



Your College Search: A To-Do List

Freshman Year

- **Get involved.** The job of becoming a well-rounded student begins now. Join and become invested in a few clubs, a sport, and participate in volunteer activities.
- **Find mentors.** Identify some adults that you trust and feel you can learn from – develop relationships with them. People like to help students they know get into college.
- **Schedule downtime.** Become involved, but do not burn yourself out. Make sure to take some time to breathe in the middle of your first year of high school and enjoy it!
- **Identify ways to relieve stress.** If you want to be successful in college, identify ways to relieve and cope with stress now. Create a healthy way for you to navigate the stress that comes with school.
- **Create an “achievements binder.”** Any award you earn, certificate you receive, or volunteer activity you participate in needs to go into a binder. This binder will follow you through high school and be a great resource when working on college applications!

Sophomore Year

- **Challenge yourself (wisely).** Strive for strong grades and do not be afraid to take on challenges but ask for help when you need it. Balance is key.
- **Speak up in class.** Learn to communicate with teachers now and to think critically about the topics you are learning. It is easier to connect with a professor in college if you engage with them, and it will make class much more enjoyable.
- **Sleep.** Your brain cannot function like it should without the right amount of sleep, and a teenager is supposed to get an average of 8-10 hours of it. Create a sleep schedule and stick to it when you can.
- **Refine your route.** Think about your schedule for 11th and 12th grade – what classes do you need to take to get where you want to go? [Register for IB classes, AP classes, and dual enrollment](#); that will allow you to earn some college credits while in high school. Talk with your counselor and teachers for advice.
- **Learn from the masters.** Talk with people who are working in the field you might be interested in; they are full of valuable information. Get involved in job shadowing or internships - experience coupled with education is the best teacher.
- **Make your summer matter.** Plug into activities that inspire you. Participate in summer camps, sports, and volunteer activities. Take some summer classes. Every decision you make is molding you, so make them count.
- **Settle on a testing strategy.** Look into the ACT and SAT. Take a free online practice test and identify which areas you need to spend more time studying. [[Click here to compare the ACT and SAT.](#)]



Junior Year

- **Plot out your calendar.** Juniors take the ACT for free through the school system; write that date in your calendar and begin preparing. Visit the SAT website and choose a date that you will take that for the first time, preferably before June.
- **Immerse yourself in activities.** Stay involved! Those clubs, sports, or other extracurriculars you participate in are still important.
- **Create a resumé.** Remember that “achievements binder?” Use that to build your resumé. There is a template of what it could look like on our [school website](#).
- **Build your college list in the spring.** Create a list of colleges that you are interested in. Try to include 1-2 schools that might be a stretch, 1-2 schools that you match well with, and 1 fallback school. Use websites like [ed.gov](#) and [U.S. News](#) for help. Check out social media accounts for your favorite schools and YouTube videos of current students.
- **Visit schools if you can.** If possible, go take some college tours. It is a different feeling when you talk with a tour guide and walk the campus.
- **Connect digitally.** If you cannot visit the college in person, participate in the virtual tours on their website. Reach out to Admissions and ask questions. Attend college fairs and connect with the school's representative.
- **Get recommendations.** Those relationships you began forming in 9th grade become important now. After spring break, reach out to teachers you know will write a solid recommendation letter for you. Ask them in advance and send them your resumé!
- **Write.** As you prepare for essays for college application essays, take some time to reflect on your experiences and strengths. Identify possible college essay questions and create a rough draft. Then have teachers or other trusted adults read over them for corrections/suggestions.

Senior Year

- **Finish testing.** If necessary, retake the ACT and/or SAT before the end of fall semester. Look at the testing requirements for the schools you are interested in – which test do they require? What scores are acceptable?
- **Know your deadlines.** Write down the deadlines for your college applications and reference them frequently. You do not want to miss submitting your application to the school of your dreams.
- **Apply.** Give yourself plenty of time to craft your application, review essays, and examine your transcript. You want to make sure all of the pieces are in place before you send everything in.
- **Follow up.** Check with the colleges that you have applied to about a month after submitting your materials to make sure that they have received everything they need. It shows responsibility and ensures you are on track.
- **Confirm aid rules.** Fill out the [FAFSA](#) in October and link it to every school you apply to. That will help the schools determine what aid they may give you.
- **Make a choice.** Once you receive your acceptance letters, choose which school is best for you. Confirm your spot with them and follow through with anything they send you. Congratulations!