

3 Steps to Decode Your Award Letters

Congratulations! You've been accepted to college! Done, right? Not quite. Celebrate your acceptances, then DECIDE after you review your award letters. College is a big investment of your time and money! So be sure to find out each options net cost—what you need to pay now and pay back later to attend.

Use the three questions below to help you focus on what matters most and make a sound financial college choice. These will help you figure out how much each college will actually cost and what you have to do to access the financial aid offers. Try working with a parent, trusted adult, or school counselor to support you in interpreting your award letters correctly.



PAY NOW: How much will your bill be for the first year?

Most important is to figure out what you will have to pay *after* scholarships and financial aid are applied. This balance is an estimate of the college bill that you will need to pay to attend this school next year. For help determining what your bill will be at each college, try entering information from your award letter(s) into the following tool: <https://www.consumerfinance.gov/paying-for-college/compare-financial-aid-and-college-cost/>



PAYBACK: How much in loans will you need to borrow?

The reality is that many students borrow loans to help them pay for college. You do not have to borrow the full amount offered, but whichever amount you do take out will need to be paid back with interest. You should multiply the amount of loans you will need to borrow by the number of years you will be in college. This will show you the minimum amount of loan debt you will be in if you decide to attend this college.



What are your next steps?

For each college that sends an award letter look at how much you will pay now (the bill) and payback later (loans). In addition, colleges may require you to take next steps in order to secure your money. Look for:

1. Prompts to accept or decline your financial aid;
2. Requests for information or documents that are missing or incomplete;

This can be confusing, if you are ever feeling unsure, call the financial aid office!