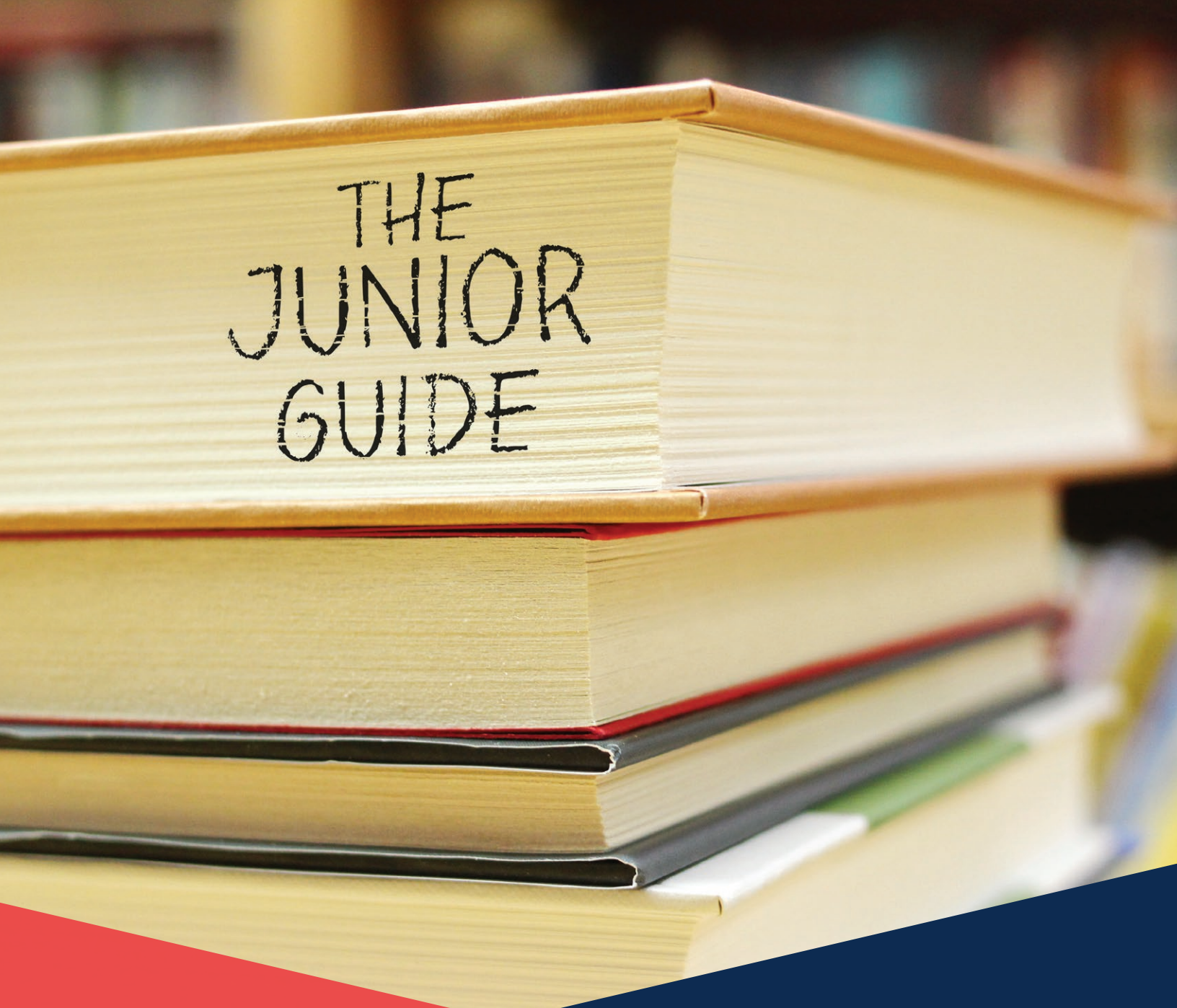

THE JUNIOR GUIDE

A series of comprehensive worksheets created especially for second semester juniors to lay the groundwork, stay on track, and get motivated for college admissions.

SARA HARBERSON

AMERICA'S COLLEGE COUNSELOR

SARA HARBERSON

Dear High School Junior (aka, Parent of a High School Junior!),

I know this is scary. I know you're just doing this for the first time. Good news? I've done this hundreds of thousands of times with students just like you. This is the type of guide that keeps you organized, honest with yourself, and one step ahead of everyone else.

It would be easy for me to give you a checklist and dates to pay close attention to as you embark on the college admissions process. But I have already done that with my Annual College Admissions Timeline. This resource is different because it allows you to see and present yourself in a deeper and more powerful way to colleges. In many ways, the college search should be renamed the "self search" because if you don't uncover your best self or you don't know how to project this in your applications, colleges won't either.

This is a small window into the curriculum for Application Nation, my private Facebook group exclusively for parents of college-bound students. One look at this guide and you will see that this process doesn't have to be dictated by the colleges. You have the power to determine how you are viewed by colleges and what you want to be known for. This guide is meant to be filled in by you and a trusted adult who wants the very best for you. It can be tweaked, updated, and changed as your college search, or more aptly, your "self search" evolves. If you like what you see, encourage your parents to join Application Nation for my advice on these same themes, but formulated especially for you.

Now let's get to work...

My best,

Sara Harberson

Sara Harberson
America's College Counselor

DECEMBER WORKSHEET:

The Month of Standardized Test Scores *(Bah, Humbug!)*

Knowing that your college search is first guided by objective criteria, it's important to keep track of scores. This month is about getting a testing plan in place and beginning to build up "evidence" for your college applications.

1. PSAT results arrive this month. List your Evidence-Based Reading and Writing score and Math score below:

PSAT Evidence-Based Reading and Writing Score:

PSAT Math Score:

2. Knowing that each section of the PSAT is only on a 760 scale as opposed to the 800 scale for the SAT and that some students do better on the ACT, take a practice test in both of them under normal time restrictions over Winter Break. List your practice scores below:

SAT Evidence-Based Reading and Writing Score:

SAT Math Score:

ACT English

ACT Math

ACT Reading

ACT Science

Composite ACT Score

3. Reviewing your practice SAT and ACT results, which test did you perform better on? If it's not obvious, check the official conversion chart offered by the College Board and the ACT to determine which score is stronger:

☐ SAT ☐ ACT

4. Look into test prep if you haven't already. Choose at least one approach to prepare for your first (or next) test and stick with it on a weekly basis until the test:

☐ Disciplined self-study ☐ Test prep class ☐ Private test prep tutor

5. Register for at least one (possibly two) Winter or Spring test(s) in junior year. Which one do you plan to take?

☐ February ACT ☐ March SAT ☐ April ACT ☐ June ACT

☐ May or June SAT (This is only an option if you're not planning to take AP or Subject Tests!)

DECEMBER WORKSHEET

BONUS QUESTIONS: “SELF” WORK

1. List at least one thing (more if you have them!) that you do or that you are interested in (academic or non-academic) that no one else at your high school or even in the community is as good or as interested in:

I’m the only one I know doing this...

2. How are you actively developing this further? This is how “evidence” of your interest or special ability can be built up for your applications next fall.

- Are you taking a class in this area? If so, what is it and where are you taking it?

Class Taken

Where

- If you took a class, what grade did you get in it?

Final Grade

- Do you pursue this interest outside of school? If yes, how? How many hours per week are you pursuing it?

Pursued Outside of School:

Yes No

Hours Per Week:

3. What could you do between now and the end of the school year to develop this in or out of the classroom even more?

JANUARY WORKSHEET:

The Start of the College List and College Visits

If you haven't started a list or visited any colleges yet (in person or virtual), this is the month to begin. You don't want to leave this until later as it's difficult to squeeze in all the college visits if you wait.

★ **TIP:** Try to wait until mid-January to visit as most colleges aren't in session until halfway through the month.

1. Have you visited any colleges yet (in person or virtual)?

☐ Yes ☐ No

2. If so, which ones did you like and why? Provide a minimum of three reasons per college.

★ **TIP:** Try to avoid reasons for liking a college that relate to campus beauty, the party scene, food options, or reputation/rank as these won't be compelling reasons if you have to interview for the college or write a college-specific essay about why you are applying. Lots of students use these reasons and you want to stand out in every way—even when it comes to why you like the college.

3. Do your practice ACT or SAT scores (or official ACT/SAT scores) match up with at least the middle 50% range of test scores for those colleges?

☐ All Colleges ☐ Some Colleges ☐ No Colleges

4. If your scores match up or are higher than the 50% range, add the college(s) below.

★ **TIP:** Most colleges that require standardized tests rely heavily on test scores to determine how competitive you are.

JANUARY WORKSHEET:

The Start of the College List and College Visits

(continued)

5. If you haven't started visiting colleges yet (in person or virtual), which college(s) will you register to visit this month and when?

★ **TIP:** Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is a popular day to visit colleges.

Name of College	Date of Visit
Name of College	Date of Visit
Name of College	Date of Visit

★ **TIP:** A majority of colleges will track whether or not you visit (in person or vitual) and show interest in them so visiting can be crucial. This is called demonstrated interest and showing it can increase your chances of admission if the college uses this approach.

JANUARY WORKSHEET

BONUS QUESTIONS: “SELF” WORK

1. Using no adjectives or adverbs, write one sentence about yourself that reflects who you are RIGHT NOW (as opposed to what you want to be in the future or what you’ve accomplished in the past) that no one else in the world could say or at least in your community:

   Example: I am the only costume designer at my high school which means that I design, sew, and style the actors for all of our theatre productions—and I have begun working with a professional theatre company in my hometown as well. *(Note the use of the present tense and the use of nouns and verbs!)*

2. Are you actively embracing this statement through coursework, activities, or outside pursuits?

   If yes, how?

3. Share this one sentence statement with an individual you trust the most (Mom, Dad, or someone else). What did they think of your statement? Do they think it’s accurate? Is it truly distinctive (meaning no one else could make the same statement)?

★ **TIP:** This statement becomes your guiding self-proclaimed identity. If your parents **join Application Nation**, I’ll weigh in on this statement, give you suggestions on how to improve it and how to pursue it in a way that it will help you set yourself apart.

FEBRUARY WORKSHEET:

Planning Ahead

If you know a college tracks demonstrated interest or expects to see all academic subjects ideally represented for all four years, this is the time to put yourself in the best possible position. Knowing the expectations for the colleges you are interested in is key to creating a balanced list.

1. Which school(s) do you plan to visit (in person or virtual) this month and when?

★ **TIP:** Presidents' Day is a popular day for college visits. Sign up ahead. Campuses will be busy!

Name of College	Date of Visit
Name of College	Date of Visit
Name of College	Date of Visit

2. Course selection for senior year begins around this time. List the classes you plan to take:

3. Check off which academic subjects are represented in your proposed senior year classes:

☐ English ☐ Math ☐ History/Social Studies ☐ Science ☐ Foreign Language

4. If one subject matter is not checked off above, did you replace it with another academic class? If so, which one?

★ **TIP:** Most elite colleges want to see all five academic subjects represented for all four years unless there is a very, very good reason.

5. Are you planning to take AP exams in May? If so, which ones?

6. If you are planning to take AP exams, are there Subject Tests that match up with those AP subjects?

☐ Yes ☐ No

7. If so, which ones? And are you signed up to take them in June?

★ **TIP:** You can take up to three Subject Tests on a given test day.

FEBRUARY WORKSHEET

BONUS QUESTIONS: “SELF” WORK

1. Is there anything you *have* to do this summer?

- [ ] Summer Job
- [ ] Test Preparation for the ACT or SAT
- [ ] Family Responsibility
  (By the way, this can usually be listed as an activity on your application!)

2. Is there anything you *want* to do this summer that supports your “self” work from January or February? If so, what? For example, if you are interested in journalism, could you write a column for your local newspaper?

★ **TIP:** Building up evidence for your passion doesn’t need to cost money. In fact, when a student does something on their own, it is more respected by colleges than attending an expensive summer program on a college campus!

3. List five individuals who work in the field that you can contact now. They can become mentors and possibly provide you with a job or internship in the future.

★ **TIP:** You usually have to reach out to a lot of people to get one person to respond so reach out to more if necessary!

Expert #1

Expert #2

Expert #3

Expert #4

Expert #5

4. While you’re getting comfortable reaching out to adults, now it’s time to set the stage for teachers that you might ask for recommendation letters. Have you spoken to a junior year teacher outside of class about something besides an assignment or grade for their class? If so, who and what did you discuss?

Teacher’s Name

Class Taught

High School Year

9th 10th 11th

Topic of Conversation

Teacher’s Name

Class Taught

High School Year

9th 10th 11th

Topic of Conversation

★ **TIP:** The strongest letters of recommendation come from teachers who had frequent interaction with a student in and out of class. Colleges prefer to hear from junior year teachers, but sometimes sophomore or senior year teachers work too.

MARCH WORKSHEET:

Getting Real About Your College List

This is when your college list begins to take shape. Visiting the colleges on your list (in person or virtual) is crucial for so many reasons. Not only do many colleges track whether you visited their campus, but there's no way to know if it's a good fit without a visit. Additionally, most highly selective colleges require additional essays on their supplements. If you haven't visited their campus, these essays are hard to pull off!

1. Adding to your list of colleges from January, what other colleges are you interested in that your SAT or ACT scores match up with at least the middle 50% range?

2. Have you visited (in person or virtual) all of the schools on your list so far?

☐ Yes ☐ No

3. If not, schedule three to five more visits this month (in person or virtual) as Spring Break is a popular time for college visits:

Name of College	Date of Visit
Name of College	Date of Visit
Name of College	Date of Visit
Name of College	Date of Visit
Name of College	Date of Visit

4. For every college on your current list, have you signed up for their mailing list to ensure you find out about events and updates?

☐ Yes ☐ No

MARCH WORKSHEET:

Getting Real About Your College List

(continued)

5. List all colleges that you are interested in below and mark whether they track demonstrated interest in the admissions process.

★ **TIP:** To find out if a college tracks demonstrated interest, look for the college's "Common Data Set" which is a universal way for American colleges to make some of their data public knowledge. I teach Application Nation parents how to sift through this data and help them use it to their advantage.

Yes No

Yes No

Yes No

Yes No

Yes No

Yes No

Yes No

Yes No

Yes No

Yes No

MARCH WORKSHEET

BONUS QUESTIONS: “SELF” WORK

1. What pieces of the application process will showcase your strengths the most? (Check off as many that apply.)

- [ ] Transcript
- [ ] Test Scores
- [ ] Recommendation Letters
- [ ] Interview
- [ ] Essays
- [ ] Supplemental Materials (portfolio, video, etc.).

2. Do the majority of the colleges on your list value your strengths? For example, if your transcript is much stronger than your test scores, does the college offer a test optional policy?

★ **TIP:** Most students don’t pay attention to the college requirements and whether they match up with their strengths. Be aware of your own strengths and whether each college on your list will truly value them.

APRIL WORKSHEET:

Topics, Teachers, and a To-Do List

The work you will do this month is often not even on the radar of most students at this point in the year. Tackling these components of the process now will give you a head start.

1. Over the course of the month, list up to five possible topics for your main essay.

★ **TIP:** Pick a topic that is not going to be represented anywhere else on your application. In other words, writing about an extracurricular activity is NOT recommended for your main essay!

Topic #1

Topic #2

Topic #3

Topic #4

Topic #5

2. Refer to #4 of your February "Self" Work and ask two academic teachers for a letter of recommendation.

★ **TIP:** Most selective colleges will require two teacher recommendation letters, but some may only require one or none at all.

Teacher's Name	Teacher's Name
Grade Level (example: 11th)	Grade Level (example: 11th)
Academic Class	Academic Class
Final Grade	Final Grade

★ **TIP:** Make sure you received a strong grade in the class! Worry less about asking a teacher that saw you "improve" throughout the year and more on a teacher that saw you as a strong student from the start.

3. Are your summer plans finalized?

☐ Yes ☐ No

4. If not, what's one thing you can do—paid or unpaid, supervised or unsupervised, structured or unstructured—that you can list on your activities list that directly relates to that one thing you are really good at?

★ **TIP:** The time investment matters so the more time you can devote to this, the more impressive it will be. For example, an artist can create a special collection of artwork or exhibit of their own work; a student interested in sports management can offer to work for free for a local professional sports team; a student who wants to be a writer can spend the summer writing a draft of a novel. It's not just the pursuit of this experience; it's the hours and weeks that matter too.

APRIL WORKSHEET

BONUS QUESTIONS: “SELF” WORK

1. If you know what major or program you plan to list on your application, list it here:

2. Do you have “evidence” right now to back up that major choice?

Check off as many that apply:

- ☐ Academic Coursework
- ☐ Non-Academic/Elective Coursework
- ☐ Summer Experience
- ☐ High Grades in Coursework
- ☐ Standardized Test in Area
- ☐ High Standardized Test Score in Area
- ☐ School Year Activity
- ☐ Teacher Recommendation in Area
- ☐ Honor/Award in Area

3. If you don’t know what you want to pursue, list up to three possible academic interests here and the evidence you have to back it up:

Interest 1:

Interest 2:

Interest 3:

★ **TIP:** Students who have a clear vision for what they want to study in college and have the evidence to back it up will present as stronger applicants. There’s nothing wrong with being “undecided” but having some academic interests in mind can help you in an interview and writing college-specific essays.

MAY WORKSHEET:

Standardized Test Month

If you are planning to apply to highly selective colleges, you are most likely taking advanced level classes like APs. AP exams occur in the month of May and can become the beginning stage of preparation for the Subject Tests offered in the same academic area. Students taking AP exams in May are usually preparing for Subject Tests in June which means they typically don't take the SATs (and sometimes the ACT) this time of year.

1. If you are taking AP classes this year, list the AP exams you plan to take below:

AP Exam #1 Date

AP Exam #2 Date

AP Exam #3 Date

AP Exam #4 Date

2. If you are taking AP exams, list which Subject Tests you plan to take in the corresponding academic area in June below:

Subject Test #1

Subject Test #2

Subject Test #3

3. How are you preparing for Subject Tests once the AP exams are done?

- [ ] Disciplined self-study
- [ ] Test prep class
- [ ] Private test prep tutor

4. If you are not taking AP exams and Subject Tests, are you taking the SAT or ACT this month? If so, how have you been preparing?

- [ ] Disciplined self-study
- [ ] Test prep class
- [ ] Private test prep tutor

MAY WORKSHEET

BONUS QUESTIONS: "SELF" WORK

1. Does your counselor know your current college list? How did you communicate this to them?

- [ ] Via Email
- [ ] In-Person Meeting
- [ ] Telepathically (just kidding!)

2. Does your counselor know that one thing that you are really good at? How did you communicate this to them?

- [ ] Via Email
- [ ] In-Person Meeting
- [ ] Other (please specify)

3. Would your counselor agree with your one-sentence statement about yourself from the January "Self" Work if you told them?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

4. If your answer is no to #3, what will you do this month to make sure they know this?

★ **TIP:** Even if a counselor has a large caseload of students, communicating who you are in one sentence takes little time and minimal effort (especially if you did this "Self" work back in January).

- [ ] Send an email update and include this statement in it.
- [ ] Meet with your counselor and communicate this verbally.
- [ ] Both

5. Review your answers to #1 from the April Worksheet on possible essay topics. List the ones you still like and any others that you have thought of:

JUNE WORKSHEET:

Finishing Up Junior Year Strong and Essay Writing

This is the month when the college process becomes much more real. Junior year is wrapping up and applying to college is just a few months away. This worksheet sets the stage for filling out applications, choosing majors, and writing essays.

1. How did you do this year?

☐ Better Than Ever ☐ Similar to Previous Years ☐ Not As Strong as Previous Years

2. Look at the class or classes you did the best in. Do they match up with your one-sentence statement about yourself or the major you plan to list on your applications?

Classes with Strongest Performance	Evidence		
		☐ Yes	☐ No
Classes with Strongest Performance	Evidence		
		☐ Yes	☐ No
Classes with Strongest Performance	Evidence		
		☐ Yes	☐ No

3. Are you planning to take another ACT or SAT between now and the fall? If so, which one and when?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Test	Date

4. What test prep do you plan to do leading up to the test?

☐ Disciplined self-study ☐ Test prep class ☐ Private test prep tutor

5. Besides the things you have to do this summer, is there anything you are planning to do that directly relates to your one-sentence statement about yourself or your intended major? If so, what is it and how much time do you plan to commit to it this summer?

Special Summer Pursuit

Time Commitment:

☐ Less Than 10 Hours ☐ Between 10 and 40 Hours ☐ More Than 40 Hours

★ **TIP:** The more time you devote to something meaningful, the more it will resonate with the admissions committee reading your application.

JUNE WORKSHEET:

Finishing Up Junior Year Strong and Essay Writing

(continued)

6. Review your essay topics for the May "Self" Work. Nail down the topic you plan to write about for your main college essay:

Topic

★ **TIP:** The main college essay can typically be used for multiple (sometimes all) applications. While some colleges do not require an essay, most selective colleges do.

7. What progress have you made on your main college essay this month?

☐ First draft done ☐ First draft in process ☐ Next month!

JUNE WORKSHEET

BONUS QUESTIONS: “SELF” WORK

1. Does your topic for your main essay fill the following criteria? Check all that apply.

- [ ] It’s about something that is not reflected anywhere else on your application.
- [ ] Puts you in a positive light.
- [ ] Focused on you instead of other people.
- [ ] Shows growth or a turning point.
- [ ] Complements the one-sentence statement about yourself.
- [ ] No one else will be writing an essay with this topic.

2. Have you run your topic by someone to ensure that it represents you in the best light and is novel enough that an admissions officer will want to read it?

- [ ] Mom, Dad, or a Guardian
- [ ] College Counselor or Trusted Teacher
- [ ] Me (America’s College Counselor) through Application Nation

CONGRATULATIONS!

Completing this guide is a huge step towards laying the groundwork for a successful college admissions journey. I hope this exercise encouraged you to dig deep and reflect on who you are as a person and as a student, and helped you start thinking about where you want to go next!

There's so much to learn about the intricacies of the college admissions process that will empower you even more. That's why I launched **Application Nation**, my private Facebook Group for parents of college-bound students! We're covering of-the-moment topics like SAT and ACT testing, extracurricular activities, course selection and grades, main college essay topics, and much, much more!

If you've been looking for a way to hit the ground running for college admissions, join **Application Nation**.

JOIN APPLICATION NATION

SARA HARBERSON

AMERICA'S COLLEGE COUNSELOR

©2020 Sara Harberson, all rights reserved.