

Some students want to find the perfect college. The truth is, there's no such thing. You can find many colleges at which you'll be happy and get a great education. The college search is about exploring who you are and what you want and then finding colleges that will meet your goals.

Still, you do need to narrow down the possibilities into a manageable list. Here are steps you can take to find colleges where you will thrive.

Stay open to all the possibilities — don't limit your search.

Decide What You Want in a College

Ask yourself what's important to you, where you want to be and who you want to become. Then you can figure out what types of colleges will allow you to reach your goals.

Here are some aspects to consider:

- Size
- Location
- Distance from home
- Available majors and classes
- Housing options
- Makeup of the student body
- Available extracurricular activities
- Campus atmosphere

Which of these aspects are things you feel you must have to be comfortable at a college? Which things are you flexible on?

Also, think about what you want to accomplish in college. Do you want to train for a specific job or get a wide-ranging education? If you have a major in mind, are the colleges you're considering strong in that area?

Keep an Open Mind

While it's good to have some ideas in mind about what sorts of colleges will be right for you, stay open to all the possibilities at the beginning of your search.

Challenge your assumptions about what will work for you. For example, "you may not think you're able to thrive in a large institution because you come from a small high school, but ... you may actually do better in that type of setting," notes Luis Martinez-Fernandez, a history professor at the University of Central Florida.

Talk to people who know you. Tell parents, teachers, relatives, family friends and your school counselor about your goals, and ask if they can suggest colleges that may be a good fit for you.

Don't limit your search. At the start of this process, you may rule out colleges because you think that they are too expensive or too hard to get into, but this may not be the reality. Remember that financial aid can make college more affordable and colleges look at more than just grades and test scores.

Do Your Homework

Once you have a list of schools, it's time to do research. To learn more about the colleges you're considering, check out college guidebooks and the colleges' websites. Jot down your questions and get answers by:

- Talking to your school counselor or teachers
- Checking out colleges' student blogs, if available
- Contacting college admission officials
- Asking admission officials to recommend current students or recent graduates to talk to
- Visiting college campuses, if possible (for more information, see the [Campus Visit Checklist](#))

Keep Perspective

During your search, keep asking yourself questions about your preferences and goals. You are changing throughout high school, so your answers may change during the search process.

And remember that there are many good college matches for every student, and that you can be successful at many types of schools.