

Ready, for More?

MASTERING THE ADMISSION PROCESS

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO APPLYING TO BOARDING SCHOOL

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1 INTRODUCTION

The most important piece of your boarding school admission process is building a systematic approach, or plan, for your application process.

Notice we use the word *process*. Applying to boarding school is a process with many pieces to gather, combine and bring to completion. Some of the pieces – such as school deadlines, teacher recommendations and standardized testing dates – are things you don't directly control. So it's important to take a bird's eye view and make a plan before you start.

The process may lead you to understand your needs or interests differently. You may end up submitting applications to schools you hadn't considered or known about.

A quick word on financial aid – If financial aid is part of your boarding school admission process, you will be completing a separate financial aid application alongside your admission application. Your financial aid application will require its own work and documentation that can be equal to, or greater than, the admission application. Chapter 5: *Understanding Financial Aid provides specific guidelines and resources that you will need.*

Don't worry if you've arrived late to the process! Our online document, **Applying To Private School After The Deadline**, is for families arriving at their boarding school application late or outside of the traditional admission calendar.

How best to manage the process? Build an admission plan. On to Chapter 2!

This month-by-month overview of the admission process provides you with a general framework for the school year and will help you use this guide.

Boarding school Admissions Offices typically make their admission decisions in March. We know many families might not begin their boarding school application process until later in the school year. Still, this calendar can serve as a guide for condensed timelines and provide helpful reminders for tasks you may need to complete.

Late Summer/Early Fall

A great time to start preparing for the next school year.

- Talk with boarding school friends and families, and ask them about schools. Glean insights into different kinds of schools.
- Be able to articulate why you're considering boarding school.
- As a family, discuss the personality, interests and skills of the student who will be applying to boarding school.
- Evaluate what he or she needs in a school environment to succeed.
- Work together to improve reading and vocabulary skills.
- Work together to improve math skills.
- Make sure this year's classes are a healthy balance of the right courses.
- Find extracurricular activities to help develop interests and skills beyond school.

September

- Write down your questions about boarding school as they arise so you can ask school admissions officers.
- Start exploring schools on ReadyforMore.com, a website featuring over 160 boarding schools of all types in the U.S. and Canada. (See Chapter 3: Finding the Right School for You)
- Request and explore school catalogs, websites, social media sites, and applications. (See Chapter 4: Step-by-Step Guide to the Application Process)
- Register and prepare to take the appropriate standardized admission tests, for example SSAT, ISEE, TOEFL. (See Chapter 4: Step-by-Step Guide...)
- Set up a calendar to track important dates and deadlines.
- Create files to keep copies of applications and correspondence.

October–November

- Attend private school fairs. (See Chapter 4: Step-by-Step Guide...)
- Identify characteristics you want in a school. (See Chapter 3: Finding the Right School for You)
- Take campus tours, attend open houses on campus.
- Make a list of your schools of interest.
- Gather application deadlines and financial aid deadlines for the school on your list. (See Chapter 4: Step-by-Step Guide...)
- Mark these dates on your calendar.
- Request letters of recommendation to include with your admission applications.

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- ❑ Begin working on admission application essays. (See Chapter 8: How to Write Your Admissions Essay)
- ❑ Interview at the schools of interest. (See Chapter 7: Preparing for Your Interview)
- ❑ Take the required standardized admission test(s). (See Chapter 4: Step-by-Step Guide...)
- ❑ Determine which financial aid forms the schools on your list require. (See Chapter 5: Understanding Financial Aid).
- ❑ Collect family tax information.

December

- ❑ Narrow your school list to a reasonable number. You might start with 8-10 schools, but might narrow down to about 4-5.
- ❑ Double check application deadlines. Many schools encourage students to complete the entire admission process by the 1st of February, but be sure to check each school's published information.
- ❑ Schedule standardized test(s) if still needed. (See Chapter 4: Step-by-Step Guide...)
- ❑ Talk with boarding school friends home on break.
- ❑ Complete and submit applications. (See Chapter 4: Step-by-Step Guide...)
- ❑ Send "thank you" notes to the admissions officer who interviewed you.
- ❑ Some schools may have financial aid applications due in December. (See Chapter 5: Understanding Financial Aid).

January

- ❑ Submit your financial aid information with current tax return information as soon as you can complete it. Again, some schools may have financial aid deadlines in December. (See Chapter 5: Understanding Financial Aid).
- ❑ Reminder: if you haven't, register and prepare for standardized test(s). (See Chapter 4: Step-by-Step Guide...)
- ❑ Send transcripts to schools.
- ❑ Respond quickly to any requests from schools.

March

- ❑ School decisions arrive around March 10. This date may vary by region or school type.
- ❑ Carefully read your letters.
- ❑ Choose whether or not you want to pursue any waitlist opportunities.

April-May

- ❑ Attend accepted student days if possible.
- ❑ Make a decision. Most schools request your reply around April 10.
- ❑ Send your tuition deposit.
- ❑ You will want to reserve a spot (make a deposit) even if you are pursuing a waitlist situation at another school.
- ❑ Respectfully decline offers from schools that you will not attend.
- ❑ Send "thank you" notes to individuals who contributed to your application.

Which boarding school is the best? Just like each student, each boarding school is different. There's no single best boarding school. But there are schools that are best for YOU, the student, based on your particular interests, skills and needs.

Consider the questions below and use the **Find A School Tool** on **ReadyForMore.com** to see all the amazing choices available to you.

You can create your list of schools based on the things that are important to you. Read the schools' profiles, go to their websites and use your instinct – your gut feeling – about where you'd like to be.

Most of all, be honest with yourself about what really appeals to you. When you find schools that feel best to you, you're likely to **find people like you** – other students, friends, who share similar interests, ambitions and inspirations. Your new community awaits you!

Location

Is it important to stay relatively close to home? Or is it comfortable to go anywhere? Is there a particular region that draws you because of its landscape, weather or culture?

School Character

School type can be defined in a number of ways – Coed, All Girls, All Boys, Military, Middle School, Religious, Non-Religious, Pre-Professional Arts... You can learn the benefits of these different types of schools by going to individual school websites. Do a search on one of these criteria and see what the schools have to say! Does a certain kind of school feel like YOU?

New Opportunities

Do you have a special interest you want to pursue – or try? 3D Design, Jazz Band, AP Psychology, Environmental Ethics, Martial Arts, Kayaking, Artificial Intelligence, Animation, Ice Hockey, Acting, Aviation Science, Global Leadership...Or maybe you want to try a lot of things!

What if you don't know?!?! Don't worry about it!

You can search for special programs – and get ideas – by following the steps below.

The Advanced Filters on the Find A School Tool will list all the different programs boarding schools offer.

1. Enter where you live.
2. Click the orange ADVANCED SEARCH button.
3. On the new page, click on the drop-down menus under Academic Programs, Arts and Athletics.
4. Scroll through the lists – what do you like? – click on the programs that interest you.
5. Click SEARCH NOW and you'll get a list of schools that offer ALL the programs you've selected. You might need to choose fewer programs at a time to get a longer list. Play with it! Have fun! You'll be getting to know a lot of schools along the way.

GO FOR IT! EXPLORE SCHOOLS NOW

4 STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO THE APPLICATION PROCESS

This is an outline of steps to help you complete all parts of the process thoroughly and on time. We suggest you read the full outline first, then come back to each step.

- Step 1 – Build Your Application Foundation
- Step 2 – Request Admission/Application Packets
- Step 3 – Schedule Interviews & School Visits
- Step 4 – Request Financial Aid Applications
- Step 5 – Submit your Completed Applications
- Step 6 – Ongoing Communication & Notifications

Step 1 – Build Your Application Foundation

1. **Start by gathering deadlines.** Most school websites list their deadlines for new student applications, financial aid applications, and admission notification. Check the deadlines for each school on your list, and mark the dates on a calendar. This way, you'll know how much time you have to complete all the steps.
2. **Identify who will write student recommendations.** This will be teachers, coaches or other adult professionals who know the student well.
3. **Register for educational tests**, if not already completed. Find info here for **Secondary School Admission Test (SSAT)** or the **Independent School Entrance Exam (ISEE)** and if needed, the **Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)** which schools require for students for whom English is a second language.
4. **Attend any boarding school fairs in your area.** You might meet admissions officers from schools on your list or find additional schools. While not exhaustive, this list of **School Fairs** is a good starting point.
5. **Have your financial documents organized and ready**, if you will be applying for financial aid.
6. **Develop a system** that helps you keep all the parts of the process accessible and organized.

Step 2 – Request Admission/Application Packets

1. **Contact the Admissions Office** of each school on your list. There are several ways to do this. School contact information is on every School Profile page on **ReadyForMore.com** and on the Admission page of each school's website. You can also call or email the Admissions Office directly.
2. **Request the school's Admission/Application Packet** (some schools say "Admission" others say "Application"). This packet often includes a printed school catalog, a student application, a writing sample form, teacher recommendation forms, and an academic transcript release form. *TIP: If you are ready to apply, make sure you request the complete packet, not just the school catalog.*

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Most schools require an online application. Some schools use the SAO – Standard Application Online, while others require the Gateway to Prep Application. Check with each school to see which application they accept.

- To complete the **Standard Application Online (SAO)**, start here.
- To complete the **Gateway to Prep Application**, start here.

3. Gather Information on Additional Requirements from each school. Schools will specify the following information on their websites, in their packets, or you can ask the Admissions Office directly:

Educational Tests required by the School

In addition to **SSAT**, **ISEE**, and **TOEFL**, schools may also want to see any standardized achievement tests used by your current school.

Deadlines and Dates for Admission

Most schools will list these important dates on their websites. Again, put them on your calendar early, so you'll be ready!

- Application Deadline – the latest possible date that the school will accept an application for a new student
- Financial Aid Deadline
- Supporting Materials Deadline – teacher recommendations, transcripts and test scores
- Admission Notification Date – the date by which students will be notified if they have been accepted or denied admission to the school

International Student Handbook

Many schools will have a handbook that describes the special services for international students.

NOTE: *Some schools offer Early Decision or Rolling Admission – Check school websites!*

Early Admission generally requires a completed application by the end of November and a commitment to attend the school the following fall if accepted. Make sure that you know the terms and guidelines if you apply under early admission terms.

Rolling Admission means that students can apply throughout the year and the Admissions Office will inform you of the decision shortly after you submit your completed application.

Step 3 – Request Financial Aid Applications

Request financial aid and student loan application materials at the same time that you request your admission application packet – if you will be applying for financial aid. Some boarding schools will have a separate officer who handles financial aid applications and requests. In other cases, it is handled by the Admissions Office. You can find the financial aid contact on the school's website or by asking the Admissions Office.

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Tip: Applying for financial aid can be stressful. Request information early and be sure to contact each school's financial aid officer with any questions. Give your family plenty of time.

For guidelines and resources, make sure to read Chapter 3: Understanding Financial Aid.

Step 4 – Schedule Your Interviews

An on-campus interview is one of the most important parts of the application process. While local or regional information gatherings are helpful, most schools place a great deal of importance on the quality of the interview.

Schedule an interview and school visit for each school on your list the same way you requested an Admission/Application Packet – on the Admission page on each school's website; or by calling or emailing the Admissions Office.

TIP #1: Most boarding schools require an on-campus admissions interview, but if you live a great distance from a school, many schools will help arrange an interview with a local or regional admissions representative, often an alum of the school.

Tip #2: Don't schedule multiple interviews in a single day. We advise students to schedule only one interview a day. Take your time. Enjoy your visit. See all there is to see. It is important.

Be sure to read Chapter 6: Preparing for Your Interview.

Step 5 – Submit Your Completed Applications

1. **Use the application checklist** from each school to make sure you have submitted all the parts of each of your applications. Most schools will include an application checklist with their application materials.
2. **Double check deadlines.** Many schools encourage students to complete the entire admission process by the 1st of February, but be sure to check each school's published information.

Step 6 – Ongoing Communication & Notifications

1. **Find out who is handling your application** in case you have any follow up questions. Usually there is one admissions officer in a school Admissions Office who will evaluate the student's candidacy. It is appropriate to send a "Thank You Note" to your interviewer but do not badger the Admissions Office. It will not help your application.
2. **Gather the Admission Notification dates** for each school on your list. Unless you have applied for rolling or early admission, most schools will notify you on or around April 10. Students who have been offered admission are generally given 30 days before a decision and a deposit is required. Once again, be sure to consult each school for variation in the notification process.

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3. In general, admissions committees will render one of four decisions on the application:

Admit: You are accepted!

Defer: The school is still interested in admitting you, but probably has some concerns about grades. They may want to see another set of grades before they make their final decision. Call the school to clarify status.

Waitlist: They really want to admit you, but don't have a room just yet. Most schools create a waitlist of qualified candidates in case a student who was enrolled decides not to attend at the last minute. In this event, the students at the top of the waitlist are offered admission. Call the school to clarify your status and get an understanding of their timeline.

Denied: The school has decided not to admit you. It's the not decision you hoped for, but if you don't get admitted to a particular school, there are likely other opportunities that will work out well.

5 UNDERSTANDING FINANCIAL AID FOR BOARDING SCHOOL

While some families will not need financial aid, many will. If you've just begun your research into Boarding Schools, check out this page to get a general overview of [Expenses & Financial Aid](#).

There are generally four types of financial aid:

Need-based Financial Aid comes from the school's budget and is offered as a grant that does not need to be paid back.

Merit Scholarships are given to students who demonstrate exceptional performance in a specific area. These do not need to be paid back.

Tuition Loan and Financing Programs provide credit-based loans that must be repaid.

Tuition Payment Programs are offered by lending institutions and allow families to pay manageable installments over the academic year.

Most schools have a Director of Financial Aid and a team focused on allocating that aid. At some schools, an officer in the Admissions Office handles financial aid.

Every school has financial aid deadlines published on their websites. You'll need to become familiar with each school's timeline for submission and the financial forms you need to submit for each school. Keep in mind that families need to apply for financial aid every year, not just the first.

STEPS TO APPLY FOR FINANCIAL AID

Get ready for some acronyms! Once you learn these, you'll be a pro.

1. **Families complete the [School and Student Services \(SSS\) form](#)** provided by Community Brands in association with the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS). This is a universal form – almost all schools use it.
2. **Completion** of the SSS form yields the PFS – “Parents’ Financial Statement”
3. **The PFS will determine a family's EFC** – “Estimated Family Contribution” which is an estimate of the amount the family can contribute toward school expenses.
4. **SSS will forward the EFC** to all the schools to which the student is applying.
5. **The EFC will determine a family's COA** – “Cost of Attendance” which indicates the amount a family can pay towards tuition at each school.

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Best Practices to keep in mind:

- Deadlines matter! Meet each school's financial aid application deadline so that your request will be considered.
- Communicate with the Financial Aid Director at each school and provide any extenuating circumstances they should be aware of. Don't hesitate to broach any issues.
- Be transparent. Complete all areas for explanation or comment on the financial aid forms to give a complete and accurate presentation of your current financial situation.

If you're ready to apply for Financial Aid, head on over to [**SolutionsbySSS.com/Parents**](https://www.solutionsbysss.com/parents) to complete your PSF and get started!

Schools will learn about your academic strengths and abilities from your grades and test scores, but aside from that...

Boarding Schools want to know about you as a person.

You will be answering a lot of questions and you might not be used to talking about yourself very much. You can prepare—for your campus visit, your interview, your essay and other parts of the admission process—by taking a thoughtful perspective on what motivates you, what truly interests you, what you would do if you could do anything in the world...

Here are some questions to jump start your personal introspection, so you can express yourself more accurately, thoroughly and concisely.

What new things would you like to try (or continue) at boarding school? What interests you about them? How do you think those activities will help you grow as a person?

Do you have a dream or specific goals for your life? How does boarding school fit in to help you achieve those? Or, how would boarding school help you discover what you want to do or be?

What do you like about the idea of living on campus? What might be fun about being in a larger community? How will meeting so many new people help you grow?

Where do you feel most comfortable or confident, where you know—you can do it (whatever it is)? What's an example of something you are proud of or that you surprised yourself by accomplishing?

If you participate in a specific activity or hobby, what makes you good at it? What do you not like about it? What would make it better? Is there an activity you'd like to start if the school doesn't have it? Are there certain things you'd like to strengthen in yourself so you can be a strong leader?

Who do you look up to? Why? Is there something a person has done that you wish you did or that you could do? What would it say about you if you did those things? How would you use those skills elsewhere?

Remember, you don't have to be perfect. You just have to be You.

Boarding School Interviews are very important. It's an opportunity for the school—and you—to see if you are a good fit for each other. Nothing replaces what you can learn face-to-face.

Often times, you don't need to have submitted your application to visit a school and interview. Check with each school on your list.

Our number one piece of advice to students – **BE YOURSELF**. You already know how to be you, right? You've been doing it your whole life. You don't need to be someone else or fit a specific mold in your interview. But you do want to present your **best self**. Make sure you've gotten plenty of sleep and aren't distracted.

These tips will help you prepare...

Anticipate Interview Topics

Be prepared to speak in detail about your academic life and extra-curriculars. If the school offers special programs in your areas of interest, be ready to talk about why you want to be a part of that program. How will it help you and what can you contribute? Share what's important or interesting to you in the world. What are you passionate about? If you have a special talent or pursuit, let them know. Be ready to discuss how you feel about living at school – and be ready to explain any unusual situations, such as a low grade, school changes, or absences. Addressing every topic directly and honestly is best for everyone.

What to Bring

Ask each school what materials they would like to see. Most schools are only interested in having a conversation during the interview, but if you have a portfolio of strong art work or something else that represents what you do, bring it. Bring an extra copy of your transcript in case the interviewer doesn't have it in advance.

Dress Appropriately

A great first impression goes a long way—and you want to feel good about yourself. See what the school dress code is and let that be your guide. A school with a formal dress code or uniform probably means wearing a suit or a sport coat for boys, and an appropriate dress or dress suit for girls. If the dress code is casual, boys can wear pants and a shirt, and girls can wear pants, skirts or dresses. Jeans are probably not the best option even if the dress code is casual.

Get to Know the School – Before and During Your Visit

You've probably already done your research on schools, but take another look at the website, be clear on what you like about the school, and think of some questions you can ask in your interview. You'll be able to talk with students and faculty as part of your visit too. Do as much as you can – observe classes, eat in the dining hall, tour the dorms, attend an athletic or arts event. Get a feel for the school's vibe.

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Schedule Interviews on Different Days

Try to schedule only one interview and visit per day. You don't want to feel rushed. Give yourself time to explore each school thoroughly.

Take Notes

If you are interviewing at several schools, jot down your impressions and anything that stood out to you—good or bad—about the school. These notes are for you to look back on and remind yourself about particulars. Don't let it all blur together.

Enjoy it!

Schools will expect you to be a little nervous, so don't worry about it. Enjoy your visit—and enjoy being you!

Your essay is one of the primary places where you—the student—can express yourself in your application. Even if the question seems to be about a remote topic—for example, *who would you like to meet in all of history and why?*—schools get to know you by what you choose to write about and how you write about it.

Here are some tips for students!

Giving Feedback vs Taking Over

That sounds a little strong, but we mean it! It's very important that the student writes their own essay. Parents can help—discuss the topic if needed, read for clarity, proof read—but the essay needs to be the student's work. Schools can tell if a parent wrote the essay and that complicates the admission process.

Monitoring Computer Features

Make sure auto-correct or a grammar feature does not change your words unless you want them changed. These features are great tools, but you are in charge. Sometimes grammar features don't understand the context and make incorrect suggestions. If you question a suggested change, look up the grammatical rule online.

Now the fun part!

Picking Your Topic

Most schools will give you a few topics to choose from. There's no right choice. Pick the one you like best, that jumps out to you, or starts to spark ideas right away.

Yucky First Draft...

A lot of writers suggest you get your first thoughts out as fast as you can. Just write. Don't worry about being perfect—or even good. The blank page can be scary. So cover that page with all your initial thoughts—like a download from your brain to the paper. This might take the form of an outline, a few complete thoughts or paragraphs, some key words, or a bunch of random sentences. Just start!

Be Specific & Stay on Topic

Whatever topic you've chosen, get into details. Don't be general. Relate the topic to your own life, interests and experiences, but make sure not to diverge too much. The content of the essay is a combination of the topic and you.

Structure

You've probably been writing papers for school. Use what you know. If you need help organizing your thoughts, ask a teacher, family friend, or parent, for help structuring your essay.

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Give Yourself Time to Write Several Complete Drafts

You're not going to get it the first time around. Few writers ever do. Once you have a complete first draft, step away for a day or two, then look at your essay again and make changes. You'll have perspective on it. Start writing early so you can do this a few times.

Have Someone Read Your Essay

Whether you go to a teacher, a parent, or another trusted person, have someone read your essay to make sure it says what you think it says and to check for typos or confusing parts. You might ask them – *Where do I need to be more specific? What did you learn about me? What's confusing? What do you want to know more about?*

Ideas Come at the Weirdest Times

Writing is a process and your brain will be working on your essay, even when you're doing something else. Keep a notebook or notes app handy to jot down ideas that pop up.

Have fun with it!

You're already starting to learn about writing and your own creative process!