

College Planning - Planning Calendar

Use these timelines to make sure you're accomplishing everything on time.

Ninth Grade

- ✚ As soon as you can, meet with your counselor to begin talking about colleges and careers.
- ✚ Make sure you are enrolled in the appropriate college-preparatory or tech-prep courses.
- ✚ Get off to a good start with your grades. The grades you earn in ninth grade will be included in your final high school GPA and class rank.
- ✚ College might seem a long way off now, but grades really do count toward college admission and scholarships.
- ✚ Explore your interests and possible careers. Take advantage of Career Day opportunities.
- ✚ Get involved in extracurricular activities (both school and non-school-sponsored).
- ✚ Talk to your parents about planning for college expenses. Continue or begin a savings plan for college.
- ✚ Look at the college information available in your counselor's office and school and public libraries. Use the Internet to check out college Web sites.
- ✚ Tour a nearby college, if possible. Visit relatives or friends who live on or near a college campus. Check out the dorms, go to the library or student center, and get a feel for college life.
- ✚ Investigate summer enrichment programs.

Tenth Grade

Fall

- ✚ Ask your guidance counselor about the American College Testing program's PLAN (Pre-ACT) assessment program, which helps determine your study habits and academic progress and interests. This test will prepare you for the ACT Assessment next year.
- ✚ Take geometry if you have not already done so. Take biology and a second year of a foreign language.
- ✚ Become familiar with general college entrance requirements.
- ✚ Participate in your school's or state's career development activities.

Winter

- ✚ The people who read college applications aren't looking just for grades. Get involved in activities outside the classroom. Work toward leadership positions in the activities that you like best. Become involved in community service and other volunteer activities.
- ✚ Read, read, read. Read as many books as possible from a comprehensive reading list.
- ✚ Work on your writing skills—you'll need them no matter what you do.
- ✚ Find a teacher or another adult who will advise and encourage you to write well.

Spring

- ✚ Keep your grades up so you can have the highest GPA and class rank possible.
- ✚ Ask your counselor about postsecondary enrollment options and Advanced Placement (AP) courses.
- ✚ Continue to explore interests and careers that you think you might like.
- ✚ Begin zeroing in on the type of college you would prefer (two-year or four-year, small or large, rural or urban).
- ✚ If you are interested in attending a military academy, such as West Point or Annapolis, now is the time to start planning and getting information.
- ✚ Write to colleges and ask for their academic requirements for admission.
- ✚ Visit a few more college campuses. Read all of the mail you receive from colleges. You may see something you like.
- ✚ Attend college fairs.
- ✚ Keep putting money away for college. Get a summer job.
- ✚ Consider taking SAT II Subject Tests in the courses you took this year while the material is still fresh in your mind. These tests are offered in May and June.

Eleventh Grade

Fall

- ✚ Meet with your counselor to review the courses you've taken, and see what you still need to take.
- ✚ In October, take the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) for practice. When you fill out your test sheet, check the box that releases your name to colleges so you can start receiving brochures from them.
- ✚ Check your class rank. Even if your grades haven't been that good so far, it's never too late to improve. Colleges like to see an upward trend.
- ✚ If you didn't do so in tenth grade, sign up for and take the PSAT/NMSQT. In addition to National Merit Scholarships, this is the qualifying test for the National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students and National Hispanic Scholar Recognition Program.
- ✚ Make sure that you have a social security number.
- ✚ Take a long, hard look at why you want to continue your education after high school so you will be able to choose the best college or university for your needs.
- ✚ Make a list of colleges that meet your most important criteria (size, location, distance from home, majors, academic rigor, housing, and cost). Weigh each of the factors according to their importance to you.
- ✚ Continue visiting college fairs. You may be able to narrow your choices or add a college to your list.
- ✚ Speak to college representatives who visit your high school.
- ✚ If you want to participate in Division I or Division II sports in college, start the certification process. Check with your counselor to make sure you are taking a core curriculum that meets NCAA requirements.
- ✚ If you are interested in one of the military academies, talk to your guidance counselor about starting the application process now.

Winter

- ✚ Collect information about college application procedures, entrance requirements, tuition and fees, room and board costs, student activities, course offerings, faculty composition, accreditation, and financial aid. The Internet is a good way to visit colleges and obtain this information. Begin comparing the schools by the factors that you consider to be most important.
- ✚ Discuss your PSAT score with your counselor.
- ✚ Begin narrowing down your college choices. Find out if the colleges you are interested in require the SAT I, ACT Assessment, or SAT II Subject Tests for admission.
- ✚ Register for the ACT Assessment, which is usually taken in April or June. You can take it again late in your junior year or in the fall of your senior year, if necessary.
- ✚ Begin preparing for the tests you've decided to take.
- ✚ Have a discussion with your parents about the colleges in which you are interested. Examine financial resources, and gather information about financial aid.
- ✚ Set up a filing system with individual folders for each college's correspondence and printed materials.

Spring

- ✚ Meet with your counselor to review senior-year course selection and graduation requirements.
- ✚ Discuss ACT Assessment/SAT I scores with your counselor. Register to take the ACT Assessment and/or SAT I again if you'd like to try to improve your score.
- ✚ Discuss the college essay with your guidance counselor or English teacher.
- ✚ Stay involved with your extracurricular activities. Colleges look for consistency and depth in activities.
- ✚ Consider whom you will ask to write your recommendations. Think about asking teachers who know you well and who will write positive letters about you. Letters from a coach, activity leader, or an adult who knows you well outside of school (e.g., volunteer work contact) are also valuable.
- ✚ Inquire about personal interviews at your favorite colleges. Call or write for early summer appointments. Make necessary travel arrangements.
- ✚ See your counselor to apply for on-campus summer programs for high school students. Apply for a summer job or internship. Be prepared to pay for college application, financial aid, and testing fees in fall.
- ✚ Request applications from schools you're interested in by mail or via the Internet.

Summer

- ✚ Visit the campuses of your top-five college choices.
- ✚ After each college interview, send a thank-you letter to the interviewer.
- ✚ Talk to people you know who have attended the colleges in which you are interested.
- ✚ Continue to read books, magazines, and newspapers.
- ✚ Practice filling out college applications, and then complete the final application forms or apply online through the Web sites of the colleges in which you're interested.
- ✚ Volunteer in your community.
- ✚ Compose rough drafts of your college essays. Have a teacher read and discuss them with you. Proofread them, and prepare final drafts. Proofread your final essays at least three times.
- ✚ Develop a financial aid application plan, including a list of the aid sources, requirements for each application, and a timetable for meeting the filing deadlines.

Twelfth Grade

Fall

- ✚ Continue to take a full course load of college-prep courses.
- ✚ Keep working on your grades. Make sure you have taken the courses necessary to graduate in the spring.
- ✚ Continue to participate in extracurricular and volunteer activities. Demonstrate initiative, creativity, commitment, and leadership in each.
- ✚ To male students: you must register for selective service on your eighteenth birthday to be eligible for federal and state financial aid.
- ✚ Talk to counselors, teachers, and parents about your final college choices.
- ✚ Make a calendar showing application deadlines for admission, financial aid, and scholarships.
- ✚ Check resource books, computer programs, and your guidance office for information on scholarships and grants. Ask colleges about scholarships for which you may qualify.
- ✚ Give recommendation forms to the teachers you have chosen, along with stamped, self-addressed envelopes so your teachers can send them directly to the colleges. Be sure to fill out your name, address, and school name on the top of the form. Talk to your recommendation writers about your goals and ambitions.
- ✚ Give School Report forms to your high school's guidance office. Fill in your name, address, and any other required information on top. Verify with your guidance counselor the schools to which transcripts, test scores, and letters are to be sent. Give your counselor any necessary forms at least two weeks before they are due or whenever your counselor's deadline is, whichever is earlier.
- ✚ Register for and take the ACT Assessment, SAT I, or SAT II Subject Tests, as necessary.
- ✚ Be sure you have requested (either by mail or online) that your test scores be sent to the colleges of your choice.
- ✚ Mail or send electronically any college applications for early-decision admission by November 1.
- ✚ If possible, visit colleges while classes are in session.
- ✚ If you plan to apply for an ROTC scholarship, remember that your application is due by December 1.
- ✚ Print extra copies or make photocopies of every application you send.

Winter

- ✚ Attend whatever college-preparatory nights are held at your school or by local organizations.
- ✚ Send midyear grade reports to colleges. Continue to focus on your schoolwork!
- ✚ Fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and, if necessary, PROFILE®. These forms can be obtained from your guidance counselor or at <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov> to download the forms or to file electronically. These forms may not be processed before January 1, so don't send them before then.
- ✚ Mail or send electronically any remaining applications and financial aid forms before winter break. Make sure you apply to at least one college that you know you can afford and where you know you will be accepted.
- ✚ Follow up to make sure that the colleges have received all application information, including recommendations and test scores.
- ✚ Meet with your counselor to verify that all applicable forms are in order and have been sent out to colleges.

Spring

- ✚ Watch your mail between March 1 and April 1 for acceptance notifications from colleges.
- ✚ Watch your mail for notification of financial aid awards between April 1 and May 1.
- ✚ Compare the financial aid packages from the colleges and universities that have accepted you.
- ✚ Make your final choice, and notify all schools of your intent by May 1. If possible, do not decide without making at least one campus visit. Send your nonrefundable deposit to your chosen school by May 1 as well. Request that your guidance counselor send a final transcript to the college in June.
- ✚ Be sure that you have received a FAFSA acknowledgment.
- ✚ If you applied for a Pell Grant (on the FAFSA), you will receive the Student Aid Report (SAR) statement. Review this Pell notice, and forward it to the college you plan to attend. Make a copy for your record.
- ✚ Complete follow-up paperwork for the college of your choice (scheduling, orientation session, housing arrangements, and other necessary forms).

Summer

- ✚ If applicable, apply for a Stafford Loan through a lender. Allow eight weeks for processing.
- ✚ Receive the orientation schedule from your college.
- ✚ Get residence hall assignment from your college.
- ✚ Obtain course scheduling and cost information from your college.
- ✚ Congratulations! You are about to begin the greatest adventure of your life. Good luck.

TIPS FOR COLLEGE APPLICATIONS

Some students send as many as 15 applications, while others send only one. To ensure a successful match, apply to a diverse group of schools and be realistic about the strength of your application. Here are a few things to keep in mind as you create your list:

Apply to a range of Colleges

Your college list should include approximately five to eight colleges, but there isn't one "magic" number.

One or two colleges where you feel you'll most likely get in -- say, a 90-100 percent chance. These are usually called "safeties" or "back-ups."

Two to four colleges that are overall good matches -- say, a 75 percent chance of getting in. These are colleges that fit academically and socially.

One or two "reach" colleges -- say, a 25 percent or less chance of getting in. These are colleges that present an admission challenge.

Don't Go Overboard

There are several reasons to apply to only those schools where you're sure you want to go.

The application fee at most colleges is around \$50. Applying to a large number of schools can be expensive.

Applications involve a lot of time and effort. There are many steps and each item must be done carefully. Quality is better than quantity when it comes to college applications.

You may be taking a spot away from another applicant who really wants to go to that school.

Seek Help

Your high school counselor or college adviser can help you find the right number of colleges for you. They know you and your academic history and can recommend good fits.

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College Planning Websites

- www.educationplanner.com - Education Planner is your one-stop career and college planning site. We have the information you need to research careers, choose a postsecondary school, apply on-line, and find ways to finance your education.
- www.fastweb.com - One of the most complete sources of local, national, and college-specific scholarships.
- www.essayedge.com - Named "**the world's premier application essay editing service**" by The New York Times Learning Network and "**one of the best essay services on the Internet**" by The Washington Post, EssayEdge has helped more applicants write successful personal statements than any other company in the world.
- www.offtocollege.com - Visit this site for planning and search tools.
- www2.collegeboard.com - Sometimes the toughest part of planning something is just figuring out where to start. Get on track to finding an education and career track that matches your skills and preferences. Learn about all your options -- and how you can achieve them.