Plan now for a great future.
College Entrance Exams

College entrance exams, such as the SAT and ACT, are just one part of the college admission process, but it is important to prepare for them.

Preparing for exams:

10th-12th Grades:
Prepare to take any SAT Subject tests for your best subjects. Visit [sat.collegeboard.org](http://sat.collegeboard.org) to take practice tests, check test dates or to register for a test. Fee waivers are available for those who qualify.

11th Grade:
Take the PSAT in October. This is the preliminary exam for the SAT and is required for several national scholarship programs, including the National Merit Scholarship. You can prepare for it by visiting [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org).
Start thinking about when and how often you will take the SAT or ACT. Plan to register for the tests at least one to two months in advance of the test date.

12th Grade:
Register for the SAT or the ACT. Your counselor can provide registration forms or you can register online. Plan to register for these exams a month or two before the test date.

Financial Aid at USC

The cost of college can be offset with financial aid, which can come from your home state, the federal government, and even your college. USC administers one of the largest financial aid programs in the U.S.

More than two-thirds of students at USC receive financial aid.

Need-based financial aid is offered according to the demonstrated need of the student and family. Financial aid includes need-based grants, merit scholarships, loans and Federal Work-Study.

Merit scholarships are awarded based on a student’s academic and extracurricular achievement. For more information about USC Merit and other scholarships, please visit [admission.usc.edu/scholarships](http://admission.usc.edu/scholarships).

For more information, please visit [financialaid.usc.edu](http://financialaid.usc.edu).

Four Facts ABOUT APPLYING TO COLLEGE

Did You Know:

You don’t have to be rich to attend a private university.
Students eligible for need-based financial aid may find the actual costs for a private university comparable to — or less than — a state institution. In fact, two-thirds of our undergraduate students receive financial assistance. And we enroll 4,300 low-income undergraduate students (as defined by Pell Grant eligibility) — more than most other private, highly selective universities.

Did You Know:

There’s not one ‘perfect’ college for you.
There are many colleges right for you. Research your options and you will find that more than one college can meet all your criteria. The College Board’s Big Future website provides free and accurate information about thousands of colleges and universities, and can help you prepare for your college search or explore potential majors and careers. Visit [bigfuture.collegeboard.org](http://bigfuture.collegeboard.org) for more information.

Did You Know:

Applying for financial aid will not necessarily affect your admission to college.
Many colleges, including USC, do not consider a family’s ability to pay when making admission decisions. This is called “need-blind” admission. A variety of need-based aid programs and scholarships may be available to you, so you should apply for financial aid soon after you apply for admission.

Did You Know:

Admission officers consider more than grades and test scores when evaluating an applicant.
In addition to grades and test scores, selective colleges are interested in the rigor of the subjects taken, the competitiveness of the school, and upward or downward trends in your grades. The essay, as well as your extracurricular and leadership activities, talent and personal character are also very important. You should be aware, though, that accomplishments in extracurricular activities and leadership activities cannot make up for a poor academic record.
Preparing for USC

Attending college is more important than ever. This brochure will help you learn about the college application process and the classes you should take in middle school and high school to prepare. We encourage you to share this with your family so they can help you reach your goal.

Remember, college admission and financial aid requirements can change from year to year, so stay in close contact with your school counselor for advice and for the most current college information.

For more information about USC: www.usc.edu

START EARLY

To help you meet the basic entrance requirements of many colleges and universities, a college-prep schedule requires you to take at least four college preparatory classes every year of high school.

A college preparatory track should include:

**English And Literature: 4 Years**

**Math: 3–4 years** Recommended track includes algebra through trigonometry or calculus.

**Foreign Language: 2–4 years**

**Laboratory/Natural/Physical Science: 2–4 years**

**History and Social Science: 2 years**

**Academic Electives: 3 years**

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### We Recommend You Take:

- Courses that will challenge you. Take the most difficult courses you think you can handle. These will prepare you for universities with selective admission (those that receive more applications than they can accommodate). Push yourself, but be careful not to become overwhelmed.
- Extra classes in the subjects you excel in. Your school counselor will help you plan your schedule according to your strengths and interests.
- Challenging classes such as Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses (if you are prepared and if your high school offers them).

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**8th GRADE**

- Tell your parents you want to attend a selective college.
- Take a course in algebra and a foreign language this year, if possible.
- Study and strive for A's. Though colleges won't generally consider grades you earned before high school, studying hard now will prepare you for the years to come.
- Develop skills that are valuable in high school and essential in college, such as basic computer skills, online research, note-taking and time management.

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**9th and beyond GRADE**

Now that you’re in high school, preparing for college begins in earnest. Colleges will consider everything you do for the next four years, so this is your opportunity to impress.

If you haven’t done so yet, get to know your school counselor. Tell him or her that you want to attend USC and that you need to enroll in college preparatory courses.

- Try to earn A's in all your classes.
- Form study groups with friends who also plan to go to college, and study together as often as possible.

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- If you fall behind or have trouble in a course, ask for help. Look for a tutor, a friend, counselor or parent who can help.
- Create a résumé file, saving items such as report cards, diplomas and certificates; a list of awards and honors you receive; a list of all school and community activities you participate in; a list of offices you hold in these organizations; and a list of volunteer or paid jobs you hold. Update this file every semester.
- Become involved in at least one extracurricular activity and participate as much as possible.
- Join clubs and organizations at your school or in your community to explore your interests and learn leadership skills. Aim for leadership roles by junior or senior year.
Often as early as the eighth grade, you will need to decide if you are going to follow a college preparatory track in high school. Preparing for USC will help you learn about the college application and admission process and the right subjects to take.

10th GRADE

It’s a busy year. You may be learning to drive or working at your first real job. It’s also the year you start exploring your collegiate interests, and step up your academic efforts.

- Review your 10th-grade schedule with your counselor to make sure you are taking all the college prep courses you need for USC.
- Try to take a leadership role in an extracurricular activity and participate in other activities that may interest you.
- Update your résumé file. Record your accomplishments, experiences, awards and service.
- Start your college search. Research colleges online.
- Begin visiting and exploring college campuses that interest you.
- Visit bigfuture.collegeboard.org for more information.

11th GRADE

This is the year you take standardized tests, tour college campuses, and make important choices. Make sure your grades remain strong, because this is the year colleges will examine most closely.

- Take the PSAT exam. This is typically offered in October. Talk to your counselor about signing up.
- Check with your counselor to make sure you are taking the college preparatory subjects you need to attend USC. Take AP and IB classes if they are offered at your school. Otherwise, consider taking classes at your local community college to further challenge yourself.
- Attend college fairs and presentations by college representatives who visit your school.
- Make a list of colleges you would like to apply to.
- Continue your extracurricular activities, and take the initiative to lead programs or plan activities. Update your résumé and activities file.
- Visit the colleges near you and/or that interest you. Campus visits will give you a firsthand look at student life and give you the chance to meet with admission staff.
- Contact the colleges you are interested in and request to be added to their mailing lists.
- Register for SAT or ACT exams. See the “College Entrance Exams” section for more information.
- Begin looking for various scholarship opportunities offered through the colleges you’re interested in, or through outside agencies.
- Be sure to update your résumé file with any new accomplishments, experiences, awards or service.
- Make a list of colleges you would like to apply to.
- Continue striving for strong grades.
- Preparing for USC will help you learn about the college application and admission process and the right subjects to take.

12th GRADE

The final year of high school is when you prepare for your college experience, from application and acceptance to enrollment.

- Review your recent and current class schedules with your college counselor to make sure you are taking the college preparatory classes you need for admission to USC.
- Continue striving for strong grades.
- Take AP or IB courses if offered at your school.
- A fourth year of math and a laboratory science are strongly recommended for your senior year.
- Complete and submit applications. Submit a portfolio of your work, such as your résumé, list of courses, a portfolio of your work, and any other materials that may be required for admission to programs in the fine and performing arts. Register for ACT and/or SAT exams. See the “College Entrance Exams” section for more information.
- Pay special attention to college application deadlines and requirements.
- Complete your college essay.
- Learn more about financial aid and how to apply at financialaid.usc.edu.
- Continue your extracurricular activities. Find new ways to demonstrate leadership, persistence, thoughtfulness, creativity or some other special trait through your activities.
- Ask your teachers and counselors for recommendations.

Ideas for Making the Most of Your Summers Throughout High School

- Take part in academic enrichment programs and special summer workshops or camps in subjects that interest you. Many of these are held on college campuses.
- Relax and take time off before the next academic year. Consider retaking a class in which you received a grade you weren’t satisfied with, or take a new class in summer school.
- Work as a volunteer in an area where your community needs help.
- Gain valuable experience and save money for college by working a part-time job or pursuing an internship in an area that interests you.
- Complete any audition tapes, art portfolios or special materials required for admission to programs in the fine and performing arts.
- Prepare for the SAT or ACT by using test prep resources found in libraries, online or in a bookstore. Workshops such as the Accesso Academy for low-income students in Los Angeles can also help you prepare for college entrance exams. Check with your counselor for more information. Low/no-cost test preparation is also available at collegeboard.org (for the SAT) and at act.org (for the ACT).
- Visit colleges that interest you.
- Complete any audition tapes, art portfolios or special materials required for admission to programs in the fine and performing arts.
- Start working on your college essay. This will give you enough time to rewrite it before submitting it with your college applications.