

## **2012 UNIVERSITY/COLLEGE GUIDE**

This guide gives students and parents practical advice on the issues that are important as you apply to university/college.\* Hopefully it will give you an honest look at the university admission process and at what you can do to maximize your chances of acceptance at a school that is a good match for you.

You will find many statements that reflect the opinions held by the ISA counsellors and many of our colleagues in other international schools. These opinions are based on years of experience in helping students who are attending international schools. We know and have worked with many university admission officers and other counsellors and have a good sense of what you need to do to maximize your chances of admission. Although friends, neighbours, and even an aunt who is a teacher may have good intentions when they give you advice, we ask that you trust us.

Many of the resources in the Careers and University Room, as well as various websites named, were consulted as this guide was written. You are encouraged to browse through these and the many other materials found in the Careers and University Room. Links to most websites named in this guide are available on your *Family Connection* site or in the Career/University folder on the ISA HS Student drive.

Hopefully you will find this guide helpful. As well as the general Table of Contents, there is an Index in the back with more specific notations.

While this guide contains useful information, it should not replace meeting with your counsellor and talking with your parents about this process, spending time online, or looking at books to research your options. We are here to help you as you make your decisions about higher education. Good luck!

\*For the purposes of this guide, the words “college” and “university” are interchangeable, unless otherwise defined.



## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

WELCOME .....	5
1 WHERE IN THE WORLD? .....	6
2 HOW DO I CHOOSE? How to select universities .....	13
4 WHAT ELSE? English Language and Admission Tests.....	29
5 HOW DO THEY DECIDE? .....	36
6 HOW DO I. . .? Application Plans and How to Apply .....	45
7 WHAT FORMS? How to improve your chances.....	49
8 WITH WHOM? Interviews .....	63
9 THEN WHAT? After you've applied.....	65
APPENDIX I: Application Cover Letter .....	71
APPENDIX II: Junior and Senior Year Calendar .....	73
APPENDIX III: The Application Process: Recommendations.....	77
APPENDIX IV: Teacher's Recommendation Information .....	79



## WELCOME

When college admission officers and how-to-get-into-college books describe the perfect university applicant, they all describe more or less the same person: one with good grades in difficult courses, high scores, solid extracurricular activities (student body president *and* captain of several teams), a fascinating cultural background with fluency in several languages, terrific hobbies, and a shelf filled with awards. The candidate also conducts unusual chemistry experiments, participates in Scottish Country Dance competitions, participates in CAS activities over and above the minimum, and never once brags about any of it.

Real life applicants may become concerned when they compare themselves to this super-applicant. While it's true that there are a few ideal candidates who could be accepted at almost any university in the world, it is also true that even selective schools at times admit applicants who bring special qualities (other than academic brilliance) to their first year class.

There are thousands of choices out there; the more closely you resemble the *ideal candidate for a particular school*, the better your chances of getting in are going to be.

The goal of this guide is to help you identify a number of schools that are a "good fit" for you and to maximize your chances of being admitted to them. By knowing what the people who will be reading your applications are looking for, you'll have an easier time presenting yourself as the sort of person they want to admit.

You'll also learn ways in which you can stand out from the thousands of other graduating students who are applying. Standing out may sound like an obvious strategy, but you'd be surprised how few students actually manage to do it.

Unfortunately there is no guide, person, or website to give you a foolproof, step-by-step plan for getting into university. Even if you could be completely mathematical in determining where you want to go and what you need to do to get in, you don't know the qualifications of the others in the applicant pool, and your application will be in the hands of subjective admission officers.

**It's time to find some schools you'd like to attend, and work toward ending up at one after graduation! Good luck.**

## **1 WHERE IN THE WORLD?**

Most students attending a local school in their home country apply to universities within a few hours' radius of their home. Your attendance at ISA has made you realize that there is a whole world of university options. In fact you have so many choices that it's often difficult to know where to begin. The following provides an overview of university admissions in the UK, US, and Canada, with brief information also about other countries. Remember, in this guide, unless otherwise defined, the words "college," "university," and "school" may all be used to describe higher education.

### ***UK Universities***

In the UK, a "university" offers three-year (England, Northern Ireland, and Wales) or four-year (Scotland, sometimes England, Northern Ireland and Wales) programmes leading to a degree; a "college" is a Further Education institution, usually offering two-year programmes, either vocational or in preparation for university (Called 2+2).. A school within a university (such as arts, science or commerce) is called a faculty or sometimes a "college." Online information is available on specific university sites, the UCAS website ([www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com)), and a variety of other websites. Individual prospectus from all UK universities and many colleges are available in the Careers and University Room. These contain specific information on the programmes and courses offered at each university.

### ***UK Applicants Choose a Course of Study***

In the UK, you are required to indicate your course of study at the time you apply. The course of study can be extremely specific—an example being "Arabic with Sociology and Social Policy" at the University of Durham. Your acceptance is for that particular course of study at that particular university. Once you begin your studies, all of your classes are related to that subject area. In England, it's important to know your course is the correct choice for you, as it can be a major problem if you decide you would rather pursue another. You may have to reapply to that new course and begin your studies all over again the following year.

In Scotland, you also indicate a course of study upon application, but since all university courses are four-year courses, it is often possible to change within a college (i.e. sciences) after the first year.

Contact a university directly to receive a specific Course Prospectus, which lists the classes and other expectations for that subject. This is the only way you will know what each course really includes so that you can do a true comparison.

### ***One Application for Five Choices***

In the UK, applications are processed through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service--UCAS. Since the folks at UCAS take care of forwarding applications to the various universities, the actual application process is relatively simple. The single on-line application form allows you to apply for up to five different courses of study. These course choices could be at five different universities, or two or more courses could be chosen at the same university (e.g.,

Psychology and Social Psychology at University of Kent would make up two course choices). No student is allowed to apply to more than five courses.

If you plan to apply to UK universities, you may begin the process by registering in your junior year for a UCASCard, and then in the autumn registering with the counsellors onto the UCAS application site section called "Apply." You will receive a copy of the UCAS *Big Map* booklet with a map showing the location of all universities and instructions for completing the application.

The UCAS website is [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com). The online form requests demographic information, a list of the courses to which you are applying, a report of completed and anticipated examinations (including IB exams and SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests scores), and a personal statement. Be sure to study this website, as it contains vital information about all courses offered, and gives helpful suggestions for writing the personal statement, the most important section of the application. The completed UCAS form is submitted to your counsellor electronically after payment of the application fee by credit or debit card.

You will need to ask your counsellor or a teacher in your intended field of study to write your reference (in both cases with input from your other teachers). Your counsellor will review your application, add the reference and your predicted IB scores (we ask your teachers to predict how you'll do on your "best" day), and submit the form to UCAS, which in turn forwards it to your chosen universities. There, an admissions tutor will determine whether you have the background, ability, and examination scores suggesting you would be able to succeed in the course of study you have chosen.

**Deadlines.** For most courses, your completed application should be sent electronically to your counsellor by mid-November. This enables us to review it, return it to you for any needed corrections or changes, write and/or add the reference and predictions, and submit your application before school closes for the December holidays. The UCAS application deadline is January 15.

**"Oxbridge", medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine.** Students applying to Oxford or Cambridge, or for any UK medicine, dentistry, or veterinary medicine course must submit the UCAS application to your counsellor by early September in order to be early for UCAS's October 15 deadline. Discuss this with your counsellor in the winter or spring of 11th grade so that you can attend specific seminars in this process, register for and sit required tests, and begin planning for submission of work samples that may be required. UCAS online applications must arrive at UCAS by 15 October. These deadlines are set in stone, and earlier is always better than near the end!

### ***Receiving Offers of Admission***

Instead of an outright acceptance, UK universities usually give "offers" of admission which are contingent upon your meeting certain conditions. A typical "conditional offer" will require you to earn certain IB scores (total and/or in specific subjects), or even certain SAT scores. Some UK universities require various admissions tests; this information is included on the UCAS website and it's your responsibility to

register for any as described as these will be reviewed before universities make offers. The more popular or competitive the course of study, the higher predicted scores you will need. An applicant may be denied if he/she will not be completing the specifically required exams or if the admissions tutor feels his/her exam scores or predictions do not meet the university's minimum for that year.

Because of the way decisions are made, the ISA high school transcript is of little importance in UK admissions, but they will look at test scores. ACT, SAT Reasoning Test, and SAT Subject Test scores should be entered on the UCAS application. If you are not an IB diploma student, you may list your high school subjects that relate to the course for which you are applying, including grades earned for any courses completed. In this case, you may ask to have your transcripts sent directly to the university admission tutor, especially if you've done well. The transcript may not carry a lot of weight, but a record showing you did well in high school will never hurt.

Once you receive all of your offers, you will be asked to narrow your choices down to two—a "firm" and an "insurance" choice. Since you won't have your IB results until July, if the firm (your first choice) is a reach for you, be certain the insurance (second choice) is a school you'd be happy attending and that you will most likely meet the required score. If you haven't visited the universities, this might be a good time to see them as that may help you with your decisions. You may also want to seek advice from your counsellor when you get to this stage.

If your qualifications are not sufficient to gain admission, you may be eligible for a "Foundation Year" at some universities, art schools, or colleges. Succeeding in a foundation course will usually gain you entry into a university. The University of Aberdeen offers a terrific access course and also a Summer School for Access programme that works the same way.

### ***Australian Universities***

Because Australia is in the southern hemisphere, the school year begins in February except for a small mid-year intake in July. Applications are usually submitted in August or September, after you have graduated high school. A few universities accept applications in the spring of your senior year; those will often make a conditional offer based on IB scores, so you will know in July where you will be studying. For others, you may not apply until summer, or even a specific month.

What Australian schools will or will not accept varies. Some of the more selective universities will only accept a student with an IB diploma or high SAT scores and two to four strong IB scores. Others will say, "Send us what you have and we'll take a look at it." This will mean sending at least a transcript, letters of recommendation, and SAT Reasoning Test scores.

If your qualifications are not sufficient to gain admission, you may take a six-month to year-long "Foundation Year." Succeeding in this programme will usually gain you entry into a university. Many courses in Australia are three years long, so taking the Foundation Year will still give you the same four-year experience as you would have had in the U.S., Canada, or Scotland.

Many of the procedures in this guide apply to Australian universities, but the dates would be approximately six months after those listed here.

If you are considering Australia, a question to ask yourself is how you would occupy yourself from the time you graduate until you begin university. This might be a great time to work or volunteer in a field related to your university or career choice.

### **Canadian Universities**

In Canada, there is a very real distinction between a university and a college. Institutions granting Bachelor's Degrees and beyond are called universities. Colleges focus only on technical or job-skills training. A school within a Canadian university (such as arts, science or commerce) is called a "faculty" or a "college", similar to the systems in many US and UK universities.

Each university in Canada has a general minimum admission standard based upon Canadian grading standards. These minimum percentages and course requirements vary from faculty to faculty. If you are interested in being admitted to an engineering programme, you may read that you are required to earn an 80%. Since an 80% is an A- on the Canadian scale (while at ISA, an 80% is a B-) your grades will be reviewed with those differences in mind. If you need an A- for a particular programme, then the Canadian universities will be looking for an A-minimum on your high school transcript. For IB Diploma candidates, most universities will make offers based on predicted IB scores.

If you're looking at Canada, it's important to be in touch with the university to see what you'll be asked to submit. You can count on being asked to submit your transcript; most schools also require predicted IB scores. Many will accept SAT Reasoning Test scores and SAT Subject Tests, and a few ask us to convert your transcript from letter grades to percentages.

In most provinces, each university has its own application. However, in the Province of Ontario, the universities use a centralized application process much like the UK, operated by the Ontario Universities Application Centre (OUAC). A student submits a single application to OUAC, which then forwards the information to the student's chosen universities. After you apply, each university will send you an email or letter acknowledging receipt of your application and requesting that you send transcripts and other documents to them. That letter will contain your personal OUAC number. Be sure to provide this number to the counsellors, because it should be written on your transcript and any other documents to ensure that these important items make it to the correct file. You are usually asked to send your transcript at the end of the first semester of senior year, and in some cases, after graduation, so be sure to keep your grades up throughout your senior year!

Canadian universities actively welcome international students. They provide an excellent and sometimes less-expensive university option than the UK or the US. The following websites will be helpful when researching universities in Canada: The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada: [www.aucc.ca](http://www.aucc.ca); and Canadian

Information Centre for International Credentials: [www.cmec.ca](http://www.cmec.ca) (select post-secondary education).

### ***Dutch Universities***

Many universities in The Netherlands offer degree programmes in English; other programmes are only offered in Dutch. The application process varies by university, but all will be looking for the IB Diploma. Some universities have online applications available in the spring—it's important to contact the specific university, visit their website, read their published materials, and if possible visit the campus so that you are clear on the requirements and process.

### ***Japanese Universities***

As described in the guide *Today's Leading Japanese Universities* in the University and Careers Room, nine leading universities in Japan are now offering courses based in English. As is the case with Japanese universities in general, admission decisions are primarily based upon examination results. US-based Temple University has a campus in Japan; their admissions process is more like the US model.

### ***Traditional Japanese Universities***

ISA students who are Japanese citizens and plan to return to Japan for university are ordinarily classified as *kikokushijo* or “returning students.” According to the Japanese government, students earning the International Baccalaureate Diploma who have reached the age of 18 are eligible candidates for university admission. Students wishing to attend Japanese universities generally must sit examinations administered by the National Center for University Entrance Examinations, during the months of October, November, or December, within two years of returning to Japan. Because of university-specific prerequisites, IB Diploma candidates should contact the admissions office of universities in which they are interested.

### ***US Colleges/Universities***

The words “college” and “university” are used interchangeably when referring to US institutions. The word “college” usually refers to an institution devoted primarily to undergraduate education. You are an undergraduate until you graduate with your college degree (called a Bachelor's Degree). A “university,” on the other hand, is usually a larger institution offering a combination of undergraduate and graduate (master's or doctorate) degrees. Universities frequently have a large commitment to research as well as teaching, and to make it more confusing, a school within a university (such as Arts and Sciences) is often called a “college”.

Community colleges are two-year schools that offer the first two years of university requirements and also various vocational or non-degree programmes. Many students in the US attend community colleges for their first two years and then transfer to a four-year college or university.

### **Choosing a Major**

A “major” is the area of concentration, in which you will earn a bulk of your university credits; a second major or a “minor” is sometimes also taken if you have a second choice in which you’d like to take several courses. If you’re not sure now what you want to study as a major, it’s okay. The majority of first year college students in the US do not know what their major will be. There is a lot of latitude to try different courses in the first year or two and then choose a major later. Many students apply as an “undecided” or “pre-major” student and wait until their second (sophomore) year to declare a major. Nearly all students take a broad variety of courses the first two years; these general education or “core” requirements help to insure that all students have a breadth of knowledge in addition to a specialized area when they graduate. The flexibility of changing majors also allows students to transfer to a new school with a minimum amount of trouble. If a student chooses to transfer at the end of the sophomore year, for example, the new school would probably accept most of the general education credits earned so far.

### **Individualized Applications**

In the US, colleges and universities each set their own criteria for determining who gets admitted. Most design their own application forms, ask different questions, and have their own deadlines. This can become rather complicated as you attempt to keep track of what each school wants from you. Some state university systems have an online application for all schools in that system, and over 300 schools will accept the online “Common Application”. Schools that accept the Common Application or a state application often ask for supplementary materials or additional essays.

Admission officers at US universities think the best predictor of college success is how well you perform in high school. Therefore, the grades you earn and the high school courses you choose to take are the most important factors they will consider, with standardised test scores a close second at many schools. . It may be necessary to send updates of your transcript at the end of the first semester of senior year, and in some cases, after graduation, so be sure to keep your grades up throughout your senior year!

### **American Universities Overseas**

There are a number of American universities with campuses in various countries, where you study in English while enjoying the culture and language of the host country. Visit <http://www.aco.eu.com>, or see your counsellor for information and links to these universities.

### **Other Countries**

Most other countries have specific requirements, and individual research into those must be part of your plan. If you are interested in learning about universities in other parts of the world, you should see your counsellor. Your *Family Connection* has links to specific universities and to sites providing information on education systems and universities around the world. Your counsellor will help you prepare your application and gather all necessary supporting materials.

### ***Taking a Year Off or “Gap Year”***

Are you ready to begin university or college immediately after high school? If you are not sure why you are going to college or what you want to study, doing something different for a year gives you some time to think about it. Gap years are not “free time” but should include a planned volunteer activity, travel adventure, or work experience. Gap years are quite common in the UK and Denmark, less so in other countries. Without planning, taking a year off can have its downside. You fall a year behind your classmates and you could wind up wasting the entire.

If you are thinking of taking a year off, you can apply to university while you are still in high school. Take your tests, collect your recommendations, and explore your college choices now. On the UCAS application, check the box that you are applying for deferred entry. In the US or Canada, once you have been admitted, contact the university to defer the starting date for a year. Almost all universities will allow you to defer your entrance, but you will need to write to universities in the US or Canada, explaining your reasons and giving them proper notice (before May 1).

There are many organizations that arrange Gap Year programmes around the world. Being involved in an organized programme is a great way to experience something new, but not have to invent it yourself! Look online or see brochures in the Careers and University Room for Gap Year programmes.

### ***Military Responsibilities***

Many countries have specific military service expectations for citizens (male and/or female). You should be familiar with the laws of your passport nation and be sure you have registered as required for the military intake or draft (usually at 18), applied for an educational waiver, or met your responsibilities in whatever way is required by that country before committing yourself to attend university. Contact your nation’s embassy or the embassy’s website to become familiar with expectations, and ***be sure you comply.***

## 2 HOW DO I CHOOSE? How to select universities

Deciding where you should apply is complicated. Your decision may be influenced heavily by one factor over which you have no control by the beginning of your senior year—the grades you have already earned. It will also be influenced by other factors, which are entirely personal. It's normal to change your mind several times as you try to decide where to apply.

A precise step-by-step process that will allow you to choose that one mythical “perfect university” doesn't really exist. For nearly every student, there are a large number of institutions where you would be happy and successful. Keep an open mind as you begin your search.

### Where to Start

You probably have at least a few schools in mind as you begin to think about university. You might get in-state tuition if you attend LSU. Your father wants you to go to A&M; your mother went to the University of Edinburgh; your brother is at Boston University; and one of your friends is at King's College London. You can start by thinking about these schools. If you don't want to go to A&M, you're going to have to come up with an explanation that will sound reasonable to your father. (“Dad, my grades are just too low, and besides, A&M is too huge.”) In thinking about why you don't want to go to one university, you may make several discoveries about where you *do* want to go.

### Know Yourself

Before you can begin finding universities that are good matches for you, you must know yourself! Being aware of your own values and goals, interests, strengths, and comparative weaknesses is important as you begin this process. There are various ways of looking at these areas. On your Naviance *Family Connection* webpage (<http://connection.naviance.com/isa>), be sure you have completed My Personality Type, the Career Interest Profiler, and My Learning Style.” On the *MyRoad* ([www.myroad.com](http://www.myroad.com)) website, complete the Personality Profiler, the QuickStart Careers, and the QuickStart Majors. These will give you insight into what's important to you, how you best work and study, and general areas that match your current interests. The careers assessment on Naviance will also give you insight into your possible future directions.

On the UCAS website ([www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com)), the Stamford link will give you the opportunity to link your interests and skills to careers and directly to courses of study throughout the UK. Enrolling in Futurewise with ISCO and taking the Morrisby Assessment provides students with insight into strengths in both academic and non-academic realms. Even completing a basic questionnaire will help you know what is important to you in school, in what you study, and in your life.

### **Work Experience**

To show universities that an interest in a specific course has been long-term and is serious, you should consider work experience, volunteer opportunities, or at a minimum short visits to sites in your chosen career field. This is especially important if you are planning to apply in the UK as the admissions tutors want to see that you've been pursuing this field seriously and have a clear understanding of what it involves. How do you know if you'll like a particular field if you really have no first-hand experience with that area? This is another way of learning what's important to you and what you really enjoy.

### **Computer Resources**

Once you've completed the *MyRoad*, Naviance *Family Connection*, and UCAS activities, begin a search on one of these sites to find possible universities that match your interests. These university searches may ask you many questions about a variety of topics ranging from location to special programmes. Select the answer for each question that best applies to you; if the choice doesn't matter, leave it "no preference." The more specific you are in your search, the fewer schools will show up as a match. Look for what's really important for you and begin your search reading about universities that match those priorities. Universities all over the world are included in the *Family Connection*; search by country!

On the *Family Connection* site, you and your parents have access to your own page, which includes your grade point average and test scores, allows you to complete various surveys related to careers as well as courses, do university searches, and create lists of prospective colleges. You can also follow the progress of your applications once they're submitted. It's fun to check a tool called "scattergrams" to predict your chance of admission to a particular university compared with ISA graduates who have applied there. Use of the scattergrams is described in more detail in Chapter 3. Sign in with your email address and password at <http://connection.naviance.com/isa>.

The UCAS website includes the Stamford Interest Inventory, which will result in lists of possible courses of study, and links to all universities in the UK offering these courses. You may also search by a specific course of study and get lists of all universities that offer such courses. You may also search for UK courses on the HERO website ([www.HERO.ac.uk](http://www.HERO.ac.uk)) or on [www.Hotcourses.co.uk](http://www.Hotcourses.co.uk). The Teaching Quality Information website ([www.tqi.ac.uk](http://www.tqi.ac.uk)) provides comparative information about the quality of higher education in many UK universities and colleges (not Scottish), including student satisfaction surveys and statistics on numbers of students remaining in courses and where these students go upon graduation. It's a great site for comparing various schools.

### **Guidebooks and CD's**

In the Careers and University Room you will find prospectus, brochures, applications, CD's and other materials sent to us by various universities. Viewing a CD or taking a virtual tour online can be helpful if you are unable to visit a campus prior to applying.

The counsellors have an up-to-date collection of independent college handbooks such as the *CollegeBoard College Handbook*, the *Peterson's Four-Year Colleges*

*Guide (both US), The Student's Guide to Canadian Universities, The Directory of University & College Entry (UK), and The Good University Guide (Australia).* These are well researched and respected. Although they can be a little boring to read, they provide an easy way to check basic facts. If you're interested in where you can find a college with a strong major in a particular field, check out *Rugg's Recommendations on the Colleges (US)* or *Good University Guide (Australia or the UK)*. The *Fiske Guide to Colleges (US)* is easy to read, interesting, and accurate, and *The Virgin Alternative Guide to British Universities* gives information on social life and other aspects of the university experience. Some of these are also available online; check for links on your *Family Connection* site.

While some other independent guides are fun to read, they seem to put more effort into being interesting than on being accurate. Typically these guides are developed by distributing surveys to students attending colleges and compiling those opinions; then a reviewer moulds a description from the survey results. Don't believe every word you read. Each year *U.S. News and World Report*, *Macleans*, *The London Times*, and several other publications, attempt to rate universities and colleges. Just because a profit-making company has assigned a rank to a school, it does not mean you should unilaterally believe it. Use a ranking guide as a guide, not as a bible.

### **Admission Office Representatives**

Each year ISA students visit the Fulbright US College Fair and the UCAS Convention at the University of Aberdeen; and a few admissions reps visit ISA. Take advantage of these opportunities to talk with representatives from various universities. Even if you're not really interested in a particular school, the more information you gather about different types of schools, the easier it will be for you to make a more manageable list of universities. Who knows, you might stumble across a school that really appeals to you. If you walk away thinking, "No way would I want to go there," you've learned something valuable.

Keep in mind that admission representatives are there to "sell" their schools. Even so, talking with them provides an opportunity for you to learn about a college and to interact with a member of the admission staff. If you decide to apply there, the chance to talk on a one-to-one basis might make a lasting impression that will be remembered during the selection process. At the very least, you will have a name to refer to later when you have a question about your application. In short, always be nice to admission officers.

### **Campus Visits or Open Days**

If at all possible, try to visit some university campuses. It's an excellent way to help you narrow your choices. For example, you may need to actually visit a large campus to discover that you would prefer a small, private college. Visits are best made early in your planning, at the end of your sophomore or junior year. Plan a college visit tour with your parents, or if you are near a campus during the summer, stop in and take the tour. UK universities publish their Open Days in *The Sixth Formers Guide*, booklets, brochures, posters, and via UCAS and ISCO publications; find the universities you are interested in and attend their Open Days. Again, do this early in your search!

Whether you're doing a college/university search on *MyRoad*, *Family Connection*, *UCAS.com*, or looking in books, visiting schools, or using other search engines, the following topics will help you compare:

### ***How to compare***

It's important to compare universities and colleges using the same rubric, if you will. When you visit schools, or when you research online or in books, the following areas may be questions to consider and/or to ask:

#### ***Type of College***

The majority of **US colleges** and universities can broadly be divided into either comprehensive or liberal arts universities. A comprehensive university is usually fairly large and consists of different departments called "colleges" of which one may be a "College of Arts and Sciences." The University of Illinois is an example of a comprehensive institution. It has a College of Law, College of Engineering, College of Business, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and a College of Agriculture. Most universities have undergraduate programmes that you're in until you earn your first degree, and graduate programmes, which offer advanced degrees such as a master's degree or doctorate in biology, or provide professional training in such areas as law and medicine.

Liberal arts colleges/universities provide students with a breadth of knowledge in all areas rather than training students for one particular job. Most majors at liberal arts colleges are of a more general nature (English, biology, psychology) rather than vocational (accounting, nursing, business, engineering), and help students become better thinkers, writers, and problem solvers—skills that help students find jobs in many different fields. Students at liberal arts colleges still specialize and graduate with a major; their degree indicates that in addition to a general core of knowledge, they also have specialized knowledge in a particular field. Students who know they will be going on to graduate programmes (law, medicine, education, business administration), often find liberal arts schools to be good preparation. The well-rounded background (similar to the IB programme) helps them do well on law, medical, or other graduate school entrance exams.

There are a small number of specialty schools offering majors in only one area. These schools are great if you're committed to a field of study. Examples are Parsons School of Design in Paris (the arts); Babson, (business); Swiss hotel management schools, Harvey Mudd (engineering); and The College of Law.

There has been a resurgence of interest in women's colleges in the US. These institutions are totally committed to the personal, social, and academic development of women. They also provide extensive opportunities for leadership and independence. There are also still a few men's colleges. Often these are located near women's colleges and may share facilities and/or social events or other activities.

**UK Universities** require a student to apply for a chosen course; so all students do not take a variety of courses in a general core of knowledge as described above. If

you apply to study mathematics, you will study mathematics, taking all the same classes as all other students of maths. Rather than going on to law, medical, business, or other graduate schools as in the US or Canada, a student must apply for these courses directly out of high school. Some will be three or four-year courses, others as long as six years or more (i.e. medicine). Courses such as education are extremely oversubscribed (many more applicants than positions) so many future teachers complete a separate degree and then enrol in a graduate programme in education. **UK Colleges** offer pre-university courses, or courses to work toward exams in specific subjects (Higher National Certificate--HNC) or to earn the Higher National Diploma (HND). Colleges also offer many job-related training programmes in non-academic fields.

***Location—which country? What area of that country? What type of environment?***

One easy way to start narrowing down your search is to consider the issue of location. Proximity to relatives, for example, may be important to you. Living away from home can be easier if you know there are people in the area you can count on should you need some help or a place to go for long weekends or holidays. The issue of location has nothing to do with education, but it is not a frivolous issue - especially for overseas-based families. You are selecting not only a school, but also a place to live. Be sure you want to live there before you decide to go there. If you easily get bored when you are not in the hustle and bustle of a major city, would you be happy at a small rural school? On the other hand, would you have difficulty finding time to study at King's College London because of all the distractions of London? As you consider different universities, always ask yourself whether the campus area will distract from or encourage your academic pursuits.

**Urban colleges** and life in a huge city may be very different from Aberdeen, as it may seem much scarier to be out and about on your own. Large cities offer more hustle, bustle, and cultural opportunities: art exhibits, drama, dance, concerts, and sporting events. But then again, most college students don't have a lot of money to spend. What good is a city campus if you are going to spend most of the time on or around campus because you or your friends can't afford to go out?

**Suburban colleges** strike a balance by being near, but not smack in the middle of a city. They typically have more of a campus atmosphere than do urban schools. Although the campus is not in the centre of the action, you are close enough to get to it when you'd like.

**Small-town colleges** or universities are often the major focus of that community or "college town", with most social and cultural activities occurring on campus. The college is nearly self-contained and provides a large number of activities to keep students occupied. Typically the campuses are beautiful, often perched in natural settings.

***Size***

Some differences between large and small schools are exaggerated. Many high school students say that they don't want to go to a small school because they won't be able to meet enough people. That's not true. Studies have shown that the number of friends you will make in college will be about the same regardless of the

size of the institution, and besides, if you attend a large university of 35,000, how many of those people will you really get to know? Yet schools do provide different experiences depending upon how small or large they are. When you read about how many students attend a particular school, make sure you aren't just looking at the number of undergraduate students. Many medium-to-large universities have graduate students who may not be included in the number of students. If that's the case, you may find that the student population is far larger than the number you're expecting.

### **Small Colleges/Universities**

Small colleges—those with fewer than 3,000 students—are best known for the close contact found between students and faculty. Everybody knows everybody. Often class sizes are small so that everyone gets to participate (or no one can hide, depending on how you look at it). Many of the best-known liberal arts colleges in the US fall into this category. These schools provide a great education, are nearly as selective as the Ivy League universities, and their graduates have amazing success at being admitted to selective graduate schools. While smaller schools brag about their warm and caring environment, some can suffer from a lack of student diversity. This is often not by design, but because they have too few applications from international or minority students. This negative has a positive side. Since these colleges are making efforts to increase their student diversity, it improves the likelihood that an international or expatriate student will be admitted.

### **Mid-Size Colleges/Universities**

Schools with roughly 3,000 to 10,000 students are usually considered midsize. These schools boast close contact with most members of the school community and may offer more social and academic options than smaller colleges. Except for some introductory classes, most class sizes are usually reasonable.

### **Large Colleges/Universities**

Large schools have more activities, more facilities, more students, more courses, more everything. At a big school you are expected to show more independence and take a greater responsibility for planning your own education. Because of the sheer number of students, large schools have a larger bureaucracy to navigate, but once students navigate it, most find their niche and get the support they need. First-year classes are often in large lecture halls and first year graduate student "teaching assistants" may teach students, but once in a major, you will probably be in small classes where you will get to know your peers and professors very well. Changing a course or correcting a billing error can take considerable time and patience. Large schools include most state universities in the US, and many provincial schools in Canada.

### **Housing**

While the type of dormitory arrangement may not be one of the most important factors, it is worth considering. Do you require vegetarian or other special meals? Check that out. During long weekends and breaks, does the dormitory remain open or will you be forced to stay at a friend's house or a hotel? Life in virtually all freshman dormitories is alike in some respects: It's loud, messy, crowded, uncomfortable, and usually a lot of fun.

### **Campus “Culture”**

Each college has a different “culture” or feel. Are most students interested in intramural sports or the theatre, or are they more interested in where the next party will be? Are students politically conservative, liberal, or uninvolved? While this is often difficult to gauge without visiting campus, it is important to find out how accepting the students are towards people who are different—whether by race, religion, culture, nationality, or even by being an international student. Check the *Fiske Guide* in the counsellors’ offices for insights on the “feel” of a campus. Many colleges are attempting to increase the number of students who come from diverse cultural backgrounds. That’s great for you as a student attending an international school. However, if 95% of the students are wealthy white kids from Oklahoma, you might wonder whether you would have a hard time finding students who share your international background and interests.

### **Safety**

Safety is obviously a concern to everyone. In the US there is a requirement that colleges have information available on campus crime. This information is published on a Department of Education website. Go to [www.securityoncampus.org](http://www.securityoncampus.org), and in the crime statistics search box, enter the name of the college. Campuses place a high priority on safety. In addition to that being the right thing, no college can afford the negative publicity that would come from a high profile crime. Emergency phones and 24-hour security officers are commonplace, and at most colleges only those students who live in a particular dormitory can enter that dorm. The most common crimes on college campuses are theft and burglary. Mobile phones, computers, bicycles and other items with a resale value are most likely to be taken, often from unlocked dorm rooms.

Date rape also exists on college campuses, especially when students are under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. Being in control and aware of your environment is important. If students do have a problem, it’s usually due to activities occurring off-campus (and often late at night). **Learn to become more safety conscious and use the escort services available on campus if you are out alone late at night.**

In the UK, university housing for students under 18 must be supervised by adults who have been vetted through the Disclosure process and shown to have no criminal record. Because this is costly, some universities do not offer housing for students less than 18 years of age, thus not accepting students until after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Again, the safety of the students is paramount, so you should check into housing and age limits if you will not be 18 upon entering university.

### **Where Friends Go**

Going to college with your high school friends can be great—or terrible. On the one hand, going away to a university where you don’t know anyone is one of the few opportunities you’ll have in life to “wipe the slate clean” of the person you used to be. If no one on campus knows you, no one will know whether you were athletic, involved, shy, whatever. On the other hand, having a friend nearby can make the first weeks of the freshman year less frightening.

While it can be a bit scary at the beginning, you are probably better off not going to the same place with several of your friends. You'll make more new friends if you don't have the old gang to fall back on. Feelings of freshman alienation usually don't last beyond the first couple of weeks anyway. You may find that the kind of people you hang around with in Aberdeen are not the same kind of people you will want to hang around with at university. Besides, you will need some old friends to visit during school breaks.

If you do end up at the same school as several of your friends, you're better off not being roommates. Living in different dorms gives you the chance to increase the number of new friends you will both make. You can still get together, but with a larger circle of friends you will find college to be a more enjoyable experience.

### ***Prestige Factor***

Many students and parents overemphasize the importance of a university's prestige or "rank" when choosing where to get an education. Be certain you know why you are choosing a particular school, and be especially honest about the prestige factor. If attending a high-profile college is important to you, admit it. If you are not honest with yourself, you may end up at a school for all the wrong reasons, such as ego or family or peer pressure.

### ***Class Size and Quality***

Many guides list something labelled "average class size" or "student-faculty ratio." Neither of these statistics means much since most colleges calculate these figures using whichever numbers put them in the best light. A more enlightening figure is the percent of classes with fewer than twenty-five students in them. Course quality is much more important than class size. Huge courses taught by great professors are more rewarding than tiny courses taught by boring lecturers. On the other hand, don't expect to be able to talk individually with a professor whose course has an enrolment of hundreds.

Some schools place a large amount of emphasis on the quality of their teachers, while others are more interested in getting the best researchers. It is worth considering exactly who will be teaching you. At universities with large graduate schools, you can be certain that many of the teachers will be doctoral candidates rather than professors. Just because a person was smart enough to get into a doctoral programme doesn't mean the person knows how to teach (although not all professors are great teachers either). At most schools (particularly the larger ones) you can be pretty certain that a Nobel prize winner will not be teaching a freshman level course.

### ***Student Satisfaction***

One statistic provided in most guidebooks and websites is the percent of freshmen (or "freshers") returning for a second year. A high number indicates that most first year students were satisfied with the school and were successful. If this statistic seems low, it would be good to find out why.

### ***Career Services***

Graduate school, career opportunities, and networking options can all play a role after graduation. Check for the percent of students who actually graduate. For this

statistic you'll need to be careful, since some schools give a student four years, others five years, and a few, six years to earn a diploma. If you think you may want to go on to law school, medical school, or graduate school, you should find out what percent of graduating students were admitted. If available, look also at what graduates are doing six months after graduation. Research the job information, career, and placement services offered on campus.

### **Course/Programmes/Majors**

While students must apply for and enrol in a specific course in the UK, many high school students going to US colleges have no idea what their majors will be; and a large percentage of students who think they know will change their majors during their undergraduate years. It is perfectly acceptable to begin a US college "undecided" about a major.

If you think you have decided on a particular area of study, you should make sure the schools you are considering offer that course or major and then try to assess the relative quality of the programme. You may start by looking at the number of students majoring in the subject, the size of the faculty, and what special resources are available for studying the subject and for internship opportunities. Searching on the *MyRoad*, *Family Connection*, *TQi*, *HERO*, or *UCAS* sites gives you a good start with these questions. Talking to parents, teachers, or people who work in the field you are considering may also provide valuable information.

It's a good idea to focus at least as much attention on the overall quality of a school as on the quality of the particular department in which you may now be interested, especially if you are applying in Canada, the US, or even Scotland. Take into account the possibility of a change in your interests while you are attending. You ought to feel reasonably confident that the colleges to which you are applying will offer you a solid education across the board.

### **Cost and Quality**

There is little to no relationship between the tuition charged by a particular college and the quality of the education. A university that costs Canadian \$20,000 per year is not two times better than one that costs C\$10,000. Some schools have huge endowments of money to support their educational programmes. Publicly supported schools use tax money to pay a portion of the costs. Although a student may be asked to pay \$20,000, a particular school may actually spend \$30,000 or \$40,000 each year to educate each student. A more accurate figure to look at is the amount each college spends to educate each student, rather than the cost of tuition. Don't choose a school merely because it costs less—or more. *This is an important topic to discuss with your parents. It doesn't do much good to be accepted to a university you cannot afford to attend!*

### **UK Finance for Higher Education**

UK and EU nationals resident in the UK for at least three calendar years (referred to as "home" students) have most university fees paid by the government. Scottish and EU home students pay no tuition fees in Scotland. England, Wales, and Northern Ireland have passed laws allowing universities to add a variable fee up to

about £9000 for a home student. Non EU students with permanent residency status also usually qualify for home status; the decision rests with the university.

Students living in Scotland who attend university or college in the UK are funded by the Student Awards Agency for Scotland or SAAS ([www.student-support-saas.gov.uk](http://www.student-support-saas.gov.uk)). Support may include payment of fees outwith Scotland and loans and support for housing expenses. Payment may be deferred until after graduation by taking out a loan from SAAS. Repayments start once a graduate is earning £15,000 per year, deducted regularly from wages on a sliding scale.

International students or other students not resident in the UK for three calendar years before enrolling in university will probably be expected to pay international fees independently; these fees are much higher than for “home” students.

### **Australian Finance for Higher Education**

Australian citizens living anywhere in the world have access to Australian universities at a minimal tuition rate as most expenses are paid by the country, with university graduates living in Australia repaying, as in the UK, directly out of their salary. International students fees are much higher; students are expected to pay all expenses themselves with family support.

### **Canadian Universities and Financial Aid**

Both resident and international tuition fees across Canada vary from university to university, from province to province and also from programme to programme. Canadian citizens living anywhere in the world qualify for domestic tuition rates. Canadian students may apply for federal and provincial financial aid (mostly loans), and scholarships may be available for domestic and international students. Applicants should contact the university directly.

### **US Universities, Financial Aid and Scholarships**

The cost of a university education in the United States varies from state to state, school to school, even student to student. Not attending high school in any state may mean a student must pay out-of-state tuition at state-funded universities, but not always. Students attending international schools should ask specific questions about residency requirements and whether the state/university allows for “temporary out-of-state” consideration. See your counsellors for a website giving information state-by-state as a starting point. *This is still an important question to ask each university, as some schools are stricter or not-as-strict as the specific state descriptions.*

One of the concerns expressed by many students (actually more often by their parents) relates to the cost of a college education, as the costs of a US university education can be very high--and students (again, more often their parents) are responsible for paying all expenses themselves. Federal financial aid is available for US citizens or permanent residents who demonstrate “financial need” as determined by a federal formula. Need-based financial aid in the form of grants or low-interest loans and student work-study programmes are available to qualified

students on the basis of the information submitted on either the “Free Application for Federal Student Aid”—or *FAFSA* or the College Board *CSS/Financial Aid Profile*. On the form, your parents will list information about assets, income, and other data from their US income tax forms. This information will be subjected to a formula and a determination will be made about the amount your family can reasonably be expected to contribute toward your education. The difference between your family’s contribution and the total cost will be your financial need. If the results from this form show there is financial need, the school will probably offer you a loan, grant, work-study programme, or more likely, a combination of all three.

To apply for need based financial aid, your parents must complete the *FAFSA* or the *CSS/Financial Aid Profile* after January 1st of your senior year. Your parents must calculate—but they do not need to send in—their US income taxes to complete the form. The *FAFSA* can be completed online ([www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)) as can the *CSS/Financial Aid Profile* (<https://profileonline.collegeboard.com/index.jsp>).

The reality is that very few ISA families qualify for need-based financial aid, but you should still submit one of the forms as it may qualify you for other aid, scholarships, or on-campus jobs. If you think you have an “unusual circumstance” which should be considered, you should discuss it directly with a financial aid officer of the college.

Some universities realize that talented students will have a number of acceptance offers and grant merit awards as an incentive to attract them. At some universities, achievement awards or talent grants are given to students who demonstrate a particular talent in sports, the arts, leadership, social service, or academics. These grants are offered regardless of a student’s financial need and are sometimes open to non-US citizens. By Ivy League agreement, these most selective schools only provide need-based financial aid.

**Financial Aid for non-citizens.** Very few schools in the world offer financial aid to students who are not citizens of that country, so the cost of a particular college may become a large factor in your choice. In most countries you will not be granted a student visa unless you can prove you have sufficient financial resources to pay for your college, living expenses, and a return trip to your home country upon completion of your education. Only a small percentage of schools offer financial aid for international students. If you are an international student and you must have aid, don’t waste your time applying to schools that don’t offer it. Because the amount of aid available to international students is limited, schools will only offer it to the very strongest applicants. A general rule of thumb is that if you are an international student who requires financial aid, you will need to be among a college’s top applicants in order to receive an offer of aid. If your scores or grades are marginal for that school, you will most likely be rejected, since money will be allocated among the top students, and the college cannot admit you without proof that your family will be able to pay your bills.

### **3 HOW MANY AND IN WHAT RANGE?**

While it's not unusual for students to talk of their "first choice" college, there really is not a single, best university for anyone. Even if, as a result of the homework you do on schools, you arrive at a point where you consider one school your "first choice," your final list should include a number of universities, any of which you'd be happy to attend if admitted.

There comes a point when you have to narrow your list of potentials down to a manageable number. In the UK, you may apply to a maximum of five courses. A range of five to seven applications is reasonable in any country. If you need to complete a different application for each school, you need enough time to do a thorough job on each, rather than ending up in a panic in November and December, possibly doing a poor job because you are overextended. With many US or Canadian applications requiring a fee of around US\$50, and adding in costs of sending standardised test scores when needed, applying to more than seven can cost a considerable amount.

To make certain you will be admitted to at least one, you'll want to apply to a range of colleges. If you choose only colleges to which you are very likely to gain admission, it makes sense to apply to even fewer than five.

#### ***Likely, Possible, and Reach***

The following is a rough guideline for you to use as you categorize your choices: Apply to one or two "reach" schools - universities that normally accept students with IB scores, grade point averages (GPA), and test scores higher than yours; two to four "possible" or mid-range schools - those that generally accept students with profiles similar to yours; and one or two "likelies" or "safeties" - colleges for which you are an extremely strong candidate. *Be certain that your safety school is a school you would be happy to attend as you may end up there!* Stranger things have happened. Remember that what may be a likely school for you might be a reach school for one of your friends. This categorization varies for each person. Be realistic about your grades, IB predictions, SAT or ACT scores, and the rest of your application.

You need to realize that only the most exceptional students are accepted at Harvard, Cambridge, Oxford, Stanford, Rice, and other prestigious universities. Harvard, for example, has about 2,100 slots for the over 19,000 students who apply each year. These kinds of schools could (and often do) fill their entire freshman classes with students who earn all A's and SAT's of 2260+. Because of the number applying, Harvard ordinarily must deny over 1000 class valedictorians and hundreds of students with perfect scores on the SAT. Oxford reports that about 10,000 qualified applicants were not given offers this year!

If you are a truly exceptional student who has a realistic chance at the highly selective US universities, you may improve your chances of gaining acceptance to at least one by sending a higher number of "reach" applications. Because of the

large numbers of outstanding students applying to the most selective schools, many acceptance decisions will be made based on extremely fine and subjective distinctions. You still must make sure you have at least one “likely” choice. There are few guarantees in the admission game. Each year a few students are admitted to places where the odds seemed impossible. Unfortunately, the opposite occasionally occurs as well: a college looked like a safe bet, but a letter of rejection arrived anyway.

In the UK, a student may apply to *either* Oxford or Cambridge, never both. If this interests you, visit and research these schools well—and early—so that you are certain the university (and the specific college at that university) is truly the one you would like to attend. A Cambridge & Oxford Information Day is offered in March, usually in Edinburgh—it’s worth attending if you are interested in either!

Using the method of applying to some likely, some mid-range, and some reach schools is the best way to avoid being shut out in the spring. So how do you decide which school is at which level?

**Look at *Family Connection*, *UCAS.com*, and the *Princeton Review Counselor-o-matic***

ISA counsellors have compiled data ISA students’ applications over the last several years. This data has been added to Naviance *Family Connection* (<http://connection.naviance.com/isa>; as described in Chapter 2) and is used to generate scattergrams that show acceptance and denial information by college. The chart plots the ISA end-of-junior-year cumulative GPA, best SAT or IB score, and (most importantly) whether the applicant was admitted, waitlisted, or denied. Obviously, the student names are *not* provided.

If previous ISA students have applied to a school that interests you, check how a student with similar grades and scores fared with his or her application using the “Scattergrams” button. Although the data is sometimes contradictory (that is, students with lower grades or scores were sometimes admitted while students with higher numbers were denied), it can give you an approximation of your chances of admission.

The main reason that contradictions occur is because applications contain more than just grades and test scores. Maybe one student was taking harder courses, was a student leader, and had outstanding recommendations, while the other student did nothing except come to school each day and make good grades. In general, however, you may be able to use the scattergram information to help you identify which schools are reaches, mid-ranges, and likelies for your own particular situation. This information is not as helpful for UK schools, because it cannot yet be categorized by the course within the university. But it is still very interesting!

Another useful website for US universities and colleges is the *Princeton Review Counselor-O-Matic* in which you enter information about your academics, interests, and extracurricular activities and it lists universities in the three ranges discussed above. (<http://www.princetonreview.com/college/research/advsearch/match.asp>)

Once you know your chances at a school, you can research it further in either *Family Connection* using the “College Lookup” button and links to each school’s

own website. If it seems like a good match for you, click on the “Add to List” button, and that college will remain in your list, unless you later decide to delete it.

## **US Universities**

### **Check the Percent Accepted**

If there is no ISA-specific application statistic in *Family Connection*, you can make a guess on your chances of admission by finding out how many students are usually admitted in a given year. The most selective schools only admit 10 to 20 percent of the applicants. Certainly your chances of getting into that selective a school are less than into one that admits 60 to 70 percent of the students. Find the percent of accepted students in most of the published college guides or on the *Family Connection* College Lookup link.

Every year there are a few “hot” schools to which everyone seems to apply. As a result, they attract a huge number of applications and become much more selective than they may have been in the past. Sometimes this happens when a school shows up for the first time rated highly by one of the ranking newspaper, magazine, or book. This situation creates a vicious cycle. When a student hears about a hot school, the reaction is often, “Hey, I’d better apply too!” But the more people who apply, the more people who are going to be rejected.

That doesn’t mean you shouldn’t apply to a hot school. It just means you shouldn’t depend on getting in, even if your grades and test scores would ordinarily make you a strong contender. Pay some attention to where your classmates are applying and use your judgment. If you decide to apply to a certain school because you read an interesting article about it in *US News & World Report* or *The Sunday Times*, remember that several thousand other people may have read about it too.

Some colleges accept students for mid-year admission who might ordinarily be denied for autumn. If you are sold on a college that might otherwise be a reach for you, check to see if there are alternate admission seasons. Also check to see if there is a greater possibility of acceptance in a second choice major. For example, computer engineering might be extremely selective at a school, while other engineering courses could be somewhat more accessible. However, if you truly want to study science, don’t apply for a major in classics just to gain admission -- it’s not always possible to switch courses.

### **Compare GPA, ACT, SAT Score Information**

Most US schools now list GPAs. ACT and SAT scores in middle fifty percentile bands—which means that one-half of the admitted students had scores within that range. Twenty-five percent of the students had scores below and twenty-five percent of the students had scores above that band.

You may be tempted to automatically eliminate schools if you do not have scores that place you in that middle fifty percent. That is a mistake. It may be easier to get into a school than the scores suggest, depending upon whether and how the school has reported the scores. Look at more data than this one piece of information!

If you’ve only taken the PSAT/NMSQT so far, comparing your scores with SAT averages can be misleading--and disappointing--since most students’ SAT scores

are higher than their PSAT scores. Non-native English speakers are also not expected to have the same level of reading comprehension and writing test scores, as many will be required to sit the TOEFL. Certainly you should never discount a college based on these statistics alone.

### **Check the TOEFL Minimum**

If you are a non-native English speaker and are asked to submit TOEFL or IELTS scores, contact the particular school's Admission Office or look on their website to find out the minimum score required for admission. Students attending ISA enrolled in grade-level or IB English courses should have no difficulty with the TOEFL or IELTS as they assess basic levels of English to determine chances of success studying in the English language. If you do not earn the minimum, you will probably be denied.

### **UK Universities**

On the UCAS website, you may search by course titles, and then follow the links to basic entry requirements for that specific course. Most of these sites include minimum IB scores required to be considered for the course. As in applying for US universities, these numbers vary somewhat each year based on the applicant pool, but they will give you a general idea of where this course and university fit in your scheme of Reach, Possible, Likely. Contact the university directly for more specific information.

### **Back to the Numbers Question**

Earlier in this section, we advised you to apply to a range of five to seven schools. There are a number of reasons why you shouldn't apply to many more than seven:

First, applying to ten or more schools suggests that you haven't done your research well. Using information such as at the *UCAS*, *TQI*, and *Princeton Review* websites or the scattergrams in *Family Connection*, and discussing your options with your counsellor and parents, you should be able to choose a reasonable number.

Second, it will be difficult and very time-consuming to complete a large number of applications. Rarely do students do a good job when faced with so many different essays and forms--in addition to keeping up with schoolwork, IB requirements, and extracurricular activities. It's much better to do an excellent job on a reasonable number of applications than to do a mediocre job on a larger number. Third, it can be expensive applying to colleges.

Fourth, when decision-making time arrives, universities sometimes ask the counsellor how many applications the student has completed, or how likely they are to attend that university. If you've applied to many colleges, your counsellor will not be able to give the inquiring college the answer they are looking for. And finally, colleges do monitor their "yield" from each high school (how many accepted students actually attend). Students who apply to large numbers cause the yield from ISA to go down. Colleges notice this and may be less likely to take future applicants from our school. In the interest of future students at ISA as well as in the interest of doing an excellent job and having your applications taken seriously, please take our advice about limiting the number of colleges to which you apply.

In the end, you can attend only one university. Do your research and homework ahead of time so that you are applying to five to seven universities where you'd be happy!

## 4 WHAT ELSE? English Language and Admission Tests

When you think about applying to university, test scores are often the first things that come to mind. As explained earlier, test scores are the primary acceptance factor if you're applying to universities in the UK; this also includes SAT, SAT Subject Test, and ACT scores. However, there are a few specific tests required for some courses at some UK universities. For courses in law, some universities require the National Admissions Test for Law (LNAT). Several universities require either the UK Clinical Aptitude Test (UKCAT) or the Bio-Medical Admissions Test (BMAT) for courses in medicine. It's crucial that you look at the university's prospectus or on the UCAS website for specific course requirements and register to sit these exams as directed.

If your native language (mother tongue) is not English, you may be required to sit an exam that tests your abilities specifically in English—the IELTS or the TOEFL:

### **IELTS: The International English Language Testing System**

If English is not your first language and you are applying for a university in the UK, you may be given an offer that includes a score on the IELTS. The IELTS tests listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The IELTS is not currently offered in Aberdeen; the nearest test centre is in Edinburgh so it's important to plan ahead and register early to assure yourself a place. You register online for the IELTS, and should visit their website early to learn more about the test. You will need your admission ticket and photo id—again a passport is preferable. <http://www.ielts.org/>

### **TOEFL: The Test of English as a Foreign Language**

If English is not your native language and you are applying for US or Canadian universities, you should probably take the TOEFL even though you are attending an English-medium school. Your native language (not citizenship) is the factor that determines whether you must take the TOEFL. Although the test is expensive, it may be to your advantage to take it even if you are now at a native English level. When an admission officer reviews your application file, the TOEFL score will immediately remind him or her that you were raised speaking another language. That reminder can be especially helpful if your SAT critical reading and writing scores are a bit low. If you are uncertain whether you need to take the TOEFL, talk to your counsellor to see what makes sense for you.

The TOEFL is designed to focus more on integrating language skills, emphasizing your overall ability to communicate in English. It includes four sections: reading, listening, speaking and writing. The TOEFL tests language that occurs in the classroom for academic purposes. Since ISA students listen, read, write and speak in academic English every day at school, they will probably do well on the TOEFL. You may take the paper-based TOEFL, which tests reading, listening, and writing; or the Internet-based TOEFL which also includes speaking. The paper-based TOEFL is given at ISA; if you wish to sit the Internet-based TOEFL, you will have to travel to London or elsewhere in England.

You register online for the TOEFL. Visit the TOEFL website for practice materials, test date and locations, cost and registration. You may also order score reports online. You will need photo ID, a photocard, which is sent in with your test, and your admission ticket—a passport is preferable. [www.ets.org/toefl](http://www.ets.org/toefl).

## **US-Based Admissions Tests**

For students applying to the US, the answer to the question of “How important is the ACT or SAT?” is a complex one. If you ask an admission officer from a selective US university if the SAT scores are the most important part of an application, the answer will be “no.” You will hear something like, “The SAT’s are one factor, but grades and the strength of your course work are more important,” or “You should spend more time worrying about your grades and getting involved with helping others than worrying about your SAT scores” or even “SAT’s are overemphasized.”

But when that same admission officer begins wading through the stacks of applications and has to decide which applicants admit and which to reject, those test scores become important. Many applicants will have roughly the same grades, the same positive recommendations, and the same well-written essays. If that’s the case, scores on the ACT or SAT may well break the tie.

Admission officers may believe there are better ways to measure university preparation (which there are), but they still see the SAT or ACT as measures of your ability. And the more selective the university, the more important scores seem to become. The bottom line is that the ACT or SAT scores are probably more important than Admission Officers say they are, and less important than you or your parents think they are.

For your information, here’s a description of some of these assessments:

### **PSAT/NMSQT**

Each October, ISA students in grades 10 and 11 take the Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test. The test follows the SAT format (containing reading comprehension, math, and writing items) and can give an early indication of your likely SAT scores. Scores on this test range from 20 to 80 on each subtest and correlate with the 200 to 800 SAT scale.

Colleges and universities do not receive these scores. PSAT/NMSQT scores are used by the US-based National Merit Scholarship Corporation to determine eligibility to enter the National Merit Scholar Competition. US citizens and permanent residents who perform exceptionally well on the PSAT/NMSQT are identified as “Commended,” or National Merit “Semi-Finalists.” Semi-Finalists with extremely high SAT scores, good grades, and positive recommendations may be named as “National Merit Scholars” and could win scholarships. Some companies and foundations use these scores to determine eligibility for scholarships; your parents should check with their employers about these!

ISA uses the PSAT/NMSQT as another measure of how our students are doing in preparation for university, and it provides you valuable practice in taking a college entrance exam. You (and your parents) should refrain from getting overly upset about low PSAT scores. Most students are going to earn lower scores than they will when they take the SAT later because they will continue learning math, reading, and writing!

## **The SAT**

The results of SAT or ACT scores are usually the only common comparison a university will have between students coming from a variety of schools and backgrounds. In combination with grades, SAT scores can help to predict who will be successful. The SAT (or the similar ACT test) is required by nearly all universities in the US or Canada. IB scores are released too late for admission comparisons; US and Canadian universities may use IB scores for placement or advanced credit but most will not use them in making admissions decisions.

The more high school math, science, social studies, and English courses you complete, the better your scores will be. That's why we encourage you to sit your first SAT Reasoning Test or ACT the second semester of your junior year.

ISA offers the SAT fives Saturdays a year. You may want to take it once in your junior year (May or June) and then once or twice in the fall of your senior year (October, November, December). While the SAT is offered in January also, ISA is not a test centre on that test date.

### ***SAT Reasoning Test***

When people talk about "the SAT," they are talking about the recently renamed "SAT Reasoning Test", previously known as the SAT-I. The SAT Reasoning Test has seven sections and takes about four hours to complete. Each of the three areas of the test – math, critical reading, and writing – is scored separately, with possible scores ranging from 200 to 800 in each area, for a total possible score of 2400. [Before spring, 2005, the SAT consisted of only verbal and math scores, so the top score was a 1600]

The questions on the Critical Reading sections assess your ability to read, comprehend, and analyze short and long passages taken from a variety of fields such as science, the humanities, social studies, literature, and fiction. They also test your ability to make inferences from what is written and to recognize relationships among parts of a text.

The Mathematics sections include content from algebra I, algebra II, geometry, statistics, functions, probability, and data analysis. You may use a calculator on the math sections of the SAT.

The Writing section includes a 25-minute student-written essay as well as multiple-choice questions on grammar, usage, word choice, and the writing process. Two readers score each essay, using a 1 to 6 scale, with 12 being the highest mark possible. That score is combined with your score on multiple-choice questions to produce your total Writing section score. Colleges that receive your scores will be

able to view and print your essay. Essay questions will ask you to take a position on an issue and support it with examples from your studies and experiences. It is scored holistically, looking at content, organization and language usage. While a few errors in spelling and grammar will not lower your score, it will start to affect your essay grade if you have many errors. Most universities are still only using the Writing to help with placement decisions; they feel it's too new to rely on as a piece of the admission puzzle.

A booklet entitled *Taking the SAT Reasoning Test* is available in the Careers and University Room. It provides useful hints and practice tests that you can take to become more familiar with the SAT Reasoning Test. The CollegeBoard (your *MyRoad*) website also provides advice and practice questions.

### **SAT Subject Tests**

Until recently, SAT Subject Tests were called the SAT-II's. Subject Tests are required by the more selective US colleges, by the University of California system, and are sometimes requested by UK universities as another measure of your ability or knowledge in a specific subject. These are one-hour tests, which cover individual subjects studied in high school. During any SAT test date, you can choose to take exams in one, two, or three subjects. **You cannot take both the SAT Reasoning Test and SAT Subject Tests on the same day.**

Most subjects are offered on each SAT test date. The notable exceptions are the Foreign Language with Listening tests, which are offered only in November. If your first language is not English, you will not be able to sit a Subject Test in your first language, since the test is designed for students who have completed three or four years of high school language study.

If you think you need SAT Subject Test scores, plan to sit the SAT Subject Tests in October, November or December of your senior year, as you will have had maximum time in chosen courses. A booklet entitled *Taking the SAT Subject Tests* is available in the Careers and University Room and can help you determine which exams you may want to sit, as well as give you practice with each subject. While you are asked to indicate which subject exams you plan to take at the time you register for the SAT Subject Tests, you can change your mind on the day of the test.

The majority of US universities do not require SAT Subject Test scores. If colleges ask for the SAT Subject Tests, you should plan to take math and one or two other tests of your choice. Each school's website can tell you whether they require or recommend the SAT Subject Tests. If you're not sure where you'll be applying but you are strong in an academic area, consider taking a test in that subject early in your senior year.

### **SAT Scores**

When students talk about their SAT score ("I scored 1750; how about you?"), they are referring to the combined mathematics, critical reading, and writing scores on the SAT Reasoning Test. The average for each of the sections is around 500. About half of the college bound juniors earn combined scores over 1500 and about half earn scores under 1500.

The easiest way to determine how you did is to check your percentile score. A percentile score judges your performance relative to other students who took the test. If you earn an SAT score at the 50th percentile, it means you scored better than 50 out of 100 typical college-bound students who took the test. In other words, if you lined up 100 students from the lowest (1) to the highest (100) scores, you would be number 50. Be careful not to confuse percents with percentiles. They have very different meanings. SAT Subject Test percentiles often seem low because students taking the SAT Subject Tests are generally a very strong group. Remember, percentiles compare you to other test takers and, for example, only the very best higher-level math students choose to sit the SAT Math IIC Subject Test.

Nearly all universities require an official copy of your SAT scores; this means your score must be sent to them directly from the testing agency (ETS). When you register for an SAT you have the option of sending your official scores to four schools at no additional charge. Beginning in 2009, you can select which scores to send to schools by test date (not different scores from various test dates). You can have your official scores sent later—and you *must* at some point have your official scores sent—but it will cost you \$9 or more for each report you send.

### ***Retaking the SAT***

Students often ask how many times they should take the SAT. Generally the answer is twice, but certainly no more than three times. If you take it too often, you start to look desperate to universities. Most students show score improvement the second time they take the test—on average, 15-20 points on Reading Comprehension and 15-20 points on Math (Writing is too new to tell). Taking the SAT more than twice will rarely improve your scores much more. Since students at ISA take the PSAT in grades 10 and 11, by the time they take the SAT a second time, it could be the fourth or fifth time they've taken an SAT-type test. If you are in despair due to your PSAT scores, remember that your SAT scores will probably be better; especially since you will take more math and English courses, read a lot, and communicate in English as much as possible (if it's not your first language).

### ***SAT Prep Programmes***

There are a bewildering array of books and computer programmes available to help you prepare for the SAT Reasoning Test. As long as they don't take time away from your homework or other activities, spending a little time using one makes sense. An optional SAT-prep course is sometimes offered at your expense in Aberdeen in the autumn and spring. The College Board Website has daily SAT questions and hints.

Remember, a change in your SAT Reasoning Test scores may help distinguish you from other applicants; but so may success in an especially rigorous set of courses, involvement in school or community activities, or demonstrating an outstanding talent. If you are attending summer school somewhere and want to also take an SAT prep course, go ahead. But don't go to summer school simply to take an SAT course. It is not worth the expense, and will not impress colleges.

### **The ACT**

The ACT is a three+ hour test developed by the American College Testing Programme. The ACT test consists of four sections: English, Mathematics, Reading

Comprehension, and Science Reasoning. Scores range from 1 to 36 for each of the subtests, along with an average or “composite score.” The ACT includes an optional 30-minute writing test in October and April, when the test is offered at ISA. The writing test is scored by two readers on a 1 to 6 scale, with 12 being the highest possible grade. As with the SAT, you may have your scores sent to four universities without additional cost if you indicate those schools when you register on line for the ACT ([www.act.org](http://www.act.org)).

Most colleges will accept ACT or SAT scores, although a few highly selective colleges may require you to submit SAT Subject Test scores with your ACT scores. Because the format of the ACT is different from the SAT Reasoning Test, some students seem to do better on one than the other, so taking both tests gives the universities more information about them. If you choose to sit the ACT, be sure to also write the optional essay.

### **Registering for Admission Tests**

Each test requires a different registration procedure, but there is one thing that the tests have in common—they will all ask you for your high school “College Entrance Examination Board” (or CEEB) code. **ISA’s CEEB Code is 791042.**

**SAT** The SAT is given at ISA in October, November, December, May, and June. Registration for the SAT Reasoning and Subjects Tests is best done on-line at [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com). You must register again each time you want to take a test. Register using your *MyRoad* user name and password. **Be sure to use your full legal name** and, if you’re a US citizen, include your Social Security number. This helps the universities match your scores to your application more easily. If you do not register online by the deadline, talk to your counsellor about taking the SAT as a Standby and pick up a registration booklet and form to complete and bring with you to the test.

On the morning of the test, bring your admission ticket or registration packet with payment, photo ID, your calculator, pencils, water and a snack for the breaks.

**ACT** registration procedures are very similar. You register online for the ACT at <http://www.actstudent.org/index.html>. As you set up your account, remember **to use your full legal name** and, if you’re a US citizen, include your Social Security number. This helps the universities match your scores to your application more easily. You should always register for the ACT and the optional essay. You’ll be guided to print out your admission ticket.

The ACT is given at ISA in October and April. On the test date, bring your admission ticket, photo ID, a calculator, pencils, water and a snack.

### ***Sending your Official Scores***

When you take an SAT, ACT, TOEFL, IELTS, or IB exam, you are the person who receives and “owns” the scores. Although the counsellors usually receive a copy of your SAT or ACT results— assuming you listed ISA (**791042**) as your high school— most universities do not consider these reports to be “official.” When you register

for the test online (or by paper) you should indicate at least four schools to which you want scores sent, and for the SAT Reasoning Test, you can select which date's scores you'd like to send. Remember, only you can send your official scores—your counsellor can't. You may pay an additional fee to have scores sent to more schools, either when you register or later on the test's website.

The best way to prepare for standardized tests is to take the most challenging courses you can (including math), read--both for school and for pleasure, get a good night's sleep the night before the test, and eat a good breakfast before reporting for the test!

## 5 HOW DO THEY DECIDE?

How does a college or university decide who gets admitted?

For **UK universities**, the decision is based primarily upon your qualifications, which usually means your exam scores. You will enter your SAT scores on the UCAS application and your predicted IB scores will be included in the reference section.

You should also write a great personal statement introducing yourself and your interest in the specific course at university. In some cases, you will be asked to attend an interview, meeting with one or more admissions tutors and academic staff members, who will then make their decision, taking your interview into account. Conditional offers are usually made, which name the total and/or any individual subject scores the applicant must earn to gain a place in that particular course.

*Spending time learning about careers in your chosen course by work experience, volunteer activities, site visits, or interviews will tell the admission tutor that you are truly interested in this course.* When comparing two applicants who look equal in classes and predicted scores, universities will often make an offer to the student who spent the time exploring that particular field or the student who sounds more interesting--and more interested in the particular course.

UK Universities are more familiar with IB scores than with SAT, ACT, or a High School Diploma. If you are not enrolled in the IB Diploma Programme and may not have the qualifications they identify as minimal, you may want to consider applying for an Access Course or a Foundation Year. Access courses are held in various universities; the University of Aberdeen offers a Summer Access as well as courses throughout the academic year. If you pass the Access Course, you will have qualifications that may meet the requirements of the universities in which you are interested.

For **US and Canadian institutions**, it's even more complicated. Each college asks for a different set of information and each one places a different amount of weight on components. The following are the usual things they'll consider as they make their decision. Although each factor is listed independently, in actual practice an admission officer views no single factor in isolation. All of the documents and forms are stuffed into one big folder (or scanned and kept in one computer file) and reviewed together.

### **Your Grades and Transcript**

Admission officers are interested in many things, but one of the things they're most interested in is making sure the students they admit as freshmen won't flunk out. All colleges want to fill their classes with students who are capable of doing the work. No university wants to traumatize students by throwing them into a situation they aren't equipped to handle.

As we've said before, the best indication schools have of how well you'll do in university is how well you've done in high school. High school grades are better predictors of college success than anything else—yes, even better than SAT

scores. As a result, most US admission officers pay a lot of attention to the classes you've taken and the grades you've earned since ninth grade. The more successful you've been, the better your chances of admission will be.

As your transcript is examined, each year will be seen as more important than the previous one. Nothing looks better than steadily improving grades—except great grades all four years. Marks from the junior and the first half of the senior year are most important. If you really messed up your freshman year, don't despair. Admission officers are pretty good about discounting isolated problems, as long as they happened early in high school and you explain them honestly. If you struggled your entire ninth grade year but then pulled yourself together for the rest of high school, most admission officers won't be overly concerned. Some schools, especially those in California, don't even consider your freshman year grades when making an admission decision.

The Grade Point Average calculated by ISA might not be the GPA used by a university when they review your application. High schools use many different sets of grading systems and weightings; therefore many colleges recalculate each student's GPA. The university may drop out IB weightings, eliminate PE or elective classes, or discount freshman grades completely. Rather than focusing on a GPA, most admission officers review your transcript globally by looking at the overall number of A's, B's and C's while at the same time carefully looking at the specific courses you've been taking.

### ***Courses You've Taken***

All A's are not created equal. The names of the courses are printed next to the semester grades earned. Admission officers and high school counsellors are often asked, "Is a B in a hard course better than an A in an easy course?" Stanford University warns applicants to "Be careful not to assume that the world is divided between students who take difficult courses and get B's and the students who take easy courses and get A's. Most of our applicants are able to take difficult courses *and* earn A's."

Granted, most students don't earn all A's, but the general principle still applies. If you can handle the work in advanced courses, you should be taking them. If it is obvious by your transcript that you are taking a lighter load than you can handle, admission officers are going to wonder about your motivation. They will be especially concerned if the difficulty of your course load drops off noticeably in your senior year. On the other hand, continuing to make good grades in four or five IB courses is more impressive than a mediocre performance in a full IB diploma course load. Don't get in over your head. Earning a D in an IB Biology course is not impressive at any time.

Sometimes moving into a new school late in high school limits the courses you are able to take. You need to take the most challenging courses available to you. Universities don't want to see that you "took the easy road" when moving into a new school. Your counsellors and IB Coordinator will help you make course choices that will help you avoid this.

### **Senior Grades Count**

Although you will apply in the autumn of your senior year, many universities require or request an updated seventh semester transcript after that first semester of grade 12. If you slack off during the first semester of your senior year or drop your hard courses midyear, you can ruin the chances of being admitted to a selective school. Colleges really do care about your 12<sup>th</sup> grade grades, and will also require a final transcript for all students. There have been cases of students having acceptances withdrawn due to poor senior grades. It's rare, but it has happened, so work hard to avoid "senior slump."

### **How Good is the High School?**

You are undoubtedly aware that different teachers hand out grades in different ways. Much the same is true of different high schools. An "A" in courses at international schools such as The International School of Aberdeen is often perceived by admission officers to be worth a lot more than an A from a typical US high school. Your counsellors have made a point of getting to know admission officers and making them familiar with ISA. It's fair to say that nearly all are impressed with the quality of our school, which certainly helps your chances as they look at your transcript.

When admission officers sit down to go through the stacks of applications, one of the most important things they have to do is decide how impressed they should be with an individual school. ISA, like most university preparatory schools, sends along a "High School Profile" with each transcript we send. This helps the admission officer understand a bit about our school, our courses and grading system, how students have done through grade 11, and where our graduates go after high school.

### **Were Previous Graduates Successful at their school?**

A computer database can be a wonderful thing. Many colleges use one to track how students from a particular high school have fared at their institution. Some go so far as to predict what they think a student's freshman GPA will be and compare that to what really happens. Hopefully ISA grads have done well at the universities to which you apply!

### **Your Test Scores**

The vast majority of universities are definitely interested in your test scores. The more selective the institution, the more interest there seems to be in scores. At the most selective schools nearly all applicants have top grades; therefore, test scores are used to distinguish you from the rest of the applicants. Many universities will ask for your predicted IB scores as well as SAT or ACT scores to get a complete picture of you as a student.

An admission officer does not look at SAT or ACT scores in isolation. They make up one part of your entire application packet. If your SAT scores are weak, the question the admission officer will ask is, "Why?" Perhaps you didn't begin learning English until late in your school career. That could help explain it. If your grades are high, and there is a good reason for your SAT critical reading or writing score to be low, the admission officer will take your lower scores into consideration and

probably give you the benefit of the doubt. A good TOEFL score will help, but it will not completely counterbalance low SAT critical reading and writing scores. There is no getting around the fact that you have to have a certain level of verbal ability to sit in a university lecture hall and understand what is going on around you in the language of the country. That is a major concern of admission officers who don't want to admit someone who really won't be able to keep up.

### ***Relationship between SAT's or ACT's and Grades***

Since it is easier to make A's at some high schools than it is at others, test scores serve to level the field. Once an admission officer has reviewed a student's courses and grades, test scores serve as a sort of confirmation. If something seems out of line the question becomes, "What's going on?" For example, if a young man has 2100+ SAT's and a bunch of B and C grades, a flag is raised. Comments regarding motivation are looked for in the recommendation letters.

At the other end of the spectrum, a student who has low scores and high grades will also come under scrutiny. An admission officer will wonder why that happened. Does the high school inflate grades resulting in many undeserving students earning A's? Or is the student a really high achiever, working hard to be successful in every class, but not a good test-taker? Again, the question is why the grades and scores don't seem to match.

### ***Optional SAT's***

There are over 200 US universities who have made the submission of test scores optional. These schools have conducted studies on what best predicts success at their institutions. Since grades in high school often come out as the better predictor, they have stopped requiring SAT's or ACT's and instead make a decision based on grades and the other information contained in your application.

The obvious problem with this system is that students who earn high scores always submit them anyway (wouldn't you?). Therefore, the admission officers know that if you didn't send yours, it probably means that you didn't do so well. Still, if you have good grades and low scores and the college doesn't require you to submit scores, it would probably be to your advantage not to send them. Most of the "optional testing" colleges will ask you to submit a graded paper as part of your application packet. This gives the schools a good perspective on the quality of your work and the grading standard of our high school.

### ***Are you Interesting?***

A university would be a pretty dull place if only those students who liked to sit in a library and read were admitted. All admission officers are looking for more than just students who are capable of earning good grades. They are looking for students who will bring a spark to a class discussion, who will start a new club or society, who will sing in an *a cappella* group, or who will make the dorm a better place to live.

One admission officer said, "When I'm considering an applicant, I try to decide whether this is the kind of student I would want as my son or daughter's roommate." Obviously being a good roommate is not something that can be determined by

looking only at a transcript. Most schools realize a GPA does not make up the total student.

### ***Essay or Personal Statement***

Colleges and universities requiring essays or personal statements use them to determine better who you are and what sets you apart from the other applicants. They want to know what kind of person you are, what you've been doing, and what is important to you. University personnel want to know whether you will be bringing a unique background to the school. In short, are you interesting?

The most constructive advice that can be offered about the essay is not to worry about what you think the college wants to hear. There is no perfect or correct essay. In fact, essay topics that result in hundreds of different responses are purposely chosen so the admissions staff will not have to read the same thing over and over. Your task is to make your essays stand out. Essays that are most effective seize a topic with confidence and imagination. There is no question that an honest, personal, well-developed essay is much more effective than an essay that recites a list of high school achievements which are already listed elsewhere on the application anyway. A good topic is one you want to write about, not one you think you ought to write about. The very best essays are the ones that truly do come from the heart rather than from a list.

An important point to note is that when an essay topic asks you to describe an experience, person, or book that has influenced you, the admission readers are particularly interested in what the influence has been. Be sure to spend at least half of your essay discussing the impact of the event/person/book on you--and not relegate that important point to one final sentence.

### ***Extracurricular Involvement***

To some extent, a university's opinion of how interesting you are has little to do with what you do in class. It's your outside-of-class activities that play a big part in distinguishing you from other applicants. Quality and commitment are much more important than quantity. Students do not impress colleges with one of everything on their applications—one year of soccer, one year as class officer, one season of something else. They are more impressed if you're deeply involved in a few activities and you remain committed to them year after year.

Colleges want to see students who rise to leadership positions. The way to impress an admission officer is to demonstrate that you can stick with something. This doesn't mean you can't become involved in many different activities. To the extent that it's possible, you should try to focus your energies enough to enable you to stand out. It is better to spend three years rising to a position of importance on the student council than it is to join every organization that comes to mind.

Your involvement in high school activities tells the admission officer that you won't just hide out in your dorm room during your four years at uni. Extracurricular activities may help make up for less than stellar grades, but only somewhat. Students deeply involved with too many extracurricular activities often find that their grades suffer as a result. No list of activities will make up for mediocre grades. Don't overextend yourself to the point where your grades suffer.

### ***Awards and Honours***

If you have been an impressive student, you've probably won an award or two. Nearly all applications contain a section in which you are asked to list your academic awards and honours. The reality is that most students don't have much to add to this section. Induction into the National Honor Society, an academic achievement award, and an occasional art or writing award is usually all a student can list. Don't become overly concerned about not being able to come up with a paragraph to fill up this section. In reality, most other students have no more than one or possibly two things to add here as well.

### ***Summer School***

Going to Harvard during the summer of your junior year is not the ticket to being admitted to Harvard later. Since people know that summer sessions at colleges tend not to be as rigorous as the regular session, surviving Harvard summer school will not convince an admission officer that you are capable of doing Harvard work. Don't sign up for summer school just because you think it will impress an admission officer. It won't. On the other hand, there are certainly worse things you could do with your summer. Being on a college campus can be a lot of fun. It will give you a chance to see what life is like there and can help you decide if it's the kind of school you'd like to attend. It certainly beats spending the summer sitting on the couch. Other activities that broaden you as a person can be just as valuable as summer school. Pre-IB or mid-IB summer courses, summer internships, work experience or jobs, volunteer work for a good cause, language immersion programmes, or vigorously pursuing a hobby that has always fascinated you are all worth considering as you plan your summers.

### ***Are you Recommended?***

Teacher and counsellor recommendations or UCAS references can help admission personnel learn more about you. There are several things you can do to increase your chances of a positive and helpful recommendation; but in all honesty, the best thing you can do is simply be a responsible student. Teachers find it easy to write about a student who is polite, involved, and interested in learning.

### ***What the College Needs***

#### ***Diversity***

Many colleges are looking for students whose characteristics or accomplishments match their "institutional priorities." For example, being an unusually talented musician won't guarantee admission anywhere, but can be the "hook" that helps admissions officers distinguish among a number of equally qualified applicants. The accomplished oboist (a necessary but apparently rare member of a college orchestra) is a frequently cited example of performing arts "hook."

Even students who are not Olympic athletes or oboe players may match a college's admissions priorities. Nearly every university is trying to increase the cultural and ethnic diversity found on campus. In fact, many brag about the number of countries represented in their student body. Many universities are trying to increase their overall percentage of international students as well as nationals who have lived

internationally. Students who have experienced life in another country or in an international school have something interesting to contribute to the life of the school.

### ***Undersubscribed Majors or Programmes***

It sometimes seems as though every senior wants to major in engineering, business, or pre-med. These hot majors mean that colleges sometimes have difficulty keeping their humanities programmes viable, so students applying for those majors may have a better chance of acceptance.

Undecided is a perfectly acceptable major if the college doesn't require you to declare a specific major. It's a particularly good response for you if you secretly harbour a desire to be a pre-med or pre-law major. You won't be lying. Some US colleges actually prefer applicants who haven't made up their minds on their majors or careers.

Universities in the UK have statistics on their programmes so that you can find out which course may have more flexibility in its offers. It's useful to search out this information if you are not certain about your programme. The same course in two different universities may have widely differing numbers of applicants.

### ***Keeping Alumni Happy***

Graduates of a university who went on to be highly successful (and rich) are important to a college. When it's time to build a new building, it's alumni who receive letters asking for their contributions. Most schools will ask if you have any relatives who attended the same school. Children of alumni and other "legacies" often have an admission advantage. Parents and siblings are the important ones, but when you're completing your application, don't leave anybody out. At some schools like University of Pennsylvania, legacies are given an advantage only as early decision applicants. Ask your counsellor or the admission officer if a school you are interested in gives an advantage to legacies.

### ***Can You Pay?***

As college expenses go up each year, many institutions are having difficulty staying within their budgets. Most US colleges and universities have a high percentage of students who require some amount of financial aid. Obviously the financial aid funds are not limitless and aid is often only available to citizens or permanent residents.

While most schools consider US citizens' admission separately from their need for financial aid (i.e., they are "need-blind"), about 10 percent of US colleges are "need aware." Stated simply, it means that if you can pay your own way, it is easier for you to get in than someone who can't. Need aware schools should state what their policy is. Ordinarily this awareness plays a bigger role as colleges make decisions on students who are just barely admissible. In the case of a tie, the admit decision will often go to the student who can pay.

Whether or not your need for aid will be considered during the admission process should be clearly stated in each school's literature. A school that guarantees to meet students' "full-need" agrees to provide sufficient financial aid to meet the need

as determined by the FAFSA or CSS/Financial Aid Profile. Other schools may admit students without regard to ability to pay, but may not provide sufficient financial aid to make it possible for them to attend.

For non-US citizens, most schools are need-aware. While some universities offer specific international student financial aid, others are quite direct in telling non-US citizens that they need not apply if they can't pay their own way. It is not that they are trying to be mean or discriminatory. The vast majority of financial aid funds come from the US government. It's the same in Canada or Australia; federal aid is for nationals only. If you are applying as an international student who needs financial aid, this is a vital question to ask university reps and your counsellors.

### ***Do You Show Interest?***

Because colleges want to admit students who are likely to enrol, a growing number of admission offices now take account of how well informed and serious a candidate is about the school. When a choice has to be made between two equally qualified applicants, your interest can provide the necessary edge.

How can you show you're interested in a school? Admission officers won't welcome a flood of pointless e-mails, but they might keep track of your thoughtful questions about academics, housing options, extracurricular activities, and campus life. They will certainly notice whether you visited the campus or talked with an admission officer at a college fair or an ISA visit. If an admission officer comes to ISA or the Fulbright College Day Fair, and you do not make the effort to visit with him or her, you are making a huge mistake. Sending a rejection letter to a stranger is always easier than sending one to a person you've met.

### **The Process They Use**

One of the things that can be most frustrating about the entire application process is that there are some things over which you have absolutely no control. In a particular year, a college may be graduating several students who have been involved in the student newspaper. That year the admission office may be under extra pressure to admit several students who have experience in student publications. If you were on the yearbook staff that year, you might get in more easily. If you are unlucky, you will be a male math major the same year the university may be trying to increase the number of women majoring in math. Colleges do look for well-rounded students. But more importantly, colleges are looking for a well-rounded student population.

### ***How Decisions are made***

In Canadian, UK and other university systems worldwide, your IB predictions or GPA and test scores may be the sole determining factor—or the main factor if you're seen as on the border between 'offer' and 'unsuccessful.' In that case your personal statement and references will be taken into account.

In the US, colleges have various systems for actually deciding who receives an acceptance envelope and a rejection letter. At many large state universities where a small number of staff reviews thousands of applications, decisions are made by a computer on the basis of GPA's and test scores alone; but at the majority of US

schools the decisions are made by a small group of professional admission officers. At some, an admission committee makes decisions democratically.

At most selective schools, an application folder is read by one of the admission officers and often two ratings are given: personal and academic. A score from 1 to 4 in each category may be used with 1 being the best score. The academic rating would ordinarily be based on grades, course work, and test scores. The personal rating would be based on extracurricular activities, essays, and recommendations. If a combined rating is 4 or less, the student may be assigned a "likely;" 6 or more an "unlikely;" and 5 a "possible." Next a second reader may review the file and add his or her ratings. If the ratings are similar, a decision may be made and your fate sealed. At other places the first reader may present "your case" to a committee where the majority rules.

Once you've sent your application to the admission office and double-checked to be sure they have all pieces needed, it is out of your hands. You might as well sit back, relax, and keep up with your schoolwork. If you have selected your schools with care, done the best job possible on your applications, and met all of the deadlines, you have done all you can to maximize your chances of admission.

## 6 HOW DO I . . . ? Application Plans and How to Apply

Once you've developed your list of where you think you will apply, the next step is to get on the school's mailing and e-mailing lists. Just because you receive materials or an application doesn't mean you have to actually apply. While you will probably not apply to more than six schools, it is perfectly acceptable to contact ten or more schools initially.

### ***Application Plans***

In the UK, a student applies online at the UCAS site to five universities. Canadian and Dutch applications may be submitted online in winter or spring; applications to Danish or Australian universities are not submitted until after IB scores are reported. These are all pretty clear cut.

However, there are several different versions of US application plans. They all have their own set of deadlines, procedures and obligations.

### **Regular Decision**

Most students complete what is called a "Regular Decision" application. This application often has a set deadline (usually before 31 January) and often a standard date—usually around 1 April—when you will be notified of your acceptance.

**Rolling admission** Some schools don't admit their freshmen all at once. Instead they make admission decisions as the applications are submitted. Therefore if you apply in October, you might hear in November or early December. Admission officers keep accepting and rejecting students until the freshman class is filled. Obviously, if a school uses this **rolling admission**, you should get your application in early. The longer you wait, the harder it is to be admitted; and you'll feel better if you have at least one acceptance early. Applications for large state universities are usually fairly brief since they have thousands of applications to process. They also tend to emphasize the numbers (GPA, SAT, ACT) in their decision process.

### **Early Decision**

Early Decision (ED), an option offered by about twenty percent of US colleges/universities, is an application programme under which you indicate that a specific college is your *absolute first choice*. The deadline for ED is usually early November. Students who choose ED are usually notified about their acceptance around 15 December. The important thing to remember about an ED application is that it is a binding agreement: you sign a contract that *if you are accepted, you must withdraw applications to all other colleges and agree to attend the Early Decision school*. Counsellors are ethically required to hold you to your Early Decision and will not submit transcripts or applications to other schools if you are admitted ED. You should only use the ED plan if you have an absolute first choice school.

One of the major advantages of applying Early Decision is that admission committees feel positive about a student who has clearly designated their college as the first choice. Because of this, at many schools students who apply ED may have a slightly better chance of admission than those who apply under the regular decision programme. If you are not accepted, you will either be denied or deferred. If it seems clear that you will not “make the cut” in April, the school will notify you in December that you have been denied. Those students who still have a chance of being admitted—or those SAT or ACT scores didn’t arrive at the college in time for the ED deadline, but appear to be admissible—are usually deferred. Deferred students are reconsidered in the pool with regular decision applicants. Some schools either admit or deny the vast majority of students who apply ED with very few students being deferred.

The major disadvantage to the ED option is that you will have less time to review all of your options and will have to commit to a school very early in your senior year. Also, if you have a very strong first semester, ED schools will not have seen those good grades before making their decision.

Some universities now offer two rounds of Early Decision, with the first round due date in November and the second round due date mid-January to early-February. It is recommended for students with one clear first choice, who feel their first semester senior year grades should be included in their applications.

## **Early Action**

Early Action (or Early Notification) schools allow you to apply early and receive an early notification, but they do not require you to withdraw your other applications; there is no binding obligation. Applications are usually due in early November and notification is made in mid-December, but accepted students don’t have to decide which offer to accept until the regular 1 May reply date. Some Early Action schools (Yale, Harvard, and Stanford, for example) state that EA applicants may not apply to any other Early Action or Early Decision programmes, although they are allowed to apply to (and accept) other colleges in the regular decision period. This rule is called “Early Action Single Choice.” You should research and know if this applies to your choices.

## ***Methods of Applying***

### **On-Line Applications**

**UCAS** applications must be done online ([www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com)), as described earlier in the Guide. This is a joint process where you complete your part of the application, including the personal statement, and electronically send it to your counsellor after paying the minimal application fee. After reading and approving your application and adding the reference and your predicted IB scores, your counsellor will send the application to UCAS electronically. It is essential that your information is factual, and that your personal statement is well written. Your counsellor or English teacher will be happy to review your

statement, and you can also take advantage of various websites and publications, which offer good suggestions for writing personal statements. UCAS is now using an online tool to determine if a student plagiarises all or sections of the personal statement. Look at sites and booklets for suggestions, but be sure to write your own statement! UCAS also publishes helpful guides, and the instructions online are clear and easy to follow.

**Outside UK:** In the US, Canada, The Netherlands, Denmark, and Australia, most colleges and universities provide students with the option of applying online. On-line applications save students time, in that they are transmitted instantaneously via the Internet rather than taking a week or more to arrive by mail, and many universities waive the application fee if the application is completed online. ISA counsellors recommend that you use on-line applications if that option is available.

With on-line applications, you avoid the possibility that your application will be "lost in the mail." On-line applications have two added advantages: many run an automatic check of your application and force corrections before you are allowed to submit; and they allow you to track your application status and check for missing items through your account on the college's admission website.

Options for on-line applications include applying directly on the school's website or by using a common application available on a separate website. These common application sites allow you to enter your name, address and other information once and then each time you open a new application, all of that data is automatically included. This process can be a great time saver. However, not all schools subscribe to these services. Depending on where you apply, these services can be very helpful or totally inapplicable to you.

Several years ago some US colleges developed an application called **The Common Application**. This allows students to complete one application form and use it to apply to several colleges. Many schools require you to submit a supplemental form specific to their school in addition to the Common Application, but since all schools accept the same initial essay, the Common Application can save you significant time. The application and supplements can be completed online or downloaded at [www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org). Be sure to check for and complete the supplements listed on the Common Application website for the specific schools to which you are applying. University websites will tell you if they accept the Common Application. On your Naviance Family Connection, complete the FERPA release, which allows your counsellors to send all Common Application forms and your transcripts electronically to the universities!

There are also state and province-specific common applications available online. For example, if you plan to apply for university in Texas, visit the Apply Texas website: [www.applytexas.org](http://www.applytexas.org); to apply to university in the province of Ontario, see [www.ouac.on.ca](http://www.ouac.on.ca); to apply in Western Australia, see [www.tisc.edu.au](http://www.tisc.edu.au), to apply to any of the University of California schools, see [www.universityofcalifornia.edu](http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu). There are links to these websites and more on your *Family Connection* site and on

the school computers in the Careers/University folder, the first folder in the ISA Student Drive.

## **Paper Applications**

Very few schools still require paper applications. There are several options for obtaining and completing the paper version of application forms. Most commonly, students download a “PDF” file from the college’s website. Some of these can be completed on your computer and then printed out, while others are “read only” and must be printed out and then filled in by hand. If you are on a university campus, you can also often pick up a paper version of the application, or you can ask the college to mail you an application packet.

If you complete a paper version by hand, it is important to use the same pen for the entire application, print clearly (unless told to write something in cursive), and keep a copy of the application.

Whether you apply online or with a paper application form, and whether you use the Common Application or an institutional form, it’s important to give great attention to detail. See the next chapter for advice on how to make the best impression with your application.

## 7 WHAT FORMS? How to improve your chances

If you've ever wanted to feel what it is like to be compulsive, now is the time. Whether filling out a form on-line, in a "PDF" file, or with a pen, this completed application will be the main way the admissions officer will know you. Remember you are filling out a college application, not messaging your friend online. Use capital letters and proper punctuation and avoid chat-line abbreviations. Answer all the questions that apply to you, and when you have finished, go back and double check that you've answered all possible questions, correctly. Misspellings can make you look really lazy and crossing out answers makes your application look sloppy.

Another thing that can make you look bad is an inappropriate e-mail address. The Trinity University Director of International Admissions recommends that students set up a separate email address for the college application process, using an address with your name or initials in it. This sounds more like you're ready for adulthood than a goofy, cute, or otherwise inappropriate email address.

### ***Online Applications***

Before beginning an online application, you will be asked to set up an account with a user name and password. Different colleges require different numbers of characters and letter-number combinations for this access information, so it's unlikely you'll be able to use the same user name and password for all your applications. **Keep a list near your computer of the user name and password that you set up for each college** - as well as your UCAS, *College Board* and *Family Connection* account information. Add to that list your U.S. Social Security number (if you have one) and our high school CEEB code (**791042**), because you will need these repeatedly as you complete your applications. Print out the "Websites Passwords Sign-on Form" from your Family Connection Documents Library to aid in this process.

Complete and submit your online applications well in advance of the due date. Printing it out and completing a rough draft by hand to help ensure you complete it all correctly. In the week prior to application due dates, there are often so many students using the website that the system becomes overloaded. This may cause slowdowns and other technical problems. Avoid this extra stress, and *complete your applications early*.

This is particularly important for applications to the University of California system, which may be submitted only during the month of November. This application requires you to enter all high school grades and test scores, so ask your counsellor for your transcript and have your test records handy when you begin!

As you work on your online applications, be sure to click *save* from time to time. Most applications require you to save at the end of each section, but save mid-page too--you could lose an hour's work if you are timed out or your server closes

down unexpectedly. It is best to complete essays offline as Word documents. When you are fully satisfied with what you have written (and someone has proofread the essay), cut and paste the essay into your application. **Before clicking the “Submit” button, have your parents and counsellor review your application.** Once the application has been submitted, there’s no way to re-do it, so be sure everything is spelled correctly and the short answers as well as the essays are all intelligently written before you send the application.

Speaking of clicking the “Submit” button, be sure you do so! Double check with the university to be sure they’ve received your application. Print out a paper copy of your application or save it to your hard drive.

### ***Paper Applications and handwritten essay requirements***

While most applications are now online, there is still an option to complete paper applications to many universities. Unless your handwriting is completely legible, don’t fill out a handwritten form. If you are handwriting your application, use a good black pen that doesn’t leave splotches or bleed through the paper, and don’t press so hard that it goes through to the other side of the page. Your neatness (or lack of it) can make a difference. If the instructions say to submit the essay in your own handwriting, you *must* write it using your best penmanship. If your penmanship is at all difficult to read, go ahead and include a word-processed version as well. The admission officer can then decide which one to read.

If the application says it is acceptable to attach extra sheets of paper, you certainly can attach your essay that way. Make certain your name, application ID number, and the essay question are included on all attachments.

Have someone proofread everything before you submit your application. Your counsellor and probably your parents are happy to do this-- be sure to ask early!

### **Essay**

University application essays/personal statements can be a procrastinator’s nightmare—don’t let that happen to you.

While the specific directions will vary from school to school, all will basically ask you to “tell us about yourself” in a well-written essay. You may even have the choice of a variety of questions. If so, choose the one that feels right to you—trust your instincts. You want to prove two things with your essay: that you are a decent writer and that you are an interesting, mature person. A well-written essay can help to tip the scales in your favour.

“Can I use the same essay for several different applications?” you ask. Perhaps, although you have to be certain the essay fits the question. Make absolutely certain if you mention a particular college’s name in the essay that you don’t send the wrong essay. It’s not impressive to tell Penn State University that your first choice school is the University of Texas. Things like that really happen each year.

**UCAS.** When completing your personal statement on the UCAS application, the same warnings are valid. You need to speak of your interest in the specific course, but if you are applying for two very different courses, it is difficult to mention them in one statement. Be a bit more general and describe your interests and strengths in more general ways. Carefully read the instructions, helpful hints on the UCAS site and other publications, and ask your counsellors to proofread for you.

### ***Keep It Brief***

Each admission officer will have a huge number of applications to read (often 1,000 or more) and will only spend a few minutes reading each essay. Your essay should never be longer than requested, should be in a normal 12-point font, and should look pleasing to the eye. If there are no guidelines on length, it should be one to two pages.

### ***Avoid Generalities***

It's easier to write a good essay if you write about particulars rather than generalities. If you're asked to write about your extracurricular activities, narrow your focus. Write about something particular that happened to you in one activity.

Use experiences that have occurred in your life and explain their significance. What have you done with your experiences? Have they changed your life? Why was the experience special to you, and what have you learned from it? How is it relevant to your personal development or to your college and career plans?

There are accomplishments you may wish to consider writing about in your essay. Again, be sure they somehow answer the question given. What kind of student are you? How did you learn to think? What do you do out of school? What was a special time/experience in your life? What have you learned by living in or relocating to Aberdeen? Is there anything unusual about your family? What have been your successes or disappointments? Who has influenced your life? What do you do for others? Was moving a wonderful or terrible experience (or both)--why?

In your life, you may have had some failures. When you are explaining what you learned through these, don't just say, "I learned a lot." Be specific and tell exactly what you learned. Show the college that you have learned and grown from your experiences—as you plan to learn and grow in university.

### ***Writing Style***

You have been learning how to write for years. Now's your chance to use those skills in "the real world." You want to get your point across, not bury it in words. Your prose should be clear and direct. Don't use a thesaurus to plug in big, impressive words; this is always obvious and never impressive. As you reread your essay, stop at every adjective or adverb and ask yourself if it is necessary--too many adjectives and adverbs make writing seem contrived. Concentrate on nouns and verbs. Don't use exclamation points. Ever!

One of the worst things a student essay can contain is a lot of sentences that begin, "as Shakespeare said..." Admission officers will know you found these lines in a book of quotations— not your memory. Also don't begin your essay with a little quotation--and never quote the lyrics of a song.

Make sure the reader understands what you're talking about, but also be concise. If you can write an essay that someone wants to read rather than one they feel they *have* to read, your essay will be a success.

Admission officers take it for granted that you will get help with your essays. In fact, if you send in an essay that is filled with misspellings and other errors, admission officers will conclude not only that you don't know how to write, but also that you didn't take the time to get help or use a spell checker. Ask someone who writes well to read your essay and comment on it. Asking for help isn't cheating (although actually getting someone else to write your essay, or copying one you found online, is!).

### ***Short Answer Questions***

In addition to the major essay, many applications ask you to respond in a paragraph or two to several other questions. A popular question is to ask you to write about which extracurricular activity was the most meaningful to you. Be specific even if the question seems to ask for a general response. The typical answer students give when asked to indicate why they want to attend that particular school is "to obtain a good education." You don't mean it and it's been said by all of the other applicants. Give an interesting answer. Write about something you learned when you talked to the school's representative or a student at the school, or when you visited the campus.

The more specific your answer is and the more you actually mean it, the more interesting it will be. Remember the admission officer has read the predictable dull answer time and time again.

While these questions are not asking for full-fledged essays, you should make certain all of your answers are well written. If you have written an outstanding essay, but your short answer questions are poorly written, the admission officer may rightly wonder whether the essay was actually your own work.

### ***The "Anything Else" Question***

Sometimes there will be an optional section at the end of the application asking if there is anything else you wish to add. Use this if, after looking at the entire application, you think there is something missing which should be said. Take a look at the completed application and determine whether it accurately and positively reflects you. If you find something has not been included somewhere else, this is where it could go. This might be where you explain if one semester your grades are much lower than usual or if you've had any experiences or interruptions that have affected your schooling.

### ***Extracurricular Activities***

Again, it is not necessary to try to mention every one of your out of school activities on your application. Nor is it important to fill up every space. Concentrate on those that were important to you and leave out the others. Activities you joined and then quickly quit should not be included. List your activities in the order of importance to you. Also, make certain you add up the total hours you spend on extracurricular

activities and see if the total seems logical. You don't really spend 60 hours a week with these activities.

### ***Impressive Activities and Awards***

Some extracurricular activities are seen as being more important than others. Here are some of the more impressive ones:

- Student government, especially if you are student body or class president.
- Yearbook editor.
- Choir, band, or drama; especially if you have been a soloist or had a leading role.
- Varsity sports, particularly if you are a captain or an all-star of some kind.
- Leadership positions with substantial time commitment either in or out of school (i.e. NHS, Scouts, church).
- Community service activities, especially beyond the CAS minimum requirement.
- Anything unusual that took a lot of time and effort.
- Math and science awards.

### ***Things to Remember***

Some things many students seem to overlook in their applications include:

- Band and choir—they may be courses, but also activities.
- Officiating athletic contests or volunteering as a coach.
- Piano or other private music lessons.
- Hobbies such as kendo or horseback riding.
- Service and CAS activities—but be specific as to what you did.

Also, don't use "NHS" or "MUN" or other acronyms, which may be unfamiliar to an admissions officer. Write out the title of the activity.

### ***Things to Avoid Mentioning***

You probably should not mention the following activities in your application. (That doesn't mean you should not do them; just don't talk about them in your application.)

- Avoid mentioning game clubs, especially role-playing clubs.
- Religion, unless you are applying to a religiously affiliated school.

### ***Summer Activities and Employment***

In listing jobs, try to make them sound interesting. Some may need an explanation if they were not the traditional kinds of high school part-time jobs. Non-paid work could go here also: if you directed two plays, don't just write down "drama," be specific. Don't forget to include such things as tutoring or extended baby-sitting.

Summer schools often go in this section. If you attended a college summer programme, you will probably be asked to submit your transcripts. If you have a copy, bring it to your counsellor so a copy can be sent with your application. This can save you trouble later.

## **Your Recommendations**

To some degree, a recommendation is a test of your judgment. If your recommendations are negative or wishy-washy, admission officers may wonder why you asked that person for a recommendation. This information primarily applies to US institutions; Canadian universities will request references if they want them.

Some colleges give you specific instructions on which teacher you should ask. The form may ask for a recommendation from an English instructor, a math or science teacher, or someone who has taught you in the last year. If there are no specific instructions, you are on your own to choose. If you've listed a major on the application, you should probably ask a teacher in a related subject. Teachers who know you, respect you, and will write positive things about you will obviously write your best recommendations. Try to ask teachers you've had in 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade if possible. It's not necessary to choose teachers in courses where you earned A's. In fact, it's often those courses in which you earned B's or C's that admission officers wonder about. If you feel a teacher has little to say about you other than the grades you earned (or even worse, will say something negative), ask someone else.

Ask the teacher in a way in which he or she can politely decline. Try to talk to your teacher when he or she has a few minutes to spare and ask if "You would consider writing one of my recommendations." You might add something like, "I don't want to put you in a spot if you'd really prefer not to do this." Give the teacher a way out. If your teacher says something like, "I'd like to help you but maybe someone else knows you better," take the hint and ask someone else. Choose teachers who know you well and who are good writers. Since teachers are busy people and are asked to write many letters for seniors, do not ask several teachers to write recommendations and expect your counsellor to "choose the best one." Ask those who know and respect you and you can be sure your letters will be just right.

### ***Be Prompt***

Teachers have a lot to do without also writing recommendations. Some teachers who teach only juniors and seniors may be asked to write recommendations for ten or more students, and writing thoughtful recommendations takes a lot of time. Give your teachers plenty of advance notice. The earlier you ask and provide the needed forms, the less likely it is that your teachers will be buried in recommendations already. Recommendations written early in the autumn are usually better than those written in December.

### ***Waive Your Rights***

In the US, you have the legal right to read the information colleges have in their files about you. Virtually all recommendation forms include a little box where you can waive this right by signing your name. Many colleges won't pay as much attention to your recommendations if they think the people who wrote them were worried that you will be reading them, so we recommend you waive the right. Sign and date the forms before you give them to your teachers.

### ***Make it Easy***

ISA counsellors have developed a system to help teachers write their recommendations. You should answer the questions found on the "Teacher

Recommendation Information Sheet” (Appendix IV) each time you ask a teacher to write a recommendation. Pick up the form from your counsellor or print one from your *Family Connection* site, Documents Library. This form asks you a number of questions about your career/university plans, what has interested you about the particular subject or class, your activities, your grades, etc. While perhaps not all of this information will be used in a letter of recommendation, it should help a teacher to recall things about you. Obviously you should add anything you think would help the teacher write a better recommendation.

You will probably also want to develop some sort of resume or CV. A resume can help you to highlight your strengths and in addition to assisting your recommendation writers, it may also come in handy when it's time to apply for a summer or campus job. You can build this resume on *MyRoad* or your *Family Connection* and print it out for teachers and others.

Your teacher will probably write one broad letter of recommendation that can be used for all of your applications. Most teachers submit those letters electronically to the counsellors. If your college has provided a specific recommendation form, you should fill out the top portion with your name and address, sign the waiver statement, and give it to your teacher as soon as possible. Your teacher will write “see attached” in the narrative section, add check marks to any rating boxes, sign, and then return the form to the counsellors, who will attach a copy of the teacher's letter and send it with the official transcript and other application documents. Since we will be sending everything together in one envelope, it is not necessary to supply a teacher with a stamped envelope even if that's what the instructions say.

One mistake students sometimes make is to finish their part of the application before they give the recommendation forms to the teachers. Don't wait that long, since it may take the teacher two or three weeks or longer to write a personal recommendation for you. They can be working on the recommendation while you are working on your essay. After October 15th a teacher has the option of saying, “Sorry, I'm too busy to write your letter.”

Letters of recommendation will be kept electronically for up to five years. That way if you decide to transfer to another college, another recommendation can be easily sent.

### **Say Thanks**

A couple of weeks before you are ready to send your applications, speak to the teacher and ask where they are in the recommendation writing process. This is especially important if a deadline is approaching.

Remember, teachers who write recommendations get no extra compensation for their work, other than the warm and fuzzy feelings associated with doing a good deed. They're nice people doing this personal favour to help you. A nice touch on your part would be to send each teacher a thank-you note to let him or her know how much you appreciated his or her efforts. Everyone likes to feel appreciated. Teachers are no exception.

### ***Counsellor Recommendation or Secondary School Report***

Many applications have something called a “Secondary School Report” or “Counsellor’s Report.” Once you’ve decided for certain that you will be applying to a particular school, you should fill in your name, sign the waiver statement, and give it to your counsellor (even if it tells you to give it to the principal). This form usually asks for an assessment of your motivation, academic promise, and integrity. An official copy of your ISA and other high school transcripts and a profile that describes ISA, will also be attached to the report. We can now also send these reports electronically via Naviance. Be sure to complete the FERPA release information there if you are applying using the Common Application!

Except in a few unusual cases, a counsellor’s recommendation should be included with each application. The counsellor’s recommendation can be used to highlight your strengths or to explain any situations that may have negatively affected your grades during high school.

Over the years, ISA’s counsellors have come to know many admission officers. The admission officers put considerable weight on what counsellors say since they know we can’t afford to lose credibility by writing a totally inaccurate recommendation. If a counsellor says “this student is brilliant and will do great” and the student flunks out after one semester, all future recommendations will be suspect. You can expect your recommendation to be positive, yet honest.

If a college asks about suspensions or disciplinary issues, we must answer the question honestly. A mistake, even a fairly serious one, can often be seen as a learning experience and may have no negative impact at all on your admission decision. If you are concerned about your past disciplinary record you should certainly discuss it with your counsellor. If asked, your counsellor must report this kind of information; it is important that you are honest and up-front about it in your application.

### ***Extra Recommendations***

Some students, and especially some parents, believe that they can influence the admission process by sending extra recommendations. You should know that there is an old saying among admission officers: “The thicker the application file, the thicker the student.” In other words the more stuff that is added to an application to impress the admission officer, the more likely they are to think the student is unimpressive. A good letter must be full of examples rather than adjectives. You should only submit extra recommendations if they are from people who really know you well and who are in a position to say interesting things about you that have not already been said—this obviously does not include your girlfriend or boyfriend or a distant family friend who works for, or attended, the university.

Some colleges ask you to submit one additional recommendation from a “non-school” person. This person should not be a relative, but should be someone who knows you well and can contribute something that has not been included in other parts of your application. This might be the parent of a good friend, a good friend of your parents, a youth leader, Scout leader, or a non-teaching coach. If you can’t think of a person to ask, see your counsellor for suggestions.

There are a few colleges that ask you to submit a “peer” recommendation written by one of your friends. The most important thing with a peer recommendation is to make certain the person writing it writes well. There is ordinarily no rule that says you can’t see the recommendation, nor a rule that says you can’t help the person decide what to write. Actually writing the letter for your friend does cross an ethical line.

### **UCAS References**

Since UK applicants apply for a particular course of study, the academic reference is written a little differently for the UCAS form. The UCAS instructions are quite specific in telling the referee to write about whether or not the candidate would be successful if admitted to the particular course of study as well as information about your strengths, interests, and personality. Whether a related subject teacher or your counsellor writes this reference, we will ask for input from your other teachers as well as for your IB predicted scores. This allows the writer to include insight from various areas as well as specific information about your strengths in their particular course.

### **Names and Numbers**

If you are a US citizen, many US colleges will use your Social Security number as your initial identification number, although by law this is now optional. Ask your parents for your number, and make certain you use the correct one when you complete your application and SAT or ACT registration forms. Students without Social Security numbers will be assigned an ID number by each college, and some universities assign every applicant an application number. Write this on your Website Passwords Sign-On Form.

Applications also ask for your high school’s College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) code. The International School of Aberdeen’s CEEB code number is **791042**—the same one you are asked to put on your SAT and ACT registration forms.

When you register for UCAS, you will be assigned a user name and you must choose a password. Once you have submitted your application, you will be given an application number so that you can track your applications on UCAS Track. You must then use this number for any correspondence with any of the universities to which you have applied. Again, write it on your Website Passwords Sign-On Form.

**IMPORTANT!** Some students use two different names—the ones used at school is not the name listed on their passports. Others go by a nickname or by a middle name. **You should use your legal name when you complete applications or sign up for tests.** If you are not a citizen of the country in which you are applying, you should use your *passport name* on all applications, since the school will issue your student visa in that name. Use the same name when you register for standardised tests and IB exams, and check with the counsellors to ensure that your passport name is the name that will appear on your transcripts. If you use one name when you register for the SAT and a different one when you fill out the university application, your SAT scores may not be matched up with your

application, and your application will be incomplete. This has happened recently to an ISA student, and it was a real hassle to get the files all put together!

### ***International Applicant—or not?***

**UK/UCAS application:** Read and follow the instructions very carefully regarding your passport country, your residence (domicile), and your supporting agency for possible funds. Your citizenship and how many consecutive years you've resided in the UK will help a university determine whether you will be considered a "home" student—even if you are a UK passport holder. Ask your parents and your counsellor for specific help with this section of the application.

Students often wonder whether they should apply as an international or a domestic/home student. On the UCAS application, you don't have any choice in the matter. You answer specific questions on the UCAS site, and an answer appears on the electronic application.

**Canada:** Ordinarily, if you have a Canadian passport, you should apply as a domestic applicant; otherwise you're an international applicant. However, if you have lived outside Canada for any length of time, you may be considered in the smaller international pool, even if you are eligible for local/domestic fees. Contact each university to ask about your classification.

**US:** Ordinarily, if you have a US passport you are a domestic applicant; if you don't, you're an international applicant. However, at some colleges all students educated outside the US are considered "international" regardless of what their passport says. If you are applying to a state-sponsored university, the question becomes "In-state" or "Out-of-state". Some states (Texas and Louisiana are two) allow you to enrol as an in-state student if your parents have been away from the state with an in-state company on a "temporary" assignment. Applying for this status involves submitting a letter from your parent's employer and other documents specified by the university. You must ask the question to be considered an in-state applicant.

**Australia:** If you have an Australian passport, you should apply as a domestic applicant. Everyone else should apply as an international student.

**On all applications,** if you have more than one passport country, list all countries when you are asked about your citizenship.

If you will need a visa to enter a country for university study, you will probably have to submit a certificate of finances showing that your family has sufficient financial resources to support your studies in that country and to pay for your return to your "home country" (see section below).

### ***Major***

In the UK, you must apply for a specific course or programme of study for each university.

In the US and Canada, most colleges ask you to state your choice of major. “Undecided” is usually one of the options. Only state a major if you truly believe that’s what you want to study for four years. Also, be absolutely certain that the specific school offers your intended major. If you list Journalism as your chosen major, you’d better be certain the school offers journalism. Don’t declare yourself as a Physics or Math major if your SAT math scores are mediocre or you don’t do well in these subjects now. If your science grades are low, don’t declare that you want to be major in Biology. Stick with “undecided.” Unless you’re in Engineering or other career-specific courses, you usually have up to two years to actually declare a major.

### ***What else?***

#### ***Photographs***

Many colleges ask you to submit an optional photograph if applying on paper. This is becoming less common as more and more students apply online. If you do submit a photo, use one that makes you look bright, lively, and healthy. Comb your hair and dress nicely. A smile is a good thing, too. Because formal yearbook photos all look pretty much alike, you might consider not using that. A clear, focused head-and-shoulders colour snapshot might be better.

#### ***Adding Pages***

Generally speaking, your essay should be the only extra page attached to your (paper) application. If they ask for a resume, include it; otherwise only include it if you have a really solid hunch that it’ll help. If they had wanted a lot of information to be included under each question, they would have given you more room on the form.

#### ***Honesty***

“Do I have to be honest?” That’s a question some may ask. The only answer is “**Yes.**” Lying is a bad idea even if you are able to do it without getting caught. Lying is something that usually backfires. If the application asks if you were ever suspended and you were, you need to answer the question honestly. The same question may be asked of your teachers and counsellor. If the question is not asked, you do not have to supply the information; but whatever is asked, answer honestly.

#### ***Signing and Keeping a Copy of the Finished Application***

Some online applications require you to print out a signature page. When applying to such colleges, sign the form and turn it in to your counsellor with your application cover sheet. If applying on paper, be sure to sign and date the application. If an application is sent off without a signature, it will not be considered since your signature certifies the answers were honest. It also makes you look pretty goofy if you forget such a simple thing.

The last thing you should do before you press the submit button is **to print out your application.** If submitting a paper application, make a photocopy before you it in to your counsellor; counsellors do not do this. While it is unusual for an application to be lost in the mail, it could happen. Also, having a copy of your earlier applications can make filling out your later ones much easier.

### ***Fees and Finances***

Almost all US and Canadian colleges will require you to submit an application fee ranging from US \$25 to \$60 before they will consider your application. While more and more schools waive the fee if you apply online, most online applications fees are generally paid by credit card, and you'll be asked to enter payment information before your application is fully submitted. Paper applications can sometimes be paid by credit card, but others require a US dollar cheque (or a Canadian dollar cheque in Canada). Generally you need to either have your bank convert pounds to a US or Canadian dollar cheque, or find someone with a checking account who is willing to write a cheque for you for cash.

### ***Financial Statement Required for a Student Visa***

If you are applying for university outside your passport country, you will be required to obtain a student visa from the school before you travel to the country to begin college. To be eligible for a visa, you must demonstrate that you have sufficient funds available to pay for your expenses while you are in that country. Therefore, you will have to submit a "financial statement" listing the names of the persons (probably your parents) who will be paying for your education. You will also have to provide a statement from their bank certifying that funds are available. Most colleges require this information as part of the application, but a few ask for it after you have been accepted and have made a commitment to attend.

Since many bank officials are naturally leery of signing a form, they may not want to certify the form provided by the college. In that case, ask for sufficient official copies of a financial statement of account or a letter (written in English) indicating your parents have sufficient funds available to support your college expenses, and attach it to the form provided by the college. That approach is perfectly acceptable to almost all colleges.

Be sure you and your parents read carefully any materials you receive about applying for a student visa and supplying required documents, and submit those as soon as possible. Student and other visas are taking longer to process each year in most countries, and you do not want to miss the first semester of study because you didn't get your visa in time. These papers do not need to be submitted until after you've decided to attend a specific university, but it's good to have them ready to send.

### ***Sending it off***

For other than UCAS applications, the ISA counsellors have developed paperwork and procedures to assist you in getting your finished applications or application supporting documents sent off. Almost 100 applications are sent out each year, and these procedures help us make sure everything gets out in an accurate and timely fashion.

You and the counsellors keep track of what forms and documents need to be sent with each application by using the "**University Application Cover Sheet**". A sample cover sheet is included in the back of this guide (See Appendix I); actual forms are available in the Careers and University Room and in your Family

Connections Document Library. If you submit an application on-line, bring in your cover sheet along with any other documents that should be sent to the college, and we will include them with your transcripts, unofficial SAT or ACT scores, and ISA's High School Profile. If you have completed a paper application, make a copy of everything for your records and then bring your application (and all of the assorted pieces that go along with it) to the counsellors along with a completed cover sheet.

We will keep a copy of the cover sheet in the counselling office files, and will refer to it later if we need to check to see if a particular document was sent. The counsellors complete a final check to make certain all of the items you've indicated are actually included in the envelope.

Once the required recommendations, an official transcript (which includes a transcript from all previous high schools if you transferred to ISA), and a High School Profile are added, the entire packet will be sent together in one envelope, and ISA will pay the regular airmail postage. If you prefer to send out your application packet by a courier service, your parents will be invoiced for this cost.

The admission officers prefer receiving all your application documents packaged together and since we have to send your transcript directly, it makes sense to enclose all other materials in the same envelope. Using this application packaging method ensures that when an admission office receives your transcript, they will also receive all other supporting documents. Since some ISA students do not have US Social Security numbers (the primary way applications are tracked) this method improves the odds that all of your application components will be placed in your file rather than someone else's.

***To make this system work, your responsibility is to complete your applications—if it's online, you must actually SUBMIT--, turn in a cover sheet for each one, along with all necessary paperwork-- a minimum of two weeks before you want the documents to be mailed.*** This allows time for your counsellor to prod a teacher to finish a recommendation, if necessary, and still have the application arrive before the deadline. It is always better to get your application completed early rather than waiting until the last minute. Early in the application process, admission officers tend to be more forgiving of borderline applications. Toward the end of the admissions cycle, the people reading files may get ruthless.

UCAS applications for Oxford or Cambridge or for Medical, Dental, and Veterinary courses should be completed and sent electronically to the counsellors by early-September for the 15 October deadline. Again, having the application in long before the deadline assures that the admissions tutors give your application a closer look. All other UCAS applications should be electronically sent on to counsellors by 20 November. We will need to review these and possibly return them to you for additions or corrections. This gives us time to provide the best possible reference, include your predicted IB scores, and send it all off electronically before the December holiday.

Cover sheets for applications due to US and other universities on or before 31 January must be submitted to your counsellor no later than 20 November. You may still be working online, but submit your cover sheet to allow us time to get all

documents for these applications mailed before the school shuts down for the holiday.

Once your cover sheet or UCAS application has been submitted to your counsellor, you can check its status on *Family Connection* to see when documents or the UCAS application was sent. You can also double-check that the correct items have been included in the envelope. Then start tracking online at the UCAS or individual university website.

## 8 WITH WHOM? Interviews

Few schools in the US require interviews. Some don't offer them at all. Others have elaborate networks of alumni (graduates of the college) who interview applicants. There are a number of alumni interviewers in the UK, and a local alumni interviewer may contact you once you have sent in your application.

UK universities may require you to have an interview, depending upon the course. The University of Cambridge interviews every applicant. When you receive letters requesting an interview, see your counsellor to work out the best day (if given an option) and to be sure your teachers are aware of this appointment.

If you are at an open day or visiting a college campus during the summer and an interview is offered, take advantage of it. If you're contacted to interview with someone in the area, make every attempt to speak with that person. The impression you make on the interviewer will probably make it into your application folder. Rarely have students been admitted simply because they had a great interview--or rejected because they had a bad one--but it's one important piece of the puzzle. If it weren't, you wouldn't be asked to interview.

Because ISA belongs to ISCO (Independent Schools Careers Organization), representatives are available to provide mock interviews for you so that you can get some practice before going to the real thing. We need to organize those with ISCO far in advance to fit into their busy schedule. So let your counsellor know if this applies to you. If you are going to an interview there are a few general guidelines you should follow.

### ***Do Your Homework***

Before you go to an interview, you need to have a pretty good idea how you'll answer several stock questions if they're asked. Some of these questions are: Why do you want to go here? Why this course? What made you decide to apply? What do you want to study? What do you want to do with your life? Most students have a hard time answering questions like this. The trouble with them is that they force you to think specifically about things that you probably haven't examined very carefully. Thinking about them now is helpful and necessary. If you can come up with an intelligent and convincing reason why you want to attend a school, your interview will fall into place. In some interviews, the goal is to see how you think; you may feel the questions are impossible or very difficult. The interviewer is more interested in how you think and respond to the question than if you got a "correct" answer. Review your essays or personal statement before your interview, as you may be asked for specifics concerning something you've written.

If given the chance to ask questions, don't ask questions that are answered in the school's brochure or can easily be found on their website. Review this information on the day of the interview and go to the interview prepared. If there is a popular conception of the school that's negative (i.e., "it's a party school"), don't ask about it. You know what the answer will be anyway. Since the interviewer will have heard the same question before, you will come across as just another typical, predictable applicant. Also, don't ask a question if you have no interest in the answer.

### ***How to Look and Act***

Comb your hair. Don't chew gum. Brush your teeth. Dress as the neatest, nicest version of "you." Poise, politeness and friendliness have little to do with how good a student you are but a lot to do with how your interview goes. You want to appear bright, interested, mature, and at ease. The more comfortable the interviewer feels at your interview, the better impression you'll make. Be comfortable taking time to think about what you'll say before you answer, but if the conversation lags, ask a question.

Forget about the length of the interview. Many colleges and alumni interviewers schedule interviews tightly. Don't worry if your interview lasts or doesn't last exactly as long as you were told it would. And don't try to stretch out the end of your interview by suddenly asking questions you don't care about.

### ***Leave Your Parents Somewhere***

If you are having an interview on campus, don't let your parents accompany you to your interview. Parents can only hurt; they never help in an interview setting. Admission officers don't like having your mom or dad in the room with you any better than you do. Most will tell parents to wait in the waiting room (if there is one). But you don't even want this problem to come up. You won't look good if your first contact with your interviewer involves him or her telling your parents to wait outside. [This only applies to an interview. It is perfectly acceptable for your parents to accompany you on the campus tour or listen to any group presentation.]

The exception to this parent rule occurs if an interviewer asks you to come to his/her home for an alumni interview. It would be better to agree to meet that person in a coffee shop, work place, or at ISA. If that is not agreeable, it is important for a parent to accompany you to this appointment.

### ***Save the Best for Last***

If you think you will have more than one interview, try to schedule them so that your first interviews are at the schools you care about least or feel you are least likely to get into. You'll find you'll get better as you go along.

### ***Send a Thank-You Note***

Sending a thank-you note is always a good idea. Your note can be quite short, but it should sound personal. As with any good thank-you note, mention something specific about your conversation and be sure to send it, by name, to the person who interviewed you.

## 9 THEN WHAT? After you've applied

Once the college or university has finished reviewing your application, they will notify you about whether or not they will make you an offer (UCAS or Australia) or have accepted you (US or Canada).

### UCAS Offers

Each time a UK university makes a decision on one of your applications, the university will send you a letter or email, and UCAS will send you a formal decision letter with the details of your offer. If you are unsuccessful, you may contact the admissions tutor by email or phone to ask for clarification, especially if you question their decision. You don't need to deal with any of the offers until you get the decision letter on your final course. Included with this last decision letter will be a form you can use to notify UCAS of which university you want to attend, and instructions for how to do the same thing online. You will be asked to code all of your offers (you could have as many as five) as "Firm," "Insurance," or "Decline." **The letter will give you a date by which you must notify UCAS or forfeit all offers.**

At this time you must choose one firm and one insurance offer, and all others must be declined. Since most offers are conditional upon you getting certain IB scores and you will not yet have received the results of your exams, this can be a difficult decision. If you are confused about any of your offers, check before you complete your reply form. Once you fill out the reply slip or submit the information online, you have made a legal commitment to those particular courses and you cannot change your mind unless you choose not to attend any university in the UK that year. If confused, ask your counsellor for advice on which are the right offers to hold.

If you did not receive any offers, you can participate in a process called "UCAS extra" in the spring, in which you can apply one at a time to additional courses until you receive an offer. You may also enter "Clearing" after receiving your IB scores in the summer if you do not qualify to attend your firm and insurance choices—or Adjustment if your scores were higher than you expected and you want to try for another university place. UCAS will send you information if you qualify for either UCAS Extra or Clearing. See your counsellor and the UCAS website for help with this process.

### US Universities/Colleges

Colleges and universities that use the "rolling" method of notification usually require at least six to eight weeks from the time they have a completed application folder (with your test scores) before you will be notified of a decision. Colleges that use a notification date (usually around 1 April) send out all of their decision letters on or about the same date. Some will send this information in e-mails or will post it to your website account; other schools still only use the post for notification.

### **Acceptance**

When you receive an acceptance letter, read it carefully. It will probably include some forms you will need to complete and send back by 1 May, along with a deposit, if you will be attending that school. There may also be information about signing up for housing. Read the material and do what it says if that is the school you want to attend.

Don't assume that a thin envelope means rejection. Read every letter from every university carefully. There are a few schools that send thin acceptance letters that say, "Congratulations! More materials will be sent in a separate packet."

Even if you are waiting to hear from your first choice university, you may want to consider submitting a housing deposit (if minimal) to hold a room for you at another university to which you have been accepted. You'll not get that deposit back if you don't attend, however, so only do this if it's a minimal amount.

### **Deferral**

Students who apply as an Early Decision or Early Action applicant sometimes get a letter of deferral. This means the college will wait until later to decide whether or not to accept you. Deferrals can be due to the need to see your first semester senior grades, or because the admission office is unsure what the strength of the rest of the applicants will be. A deferral is not necessarily a terrible thing. Some students who are deferred are admitted later.

### **Denial**

The cruel fact is that not everyone can be admitted everywhere. If it's any consolation, the admission decision has little to do with you personally. It has more to do with the other students who happened to apply that year. You can do everything right and still not get in. If you happen to be denied admission to a college you especially wanted to attend, don't call or email the admission office to vent your anger. If you are contemplating transferring a year later, a bitter encounter with the admission office can seal your fate forever. Only in extraordinary circumstances is an "appeal" possible. Appeals are rarely successful unless the college has made an honest mistake; perhaps they were unable to locate a part of your application and denied you for that reason. If you think something like that has occurred, ask your counsellor to contact the admissions office.

### **Waitlist**

Some schools will place students on a Waitlist. All colleges admit more students than they have room for in a freshman class. That's because they realize not all students they admit will choose to enrol. Even Harvard only gets about 75% of their accepted students to enrol. Guessing this "yield" is a difficult task— especially since students seem to be applying to more schools each year. If a school overestimates the number of accepted candidates who will enrol, there will be holes in the incoming freshman class. These holes, if they occur, will be filled from the waitlist.

Even so, the waitlist is usually a long shot. Final notification may not come until well into the summer, so for safety's sake it's best to accept an offer of admission from another school, even if it means sending in a non-refundable deposit. Only choose to remain on a waitlist if you really plan to attend should you be admitted later.

Some colleges waitlist almost as many students as they admit, so the chance of being admitted off the waitlist at these institutions is minimal.

### ***May 1st Reply Date***

Once you have received all of your acceptance letters, you must make up your mind about where you will go. If, like most students, you are accepted at more than one school, you will have to weigh your choices and make a decision. The US candidate reply date is 1 May. That means if you don't tell a school by the first of May that you will be coming in the fall, they can withdraw your acceptance. You also need to notify the other schools that accepted you of your decision not to attend by that date. If a postcard is not included in the acceptance materials, write them a brief note. Doing this promptly may open up other slots for other (possibly ISA) students.

Once you've made your choice, you usually will need to pay an enrolment deposit. This deposit is non-refundable and tells the school you are serious about actually showing up in the autumn. You should also check on housing arrangements. Read the materials you received with the acceptance letter to see how you should take care of these matters. If you haven't done it already, now is the time to thank those people who proofread your essays and wrote letters of recommendation for you. Teachers who were asked to write recommendations feel hurt when students forget to say "thank-you," or fail to tell them the outcome of the colleges' decisions. If you haven't already thanked them, do it now.

### ***Canadian University Decisions***

Some universities in Canada have coordinated their decision period to coincide with that of the US. Other universities hold off their decisions until after receiving final senior year grades or IB scores. This is especially true if a candidate is on the borderline between admit and deny. Clearly the final semester of senior year is no time for "senioritis" if you are still waiting to hear from universities. It is a good idea to e-mail or phone the admissions offices of any Canadian universities from which you have not received a reply by mid April to check if all required documents have been received.

### ***"Senior Slump"***

After the college decisions have been announced, some students go through what is called a "senior slump." You have been accepted at a college/university and you begin to feel that your high school performance is no longer important. Beware! You probably still have IB work and exams, to complete. For those of you applying in the UK and even Canada, these scores determine your ultimate placement. In the US, most universities grant advanced placement credit for various IB scores, meaning you test out of freshmen level courses in those subjects. The fine print on most US university acceptance letters probably says something to the effect that "your acceptance is contingent upon your continued progress during your senior year." Each year some students have their acceptances revoked or are placed on probation immediately upon entering college due to their final semester grades. Granted, it doesn't happen that often, but it does happen. Don't let it happen to you! After all, would you really want to go through all of this work again next year?

## **Beyond Graduation**

Once you've made your decision, taken your IB exams, and graduated from high school it seems like you should finally be able to take it easy. Not so fast.

## **Housing Contract**

Somewhere in with your acceptance letter you should find information on housing. The earlier you send this form in, the better choices you often have. In fact, if you wait too long, you may be stuck in the oldest and worst dorm, or no room at all. In the housing contract you will also probably find a form asking about your likes and dislikes. This information is used to match you up with a compatible roommate. You may be asked to comment (honestly) on areas such as neatness, study habits, smoking habits, and taste in music. A college won't guarantee to match you up with a perfect roommate, but they'll try. Once you find out who your roommate will be (usually in July), contact him or her.

## **Address Changes**

If you are leaving Aberdeen right after graduation and returning to your home country for the summer, be sure to file an address change with your college in late May. Otherwise, you might miss some important mailings - such as information about orientation programmes, course registration, roommate assignments, and housing.

## **Getting a Visa**

Once you've made a decision on where you will go, you'll need to get a student visa if you are not a citizen or permanent resident of the country where you'll be in uni. For example, if you are an international student going to the US, you should receive a "Form I-20" from the college's international student office with your acceptance letter or shortly after. The US Embassy will require this form when you apply for your visa. You can't enter a foreign country for university study unless you are a citizen, a permanent resident, or have an appropriate student visa stamped in your passport. Do not enter any country for university travelling on a tourist visa.

## **Health Documents**

You may receive health forms, which will need to be completed by a physician. You may also be asked to include an official copy of your immunization history. In some countries, you will not be able to begin classes unless this form is completed. If your family does not have a record of your immunization, you should contact the ISA nurse before the end of the school year for help with this requirement.

## **Travel Plans and Orientation**

Most colleges and universities in the US, Canada, and the UK begin in August or September, and many expect new students to arrive on campus a week or two

before classes actually begin to go through an orientation programme. Do not make the mistake of skipping the orientation. It's a great way to meet some new people and to get over the freshman jitters before classes begin. ISA graduates always report that attending orientation was a big help in their adjustment to university.

If you're attending university in a new city or country, it's important that you finalise your airline or other travel reservations as early as possible. Otherwise you may find it impossible to get to campus on the proper date. If you are entering as an international student, remain in touch with the International Office for possible airport pickup and other support when you arrive on campus.

### **Transferring**

If you do think you might want to transfer to a different or even "better" school, it is sometimes possible after a year or two of study if you can demonstrate that you have been successful at the university level. Generally speaking, the more prestigious a school is, the harder it is to transfer into later. Colleges often expect transfer applicants to have a good reason for wanting to switch schools. Simply being unhappy at your present school isn't enough. The best reason is that you've decided on a major that your first school doesn't have. Your case has to be convincing. If you come across as the type of student who would be unhappy anywhere, you're not the type of student most colleges would want.

### **Keep in touch**

While we know you'll be busy once you begin university, we hope you'll drop us an email or stop by when you're in Aberdeen. Good luck!







## APPENDIX II: Junior and Senior Year Calendar

### **Second Semester Junior Year (Grade 11)**

- Schedule a parent-counsellor-student appointment.
- If you have not already, complete, and the Learning Styles Assessment, Personality Type, and Career Planner on your *Family Connection* site, and the Stamford Interest Inventory on *UCAS.com*.
- Do university searches on one or more of those sites.
- Begin formulating your List of Potential Colleges in your *Family Connection*.
- Check your transcript and GPA for accuracy.
- Register and take the SAT, ACT, IELTS or TOEFL as necessary.
- Study *The UCAS Guide to getting into University and College* if you are applying in the UK.
- Attend Open Days and make arrangements for college visits if possible during the summer.

### **Summer**

- If at all possible, do something college/university/futures related: attend Open Days, visit campuses, research schools that interest you, compose your resume, write drafts of required essays, or attend a summer programme.

### **Senior Year (Grade 12)**

#### **August**

- Make an appointment with your counsellor to review your college plans.
- Review your transcript for accuracy.
- Register for the October ACT and/or SAT Reasoning Test, as well as the TOEFL or IELTS if necessary. Check your selected universities to see if you need to sit SAT Subject Tests; if so register for them as well.
- Explore the UCAS website and university websites for the schools you are considering. Check requirements. **PRINT OUT REQUIREMENTS SO YOU CAN CHECK THEM OFF AS YOU COMPLETE!**
- **If you will be applying to Oxford, Cambridge, or any medical, dental, or veterinary programmes in the UK, or applying Early Action or Early Decision in the US, talk with your counsellor right away.**

#### **September**

- Attend the Grampian Higher Ed Convention at the University of Aberdeen, and possibly the Fulbright US College Day in London.
- Attend university rep visits and college fairs as appropriate.
- Periodically meet with your counsellor.
- Register for the November SAT Reasoning Test or SAT Subject Tests.
- Complete a "Teacher Recommendation Information" form for each teacher from whom you are requesting a recommendation. Politely ask them to write you a recommendation and give them this form and possibly your resume.
- **Complete and submit UCAS apps to counsellor if applying to Oxbridge, medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine.**

- Work on the actual university applications, especially if an application is for Early Decision, Early Action, or if a college sends out decisions on a “rolling” basis. Complete Early Action/Early Decision applications this month.
- **Submit cover sheets for all US Early Action or Early Decision applications!**
- If you will need a student visa to attend university, download the financial certification form from each college website and ask your parents to start obtaining the required documents from their bank. This may take time. (Some universities may want you to do this after you’ve made the decision to attend)
- Work on your application essays or personal statements.

### **October**

- Take the October ACT and/or the SAT Reasoning or SAT Subject Tests
- Register for December ACT or SAT Reasoning or Subject Tests.
- Complete your first application and submit the Cover Sheet to your counsellor.
- Complete the FERPA release on your Family Connection if you are applying via the Common Application. If you receive an application that includes a “Secondary School Report” form, fill in your name and address, sign if waiver statement, and give it to your counsellor. If there’s a “Mid-Year School Report” form, please fill out your section and give that form to your counsellor now also. Print out all required Teacher Recommendation forms and give them to the teachers who are writing your recs!
- Continue to meet college representatives and your counsellor.
- Continue working on essays.

### **November**

- **Send your UCAS application electronically to your counsellor by mid-November.**
- **Submit cover sheets for all US applications with deadlines in December and January by the middle of November.** Fill out an “Application Cover Sheet” for each university, so we will know what documents (e.g. transcripts, recommendations) to send to each.
- Take the November SAT Reasoning or SAT Subject Tests if necessary. [This is the only month that the SAT Language with Listening Subject Tests are offered.]
- Continue to meet all IB deadlines throughout the year.

### **December**

- Take the December ACT, SAT Reasoning or SAT Subject Tests if needed.
- If you have not already done so, make certain the testing agency is sending your official SAT, ACT, and/or IELTS or TOEFL scores directly to your schools.
- Do as well as possible in your first semester courses.

### **January**

- Notify your counsellor as offers, letters of acceptance or rejection arrive.
- Check the status of all of your applications directly with each university and on UCAS Track. Confirm that all supporting documents (including SAT or ACT scores) have been received. Do this early and often!
- Contact UCAS, or the college or university if you have not received confirmation that your application was received.
- If a school gave you a “Mid-Year School Report” form or asked for your mid-year grades, double check to be sure your counsellor has all forms and will send your grades.
- Use your time wisely, finish Extended Essays, do well on all mock exams.
- If you’re applying in the US, complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (*FAFSA*) or the *CSS/Financial Aid Profile* if you are a US citizen or permanent resident. Your parents must figure their US taxes to complete this form (but they do not need to have filed their tax form already). The *FAFSA* is available online at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov); the *CSS/Financial Aid Profile* is available at [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com). One of these must be filed for you to qualify for any aid or even to have a job on campus, some of which may be available no matter what your family situation.

### **February, March, April**

- Register and sit the April ACT if necessary and/or May SAT Reasoning Test.
- Letters of acceptance and offers continue to arrive. As you receive each decision, notify your counsellor.
- UCAS applicants: complete your Statement of Decisions online as required in final offer instructions.
- As you are accepted to universities, determine if you want to reserve housing at that school. If required, pay a deposit to hold that spot.
- US applicants: You have until 1 May to make your final decision (except in the case of Early Decision applications). If a college pressures you to commit earlier than that, see your counsellor. You must pay the enrolment deposit at US universities before 1 May to hold your place. If your reply is not postmarked by May 1, your acceptance can be withdrawn. Confirm housing commitments at this time also.
- if you are placed on a “waitlist”, see your counsellor to review your options.
- Once you’ve made your decision, notify all of the schools that accepted you whether you will be attending or not.
- Keep your grades up. Your acceptance is contingent upon you completing high school satisfactorily; your offer may be contingent upon your IB scores. If your grades drop, your acceptance can be withdrawn.
- Be sure the IB coordinator knows to which university your scores should be sent, or your UCAS application number if applying in the UK. This form must be completed early or you will have to handle it yourself once scores become available.

### **May and June**

- Complete your IB exams to the best of your ability. Use your study time wisely to be truly prepared for each exam.

- Complete all course requirements and sit final exams in all non-IB courses. Again, do the best you can!
- Notify your counsellor of your “attending” school; complete “Final Transcript Request” so that your transcript and proof of graduation can be sent to your university.
- if you will be attending university in the UK , submit application for funding to the Student Awards Agency for Scotland--SAAS (<http://www.student-support-saas.gov.uk>).

## APPENDIX III: The Application Process: Recommendations

Okay, so you're ready to begin the college/university application process. There are several parts to this process. One of the most important parts is securing recommendations that will help you in your pursuit of university! Some of you are ready for that today; others have yet to request applications from any schools. Here's some information that will help you with this important step:

### ***Who do I ask?***

Recommendations are an important part of many colleges' applications. Some colleges give you specific instructions about whom you should ask. You may be asked to provide a recommendation from an English instructor, a math or science instructor, or someone who has taught you in the last year. It's not necessary to choose teachers in courses where you earned A's. In fact, it's often those courses in which you earned B's and C's that admission officers wonder about. If you don't know whom you should ask, see your counsellor.

Select teachers who know you, respect you, and will write positive things about you. If you feel a teacher will have little to say other than report the grades you earned (or worse, say something negative) pick someone else. Be sure to ask the teacher in a way in which he or she can politely decline. Talk to the teacher when he or she has a few minutes to spare and ask if "You would consider writing one of my recommendations." Give the teacher a way out, maybe by adding something like "If you'd rather not do this, I don't want to put you on the spot." If the teacher says something like, "I'd like to help you but maybe someone knows you better," take the hint: ask someone else.

### ***When should I do this?***

Writing recommendations takes a lot of time and several teachers will be asked to write many applications. Give your teachers plenty of advance notice. The earlier you ask and provide the needed forms, the less likely it is that the teacher will be buried in recommendations already. Recommendations written early in the fall are usually better than those written in November or December. At the very latest, teachers should be asked and given all forms *at least* two weeks before the recommendation is needed.

Don't wait until you have submitted your application to ask the teacher. Teachers can be working on your recommendation while you are working on your essays.

***How can I make it easier for the letter writers?***

To help the teachers write their best recommendations, answer the questions on the “Teacher Recommendation Information” form and give it to the teacher who agrees to write your recommendation. While all information you provide won’t be included in a letter of recommendation, your comments may help a teacher recall things about you. You should of course add anything you think might help the teacher write a better recommendation!

The teacher’s letter will be turned in to the counselling office and kept on file to be used with each of your applications. If your college has provided a specific recommendation form, you should fill out the top portion with your name and address, sign the waiver statement, and give it to your teacher as soon as possible. Your teacher will write, “see attached” in the narrative section, check any rating boxes, sign, and return the form to the counselling office. A copy of their letter of recommendation will be attached. Since we will be sending everything in one envelope, it is not necessary to give the teacher a stamped envelope.

Letters of recommendation are kept on file for five years, so that if you decide to transfer to another college, another recommendation can be easily sent. Although a copy will be kept, you will not be allowed to read any of the recommendations.

***Double check and don’t forget to say “Thanks”***

At least a week before you are ready to send the application, speak to the teacher and ask where they are with the recommendation. This is a gentle reminder, and especially important if a deadline is approaching.

Remember, teachers are writing these letters as a personal favour to help you. It would be nice of you to send the teachers thank-you notes or do something to let them know how much you appreciated their efforts. Teachers like to be appreciated just like everyone else!

## APPENDIX IV: Teacher's Recommendation Information

*If your applications require one or more teacher recommendation letters, completing this form will help your teachers write more effectively. If a second recommendation is required, you should complete a second form for that teacher. Your teacher will return the recommendation directly to the counsellor's office (regardless of any instructions on the form). Do not wait until you have finished your part of the application before you give this to your teacher.*

I have reviewed this recommendation request.

\_\_\_\_\_

Counsellor's Signature

**Teacher's Name** \_\_\_\_\_ **My name** \_\_\_\_\_

**My first application will be completed by:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please submit this recommendation to the Counselling Office by:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Other teachers (if any) writing recommendations for me:**

**I will probably apply to the following colleges/universities:**

**I think I will be studying the following course, subject area, or major in university:**

A teacher's recommendation ordinarily concentrates on your academic performance. Think about your admirable qualities as related to this academic subject area (e.g., eagerness, participation, you "stick to it" even when it's difficult, not afraid of challenges, ability to understand difficult concepts, etc.)?

**Some of my admirable qualities in this subject area are:**

**I have had the following out-of-class experiences related to this subject area (e.g., summer courses, reading, things you did but weren't required to do for the class, etc.)**

**This is one project, paper, or activity in this class I did that I especially enjoyed or am proud of:**

**One way I have made a difference at ISA (in or out of class):**

Have your academic success and grades in this subject been affected by any personal or family obstacles (change of schools, etc.)? If you have not done particularly well, are there any pertinent reasons to explain why?

**Things I'd like you to know that may have made a difference:**

**Three positive adjectives you might use to describe me are:**

**Anything else I think you should know in order to write a more effective recommendation for me:**

**Thank you for taking the time to write this recommendation!**

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Your Signature



INDEX

Acceptance.....	66	International.....	10, 38, 57, 58, 71
ACT .....	24, 33, 34, 57, 71, 73, 74	Japanese Universities.....	10
Activities and Awards.....	53	Large Colleges/Universities .....	18
Address Changes .....	68	Liberal Arts colleges.....	16
Admission Office Representatives .....	15	Likely, Possible, and Reach.....	24
Alumni .....	42	Location .....	17
Application Cover Sheet.....	60, 71, 74	Major .....	11, 58
Application deadline.....	7	Mid-Size Colleges/Universities .....	18
Australian Universities .....	8	MyRoad .....	21, 34, 55
Awards and Honours .....	41	Names .....	57
Campus “Culture”.....	19	Need aware .....	42
Campus Visits.....	15	Offers of Admission .....	7
Can You Pay?.....	42	Online Applications.....	49
Canadian Universities.....	9	Ontario Universities Application Centre .	9
Canadian University Decisions.....	67	Open Days .....	15
Career Services .....	20	Orientation .....	68
CEEB .....	34, 49, 57	Other Countries.....	11
791042 .....	57	Paper Applications.....	50
Check the Percent Accepted .....	26	Parents .....	42, 64
Class Size and Quality .....	20	Prestige Factor .....	20
Common Application.....	11, 47, 48, 71	Previous Graduates .....	38
Comprehensive university .....	16	Programmes/Majors.....	21
Computer Resources.....	14	PSAT/NMSQT .....	30
Cost and Quality .....	21	Recommendation 8, 39, 41, 54, 55, 56, 57,	
Counsellor Recommendation.....	56	61, 67, 71	
Course of Study .....	6	Recommendations ..12, 25, 30, 41, 44, 55,	
Courses You’ve Taken .....	37	56, 61, 67, 74	
Deferral .....	66	Registering for Admission Tests .....	34
Denial.....	66	Regular Decision .....	45
Diversity .....	41	Reply Date .....	67
Downloadable Applications.....	48	Roommates .....	20
Early Action.....	46, 73	Safety .....	19
Early Decision .....	45, 46, 71, 73, 75	SAT.7, 8, 9, 24, 25, 26, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33,	
Employment.....	53	34, 36, 38, 39, 45, 46, 57, 59, 71, 73, 74	
Essay .....	32, 40, 50, 71	SAT Scores .....	26, 32, 38
Extracurricular .....	40, 52	Scholarships.....	22
Family Connection...14, 21, 25, 26, 27, 62		Secondary School Report .....	56
Fees and Finances .....	60	Sending it Off .....	60
Financial Aid .....	22, 23	Sending your Official Scores.....	34
Financial Statement .....	60	Senior Grades .....	38
Freshman Satisfaction.....	20	Senior Slump .....	67
Grades .....	36, 39	Short Answer Questions .....	<i>See Essay</i>
Guidebooks and CD’s.....	14	Size .....	17
Health Documents .....	68	Small Colleges/Universities .....	18
Housing.....	18	Small-town Campus .....	17
Housing Contract.....	68	Social security number .....	49, 57
How Decisions are Made.....	43	Specialty schools .....	16
How Good is the High School.....	38	Suburban Campus.....	17
IB .....7, 8, 9, 27, 34, 37, 41, 65, 67, 68, 75		Summer Activities .....	53

Summer School.....	41	UCAS Offers .....	65
Taking a Year Off.....	12	UK Finance for Higher Education.....	21
Test of English as a Foreign Language:		UK Universities .....	6, 15
The TOEFL.....		Visa.....	60, 68
.....	24, 27, 29, 34, 39, 71, 73, 74	Waitlist.....	66
Transcript.....	36, 71	What to compare.....	16
Transferring .....	69	Where Friends Go.....	19
Travel Plans .....	68	Women’s colleges.....	16
Types of US Colleges .....	16	Writing Style.....	<i>See Essay</i>
UCAS..	6, 7, 14, 15, 21, 27, 36, 51, 57, 61, 65, 74, 75		

