges	Continue to visit colleges
	Increase class participation	Increase class participation	READ!	Work on regular decision applications
	Don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it	Don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it	Don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it	Don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it

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Monthly Planner, continued				
Month	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade
December	Begin a conversation with your parents about college	Receive and review your PSAT/PLAN scores	Receive and review your PSAT scores	Continue to work on regular decision applications; use a planner or files to organize application
	Continue to read during vacation	Talk to your parents about colleges and financial concerns	Start preparing for SAT/ACT exams	Take SAT/ACT again, if needed
	READ!	READ!	READ!	Some early action, early decision II applications are due; early decision I results are in!
	Use the FAFSA4CASTER at fafsa4caster.ed.gov to project financial aid awards for college	Use the FAFSA4CASTER at fafsa4caster.ed.gov to project financial aid awards for college	Use the FAFSA4CASTER at fafsa4caster.ed.gov to project financial aid awards for college	Remind teachers to complete their letters of recommendation
	Review your teachers' pages on high school's Web site (if it has one) for updates on homework, quizzes, and notes	Review your teachers' pages on high school's Web site (if it has one) for updates on homework, quizzes, and notes	Review your teachers' pages on high school's Web site (if it has one) for updates on homework, quizzes, and notes	Take the SAT/ACT again, if necessary and send your scores
	Take appropriate steps if your grades are not where you want them to be: talk to teachers, cut down on computer time	Take appropriate steps if your grades are not where you want them to be: talk to teachers, cut down on computer time	Take appropriate steps if your grades are not where you want them to be: talk to teachers, cut down on computer time	Check with your guidance counselor to ensure your application documents have been sent
	Try to get to know 1 or 2 teachers on a more personal level	Try to get to know 1 or 2 teachers on a more personal level	Try to get to know 1 or 2 teachers on a more personal level	Review your application status online at college Web sites

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Monthly Planner, continued				
Month	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade
January	Select classes for next year	Select classes for next year	Select classes for next year	Early action decisions start coming in!
	Review your report card/evaluate your performance	Review your report card/evaluate your performance	Review your report card/evaluate your performance	Most regular decision applications are now due
	Take appropriate steps if your grades are not where you want them to be: talk to teachers, cut down on computer time	Take appropriate steps if your grades are not where you want them to be: talk to teachers, cut down on computer time	Register for SAT/ACT exams	Follow up on your applications to make sure they are complete
	READ!	READ!	Prepare for SAT/ACT exams	Complete FAFSA and other financial aid applications
	Start thinking about your plans for the summer	Start thinking about your plans for the summer	Start thinking about your plans for the summer	Research and complete scholarship applications
	Prepare for mid-terms	Prepare for mid-terms	Make an appointment with your guidance counselor for your junior meeting to discuss colleges	Complete special talent portfolios

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Monthly Planner, continued				
Month	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade
March	Visit your guidance counselor	Visit your guidance counselor	Prepare for SAT/ACT exams	Regular decision results start coming in!
	READ!	READ!	Register for spring SAT/ACT exams	Avoid senioritis
	Prepare in advance for exams	Prepare in advance for exams	Visit college campuses	Revisit colleges
	Review daily, rather than cramming for exams	Review daily, rather than cramming for exams	Research college Web sites and other relevant sites	Decision time is coming; review which college is the best fit for you
	Perform community service or volunteer at a place of interest (local vet/animal shelter, nursing home, after school program...)	Perform community service or volunteer at a place of interest (local vet/animal shelter, nursing home, after school program...)	Perform community service or volunteer at a place of interest (local vet/animal shelter, nursing home, after school program...)	Look for scholarships from local organizations, check with your guidance counselor for ideas
	Improve your vocabulary and reading comprehension skills	Improve your vocabulary and reading comprehension skills	Improve your vocabulary and reading comprehension skills	Think about worthwhile summer activities
	Try to get to know 1 or 2 teachers on a more personal level	Try to get to know 1 or 2 teachers on a more personal level	Try to get to know 1 or 2 teachers on a more personal level	Review your application status online at college Web sites
	Do your homework—stay motivated	Do your homework—stay motivated	Do your homework—stay motivated	Do your homework—stay motivated

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Monthly Planner, continued

Month	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade
May	READ!	Take Advanced Placement exams, if you are in AP classes	Take Advanced Placement exams, if you are in AP classes	Take Advanced Placement exams, if you are in AP classes
	Continue with extracurricular activities	Continue with extracurricular activities	Take SAT/ACT exams	May 1—universal reply date
	Cut down on computer and TV time	Cut down on computer and TV time	Visit college campuses	Send only one deposit to the college you will be attending
	Set small goals; don't feel overwhelmed	Set small goals; don't feel overwhelmed	Attend open houses and college fairs	Notify colleges you have decided not to attend
	Reduce test anxiety: be prepared, take practice tests, and use relaxation techniques	Reduce test anxiety: be prepared, take practice tests, and use relaxation techniques	Reduce test anxiety: be prepared, take practice tests, and use relaxation techniques	Reduce test anxiety: be prepared, take practice tests, and use relaxation techniques
	Use your time wisely!	Set aside 15 minutes daily for personal reading	Set aside 15 minutes daily for personal reading	Complete housing forms and relevant papers
	Talk to family and friends about potential careers	Talk to family and friends about potential careers	Talk to family and friends about potential careers	Talk to family and friends about potential careers

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Monthly Planner, continued				
Month	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade
July	Continue to read!	Continue to read!	Continue to read! Do something challenging over the summer	Continue to read!
	Talk to your parents about college	It's not too early to start visiting colleges	Visit colleges	Attend orientation sessions
	Begin summer activities	Begin summer activities	Start working on your college essay and resume	Register for fall classes
	Shadow/spend a day (or more) with people in careers that interest you	Shadow/spend a day (or more) with people in careers that interest you	Shadow/spend a day (or more) with people in careers that interest you	Take a summer course at a community college for college credit
	Don't procrastinate summer reading assignments, if you have one	Don't procrastinate summer reading assignments, if you have one	Don't procrastinate summer reading assignments, if you have one	Make a list of items you'll need for college
	If you travel, keep a photo journal for a potential college essay	If you travel, keep a photo journal for a potential college essay	If you travel, keep a photo journal for a potential college essay	Make the most of your last summer before college!

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