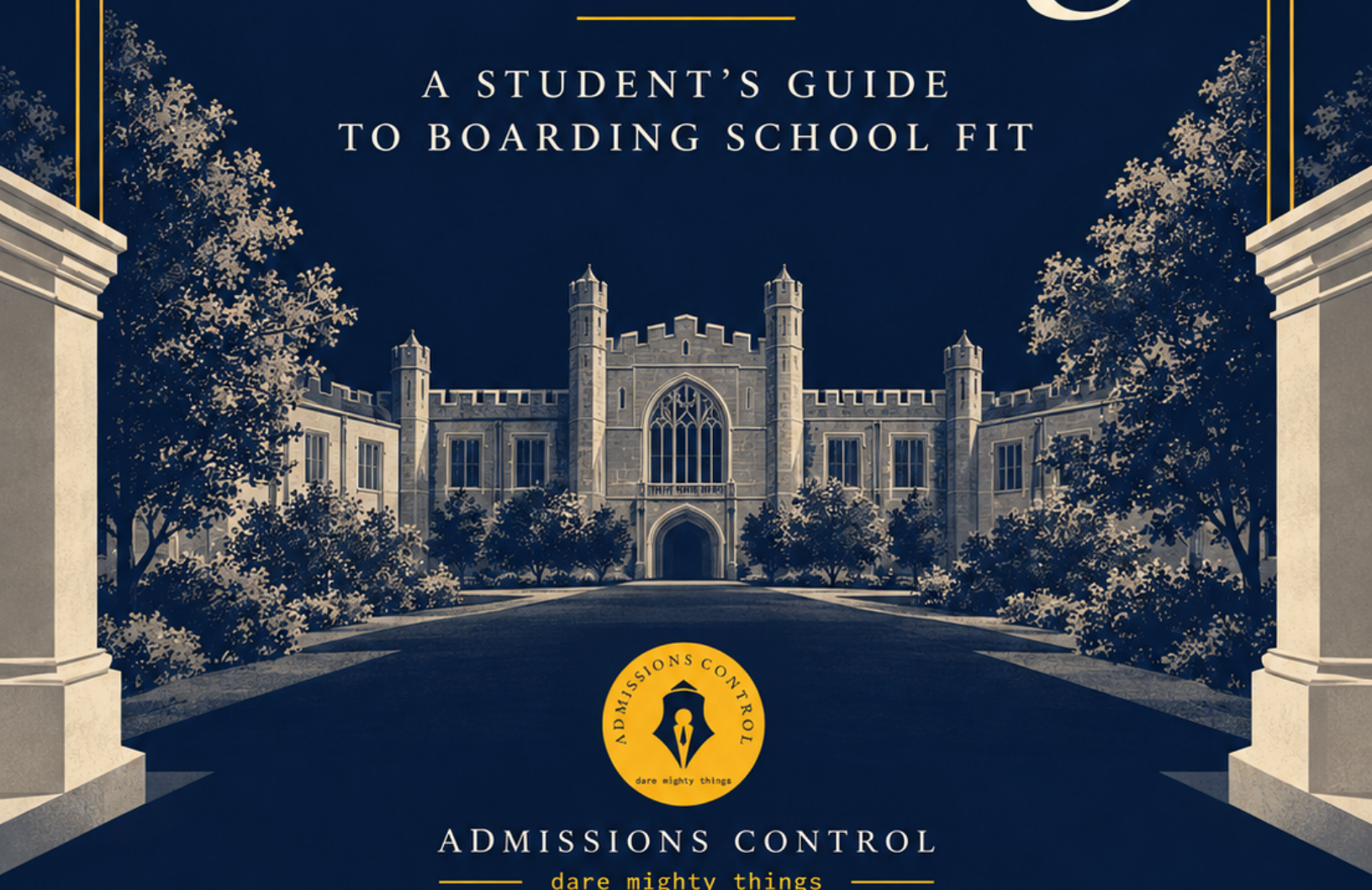
A Place *to* Belong

A STUDENT'S GUIDE
TO BOARDING SCHOOL FIT



ADMISSIONS CONTROL

dare mighty things

THE GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

The School You Will Live In

Imagine that you're visiting a boarding school. There are old brick buildings, enormous trees, and a library that looks as though it ought to contain a secret passage. Your guide tells you about challenging courses, famous graduates, and an impressive college placement record.

You see a classroom where students are having an animated discussion. You pass a group of friends laughing outside the dining hall. Someone points out the dormitory where you might live. It's easy to picture yourself here - or at least the version of yourself who appears in a boarding school brochure.

Now imagine that you've attended for three months. It's Tuesday. You have a mathematics test tomorrow. You forgot to do your laundry. Your roommate has developed a mysterious habit of leaving half-eaten food on the windowsill. You still have two hours of homework. Are you happy here?

That's a harder question. It's also a useful one. At boarding school, classrooms are only one part of the experience. You'll eat breakfast, make friends, celebrate birthdays, disagree with people, and figure out a surprising number of things about yourself. The school will become the setting for much of your daily life.

What do we mean by fit?

School fit describes the relationship between a student and the school's academics, expectations, routines, opportunities, community, and support. A school might have an exceptional program in your favorite subject while requiring more independence than you're ready to manage. Another might have an inviting dorm community but few opportunities in an activity you love.

Most schools involve trade-offs. You want enough information to judge those trade-offs thoughtfully. You also want a place that gives you room to change. Your interests and friendships won't necessarily look the same in two years.

Throughout this guide, imagine an ordinary Tuesday at each school. You'll find questions to answer as you read, followed by reproducible worksheets for researching real schools.

CHAPTER 01

The Boarding School Landscape

At first glance, boarding schools can look remarkably alike. The most revealing differences emerge when you ask how students spend their days.

Most boarding schools advertise strong academics, supportive communities, interesting activities, and opportunities to grow. Then you discover that one has Saturday classes, another requires athletics every term, and a third gives students considerable freedom to design independent projects. Those distinctions will affect every week of your life.

Size, community, and who stays on campus

A school with 250 students may feel familiar quickly. You might know people across grade levels and see the same teachers in class, in the dining hall, and in your dorm. That closeness can be reassuring. It may also mean fewer advanced electives, smaller activity groups, or less social privacy.

A school with 900 students may offer more courses, teams, and student groups. Its dorms could nevertheless be organized into intimate houses where students develop strong relationships. The number on the enrollment page is only a starting point.

Ask what proportion of students board. If many students leave in the afternoon, weekends may be quieter than school-day tours suggest. Ask whether boarding students have organized activities, off-campus transportation, and opportunities to build friendships beyond their dorm.

HAWTHORNE

280 students; nearly all board

Small residential houses

Saturday classes

Discussion-oriented courses

Rural campus

BROOKFIELD

850 students; many day students

Broad elective offerings

More flexible afternoons

Larger club and athletics programs

Suburban campus

The Hawthorne School and Brookfield School are fictional comparisons. Neither description supplies enough information for a final judgment.

How schools teach

At one school, you may spend hours around a seminar table, debating books and explaining your thinking. At another, your week may include lectures, laboratories, independent research, and enough problem sets to make you briefly question your enthusiasm for engineering.

Most schools use more than one approach. Ask what a normal lesson looks like, how teachers provide feedback, and what happens when a student has trouble understanding an assignment. Think about which methods help you learn in different subjects.

Look closely at specialized programs. A splendid science laboratory is less useful to you if few students have access. Find out whether activities have prerequisites, how students are selected, and whether scheduling conflicts prevent students from combining interests.

Life is organized differently

Dorms may be arranged by grade or mixed ages. Faculty may live in residential houses or supervise on a rotating schedule. Some students attend required evening study periods, assemblies, community service, or religious services. Others have fewer scheduled obligations. Policies may also change as students get older.

Location changes the possibilities. A rural campus may offer trails and a close residential community; a school near a city may offer museums and performances. Find out when students may leave campus and how they get around.

> FOR PARENTS Research the school handbook, boarding percentage, sample weekly schedule, activity requirements, and actual access to advertised programs. These often reveal more about daily life than rankings or architecture.

REFLECTION / USE THIS PAGE AS YOU READ

TRY IT / STUDENT WORKBOOK

Two schools, two experiences

Which of the two fictional schools would you want to visit first, and why?

What is one possible disadvantage of the school you chose?

What three pieces of information would you need before comparing them seriously?

A CURATED FIELD GUIDE

Sixteen Schools, Sixteen Different Experiences

What do a school with required horsemanship, a school organized around studio arts, and a public five-day boarding school have in common? They all ask students to live where they learn. Their answers to almost everything else can be very different.

The sixteen schools that follow offer different approaches to academics, community, and daily life. As you read, notice which experiences appeal to you and which raise questions.

School programs and admissions arrangements change. Use each school's official website to confirm current details as you investigate.

FOUR WAYS TO EXPLORE THE COLLECTION

I. Different ways to learn Exeter · Interlochen · Marvelwood · Bard Academy

II. Learning through experience Putney · Thacher · Madeira · Hawai‘i Prep

III. Community, values & structure Lawrenceville · George · Avon Old Farms · Camden

IV. Different paths to boarding Eaglebrook · SEED DC · UWC-USA · St. Andrew's

> FOR PARENTS Treat these profiles as educational illustrations, not a school list for your child. Confirm eligibility, academic requirements, accommodation availability, and financial aid before deciding which schools to pursue.

I / DIFFERENT WAYS TO LEARN / 1 OF 2

01

DISCUSSION-LED ACADEMICS

Phillips Exeter Academy

Exeter, New Hampshire

Exeter is known for Harkness: students and teachers explore ideas together around a table. In mathematics, students prepare problems beforehand, discuss different approaches, and explain how they reached their answers.

ASK YOURSELF Would regular discussion help me think more deeply, or would I need time and support to feel comfortable participating?

CONSIDER Ask what preparation looks like outside class, how quieter students participate, and how help is available when you are stuck.

OFFICIAL SCHOOL WEBSITE >

02

ARTS-CENTERED EDUCATION

Interlochen Arts Academy

Interlochen, Michigan

Interlochen combines academic classes with intensive study in creative disciplines such as music, theater, visual arts, dance, and writing. Artistic work is central to the schedule and peer community. Students interested in serious creative training can investigate what it means to organize high school around their chosen art.

ASK YOURSELF How much of my time would I enjoy devoting to an art form, and what other interests would I want to protect?

CONSIDER Examine audition or portfolio requirements, schedules, opportunities outside your major, and the experience of beginners versus advanced students.

OFFICIAL SCHOOL WEBSITE >

I / DIFFERENT WAYS TO LEARN / 2 OF 2

03

INDIVIDUALIZED LEARNING SUPPORT

The Marvelwood School

Kent, Connecticut

Marvelwood emphasizes individualized academic attention and offers learning-support programs that may include executive-function and study strategies. Ask how academic support is scheduled, who provides it, and whether additional fees apply.

ASK YOURSELF What kinds of support help me do my best work, and how would I receive them in practice?

CONSIDER Ask which services are included in tuition, which involve extra costs, and what documentation or scheduling is required.

OFFICIAL SCHOOL WEBSITE >

04

EARLY-COLLEGE PATHWAY

Bard Academy at Simon's Rock

Barrytown, New York

Bard Academy offers a two-year high school program followed by an early-college pathway at Simon's Rock for students in good academic and social standing. Its model challenges the familiar assumption that secondary school must follow four conventional high-school years before college begins.

ASK YOURSELF Would an earlier transition to college-level study suit my interests, readiness, and social life?

CONSIDER Investigate the residential arrangements, college transition, credentials, transfer options, and the fit of a nontraditional timeline.

OFFICIAL SCHOOL WEBSITE >

II / LEARNING THROUGH EXPERIENCE / 1 OF 2

05

WORK AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

The Putney School

Putney, Vermont

Putney integrates a student work program into school life. Responsibilities connected with food, facilities, and campus operations help students learn what it takes to sustain a community. The arrangement offers a useful contrast with schools where campus work remains almost entirely the responsibility of employees.

ASK YOURSELF Would I enjoy practical work as a regular part of my education and community membership?

CONSIDER Ask how assignments are made, how much time they require, and how the work program interacts with academics and activities.

OFFICIAL SCHOOL WEBSITE >

06

HORSEMANSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY

The Thacher School

Ojai, California

At Thacher, ninth-grade students spend their first year learning to ride and care for a horse; new older students participate for a shorter required period. Riding, feeding, and caring for an animal become regular responsibilities. The school shows how one tradition can influence daily routines in surprisingly substantial ways.

ASK YOURSELF Would I enjoy learning a challenging new practical skill that also brings daily obligations?

CONSIDER Ask about time demands, expectations for novices, physical considerations, and how students balance horse care with other interests.

OFFICIAL SCHOOL WEBSITE >

II / LEARNING THROUGH EXPERIENCE / 2 OF 2

07

INTERNSHIPS AND EXPERIENCE

The Madeira School

McLean, Virginia

Madeira is a girls' boarding and day school known for Co-Curriculum: an organized sequence of internships and real-world placements that complement classroom study. Students encounter service, government, and career-related settings as part of their education.

ASK YOURSELF Would I enjoy leaving campus to learn through work and service, even when the experience is unfamiliar?

CONSIDER Ask how placements are assigned, whether students can express preferences, and how internships affect the normal academic schedule.

OFFICIAL SCHOOL WEBSITE >

08

PLACE-BASED LEARNING

Hawai‘i Preparatory Academy

Hawai‘i Preparatory Academy draws on its island setting through field experiences and learning connected with local environments and communities. Students can explore how Hawai‘i shapes courses, activities, and campus life.

ASK YOURSELF How much would I enjoy outdoor fieldwork and learning connected to the place where I live?

CONSIDER Research travel distance, local opportunities, costs, and the difference between advertised experiences and required activities.

OFFICIAL SCHOOL WEBSITE >

III / COMMUNITY, VALUES & STRUCTURE / 1 OF 2

09

RESIDENTIAL HOUSE COMMUNITIES

The Lawrenceville School

Lawrenceville, New Jersey

Lawrenceville organizes much of student life around a House system. Houses help create smaller communities within a larger school and connect students with peers and adults outside the classroom. Residential organization can shape friendship, mentoring, and the feeling of belonging.

ASK YOURSELF Would a strong House identity make a larger school feel more personal to me?

CONSIDER Ask how Houses are assigned, how day students participate, and what support exists when a residential relationship becomes difficult.

OFFICIAL SCHOOL WEBSITE >

10

QUAKER VALUES AND REFLECTION

George School

Newtown, Pennsylvania

George School's Quaker heritage influences student life through practices such as Meeting for Worship, community participation, and reflection. The school also offers varied academic pathways. It shows how institutional values may shape the atmosphere and expectations of a residential community.

ASK YOURSELF How would I feel about reflection and a school's shared traditions becoming part of my week?

CONSIDER Ask what participation is required, how students with different beliefs experience the community, and how values guide school decisions.

OFFICIAL SCHOOL WEBSITE >

III / COMMUNITY, VALUES & STRUCTURE / 2 OF 2

11

ALL-BOYS EDUCATION AND MENTORSHIP

Avon Old Farms School

Avon, Connecticut

Avon Old Farms is an all-boys boarding and day school that emphasizes relationships, community, and practical learning. Its model opens a question about how a single-sex environment may influence students' academic participation, friendships, activities, and sense of identity.

ASK YOURSELF Would I enjoy a school community organized around boys' education, and why?

CONSIDER Ask current students how they experience academic culture, friendship, mentoring, and opportunities across different interests.

OFFICIAL SCHOOL WEBSITE >

12

MILITARY STRUCTURE AND LEADERSHIP

Camden Military Academy

Camden, South Carolina

Camden Military Academy is an all-boys residential school serving grades 7–12. Cadet life, uniforms, military organization, and closely structured expectations distinguish its daily routines from many independent boarding schools.

ASK YOURSELF Would clear routines, uniforms, and formal leadership roles help me thrive?

CONSIDER Investigate disciplinary expectations, schedules, the role of JROTC, contact with home, and how independence develops over time.

OFFICIAL SCHOOL WEBSITE >

IV / DIFFERENT PATHS TO BOARDING / 1 OF 2

13

JUNIOR BOARDING

Eaglebrook School

Deerfield, Massachusetts

Eaglebrook serves boys in grades 6–9 in a junior boarding and day environment. Faculty families live in its residential houses. Students begin residential life at a younger age, with routines and adult supervision designed for that stage.

ASK YOURSELF Would I feel ready to live away from home in middle school, and what would make that transition manageable?

CONSIDER Ask about parent communication, age-specific supervision, homesickness support, and the move to a later secondary school.

OFFICIAL SCHOOL WEBSITE >

14

PUBLIC FIVE-DAY BOARDING

SEED School of Washington, D.C.

Washington, D.C.

SEED DC is a tuition-free public charter boarding school using a five-day residential model. Students check in Sunday evening and leave Friday afternoon. It shows that boarding can have a different weekly rhythm and funding structure from a traditional independent seven-day school.

ASK YOURSELF How would weekday boarding and weekends at home change my friendships, routines, and family life?

CONSIDER Eligibility is limited; families should confirm D.C. residency and current admissions rules directly with the school.

OFFICIAL SCHOOL WEBSITE >

IV / DIFFERENT PATHS TO BOARDING / 2 OF 2

15

INTERNATIONAL TWO-YEAR PROGRAM

UWC-USA

Montezuma, New Mexico

UWC-USA brings students from different countries and cultures together for a two-year International Baccalaureate residential education. The school's international mission places intercultural exchange and global questions at the center of the student experience.

ASK YOURSELF Would I enjoy joining an international community for the final two years of secondary school?

CONSIDER Explore country-specific application routes, language demands, the IB program, and what a two-year experience means socially.

OFFICIAL SCHOOL WEBSITE >

16

FINANCIAL ACCESS

St. Andrew's School

Middletown, Delaware

St. Andrew's is a traditional coeducational boarding school that emphasizes need-based financial aid. It helps illustrate why families should investigate a school's actual aid practices instead of assuming its published tuition is the price every student pays.

ASK YOURSELF Could a school that looks financially out of reach become realistic after a careful aid review?

CONSIDER Ask whether admission and aid are assessed separately, which expenses are covered, and how grants may change from year to year.

OFFICIAL SCHOOL WEBSITE >

FIELD GUIDE / REFLECTION

What Surprised You?

Which approach would you like to investigate further? Did any of these schools change an assumption you had about boarding school?

Which school or educational model would you investigate first? Why?

Which school made you reconsider an assumption about boarding?

What kind of requirement or commitment would you need to investigate carefully?

Name three characteristics you now want to look for at other schools.

When you begin researching an actual application list, use the School Research Profile in the toolkit to investigate programs, admissions eligibility, student support, and affordability.

CHAPTER 02

What Kind of Student Are You?

You already have experience being a student. The trick is learning to describe what makes a classroom, a routine, or a community work well for you.

You know which classes you look forward to, what happens when you're overwhelmed, and whether you tend to begin assignments early or suddenly notice it's midnight. You may also know which teachers bring out your best work. Those observations are useful evidence.

Students are frequently asked whether they want challenging courses, supportive teachers, and exciting opportunities. Most reasonably answer yes to all three. More useful questions investigate what happens when those priorities pull in different directions.

A STUDENT EXAMPLE / ILLUSTRATIVE COMPOSITE

Daniel and the meaning of challenge

Daniel loves mathematics and science. He enjoys problems that take a long time to solve and is excited to attend a school known for demanding courses and accomplished students.

After arriving, Daniel enjoys meeting classmates who share his interests, but discovers that some classes move through material he already knows while others organize assignments in ways he finds frustrating. The school's reputation doesn't tell him whether each course will challenge him in the way he wants.

Daniel's experience raises practical questions: Can students change levels? Is independent study possible? What help is available when the difficulty lies in how a course is taught? The answers tell Daniel far more than the word 'rigorous' ever could.

About the student stories: The scenarios in this guide use fictional details to explore common student experiences.

Rigor, pressure, and support

Academic rigor concerns the intellectual demands of coursework. Academic pressure concerns the stress students experience from workload, expectations, competition, and the consequences of performance. A school can be intellectually demanding and supportive; it can also feel competitive in ways that suit some students and exhaust others.

Pay attention to how teachers help students who get stuck. Are there office hours? A writing center? Peer tutoring? Structured study periods? Does the school have staff who help with planning, organization, or accommodations? Students who need specific services should ask how those services are delivered in practice.

REFLECTION / USE THIS PAGE AS YOU READ

TRY IT / STUDENT WORKBOOK

Your best learning experience

Think of a class you genuinely enjoyed. What did the teacher do that made it work?

Which kinds of assignments helped you learn? How did the class handle difficult material?

Think of a class where you struggled. What would have made that experience better?

Independence develops with practice

Boarding students track assignments, manage belongings, share living spaces, and ask for assistance. Think about laundry, deadlines, and approaching teachers. Which responsibilities can you manage now? Which would you like to practice?

> FOR PARENTS Ask how the school supports time management, executive functioning, and self-advocacy. If your student needs accommodations, request specific information about eligibility, staffing, services, and how support works day to day.

The person you are becoming

You might love music now and discover programming later. You might be devoted to a sport and decide to try a play. Some students don't know what they want to specialize in yet. A school should make space for interests you already have and the ones you haven't discovered.

List one thing you love, one skill you'd like to improve, and one activity you're curious about. Then investigate whether you could realistically pursue all three at a given school. Look at requirements, scheduling, and who can actually participate.

REFLECTION / USE THIS PAGE AS YOU READ

TRY IT / STUDENT WORKBOOK

Your independence inventory

Name two responsibilities you already manage independently.

Which two responsibilities would be easier with reminders or support?

What could you practice now, and what support should you ask a boarding school about?

CHAPTER 03

Living at School

Your days will unfold in residence halls, dining rooms, classrooms, and all the hours in between.

School websites celebrate victories, concerts, traditions, and beautiful autumn afternoons. Most of your life will happen between those moments. You'll wake up, eat breakfast, go to class, participate in activities, do homework, and live with other people. A school that feels wonderful during a visit should also make sense when you're tired on a Tuesday evening.

7:00	Breakfast / dorm
8:00	Classes begin
3:30	Activities / athletics
6:00	Dinner and community time
7:30	Study period
10:00	Dorm / bedtime routines

An illustrative day only. Schedules, study periods, required activities, and curfews vary widely by school and grade.

A STUDENT EXAMPLE / ILLUSTRATIVE COMPOSITE

Mei, far from home

Mei comes from another country to attend boarding school. She loves mathematics and science and begins exploring theater and film, but finds that adjusting takes time. Some evenings she misses hearing her first language and feels tired from working so hard in humanities discussions.

Her classmates are friendly, yet she occasionally feels lonely. Gradually, trusted adults, friendships, and familiar routines help her feel more at home. Enjoying school and missing home are feelings that can exist together.

Ask how schools support multilingual students, help new boarders settle in, and connect students with counseling and residential staff when they need someone to talk to.

Your room is your home

Dorms are where students become close friends, study together, celebrate birthdays, and sometimes have irritating disagreements. A roommate may be delightful and still insist on sleeping with a light on. Quiet places, personal space, and clear rules can make a large difference to daily comfort.

Find out how roommates are assigned, who supervises the dorm, what happens when roommates clash, and whether room changes are possible. Ask about quiet hours, visitors, laundry, room inspections, technology rules, and where students can have private calls with home.

Friendship within a residential community

Living with classmates creates chances for deep friendships. It can also make disagreements harder to escape. At day school, you might go home after an argument. At boarding school, you may see the same person at dinner and again during study hall.

Think about where you currently feel comfortable. How do people treat one another? What happens when someone makes a mistake? What kind of social atmosphere helps you feel like yourself? Ask schools how new students make friends and how residential staff respond to bullying, exclusion, or conflict.

Weekends, rules, and choice

At some schools, Saturdays include classes or athletic commitments. At others, students choose from excursions, clubs, free time, service, or rehearsals. Don't assume that a school near a city allows students to visit independently; off-campus policies and transportation may be restrictive.

Find out how many students remain on campus each weekend, what a typical Saturday looks like, and whether students can participate in activities outside their regular commitments. A school's published list of clubs may be far more extensive than what fits into a student's actual schedule.

Belonging also means getting help

Students bring their identities, religions, family backgrounds, cultures, learning needs, and health needs to school. Ask whether the school has accessible support services and how students raise concerns about discrimination, bullying, health, or well-being. General statements about inclusion should be backed by understandable practices.

Every student will eventually have a difficult week. Ask what happens if someone becomes sick, falls behind, feels isolated, or needs counseling. Who is available at night? Who follows up? When are families contacted? Ask how that support works in practice.

> FOR PARENTS Confirm overnight supervision, health-service access, counseling, required activities, crisis procedures, communication expectations, and how students can request help. Ask for specifics rather than assurances alone.

REFLECTION / USE THIS PAGE AS YOU READ

TRY IT / STUDENT WORKBOOK

The ordinary Tuesday test

Imagine waking up here in November. What is the first hour of your day like?

Where do you go after classes? What happens during the evening?

Where can you find privacy? Who would you talk to after a difficult day?

CHAPTER 04

The Family Equation

A boarding school decision affects the whole household. Practical constraints and different family priorities deserve an honest conversation.

Living away from home can feel exciting and unsettling at the same time. You may miss siblings, pets, familiar meals, your bedroom, or the freedom to disappear into a quiet room at the end of the day. You may also enjoy developing new routines and relationships. Homesickness isn't a verdict on your readiness.

Distance changes family life. A school an hour away permits different kinds of visits from one that requires a flight. Consider school breaks, travel costs, family events, emergencies, leave rules, and how often you'll want to be in touch.

A STUDENT EXAMPLE / ILLUSTRATIVE COMPOSITE

Avery and two different ideas of fit

Avery loves making films, drawing, and working backstage. Avery's parents are impressed by a school with an exceptional academic reputation and college placement record. On a visit, Avery realizes it may be difficult to fit arts activities around the school's requirements.

At a less famous school, Avery meets students who combine demanding classes with serious artistic projects. The environment feels inviting. The parents still want to investigate academics and college counseling; Avery still wants to understand whether the first school's arts program might be more accessible than it appeared.

They now have specific questions to research together and a clearer way to compare the schools. The right conversation examines both the student's daily experience and the family's long-term concerns.

The cost of attending

Boarding school can be expensive, and the published tuition is only part of the picture. Families may need to budget for fees, travel, technology, uniforms or clothing, trips, supplies, and medical or insurance-related expenses. Financial aid can change the net cost substantially, but each school's policies differ.

Students don't need to manage their family's finances. They do deserve clarity about genuine constraints. A family can discuss affordability respectfully and early, before a student becomes deeply invested in an option that cannot work.

A family conversation worth having

Students and parents may value different things. One may worry most about academic rigor; another may be concerned about friendships, support, or the distance from home. These priorities needn't be in competition. They tell the family which questions to research.

> FOR PARENTS Explain constraints around affordability, travel, safety, and essential services without making your student responsible for solving adult problems. Within those limits, give the student meaningful influence over the search.

REFLECTION / USE THIS PAGE AS YOU READ

TRY IT / STUDENT WORKBOOK

Compare priorities

Student: What are your three highest priorities for boarding school?

Parent or guardian: What are your three most important considerations?

What do you agree about? Where do you differ, and what information would help?

CHAPTER 05

Reading a School

A school's website introduces its version of the story. Your research should uncover what that story means on an ordinary day.

'Our students benefit from an exceptionally supportive, close-knit residential community.' You've probably read something similar. It sounds encouraging. But what exactly does it describe? Small dorms? Regular advisor meetings? Student mentors? An accessible counseling office? A pattern of adults noticing when someone is having a hard time?

School websites offer carefully edited introductions. Follow up with handbooks, sample schedules, course descriptions, activity requirements, and conversations with current students. A specific example can be more valuable than a flattering adjective.

A STUDENT EXAMPLE / ILLUSTRATIVE COMPOSITE

Riley changes the list

Riley has admired a well-known boarding school for months. The campus photographs and traditions suggest an exciting place. On a visit, the formal atmosphere and structured schedule are less appealing than Riley expected.

A later visit to a school with less name recognition reveals classes, independent projects, and student relationships that seem easier to imagine participating in. Riley now has to reconsider the initial list.

Ask questions that produce stories

Ask a student how much homework they had last Tuesday, when they last needed help from a teacher, and what they did over the weekend. Specific memories reveal routines that broad descriptions overlook.

Questions about specific experiences tend to reveal schedules, trade-offs, and routines. Try asking several students the same question. Different answers may reflect different grades, interests, or dorms rather than a contradiction.

Be a campus detective

During a visit, notice what happens between scheduled tour stops. How do students talk to teachers? Where do people spend free periods? How do the dining hall and dormitory feel? What do current students say about obligations and downtime?

One visit is only a small sample; weather, time of day, and the people you meet can shape the impression. Record observations soon afterward, then follow up on uncertain points. Keep a distinction between what you personally saw and what someone told you.

FIVE QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING A STUDENT

- What surprised you most about attending this school?
- What does a typical weekend look like?
- What do you wish you had known before enrolling?
- What happens when someone has a difficult week?
- If you could change one thing about the school, what would it be?

> FOR PARENTS Seek school handbooks and written policies for high-stakes questions. For sensitive student needs, obtain specific answers from qualified staff and confirm them in school policies.

REFLECTION / USE THIS PAGE AS YOU READ

TRY IT / STUDENT WORKBOOK

The evidence test

A school says students receive 'exceptional individual attention.' What evidence would verify the claim?

What did you observe personally during a visit? What did students or staff tell you?

What remains uncertain, and whom could you ask next?

CHAPTER 06

Making Sense of Your Options

By the end of your research, you'll have competing strengths, unanswered questions, and some impressions you trust more than others. That's normal.

Imagine two schools. One offers remarkable science courses but a demanding, competitive schedule. Another has fewer advanced electives but a community where you immediately feel comfortable. How do you decide? You might consult course catalogs, speak with teachers, ask about independent study, or investigate the first school's social atmosphere more closely.

You're learning to compare trade-offs. Think about which opportunities you gain, which compromises you'd make, and what you still don't know. Some preferences may turn out to be flexible. Essential medical, accessibility, safety, support, and financial needs are not optional.

Priorities before scores

Sort your criteria into essential, important, nice to have, or flexible. Then use the fit matrix in the toolkit. Give each school a rating when you have adequate evidence; use a question mark if you don't. Write down why you chose the rating, especially when you're concerned.

Ratings help organize your impressions. Compare the evidence behind them, especially when a school may be unable to meet an essential need. Write down what would change your assessment.

Build a list you would be happy to attend

Fit and admissions selectivity are different questions. Some schools are exceptionally competitive; at others, admission may depend on available places in a particular grade or program. Your preparation, interests, recommendations, interview, and application materials also play roles.

Try to investigate a range of realistic possibilities and consider each school's admissions requirements and financial aid process. Your final list should contain schools you could genuinely imagine attending.

REFLECTION / USE THIS PAGE AS YOU READ

TRY IT / STUDENT WORKBOOK

Your current front-runner

Which school currently feels strongest, and what specific evidence supports that feeling?

What concerns remain, including any essential need you haven't confirmed?

What could change your mind? What will you investigate next?

FOR PARENTS Use the matrix to discuss particular strengths and concerns. Review essential services, affordability, and admissions feasibility separately. Encourage the student to explain both excitement and reservations.

CONCLUSION

Finding Your Place

There's a strange thing about choosing a boarding school: you're trying to decide where a future version of yourself might be happy. You know something about that person already - what interests you, what frustrates you, what kinds of people you enjoy spending time with. You also know you'll change.

In a year, you may find an interest you didn't know you had, become friends with someone unexpected, or try something that currently seems terrifying. A good school should give you room for all that.

Pay attention to what each school expects, what it offers, and what an ordinary day feels like. Talk to people who know the place. Ask questions until you understand the answers. You may even decide boarding school isn't right for you now. Whatever you learn, you'll have a better understanding of what you need from an educational community.

REPRODUCIBLE FORMS

The Boarding School Fit Toolkit

Make a fresh School Research Profile for each school you investigate and a new set of Campus Visit Field Notes after each visit. Keep the completed forms together as your list develops.

Use a question mark when you need more information. Confirm that a school can meet your essential academic, health, accessibility, safety, and financial needs.

01 My Boarding School Fit Profile

Identify your learning, community, residential, and personal priorities.

02 School Research Profile

Two pages per school, combining school facts with questions and sources.

03 Campus Visit Field Notes

Two pages per visit, separating observations from conversations.

04 Boarding School Fit Matrix

Two pages to compare priorities, ratings, strengths, concerns, and missing evidence.

05 Final School Comparison

Two pages for family discussion and a clear next step.

WORKSHEET 01 / 1 OF 1

My Boarding School Fit Profile

Complete this once, then revisit your answers after researching several schools.

Student / date:

I learn best when...

My ideal community feels like...

I would enjoy living at a school where...

Three things I consider essential

Interests I want to pursue or explore

WORKSHEET 02 / PAGE 1 OF 2

School Research Profile

Use school-published materials and record uncertain details as questions.

School / research date:

Basic facts: grades, enrollment, boarding percentage, location

Courses and teaching approaches that interest me

Typical workload and academic support

Activities and opportunities I could realistically join

Continue on Worksheet 02, page 2.

WORKSHEET 02 / PAGE 2 OF 2

School Research Profile - Continued

School / research date:

Residential life: dorms, roommates, staff, study periods

Rules: weekends, transportation, technology, leave

Health, counseling, accommodations, and belonging

Cost, financial aid, travel, and deadlines

Sources consulted / three questions remaining

WORKSHEET 03 / PAGE 1 OF 2

Campus Visit Field Notes

Separate direct observations from claims or opinions you heard.

School:

People I spoke with / visit date

What I personally OBSERVED in classes and common spaces

What I personally OBSERVED about dorms and student interactions

One moment that surprised me

Continue on Worksheet 03, page 2.

WORKSHEET 03 / PAGE 2 OF 2

Campus Visit Notes - Continued

My

School / visit date:

What STUDENTS OR STAFF TOLD ME about daily life

Three things I liked

Two concerns or possible trade-offs

Questions to follow up and whom to ask

WORKSHEET 04 / PAGE 1 OF 2

Boarding School Fit Matrix

Student / date: _____

School A: _____ B: _____ C: _____

Priority: E = essential | I = important | N = nice | F = flexible
Rating: 1 = poor fit through 5 = excellent fit | ? = more evidence needed

FIT CATEGORY	PRIORITY	A	B	C
Academic courses and teaching				
Academic help and accommodations				
Residential life and rules				
Friendships and belonging				
Activities and free time				
Health, safety, and well-being				
Location, travel, and finances				
Your own criterion: _____				

What is one essential need that must be confirmed?

Continue on Worksheet 04, page 2: evidence, concerns, and unknowns.

WORKSHEET 04 / PAGE 2 OF 2

Evidence Behind the Ratings

Record sources: official policies, student conversations, firsthand observations.

Schools A / B / C:

School A: strongest evidence AND biggest concern

School B: strongest evidence AND biggest concern

School C: strongest evidence AND biggest concern

Essential needs that are not confirmed or not met

What to research next before deciding

Worksheet 04, page 2 of 2.

WORKSHEET 05 / PAGE 1 OF 2

Final School Comparison

Compare qualitative evidence; never use a single average to make the decision.

Student / date:

School A — strengths, concerns, essential needs

School B — strengths, concerns, essential needs

School C — strengths, concerns, essential needs

Continue on Worksheet 05, page 2.

WORKSHEET 05 / PAGE 2 OF 2

Your Decision, Your Next Step

Return to the profile you completed earlier. Have your priorities changed?

Student / date:

Which school currently appeals most? Why?

What evidence supports my current preference?

What could change my mind?

Where do my family and I agree or differ?

My next research or application step

Worksheet 05, page 2 of 2.

ABOUT ADMISSIONS CONTROL

Dare Mighty Things

Admissions Control provides individualized guidance for students and families navigating college, boarding school, and other educational admissions processes.

Our work helps students understand their options, develop thoughtful lists, prepare compelling applications, and make informed decisions about their educational futures.

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