

College Planning Checklist

(2020 coronavirus edition)



Soph Yr

Take the PSAT and/or Pre-ACT (if available).
If offered at your school, take them! With COVID-19, likely you can just take them in the Fall.

Begin researching colleges online.
You don't need to start making your college list—but familiarize yourself with what traits make colleges different (e.g. class size, academic majors).

Talk to your parents about paying for college.
Check out FAFSA4Caster for an estimate of what your financial aid package might eventually be.

Draft your high school résumé. (See info here)
Include your GPA, activities, and accomplishments.

Line up your (online) summer plans.
Consider online courses or fully-remote internships.

Jr Fall

Take your practice standardized test, and decide on ACT vs. SAT.
Take the PSAT in October. Decide whether the SAT or ACT highlights your strengths more. (Note: Some colleges won't require test scores, so you might get to choose "neither.")

Begin your scholarship search.
As busy as junior year seems, it gets even crazier senior year! So start applying for scholarships now. Get a personalized scholarship list by signing up for [Going Merry](#). (It's free!)

Keep involved, and begin to lead.
Try to gain leadership roles in your extracurricular, sports, or community service activities. If you haven't joined any student clubs, now is the time!

Evaluate post-secondary education options.
Choose between: vocational-technical school, career college, two-year community college, four-year university/college, or military college.

College athletics (if applicable)
To play Division I or II sports in college, start the certification process. Check that your courses meet NCAA curriculum requirements.

Jr Winter

Register for the SAT/ACT and begin studying for it (if applicable)
You can get free practice tools at [satpractice.org](#), or Google for free practice tests of either type. Also check with your counselor on how to request free test fee waivers if you are lower-income.

Explore SAT subject tests and AP tests.
Depending on your course load, you might want to take these in the Spring, when the material is still fresh in your mind.

Continue applying for scholarships.
There are deadlines throughout the year.

Research college majors and careers.
Knowing what you want to study can help you choose the rest of your high school classes, narrow down colleges (to ones with your intended major), and write your college essays next year.

Learn about colleges & their affordability.
Check out college websites, and download (or request mailed) catalogs. Try to get a sense of what matters to you in a college (for example: size, location, cost, sports, religious affiliation). Use [Going Merry's](#) college comparison tool.

Jr Spring

Ask for Letters of Recommendation (LORs).
Most schools require 1-2 teacher LORs; some allow more. [Here's some advice](#) on deciding whom to ask and what info to give them.

Create a target college long-list.
This should include a longer list of 15-20 schools that you'll slim down later. Make sure to include a mix of reach, match, and safety schools—and think about college affordability from the beginning. Use Net Price Calculators, or check out financial aid information on [Going Merry](#).

Line up your summer plans.
This might be a job, internship, course, or summer camp. (Want to corona-proof your summer plans? Consider taking accredited online courses.)

Continue applying for scholarships.
Need essay inspiration? Read [examples of winning essays](#), and then apply for scholarships yourself.

Reschedule the SAT/ACT (if applicable)
Spring test dates have been cancelled. The next dates are: SAT (6/6, 8/29) and ACT (6/13, 7/18).

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Summer

College Applications Prep

- Continue researching colleges.**
Continue looking at college websites. Do virtual tours (e.g. via [YouVisit](#)) and join online information sessions. Some colleges are also making online interviews available with admissions officers.
- Take the ACT/SAT (if applicable)**
This will give you time to re-take the test in the Fall if you're unhappy with your scores.
- Start your college app spreadsheet.**
Get organized! Note application deadlines, questions and essay prompts, costs, and average stats for admitted students to gauge your chances. Also write down any requirements for merit scholarships (like [this one](#))-- to give yourself clear targets for your senior year.
- Draft your main college essay(s).**
Many colleges are on the Common App, meaning you can choose any of their prompts for your main [personal statement](#). Aim to have your first draft ready before senior year starts.

Financial Aid & Scholarships

- Gather documents, and sign up for the FAFSA (the federal financial aid form).**
Although the FAFSA only opens in October, you can get your FSA ID (that is, your username) and password ahead of time. You can also begin gathering other documents you need, like your parents' tax returns.
- Learn more about financial aid.**
Once senior year rolls around, you'll be focused on college apps. Get up to speed on the financial aid process now, so you don't accidentally miss deadlines! Psst - [This guide](#) might help.
- Continue applying for scholarships.**
Students sometimes forget about scholarships during the summer, which means there's usually less competition to actually win! [Apply here](#).
- Military ROTC scholarships (if applicable)**
If you're interested in an ROTC scholarship, begin the process now.

Senior Year

Fall

- Take standardized tests (if applicable)**
(Re-)take the SAT/ACT, SAT subject tests, and AP Tests. Or consider [test-optional colleges](#).
- Apply early (or to UC/Cal State system).**
Most early decision/action deadlines are in November. UC and Cal State apps are due Nov 30.
- Complete all your financial aid forms.**
Fill out the FAFSA and your [home state's financial aid form](#) (if there is one). Some colleges also require the CSS Profile or a college-specific form. Most funds are first-come, first-served, so apply early. And don't forget about [external scholarships](#)!

Winter

- Apply for colleges Regular Decision,**
Popular deadlines are Jan 1, Jan 15, and Mar 1, though some schools have rolling deadlines.
- Hear back from any EA/ED applications.**
If you applied early action/decision, you'll likely get your admissions decision and financial aid offer.

Spring

- Hear back and decide on your college!**
Get your RD admissions decisions--and decide which college you'll attend.
- Evaluate your financial aid offer(s).**
Compare offers, and possibly write an [appeals letter](#) to request additional financial aid.
- Provide additional documentation (if required)**
If relevant, submit your final high school transcript and your official test scores.
- Come up with a plan for any financial gaps.**
This may include a summer job, student loans, or [scholarships](#).