

GENERAL INFORMATION

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JUNIOR CHECKLIST

SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER

- ✓ Ask about test dates for the PSAT, ACT, and SAT. You'll need to register up to six weeks ahead of time.
- ✓ Start developing a résumé—a record of your accomplishments, activities, and work experience. This will be an important part of your college application.
- ✓ If you haven't participated in many activities outside of class, now is the time to sign up. Consider clubs at school, team sports, leadership roles, or involvement in a religious or civic community group.
- ✓ Take the PSAT. Taking the test as a junior will qualify you for some scholarship consideration and identify you to colleges as a potential applicant.
- ✓ Begin to prepare for the ACT or SAT. Plan to take at least one of these tests in the spring. Ask your counselor if you qualify for a fee waiver.

JANUARY-FEBRUARY

- ✓ Work with your counselor to set your senior schedule. Confirm that your courses will put you on the right track for college admission.
- ✓ Register for a spring SAT and/or ACT.

MARCH-MAY

- ✓ Start researching colleges and universities. Go to college fairs, open houses, and engage in virtual opportunities. Learn as much as you can about the colleges you are interested in.
- ✓ Begin planning college visits. Try to visit colleges near you over spring break. Include a large, medium, and small size campus along with a urban and/or suburban campus.
- ✓ Develop a preliminary list of colleges that interest you.
- ✓ Take a look at some college applications. Make note of all the pieces of information you will need to compile. Make a list of teachers, counselors, employers, and other adults who could write letters of recommendation.
- ✓ Request personal recommendations from teachers, school counselors, or employers.
- ✓ Consider lining up a summer job or internship.
- ✓ Explore summer opportunities on college campuses—a great way to find out what college life is all about.

JUNE-AUGUST

- ✓ Continue investigating colleges.
- ✓ Schedule campus visits at the schools that interest you.
- ✓ Begin thinking about your applications. Generally, colleges will have their applications online by the beginning of August. The common app is available for juniors as early as the Spring.
- ✓ Start brainstorming your college essay.

CAMPUS VISIT CHECKLIST

Every college visit should have at least two dimensions: formal and informal. Use this checklist to begin your planning. And don't forget to call the college ahead of time or register online to schedule your visit—the admission office can help you hit all the highlights.

Formal

- ✓ Take a campus tour.
- ✓ Have an interview with an admission officer.
- ✓ Participate in a group information session at the admission office.
- ✓ Sit in on a class (or two).
- ✓ Talk to a professor in your chosen major.
- ✓ Talk to a coach in your chosen sport.
- ✓ Talk to a student or counselor in the career center.
- ✓ Spend the night in the dorm with a current student.

Informal

- ✓ Read the student newspaper, even the ads.
- ✓ Try to find other student publications—department newsletters, alternative newspapers, literary reviews.
- ✓ Eat in the cafeteria.
- ✓ Ask a student why he/she chose this college, and what their favorite part about it is.
- ✓ Wander around the campus by yourself.
- ✓ Search for your favorite book in the library.
- ✓ Read the bulletin boards in the student union and in the academic department you're interested in.
- ✓ Ask a student what he/she dislikes about the college.
- ✓ Browse in the college bookstore.
- ✓ Eavesdrop on students to hear what they're talking (or complaining) about.
- ✓ Walk or drive around the community surrounding the campus.
- ✓ Find out how most students get around: Is there public transportation? Can you have a vehicle on campus?
- ✓ Ask a student what he/she does on weekends.
- ✓ Visit career services and ask about upcoming job opportunities.
- ✓ Look into clubs and organizations on campus that interest you.
- ✓ Listen to the college's radio station.
- ✓ Try to see a dorm that you didn't see on the tour.
- ✓ See if you can imagine yourself as a student at the college.

TOP 10 TIPS FOR WRITING A COLLEGE ESSAY

1: Start early. More time = less stress. You'll have plenty of time to give the essay your best effort.

2: Be yourself. One of the biggest mistakes students make is writing what they think others want to hear, rather than about an issue, event, or person they care about. An essay like that is not just boring to write. It's boring to read. What interests you? What do you love to talk about? Write about that. Think of your essay as a creative way to help college officials get to know you as a person.

3: Be honest. College admission officers have read hundreds, even thousands of essays. They are masters at discovering any form of plagiarism. Don't risk your college career by buying an essay off the internet or getting someone else to write your essay.

4: Stay focused. Read the essay question carefully. Jot down a few ideas, then choose the one that looks like the most fun to write about. Stick to that main theme throughout the essay. Essays can help you make your case to admission officials, but don't go overboard. There will be opportunities elsewhere in the application to list all your achievements.

5: Put your best foot forward. Applying online may feel like you're sending email, but you're not. Incorrect capitalization or abbreviations like B4 or "thanx" are not appropriate for a formal document. Make sure your essay represents the best of you.

6: Write and rewrite. Don't try to knock out a masterpiece on your first try. For your first draft, write anything that comes to mind about your topic. Let it "rest" for a few hours or a few days. When you come back to the draft, look for ways to make it more focused and better written. Are there details that don't really relate to the topic? Cut them. Do you need another example? Put it in.

7: Get a second opinion. When you've rewritten the essay to your satisfaction, find someone who can give you advice on how to make it even better. Choose a person you respect and who knows something about writing. Ask them to tell you what they like best about your essay, and what you can do to improve it.

8: Keep an open mind. Criticism can be tough to hear, but try to listen with an open mind. You don't have to make every change suggested. After all, it's your essay and no one else's. But you should seriously consider each suggestion.

9: Proofread, proofread, proofread. Little errors creep in throughout the writing and editing process. Before you submit your essay, make sure to proofread. Try reading your essay aloud or having someone else read it to you. Another strategy is to read the essay backward, from the last sentence to the first. Errors your eye may have previously skipped over will jump out at you.

10: Don't expect too much from an essay. The application essay is important. But admission officers look at the whole package — your academics, extracurricular activities, standardized tests, and other factors. Make your essay as well-written as you can, but don't put so much pressure on yourself that the rest of the application fades in importance.

SENIOR CHECKLIST

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER

- ✓ Register for the SAT and/or ACT if you didn't take a college entrance exam as a junior or want to take one again.
- ✓ Take a look at some college applications. Make note of all the pieces of information you will need to compile.
- ✓ Take every opportunity to get to know colleges. Meet with college representatives who visit your school, attend local college fairs, and visit campuses.
- ✓ Narrow down your list of colleges. Collect information about the application and financial aid process at each school.
- ✓ Create a checklist and calendar to keep track of standardized test dates, college application due dates, and financial aid deadlines. Make note of the other materials, such as recommendations or essays, you'll need to complete your applications.
- ✓ Follow up with your personal recommendations from teachers, school counselors, or employers.

OCTOBER

- ✓ File your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) as soon after Oct. 1 as possible. In addition to determining your eligibility for federal funds, many colleges and states use the form when distributing grants, so don't delay. Watch the mail for your Student Aid Report (SAR)—it should arrive four weeks after the FAFSA is filed.
- ✓ Some colleges will have deadlines (rolling, priority, early decision, and early action) as early as this month. Many popular and selective colleges will have application deadlines as early as Oct. 15 or Nov. 1.
- ✓ Every college will require a copy of your transcript from your high school. Follow our school's procedure for sending transcripts.
- ✓ If you cannot afford the application fees that many colleges charge, ask your counselor to help you request a fee waiver.
- ✓ Finalize your college essay. Many schools will require that you submit at least one essay with your application.
- ✓ Make sure testing companies sent your scores directly to the colleges to which you are applying.
- ✓ Research scholarships. Ask your counselor, your colleges, and local religious and civic groups about scholarship opportunities. You should *never* pay for scholarship information.

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER

- ✓ Finalize and send any early decision or early action applications due this month. Have a parent, teacher, counselor, or other adult review the application before it is submitted.
- ✓ Every college will require a copy of your transcript from your high school. Follow our school's procedure for sending transcripts.
- ✓ Begin to organize regular decision applications and financial aid forms, which will be due in January and/or February.
- ✓ Many popular and selective colleges will have regular application deadlines as early as Jan. 1. Others have deadlines later in January and February.

JANUARY-MAY

- ✓ Submit your Regular Decision, Early Decision II and Early Action II applications.
- ✓ Acceptance letters and financial aid offers will start to arrive. Review your acceptances, compare financial aid packages, and visit your final choices.
- ✓ Don't slack in the classroom. The college you decide to attend will want to see your final transcript.
- ✓ May 1 is the date when the college you plan to attend requires a commitment and deposit. When you've made your college decision, notify your counselor. Send in your deposit by the postmark date of May 1. If you've been offered financial aid, accept the offer and follow the instructions given. Also notify schools you will not attend of your decision.
- ✓ Communicate with your school counselor that your final transcript be sent to the college you will be attending.
- ✓ If you are wait-listed by a college you really want to attend, visit, call, and write the admission office to make your interest clear. Ask how you can strengthen your application.

ADMISSION PLANS

Many college admission timetables call for applications to be filed during the fall or early winter of a student's senior year. Supporting materials—including standardized test scores, high school records and recommendations—are sent to colleges at the student's request.

Rolling Admission: Institutions review applications as they are submitted and render decisions throughout the admission cycle.

Early Action (EA): Students apply early and receive a decision well in advance of the institution's regular response date.

Restrictive Early Action (REA): Students apply to an institution of preference and receive a decision early. They may be restricted from applying ED, EA or REA to other institutions. If offered enrollment, they have until May 1 to confirm.

Early Decision (ED): Students apply early to a first-choice institution where, if admitted, students are required to enroll. The application deadlines are typically between November 1 and December 1. Upon admittance, it is expected that you withdraw all other active applications.

Early Decision II (EDII): Students apply to a first-choice institution where, if admitted, students are required to enroll. The application deadlines are typically in January. Upon admittance, it is expected that you withdraw all other active applications.

Regular Decision: Students submit an application by a specified date and receive a decision in a clearly stated period of time, but no later than April 1.

THE COLLEGE INTERVIEW

Visiting a college campus is the best way to determine whether you want to spend several years there. Plan campus visits at the end of your junior year, during summer months or early in your senior year. Make an appointment for a visit by emailing or calling the admission office.

When you have your interview:

- ✓ Before the interview, think about how you'd answer the following questions:
 - What are your goals?
 - How does this college fit in with your interests and talents?
 - What majors are you interested in, and why?
 - What are you passionate about?
 - Why do you want to attend college? Why this college?
 - What extracurricular activities are important to you?
 - What academic or intellectual topics interest you?
 - What types of books do you enjoy reading?
- ✓ Be prompt.
- ✓ Be neat; appropriate dress is an easy way to make a good impression.
- ✓ Be well-prepared; read the college's catalog or visit its website prior to your interview and prepare questions based on what you read.

Examples include:

 - What percentage of students come back after freshman year?
 - Could you tell me some details about a program/major?
 - What makes a program/major a good one?
 - What social options are available?
 - What campus issues are students talking about this year?
 - How involved are students in extracurricular activities? Do most students stay on campus during the weekends?
- ✓ Answer questions to the best of your knowledge and ability. Don't be afraid to admit that you don't know something.
- ✓ Be ready to volunteer information. Know your test scores, latest grades, and current course load.
- ✓ Be yourself; don't pretend to be something or someone you are not.
- ✓ Don't be concerned if your interviewer is someone other than the dean or director of admission. If the interview is an important part of the admission process at a college, all formal interviews have equal weight. All interviewers are trained and prepared to represent the institution. An interview with a senior staff member is not essential.
- ✓ Above all, relax. Interviews are meant to be informative to both parties. Try to get as much out of an interview as you provide for it.
- ✓ When you get home, consider writing a thank-you note to your interviewer and tour guide.

FINANCIAL AID & SCHOLARSHIP WEBSITES

FAFSA on the Web: <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>

File the Free Application for Federal Student Aid online. Register with Selective Service. Search for Federal School Codes.

www.pin.ed.gov – Register for a PIN to electronically sign FAFSA make changes to the FAFSA, submit a Renewal FAFSA or to access the National Student Loan Data System

www.studentaid.ed.gov – Explains what you need to know about applying for federal student aid to help pay for education after high school. Plus, the site provides information about, and links to, scholarships and other nonfederal aid.

www.fastaid.com – Claims to be the “world’s largest and oldest private sector scholarship database”.

www.fastweb.com – One of the fastest and largest scholarship search engines on the Net, this site allows users to create their own personalized profiles and directs them to the best scholarship funds for their needs. Use of the site is free. There are numerous links to all forms of financial aid. Matches students to scholarships-

www.scholarshipexperts.com – Create your profile and get immediate access to a full list of scholarship opportunities customized just for you.

www.collegeboard.com – Select “Pay for College” and then “scholarships”. Locate scholarships, internships, grants and loans that match your education level, talents and background.

www.collegenet.com/mach25 - Free scholarship search page that will also assist students in creating letters to apply for scholarships.

<http://www.finaid.org> – A free, comprehensive, independent and objective guide to student financial aid. Scholarship & Financial Aid search through the Financial Aid Information Page using U.S. and Canadian database.

www.free-4u.com/minority.htm - Scholarships for many ethnic groups and minorities.

www.absolutelyscholarships.com – Database of over 200,000 scholarships.

www.collegelink.com – Free scholarship and search information.

www.collegescholarships.com - Designed to offer college bound students, parents, and counselors’ easy access to information on free college scholarships and financial aid searches.

www.princetonreview.com – EMBARK – This site offers not only a free scholarship search but also contains a free college and career recommendation search.

www.gocollege.com – This page offers a free college search, scholarship search and online ACT and SAT practice tests.

www.mappingyourfuture.org – Student site for aid and scholarships. Also offered in Spanish.

www.plato.org – Apply for student loans online. Part of Wells Fargo.

www.salliemae.com – Apply for student loans.

www.scholarship-page.com – Search for scholarship by keyword or browse.

www.scholarsite.com – Allows students to search for scholarships without entering personal information.

www.wiredscholar.com – Scholarship search including thousands of private grants and fellowships offered to students by lending agency Sallie Mae.