

How to Transfer Colleges: A Guide for Success

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If you're thinking of transferring to a new college, you aren't alone. A [2015 study](#) from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center revealed that 38% of college students transfer to a different college within six years of first starting school.

Key Takeaways: Transferring Colleges

Make sure you can present to the admissions folks specific reasons why the new school is the right match for you.

Make sure your classes at your current institution will transfer to the new school. It can be costly if they don't.

Watch transfer deadlines. Often they are in March or April, but they can be much earlier.

Don't make enemies at your current school—you'll need good letters of recommendation.

To transfer successfully, you need to know how the process works. With some careful planning, you can avoid many of the hidden costs of transferring and improve your chances of being admitted. Done improperly, you may end up with a rejection from your target school, or your transfer may lead to a longer and more expensive path to graduation.

Have a Good Reason for Transferring Colleges

Before you decide to change schools, make sure you have a [good reason for transferring](#). Struggles with bad roommates or difficult professors are likely to improve over time, and it's important to give yourself adequate time to adjust to college life before considering a transfer.

If you're trying to transfer to a selective four-year college, the admissions folks will be looking to see that you have a compelling reason for your transfer. They will admit only those students whose transfer applications articulate a clear and meaningful rationale for the transfer.

Choose Classes at Your Current College Carefully

One of the greatest frustrations when transferring to a new college can arise when you try to transfer credits from your current college to your new college. Remedial classes often won't transfer, and highly specialized classes may transfer as elective credits and not toward graduation requirements. If your credits fail to transfer, you may be looking at a longer time to graduation, which can be one of the most significant [hidden costs of transferring](#). Even if your target school costs much less than your current college, you won't realize those savings if you end up paying for an extra year of tuition and fees.

You may be able to avoid this problem by taking general education classes such as Introduction to Psychology or American Literature, which are offered at nearly all colleges and generally transfer without problems. Also, look to see if your target school has an articulation agreement with your current college. Many colleges have pre-approved classes for transfer credit. Within public university systems, you'll often find that articulation agreements are in place for students who transfer from community colleges to four-year state universities.

Keep Up Your Grades at Your Current College

After you decide to transfer, make sure you continue to keep your grades up. Colleges want to admit transfer students who have demonstrated their ability to succeed in college. Just as your academic record in high school was the most important part of your regular college application, your college transcript is going to be the most important part of your transfer application. The admissions folks will be looking to see that you have a proven record of handling college-level work.

Also, think about your transfer credits and the time it will take you to graduate. Colleges generally won't transfer grades that are lower than a "C." The fewer credits you are able to transfer, the longer it will take you to graduate. If it takes you five or six years to graduate instead of four, you could be looking at tens of thousands of dollars of additional costs as well as an additional year or two in which you aren't earning income.

Position Yourself to Get Good Letters of Recommendation

It's important that you don't burn bridges at your current college. Many transfer applications require at least one letter of recommendation from a faculty member at your current school, so make sure you have a good relationship with one or two professors who will give you positive recommendations. You'll be in an awkward position if you need to ask for a letter from a professor whose class you've regularly skipped or who doesn't know you well.

Step outside of your own shoes and think about what a recommender will say about you. Your transfer application will be much stronger with a recommendation letter that begins "All of us at ABC College will be sorry to see John leave us" rather than "Although I don't know John well..."

Finally, be thoughtful and give your recommenders plenty of time to write their letters. It's inconsiderate and unreasonable to ask for a letter that is due in 24 hours, and you may very well get a refusal from your professor. Plan ahead, and make sure the people recommending you have at least a couple of weeks to write their letters.

Keep Track of Transfer Application Deadlines

If you're planning to begin classes at your new college in the fall, transfer application deadlines will often be in March or April. Typically, the more selective the school, the earlier the deadline (for example, [Harvard University's](#) transfer application deadline is March 1st and [Cornell University's](#) is March 15th). Transfer students in the [University of California system](#) need to apply at the same time as the regular applicant pool in November.

At many less selective schools, transfer applications can be submitted in late spring or even the summer for fall admission. Deadlines will often be flexible depending on the college's current needs and enrollments. Penn State, for example, has an April 15th priority deadline, but after that date the university has a [rolling admission policy](#).

In general, you will have the best chances of a successful transfer if you plan ahead and submit your application before the published deadline. This is particularly true for highly selective colleges and universities and for more selective programs. That said, you'll still have many transfer options should you decide to transfer at the end of the academic year, and it's not unusual for students to transfer just a couple of weeks before classes begin. You'll want to contact the admissions office at your target school to find out if they are still accepting transfer applications.

Make Sure Your Transfer Application Essay Is Specific and Polished

Don't underestimate the importance of your transfer application essay. Transfer applicants using the [Common Application](#) may select one of the seven Common App prompts unless instructed differently by their desired school. Some colleges will also ask applicants to respond to the question: "Why do you want to transfer to our school?"

As you [write your transfer essay](#), you'll want to have clear, school-specific reasons for your transfer. What exactly does your target school offer that makes it attractive to you? Does it have a specific academic program that speaks to your interests and career goals? Does the school have an approach to learning that you think is a good match for you?

As a test to see if your essay succeeds on this front, try replacing your target school's name with a different school's name everywhere in your essay. If your essay still makes sense when you substitute in a different college's name for your target school, your essay is too vague and generic. The admissions officers don't just want to know why you want to transfer to a different school. They want to know why you want to transfer to *their* school.

Finally, keep in mind that [a good transfer essay](#) does more than present clear and specific reasons for transferring. It also needs to be polished and engaging. Proofread and edit carefully to [improve the essay's style](#) and ensure that your prose is free of awkward language and grammatical errors.

Visit Campus and Make an Informed Decision

Before you accept an offer of transfer admission, make sure you are making a wise decision. Visit the campus of your target school. Sit in on classes. Talk with professors in the major you hope to pursue. And ideally, arrange an [overnight visit](#) to get a good sense of the campus environment.

In short, make sure that your target school truly is a good match for your personal and professional goals. Ultimately, you should feel confident in your decision to transfer.

