



Apply to College with Confidence

An ASU Prep playbook for navigating college applications

Your potential is our promise

You've spent years getting to this point. Late nights. Early mornings. Classes that stretched you. Moments that surprised you — it all counts. Take a second to pause and reflect. You've done the hard work, now it's just a matter of highlighting it.

College applications aren't about being perfect, they're about being real. The more colleges see you in your application, the stronger it becomes. Your interests, effort, growth — everything that's shaped your story. Think of your application as a chance to show it all off. An opportunity to brag a little. To reflect. To connect the dots. Colleges want to understand who you are and how you think, not just what appears on a transcript.

In this playbook, we've broken down everything you'll need into five clear checkpoints. It's a roadmap designed to keep you focused, relaxed and confident as you move through the college application process.



About ASU Prep

We've helped thousands of students apply to college, and we know firsthand what it takes to succeed. Here, students don't have to navigate the application process alone. With Learning Success Coaches walking alongside you and clear steps at every stage, uncertainty turns into progress, stress turns into a plan and all your hard work sets you up for a bright future ahead.

Class of 2025

88% admitted
to college

86% of students had
a 3.0+ GPA

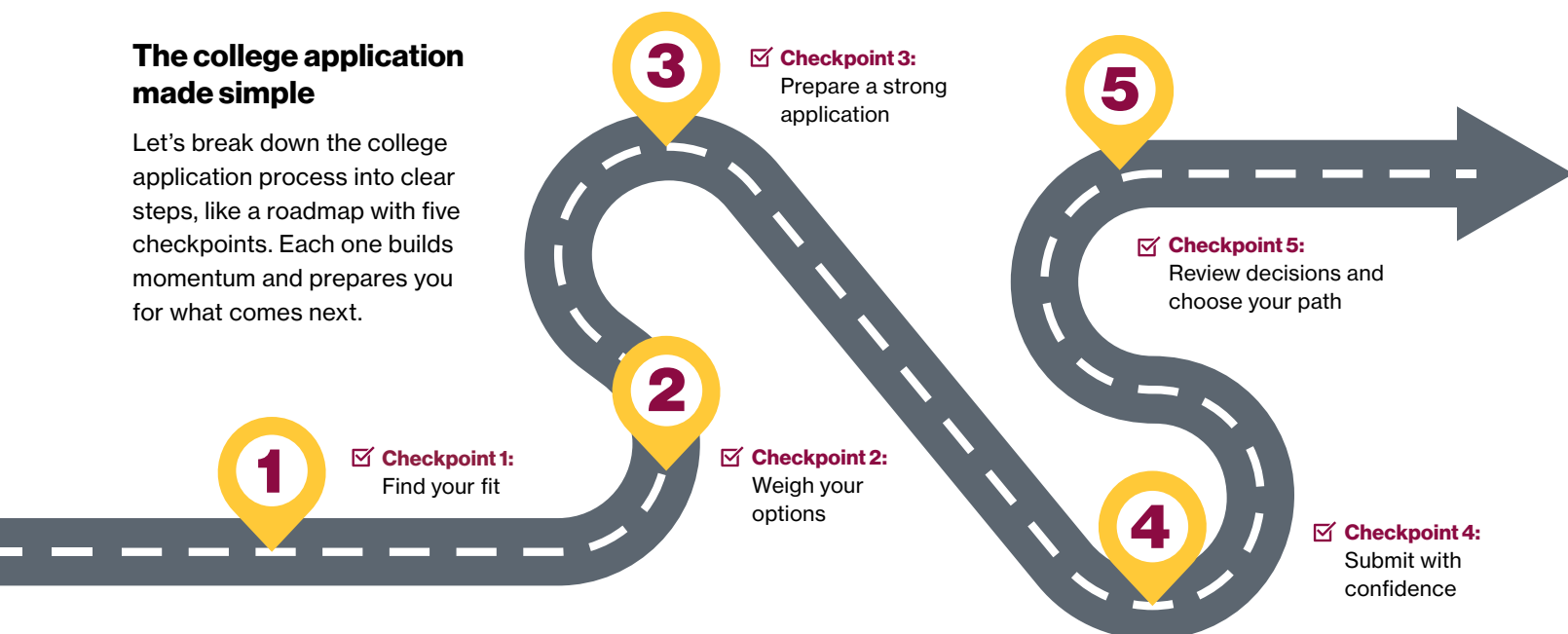
81% of students
applied to ASU

1 in 3 students
enrolled at ASU

Your guided roadmap from planning to acceptance

The college application made simple

Let's break down the college application process into clear steps, like a roadmap with five checkpoints. Each one builds momentum and prepares you for what comes next.



Most students move through these checkpoints across junior and senior year. Keep in mind, some steps may overlap. Now let's get clear on what these checkpoints actually do with a helping hand from our timeline.

Time it right:

Senior year application timeline Add in para from copy doc: Before diving into the individual checkpoints, it helps to zoom out and see the full picture. College applications aren't one big moment. They're a series of smaller steps starting in the summer before your senior year. Knowing what usually happens when can make everything feel more manageable and a lot less stressful.

Summer	Fall	Winter	Spring
<i>(Before Senior Year)</i> ☐ Finalize college list ☐ Draft personal statement ☐ Request 3 to 5 recommendation letters ☐ Create a volunteer or service list	☐ Take or retake SAT/ACT if needed ☐ Submit Early Decision or Early Action applications ☐ File FAFSA® (opens October 1)	☐ Submit Regular Decision applications ☐ Apply for scholarships and grants	☐ Review acceptances and financial aid offers ☐ Make final college decision ☐ Celebrate your achievement



Checkpoint 1: Find your fit

This is where everything begins. Choosing a college is about finding the right one for you. Fit matters. When your school matches how you learn, live and grow, everything feels more aligned.

This checkpoint helps you get clear on what you want out of college before building your list. You'll start exploring colleges, majors and campus experiences to figure out what feels right for you. There's no pressure to have it all figured out; curiosity is more than enough.

At this checkpoint, you'll:

- ✓ Explore your interests, strengths and future goals
- ✓ Learn about different types of colleges and programs
- ✓ Experience real college life through ASU coursework and campus visits
- ✓ Use our college match prompt in ChatGPT

Find your college match

Copy and paste the prompt on the right into ChatGPT and fill it out as completely and honestly as you can. There are no right or wrong answers; the more specific you are, the better your matches will be. Once you submit it, ChatGPT will recommend your top 3 college matches based on your preferences.

The ASU advantage

ASU Prep students earn transferable ASU college credits while they're still in high school. By taking real college courses from a university ranked #1 in innovation, our students build momentum before they even apply. Along the way, they have support from a [Learning Success Coach](#) (LSC) who helps them explore options, ask the right questions and begin shaping a college list that fits their goals.

Your college match prompt

I am a high school student building my college list. Based on the information below, match me with my top 3 college options and explain why each school is a good fit.

Here's what matters to me:

- ☐ I'm looking for a college with a [college size] (*small, medium or large*).
- ☐ I want to be located in a [location type] (*city, suburb or college town*).
- ☐ I prefer [weather/climate].
- ☐ I'm looking for a campus environment that feels [overall environment] (*collaborative, competitive, social, academically intense, balanced, etc.*).
- ☐ My academic interests or intended major are [academic interests / intended major].
- ☐ Transferring credits is [very / somewhat / not] important to me.
- ☐ I want a [campus style] campus (*traditional, modern, close-knit, spread out, etc.*).
- ☐ Ideally, I want to be [distance] from home. I currently live in [current city/state].
- ☐ Beyond earning a degree, I hope college will give me [what you want out of college] (*career preparation, community, independence, networking, personal growth, etc.*)

Please recommend three colleges that fit me best and explain each choice clearly.



Strong habits built early give students more choices when it's time to apply.

86% of ASU Prep students earn a 3.0+ GPA

2 Checkpoint 2: Weigh your options

Now it's time to turn exploration into a plan. This is where your college matches, your own research and real guidance come together. The goal of this checkpoint is simple and important: walk away with **three top choices and two alternates you feel good about**.

As you narrow your list, consider:

- ✓ Academic fit and interests
- ✓ Majors and programs you're excited about
- ✓ Campus size, location and culture
- ✓ Cost, financial aid and scholarship opportunities
- ✓ How earned college credits may apply

What to know before you move on

Every college application is different. Each school may ask for different essays, recommendations or additional materials. Your applications should be tailored to each college on your list. Ensure your college list balances ambition and opportunity with schools that challenge you, fit you and support your goals.

Senior Seminar

Dedicated support for college application milestones:

Senior year of high school is the final stretch where all your preparation comes together. ASU Prep students stay on track with guidance from their Learning Success Coaches and the year-long Senior Seminar, which covers college and career preparation, applications, resumes, scholarships and financial aid.

Partner with your guidance counselor or Learning Success Coach

- **Create a pros and cons list for each school**
Focus on what excites you and what gives you pause. Patterns will start to appear.
- **Place your top schools in a venn diagram**
Where they overlap is often where the best fit lives. This is especially helpful when deciding between similar options.
- **Revisit your matches from Checkpoint 1**
Compare your college matches to the schools on your list. Ask why certain schools align with your goals and what might be missing.



A clear list and **steady support** help students apply with confidence.

88% ASU seniors
admitted to college



Checkpoint 3: Prepare a strong application

This is where everything comes together. Your list is set. Now it's time to show colleges who you are, what you care about and how you've grown. This checkpoint gives you real tools to do that with confidence.

You'll knock out:

- ✓ Essays that reflect your voice and goals
- ✓ Requesting recommendations
- ✓ Organizing transcripts and test scores
- ✓ Highlighting activities, achievements and growth

How to write a standout personal essay

Start with a real moment. Choose a specific experience that changes how you think, act or see the world. Small moments often tell the strongest stories.

Reflect, don't just describe. What did you learn? How did it shape you? Colleges care more about insight than achievements.

Make it unmistakably yours. Use your voice. Be honest. If another student could swap names with you, go deeper.



How to request your official transcripts

Your transcript is the official record of your coursework and grades. Here's exactly how to do it with confidence:

Step 1: Find out who sends your transcript
At many schools, including ASU Prep, transcripts are sent by your school, not by you. Your first point of contact is your guidance counselor or Learning Success Coach (LSC). They can help coordinate transcript requests and make sure everything is sent correctly.

Step 2: Submit your request
Transcript requests are typically handled online or by email, not in person. Your guidance counselor or LSC will submit the official request on your behalf or guide you through the school's request process if an online form is required.

To request your transcript:

- ☐ Message or email your Learning Success Coach
- ☐ Share your full college list. Include application deadlines and application type (Early Action, Early Decision or Regular Decision)
- ☐ Let them know how each college receives transcripts, such as through [Common App](#) or a school portal

Step 3: Request early
Submit your request at least 2–3 weeks before each application deadline. This gives time for processing and avoids last-minute stress.

Step 4: Confirm delivery
After you apply, log into each college's applicant portal. Look for a checklist or status page and confirm your transcript shows as received. If something is missing, tell your guidance counselor or LSC right away so it can be fixed quickly.

If you earned college credit in HS: Some colleges also require a separate university transcript for dual enrollment or concurrent courses. Your guidance counselor or LSC will help you determine if this is needed and how to request it.

How to ask for recommendation letters

Ask early. Give teachers plenty of time and extra context to write you a strong letter.

What to say or email:

Hi [Teacher's Name],

I'm applying to college this year and was wondering if you'd feel comfortable writing me a letter of recommendation. I really valued your [subject area] class. Attached is my resume, activities list and deadlines to make this easy. Thank you for considering.

Sincerely,
[Student's name]



How to highlight your extracurricular activities

Your extracurriculars help colleges see who you are beyond grades and test scores. Admissions teams are looking for impact, initiative and growth. Strong activity descriptions show how you contributed, what you cared about and what you learned along the way. Even a small role can stand out if you explain it clearly and thoughtfully.

Be sure to include:

Organization name and your role: _____

What problem(s) you helped address: _____

How you contributed: _____

Skills you gained or impact you made: _____

8,000+ ASU Prep students earned more than 8,000 college credits while in high school, giving applications real weight and momentum.

Building a better world through service: Academic achievement and college credits are important, but colleges also look for impact beyond the classroom. ASU Prep student Analiese stands out by turning passion into action. Her community leadership and service earned her a spot as a top 10 Arizona finalist for the U.S. Senate Youth Program. [Read Analiese's Story→](#)



4 Checkpoint 4: Submit with confidence

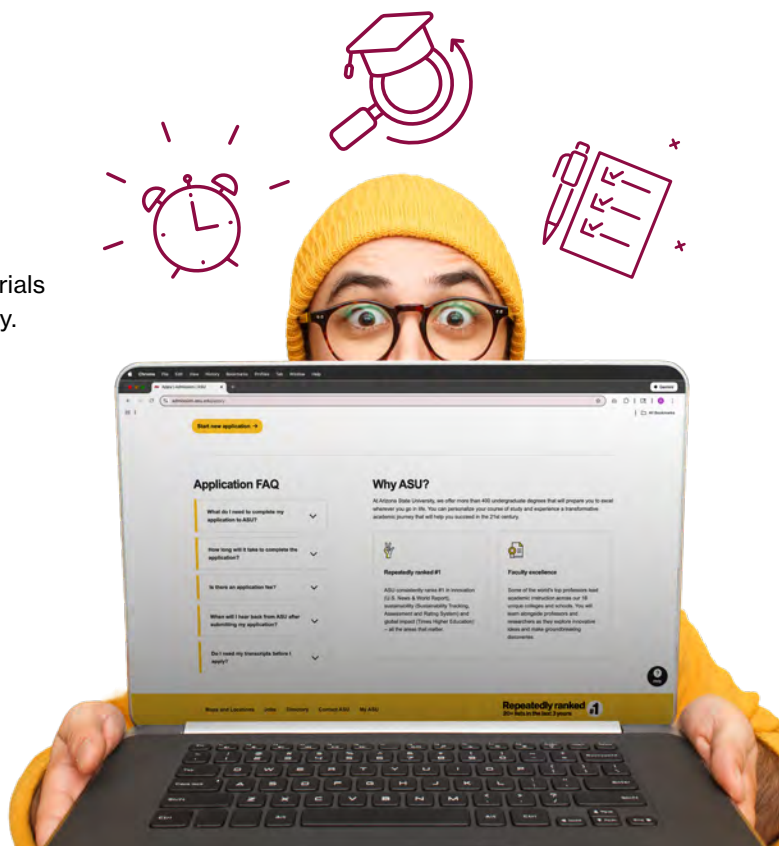
This is the execution phase. With your list set and your materials ready, now it's about submitting each application thoughtfully.

You'll work on:

- + Submitting applications on time
- + Double-checking requirements and materials
- + Understanding what happens next

Keep in mind:

Waiting is part of the process and knowing the timeline helps you stay grounded. Early Decision and Early Action results typically arrive between December and January. Regular Decision results are typically posted in March or April and most colleges ask for your final choice by May 1.



Application prep:



Step 1: Tailor every application to the school

This step matters more than students realize. Colleges can tell when an application is rushed or reused. A strong application shows care, attention and genuine interest in that specific school.

Customize your personal statements and supplements: The story in your main personal essay may stay the same, but many schools ask additional questions. Use these prompts to show why the school fits you. Reference specific programs, majors, values or opportunities that connect to your goals.

Before finalizing your essay, ask yourself:

- + Could this response better explain why this school is a good fit for me?
- + Could this essay be sent to another college without changing anything?

If the answer is yes, pause, personalize and tailor to the college you're applying to.

Step 2: Confirm all required materials

Each college has its own checklist. Some schools may require:

- + Supplemental essays or short answers
- + Portfolios or resumes
- + Additional recommendation letters
- + Test scores or optional materials

Use each college's application portal to confirm every item is complete.

Step 3: Submit resumes and documents carefully

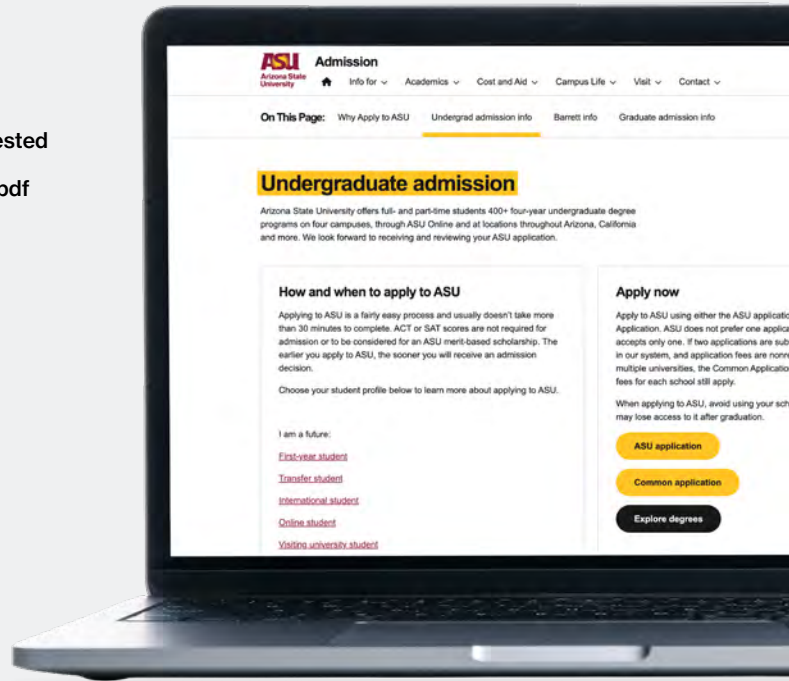
Correct formatting ensures your materials open properly and look professional. If you upload a resume or activities list:

- ☐ Save documents as a PDF unless another format is requested
- ☐ Use a clear file name like FirstName_LastName_Resume.pdf
- ☐ Keep formatting simple and easy to read

Step 4: Do a final review before hitting submit

Before submitting each application:

- ☐ Double-check essays are school-specific
- ☐ Confirm all materials are uploaded
- ☐ Verify deadlines and submission dates
- ☐ Make sure school names are correct throughout



What to expect when it comes to college interviews

Not every college requires interviews. When they do, they are usually optional or informational.

If you are offered an interview:

- + Accept it if you can
- + Prepare to talk about your goals, interests and why the school fits you
- + Review your application beforehand so your story stays consistent

[Read our best practices for preparing for college interviews→](#)



\$23.5M

In 2025, ASU Prep students received \$23.5 million in scholarships awarded. Here, support doesn't stop at acceptance; it also extends to affordability.

5 Checkpoint 5: Review decisions and choose your path

This is a big moment. After years of preparation, your college decisions are in and now it's time to step back, compare your options and choose the path that feels right for you.

You'll learn how to:

- + Compare acceptance letters and financial aid offers
- + Transfer any college credits earned in high school
- + Make your final decision by May 1
- + Celebrate all the hard work you've put in

Compare acceptance letters and financial aid offers

An acceptance letter is exciting, but it's only part of the picture. Take time to review each school's financial aid offer, including scholarships, grants, loans and expected out-of-pocket costs. Compare what each college is offering and what it will actually cost to attend so you can make a confident, informed decision.

Transfer any college credits earned in high school

If you earned college credits while in high school, now is the time to make sure they count. Confirm which credits will transfer, how they apply to your degree and what steps are required to send transcripts. Transferring credits will save you time and money and help you start college ahead of the game.

Make your final decision by May 1

Most colleges require students to commit by May 1, often called National College Decision Day. Once you've made your choice, submit your enrollment deposit, accept your financial aid package and officially secure your spot. Then notify other schools of your decision so they can offer spots to other students.

Celebrate all the hard work you've put in

Applying to college takes focus, resilience and commitment. You did it. No matter where you enroll, this moment represents growth, effort and achievement. Take time to celebrate how far you've come and get excited about what's next.



Thanks to the concurrent courses I was able to take while at ASU Prep Digital, I will be starting my Mechanical Engineering degree path at ASU as a sophomore.

— Kyle, earned 28 college credits while in high school

You've been accepted!

Now what?

Explore our Paying for College Playbook for step-by-step guidance on scholarships, grants and student loans.

[Download the Playbook→→](#)



84% of ASU Prep seniors complete the FAFSA® — 30% higher than the national average, unlocking more grants, scholarships and opportunities.

Your pathway to college starts here

From the start, students at ASU Prep rise to high expectations with support that meets them where they are. They develop essential skills and learn the routine for success: plan the work, do the work, show what you know, *repeat*.

Students also gain early exposure to college-level courses and concepts, building confidence and experience so that hard work feels familiar, not foreign. Through immersive projects, ASU courses and real-world experiences, they see the standards they will meet and embrace the opportunities ahead, carrying skills and confidence into college and beyond.



The ASU Prep advantage

ASU Prep students earn their first college credits, gain confidence and see how today's work moves them closer to the life they want. That means credits add up and skills grow as the time and cost for college shrink.

We pair that momentum with practical support. Teachers and Learning Success Coaches guide students on course selection, workload and timelines that fit real life. By graduation, ASU Prep students have earned thousands of college credits and millions in scholarships. But more importantly, they leave with lasting habits –how to think critically, study, ask for help, make choices and follow through.

It's not just a head start. It's a lifelong advantage.

What's next

Your journey doesn't stop here. The playbooks in this series will guide you through:

- + **Preparing for College:** Study habits, earning college credit, prepping for tests
- + **Paying for College:** Scholarships, FAFSA, financial aid and cost planning

- ✓ **Prep for college.**
- ✓ **Prep for careers.**
- ✓ **Prep for life.**



Learn More

To learn more about ASU Prep Digital and enroll, visit www.asuprepdigital.org or call 844-692-3372.