

HOW TO APPLY FOR YOUR U.S. STUDENT VISA

A LIST OF HANDY SUGGESTIONS FROM
THE TEAM AT PRODIGY FINANCE

The purpose of this guide is to provide prospective students with an overview of the application process for a US student visa and should not be regarded as legal or immigration advice or as a substitute for the official information published by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) from time to time or any instructions and/or advice provided by US embassies and consuls. Whilst we have carefully compiled the guide in accordance with the information published by USCIS, Prodigy Finance Limited does not accept liability for any inaccuracies, mistakes, omissions or outdated information in the guide and we encourage prospective students and other readers to consult the USCIS's website at <https://www.uscis.gov>. Prodigy Finance Limited is not authorized by the Department of Justice (DOJ)'s Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) to provide immigration services and will not provide any additional information or assistance to any person to apply for a US student or other category visa.

U.S. STUDENT VISA APPLICATION TIPS



Applying for a U.S. visa can be a long and detailed process. It will involve a physical appointment, two separate fees paid to the government, and dozens of backup documents. Have no fear – we're here to make the process as painless as possible.

Grab a tea and get settled in!

Most of our clients who study in the U.S. on full-time programs will apply for an F1 visa. Your school can give more guidance on which types of visas they support, but for the sake of this guide, we'll assume you're after the F1.

#PROTIP: Get yourself one of those plastic folders that hyper-organised people use to keep their documents. You're going to need to print and keep all of your confirmations and receipts throughout this process.

STEP 1: COMPLETE THE DOCUMENTS FOR YOUR I-20

Your school will get this process started for you.

Once you've got an admit letter for your course, the university will enroll you with the U.S. government visa system (called SEVIS) and send you a form to complete before they are able to issue the F-1 visa document (called the I-20). The process of submitting your information usually happens online and the university will send you the finished document via post.

The I-20 is the most important document in the extensive visa application process. In fact, you will carry the I-20 with you while travelling for the next two years. Complete it entirely and with care.

PRO-TIP: Each university has its own timelines for processing your request for an I-20 and these can vary widely. Make sure you know the due date for your university, wait times associated with submission and average delivery times (often by standard mail).

STEP 2: PAY YOUR SEVIS REGISTRATION FEE

As soon as you receive your I-20, the next step is to pay the SEVIS registration fee. This is the administrative cost of getting you registered with the U.S. visa system, and the charge is \$200 per person. You'll need to pay this fee at least three days before submitting your visa application.

**DOCUMENTS FOR
YOUR FOLDER:
Proof of payment**

STEP 3: CHOOSE YOUR EMBASSY OR CONSULATE

You'll need to apply for your visa through a specific embassy or consulate. Most people find the office that's closest to their permanent address (the U.S. visa department recommends this, but it's not required). Here's where to find the specific instructions for your city.

STEP 4: START YOUR APPLICATION ONLINE

Everyone fills out the same form (called DS-160), and it's online! Fill yours out here. Your application ID is at the top of the form. Hang on to that number, as you'll need it later.

DOCUMENTS FOR YOUR FOLDER:
DS-160 application confirmation page, with your application ID and barcode.

STEP 5: COLLECT YOUR DOCUMENTS

This is the time when you'll try to impersonate a ridiculously detail-oriented person. The folks at the visa office will check and double-check your backup documents to make sure that it completely matches your application. If you haven't followed all of the rules to the detail, they might ask you to re-do the application or make a second appointment. Collect everything in advance, using our handy document checklist on the side of this page.

CHECKLIST

- ALL OF YOUR PASSPORTS, CURRENT AND EXPIRED
- DATES AND DETAILS OF ANY PREVIOUS TRAVEL THAT YOU'VE MADE TO THE U.S.
- A POINT OF CONTACT IN THE US (schools will share the details of a school administrator in their letter regarding visas)
- MEDICAL HISTORY
- TRANSCRIPTS AND DIPLOMAS FROM YOUR UNIVERSITY STUDY
- OFFICIAL GRE, GMAT, AND/OR TOEFL SCORES
- A RECENT PHOTO OF YOURSELF, FOLLOWING THESE REQUIREMENTS
- EVIDENCE THAT YOU HAVE ENOUGH FUNDS TO COVER YOUR STAY IN THE U.S.

(Your Loan Confirmation Letter from your Prodigy Finance dashboard should help. Otherwise, proof that you've paid your deposit and 3 months' of bank statements to prove your savings.)

STEP 6: PAY THE VISA APPLICATION (MRV) FEE

Yes, there is a second fee! There are different payment methods for each embassy or consulate, so check with yours to get the details. Generally, there are three options:

1. GO PHYSICALLY TO A BANK
2. PAY BY PHONE
3. PAY ONLINE

Whichever method you choose, record your fee confirmation number and print your receipt! advance, using our handy document checklist on the side of this page.

DOCUMENTS FOR YOUR FOLDER:
Receipt for the MRV fee.

Time: Class start date – 160 days

STEP 7: SCHEDULE YOUR VISA INTERVIEW

Pick up your MRV confirmation number, and either phone or go online to make an appointment with your embassy or consulate. As a reminder, you can find the nearest office by searching here.

Important note: Different embassies and consulates have varied waiting times to get an appointment. Here's what to expect in the way of wait times for your consulate.

**DOCUMENTS FOR
YOUR FOLDER:
Visa appointment
interview
confirmation.**

Time: Class start date – 150 days

STEP 8: SHOWTIME! IT'S THE INTERVIEW

Definitely arrive on time. Wait, no. Arrive early. If you're late they might ask you to reschedule to a different day.

Important note: Only people applying for visas will be allowed inside. If your family aren't coming with you to the U.S., it's best for them to meet you back home.

PRO-TIP: Don't try to predict what the interviewer might be thinking. Instead, give brief and honest answers. Rather than "tell your whole life story" keep it simple and allow the interviewer to follow up if he or she has other questions. You'll be great!

WHAT QUESTIONS SHOULD YOU EXPECT?

- Tell me about your education and professional career to date?
- Why do you want to study for a Master's?
- Where is your extended family? What are your ties to [your home country]?
- (For non-native speakers) How have you developed your English language skills?
- How are you planning to fund your studies?
- What do you plan to do when you finish studying?

OTHER THINGS TO EXPECT

They'll take digital scans of your fingerprints.
They'll hang on to your passport, and let you know when and how to expect it back. Usually they'll ask you to fetch it from the consulate or send it via courier.

Time: Class start date – 120 days

STEP 9: TRAVELLING TO THE U.S.

Remember to keep your visa documents in your hand luggage! You might be asked to show them again when you enter the U.S. Here's the master list to carry with you:

- **Valid passport with your newly-minted visa stamp**
- **Form I-20 approval notice and any letters that arrived with it**
- **Receipt of payment for your SEVIS fee**
- **Evidence of your funding (e.g. your Prodigy Finance loan confirmation letter)**
- **Contact information for the person on your campus listed as the visa liaison**

When you arrive on campus, you'll need to check in with a Designated School Officer (usually in the International Students branch) who will confirm with the U.S. government that you're safe and sound on campus. Even when you're going on holiday, you'll need your I-20 form every time you re-enter the U.S.

Time: Class start date – 30 day
