

CENTRAL ACADEMY COLLEGE APPLICATION GUIDE

PRE-APPLICATION

Tests

Taking Standardized Tests: With all standardized tests, at least looking at a practice test and understanding the timing and requirements is a good idea. Look at the rubric for the essay. Check the math section. If you're already in calculus, you might want to review a little geometry.

PSAT: Be aware that they matter for National Merit Scholarships and that there is only one weekend where it is available to take. Take it seriously.

SAT: Most East and West coast schools will take either the ACT with writing or the SAT, but it depends on the school. If you're considering applying outside the Midwest, you should probably look into taking the SAT. The best time to take it is the end of your junior year. It is approximately five hours long, and includes writing, reading, and math portions broken into 25 minute sections, and has an essay that is scored on the same scale as ACT writing, but on which Central students generally score higher. Some people prefer the format of the ACT, and some prefer the format of the SAT.

SAT II: SAT II's are annoying. They are subject-specific, 60-minute multiple choice tests written and proctored by the same people (the College Board) who give AP tests. Higher-tiered schools often either require or "recommend" them, but, in the same way that your mom "suggests" that you clean your room, you probably want to take them. Check schools to which you might be applying to see if you need to take them. The perfect time to take them is immediately around the time you take the corresponding AP test, because you won't have to study. Be aware that the highest math is Pre-Calculus, and, for some reason, there is no European History (the typical junior class). Look into this once you're taking AP classes to make sure you don't miss a time and study-saving opportunity. Most schools require two or three tests, and recommend a variety of subjects. Engineering or math/science schools often require a math and a science.

ACT: This test has four sections—math, science, reading, and English—each taken in one block of time. There is an optional writing portion which you have to specifically sign up for if you want to take it. Some schools require it, and some don't. When DMPS gives the ACT to juniors in April, the writing portion is not available (stupid, I know). Many people like to take the ACT twice to try and improve their scores, but taking it more than twice is not usually helpful.

AP: Taking AP classes and AP tests is great for college apps, and, perhaps more importantly, great for college. However, colleges don't require that you send official scores. They just ask you to report them on the common app or any similar application. In case you were thinking it; if you lie, they can revoke your offer of admission.

ACT vs. SAT, SAT II: A lot of coastal schools will require either SAT and SAT II's, ACT with writing, or ACT without writing and SAT II's. Any combination is fine by them. If you've taken both, it won't hurt anything to send them both unless one of your scores is significantly worse than the other. Policies will be hard to find, but they will be on each school's website or available by emailing or calling the admissions office.

Reporting Scores: Some schools will require that you report every sitting of every test you've taken. Note that they don't mean anything you took before high school (I called and checked), so if you took the ACT in 7th grade for some GT program, you don't need to make the ACT people pull the file out of their "archives" (which costs \$20) and send it. If you are thinking of taking another sitting of a test, keep in mind that you'll have to pay to send it. This doesn't cost extra for the SAT (one fee for sending as many scores as you want to an individual college), but it costs a lot for the ACT (\$20-\$40 per test).

"Super-Scoring": Some schools take all the tests you've taken and put together your highest score on each section. If they do this, their computer spits out the super-score and they are unaware of any other scores you got, so they're not lying.

Organization

- Keep track of what you've sent where. (Transcripts, tests, apps, fees...)
- Keep an excel or word document with the passwords for each of the websites of the places to which you've applied. That way, when you want to check if you got in, you aren't running around your house in a panic. (Are you looking at me? I definitely didn't do that.)
- Keep a folder or document with every award, mundane or not, which you've received in high school. If you're a musician or athlete, keep a list of important performances or awards.
- Keep track of volunteering and extracurricular activities (and know that on the common app they ask for the approximate hours per week you spend on each).
- Keep essays and reflections that you write throughout high school, and recycle!
- Take the AP Lang college writing assignment seriously. Then, you won't have to do that stuff later.

WHERE TO APPLY

Helpful Websites

college confidential, college prowler: Helpful sites to give you insider info on campus life at different schools. Take it all with a grain of salt, though. Think about the kind of student who would take the time to write on such a site. They are either really, really happy with where they are, or really, really not.

collegeboard.org: useful site that gives a profile of pretty much every school on the planet—standardized test scores of the students, urban/rural location, admittance rates, housing requirements, the address of the admissions office—you name it, it's on there. That being said, it doesn't have all the deadlines that you'd need to know about, so use the resource, but be aware of its limitations, and remember that it's secondary, not primary, material.

Mail and Email: Decide how you want to deal with it. Making a separate email for college apps doesn't hurt. Just be careful that colleges can still reach you if you give them that address when you apply. Some people look through it carefully and keep anything that might sound interesting. Others just throw almost everything out. You'll be fine either way. If you want to know some specific strategies for handling mail and email, check out our war stories in the back.

Visiting: There is no better way to decide whether a particular college interests you than to visit it. Whenever you are going to be near a college, even if you think you might not be interested, it's not a bad idea to sign up for a tour and info session and see what it has to offer. Even a terrible visit tells you something: whatever you didn't like is a trait to avoid in the schools on your application list.

THE APPLICATION

Codes:

Central: 1800 Grand Ave.	50309-3310	CEEB code: 161185
Roosevelt: 4419 Center St.	50312-2299	CEEB code: 161215
Lincoln: 2600 SW 9 th St.	50315-1955	CEEB code: 161180
East: 815 E. 13 th St.	50316-3499	CEEB code: 161195
Hoover: 4800 Aurora Ave.	50310-2999	CEEB code: 161203
North: 501 Holcomb Ave.	50313-4917	CEEB code: 161205
Dowling: 1400 Buffalo Rd.	50265-1699	CEEB code: 161190
Valley: 1140 Valley West Dr.	50266-2138	CEEB code: 164625
Johnston: 6501 NW 62 nd Ave.	50131-2932	CEEB code: 162220

Test Scores: See above for policies. You need to send these to colleges by the deadline.

Transcripts: Be prepared to fork out a couple bucks for your transcripts. You will need these for each school to which you apply and later for each scholarship. There are official and unofficial transcripts, but most often you will need the official. This means that you will have to fill out an easy consent form (parent signed each time), bring an addressed and stamped envelope, and pay

two dollars for each transcript after you've sent 5. It makes your life easy to copy these forms at home so they will be easily accessible when you need them. Request your transcript 1-2 weeks before you would like it to arrive, so the counselors can make updates and send them off. Your Central transcript will go automatically with your home school transcript, but you need to request transcripts from your home school, not Central. Transcripts for colleges are different than those for scholarships. *See scholarship info at bottom.

Deadlines

Know your deadlines! The Common App will list the application deadlines for your schools, but there are multiple other deadlines that you will need to go to the school website to find. **FIND THEM. WRITE THEM DOWN. DON'T LOSE THEM.** Word docs, excel, sticky notes- whatever works for you. Be organized. Just do it.

There are three main deadlines:

1. Early action: This is non-binding and is generally in October/November (it changes for each school). You will typically receive an admittance decision earlier, which is always nice, but don't feel pressured into applying early action if you're not ready. NOTE: A. Some schools have "restricted" early action, which can change for each school. At some schools, that means you can only apply early action to one school. At others, it means something else. Just go on the school website and find out. B. For many schools, you need to apply early action to be eligible for merit-based scholarships, honors programs, etc. Once again, go to the website or call the school to find out.
2. Early decision: This IS binding. You can only apply early decision at one school. If you apply early decision, you are saying that you **WILL** attend that school if accepted. The only way to get out of it is if the financial aid that school offers is unacceptable for your family's situation.
3. Regular decision: This is the final deadline to apply. Once again, it's deadline can be different by school, but usually ranges from December 31 to January 15.

Recommendations

Teachers/Coaches etc.: Have one or two recommenders that you can use regularly. Sometimes schools will ask for recommendations from two different disciplines (ex: English & science). English teachers often write good letters, but it's most important to get a recommendation from a teacher who really knows you. It's a great idea to have recommendations from people who knows your academic abilities, community involvement, extracurricular involvement, and character (may require 2 or 3 different people). Ask for these at least 2 weeks out at the absolute

minimum. Note that on the common app, you will need to request recommendations online. Make sure that you ask those teachers in person first before you make requests online. It's just good manners.

Counselors: You will also need a recommendation from a counselor. Mrs. Hilton counts for this one, so decide if you'd rather have her or your home school counselor write your letter. Like with the teacher recommendations, pick the person who knows you and your high school career best.

DEADLINE FOR RECOMMENDATIONS FROM TEACHERS/COUNSELOR AT CENTRAL ACADEMY FOR JANUARY 1ST DEADLINE IS THE TUESDAY FOLLOWING THANKSGIVING. ALL OTHER DEADLINES NEED TWO WEEKS NOTICE.

Essays

The essay is what can really make you stand out, beyond numbers and statistics. Make sure it reflects your personality. Be funny or serious, whatever suits you and the question, but always, always be yourself. Common prompts (for schools and scholarships) are:

- Tell us about a time you failed.
- Tell us about a time you faced a moral challenge.
- Tell us about your proudest accomplishment.
- Tell us about leadership.
- Tell us about yourself.

If these don't sound terribly different from each other, it's because they aren't. Sometimes it's better to pick an experience or story or trait that you'd like to talk about, and then build the essay from there.

Keep copies of everything you use, because, unlike with the Central Academy English department, where word would get around, nobody will know if you reuse material.

Interviews

Be professional and prepared. That means dress at least business-casual (unless informed otherwise). Be articulate, thoughtful, and passionate about what you've done. They already know you're smart on paper; they want to know that you're "smart" in person too. Be prepared with at least a couple questions that you can ask them at the end. Bring a smile, a firm handshake, and a resume.

The Common App

Here are some stupid/frustrating things about the Common App. If you have any other questions, email Ms. Hilton (Kristin.hilton@dmschools.org)

- Be aware that the “future plans” section will not print when you print the preview.
- Macs might not show the preview (if you can’t see it, look it up on another computer before you submit your app).
- Under the “proficiency” section for languages, you are NOT proficient unless it’s a language spoken at home/native language.
- Use Ms. Hilton for your counselor unless you know your home school counselors really, really well.
- You’ll get your official class rank in October. (If you have over a 4.0 unweighted, you’ll be #1)
- Your GPA is on a scale of 4 (weighted); your rank is also weighted.
- List Central as a 2nd high school & DMACC as a college/university.
- Central/APs/DMACC is NOT a college course/enrichment program
- Waive your right to view recommendation letters.
- Once you submit your FIRST application through the common app, you can’t make any changes for ANY school. (If you make a mistake, don’t freak out- You can email any serious changes to the school’s admissions counselor).
- Your Common App essay goes to every school, so make it general (not school specific).
- In the “additional info” section, you can describe Central. Most places have heard of it (it has that kind of reputation), and Ms. Hilton will explain in her letter, but it can’t hurt to add a few words.

National Merit

National Merit is a scholarship based upon PSAT scores and later SAT scores. The score cut-off is done by state (which makes it relatively competitive in Iowa).

National Merit more or less does the notifying for you up to your senior year. If you make it to the application stage, you can reuse your common app essay without any harm. One thing that does get confusing is the college preference deal. So here it is:

National Merit Corporation has two kinds of scholarships. One they or a sponsor (firms, companies, etc., who give them either to competition winners who were finalists or to the children of their employees) give directly to students, and the other colleges give to admitted students who will be attending. You can look up online, call, or ask which schools give money to National Merit Finalists, but most do. The award is typically \$2,000 a year from the college, or a \$2,500 lump sum from a sponsor, but can vary.

Some, beyond the \$1,000 or so a semester, give additional money to Finalists to encourage attendance. Oklahoma, famously, covers all costs for all Finalists. Iowa State covers tuition for the first 50 admitted Finalists to have applied in that application cycle. If you think Iowa State is a real option for you, make sure they're listed as your top choice by spring, and that you apply early enough, so that you're in that top 50. If not, you have a little longer.

If you have no idea where your top choice is when National Merit first asks, check and make sure that leaving yourself "undecided" won't cut you out of some specific school's scholarship that you might want. To find this out, you unfortunately must look it up school by school. If none of your schools have such a scholarship policy, you have until late May (usually in the 20s; they'll give you the date) to fax in/mail in a form with your top choice on it.

Whew. Take a deep breath. That's as confusing as it sounds.

POST-APPLICATION

Advice

- This is where you are going to live for 4 years. It is ultimately your decision.
- Get advice from people who know you and people you trust. If you would regularly trust their advice, they're probably someone good to ask; if you don't agree with most of their opinions, nod politely, but keep in mind who it's coming from.
- Try not to let other people influence your decision too much—people choose schools for different reasons. Just because your friend had a great experience at a school doesn't mean you will, or the other way around.
- Everybody and their brother has an opinion about where you should go to school, how you will pick, etc. There will be a period of about 5 months where every adult who knows you're a senior will ask you where you've applied, where you're going, and what you're majoring in. It is ok if you don't know yet, but forgive them for asking every time they see you—it seems a great conversation starter. Sometimes the easiest thing to do is say "I'll know in April".
- It is better to be very involved in one or two extra-curricular activities that you are passionate about than to be involved in many that don't really interest you. Colleges can tell when an essay or description is genuine and when it's fake.

SCHOLARSHIPS AND FINANCIAL AID

Scholarships

- Check with home school counseling offices! Most schools have foundation scholarships such as the Roosevelt Foundation Scholarships that are worth a few hundred to a few thousand dollars. Some are really specific (such as a woman interested in business and athletics) but there will be a few that fit you. Make sure you know the requirements—most require recommendations (ask a few weeks before they're due) as well as transcripts, an application, and essays.

Financial Aid

Please share this section with your parents—YOU WILL NEED THEIR HELP!

- FINANCIAL AID IS CONFUSING. Don't be afraid, it's doable—but BE VIGILANT and get your parents or another adult involved.
- Your parents are going to have to file your taxes as soon as possible, in most cases in mid-February. However (surprise, surprise!) schools all have different deadlines, so check these.
- The main forms you need are:
 - FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid): All schools require the FAFSA. The Iowa College Access Network (ICAN) will help you fill out the FAFSA for free if you call and make an appointment, and most high schools will provide this service as well on a financial aid night. You will need:
 - W2 forms and other records of your income and your parents' income
 - This year's income tax returns
 - Untaxed income records
 - Bank statements
 - Mortgage information, stocks and bonds, etc. (any type of investment records including life insurance accounts)

If you aren't a US citizen, there are more requirements that can be found online.

- CSS: This is the college board's financial aid form. Some schools require this in addition to the FAFSA. You will need:
 - This year's tax returns (if you have them)
 - Last year's tax returns
 - W2 forms and records of income (taxed and untaxed) for the past year
 - Bank statements and information on mortgages, stocks, bonds, and any other assets and investments
- IDOC: This financial aid service is through the College Board. Not as many colleges will require this as the FAFSA or CSS, but it's important to know if your college does.
- In addition to some combination of the above, many schools will have their own supplement on their portal/application website that you can access to track your application after you've applied. Check all tabs and anything having to do with financial aid; some are a little difficult to find.

Transcripts: Your school's registrar will still want 1-2 week's notice on transcripts, but be aware (at least for DMPS) that schools can NOT release transcripts to you. So for scholarships that require a transcript, complete your entire application packet (including letters of recommendation), put it in an envelope (addressed & stamped), and give it to the registrar at least a week before the postmark date. This means that you will need to ask for recommendations at least 3-4 weeks out from when the scholarship needs to be postmarked.

Recommendations: Have at least one teacher and one extracurricular leader who will give you recommendations. Ask at least two weeks out and inform the recommender what the scholarship is for. Also be aware of school foundation scholarships that require very specific recommendations (ex: Roosevelt English Teacher).

That's it! It's a scary, scary process but know that there are people around, your parents, teachers and counselors, who will help and support you along the way!