



FOUR-YEAR HIGH SCHOOL CHECKLIST

YOUR ROADMAP FOR SUCCESS



FRESHMAN YEAR:

Experience & Explore

Welcome to high school! Your school counselors and teachers will be some of your strongest resources in the coming years, so be sure to reach out to them for advice on classes and extracurriculars. Start building meaningful relationships with them now, so they have a good sense of who you are and the goals you're interested in pursuing.

Most importantly, if you find yourself struggling, be sure to reach out to them as soon as possible. If you fall behind, it's much easier to get back on track early, before things get out of hand.

SCHEDULE YOUR CLASSES

Meet with your counselor to help schedule your core classes. Be sure to plan for basic requirements, as well as electives that interest you, to be fully prepared for your first year of college.

CORE CLASS RECOMMENDATIONS

ACT recommends taking challenging classes across 4 years of English, 3 years of math (including Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II), 3 years of science (including Biology, Chemistry, and Physics), and 3 years of social studies.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Talk to your counselor, teachers, or other adults and professionals about colleges and post-high school career opportunities. Visiting college websites or researching scholarships, grants, and careers will give you a better picture for choosing a path in the years to come.

GAIN WORK EXPERIENCE

Consider researching and applying for part-time jobs that you can have during high school. Having a job will help you start saving for college early and teaches valuable life skills like teamwork, problem solving, money management, and staying productive.

START SOLID STUDY HABITS

Good study habits are key for high school and college success – look into finding study groups for your classes or consider starting your own!





PLAN AHEAD

Use a planner or download apps to help keep up with reminders and dates for assignments.

PURSUE YOUR INTERESTS

Join extracurricular activities like sports, arts, maker clubs, community service, and more. It will expand your life experiences and keep you active, giving you lots of material for college and career applications.

CREATE YOUR MYACT ACCOUNT

With **MyACT**, you can start doing some self-discovery with an interest inventory. This will help you pinpoint your interests and skills and get you thinking about possible college majors and careers.

STAY SHARP

Keep your mind working by reading books and magazines to develop your reading skills. Find ways to practice academics outside of the classroom, like writing a blog or tutoring others in your favorite subject.

SOPHOMORE YEAR:

Explore & Develop

Your sophomore year will look a lot like your freshman year, in terms of what you should be thinking about and the activities you should pursue. Continue developing good study habits and staying in touch with your counselor and teachers to make sure you're on track to meet your goals (remember to set goals!).

MEET WITH YOUR COUNSELOR AND REGISTER FOR THE CORE COURSES

Your counselor can help you map out your path in high school (See Core Courses on page 1) and help you prepare for life after graduation.

EXPLORE YOUR OPTIONS

There are many paths that lead to success; college is just one of them. Talk to your counselor and mentors about apprenticeships, internships and career opportunities for high school graduates interested in diving into the workforce.



CLICK HERE:

Learn how to make the most out of your conversation with your counselor.

TAKE A PRACTICE ACT

[Download a free practice test](#) and gain experience with the format and the types of questions on the ACT. Identify areas for improvement and take time to sharpen those skills to help you with your coursework.

MANAGE YOUR TIME OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM

Consider participating in the sports and clubs that interest you most, but don't spread yourself too thin. ACT research shows involvement in high school activities is often associated with higher ACT Composite scores, regardless of a student's GPA.

COLLECT COLLEGE INFORMATION

Start researching colleges and programs that you're interested in pursuing. Bookmark websites, ask teachers about their college experience, and talk to older students about their future plans..

THINK ABOUT TAKING YOUR INTERESTS TO THE NEXT LEVEL

If you've taken a career or interest survey ([available free in MyACT](#)), you've started to put a finer point on the ideas and activities that interest you. Start thinking about how these things might translate into a field or career area, and look for ways to gain relevant experience with a part-time job or volunteering.





PART-TIME JOBS

Having a part-time job can help you save for college, learn valuable life skills, and shows you can hold yourself accountable to others and manage responsibilities you might not have in school. Plus, it's a great way to build relationships with mentors who can provide references for work, college, and scholarships.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Volunteering helps you develop important skills, strengthen your community, and build connections that can help with your education, career, and mentorship now and in the future.

FLEXEREXERCISE YOUR MOST IMPORTANT RESOURCE

In school or out, it's important to give your brain what it needs for strength. Exposure to people and ideas that expand your perspective, physical activity, pursuing friendships, self-reflection, and developing strategies for managing stress in all its forms are key activities for keeping your mind at peak performance.

GET COMFORTABLE WITH THE ACT

Get to know some of the resources that can help you prepare for the ACT.

Familiarity with the test format and knowing the types of questions on the test are great ways to reduce anxiety and focus on delivering a great performance. Remember, the ACT tests you over the material you're learning in school, so you're already studying for it! If you're concerned about the cost of the exam, reach out to your counselor about **taking the ACT for free through the fee waiver program.**

JUNIOR YEAR:

Showtime

Your junior year is when your planning and your post-high school goals start to come together in concrete ways. You've laid the groundwork for your junior and senior years, now it's time for your plan to come together.

SIGN UP FOR THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FOR JUNIORS

Stay on top of your junior year with helpful articles and important dates [sent directly to your inbox](#).

STAY ON TRACK WITH THE RIGHT CLASSES

[Meet with your counselor](#) to help schedule your core classes. Review your coursework and plan for the rest of high school. Take a close look at college prerequisites (particularly around foreign language and science) and make sure your schedule includes the classes you need for college.

MAP OUT YOUR JUNIOR YEAR

Use a calendar to note important events and activities for the year ([ACT test dates](#), test prep opportunities, campus visits, career and college fairs, etc.). Be sure to keep your parents informed so they can help keep you on track. Make a plan to take your first crack at the ACT in the fall, then work on areas where you can improve and build your superscore in the spring.

TALK ABOUT YOUR EDUCATION AND CAREER GOALS

Talk to your parents and mentors about your education and career goals, ask your teachers about their college experience, and meet with your counselor to learn about the helpful resources they have to help you achieve your goals.

GIVE YOURSELF AN EDGE

Consider taking the ACT in September and/or October and [use your score report](#) to confirm your strengths and uncover areas for improvement. Knowing where you stand can help you prepare for the next time you take the test to [build your ACT Superscore](#). Practicing your skills with [ACT test prep materials](#) can help too.

IDENTIFY IMPORTANT FACTORS IN CHOOSING A COLLEGE

Two or four-year? Location? Cost? Application deadlines? Study programs? Entrance fee requirement? Career placement? [Create a college list](#) to compare the colleges you're interested in attending.





HOW TO GET YOUR PERSONALIZED ACT MY ANSWER KEY

Exclusive to three test dates a year, you can order your [ACT My Answer Key](#) and review all your answers to the questions on the ACT. You can learn from your mistakes and build a dynamite superscore the next time you take the ACT.

IDENTIFY YOUR SUPPORT NETWORK

[Getting help from the right people](#) can help you better navigate career decisions and the college admissions process. Talk to your family members, school counselor, and mentors about your future goals. This is also a great time [to start thinking about who you'll ask for references and letters](#).

FOCUS ON YOUR FAVORITES

Continue to work hard and grow in the [extracurricular activities](#) that interest you most.

CONSIDER TAKING THE ACT IN FEBRUARY OR APRIL

If you haven't taken the ACT yet, this is the time to do it. By now, you've likely completed all the coursework covered on the test. Many colleges send information about admission, advanced placement, scholarship opportunities, and special programs to prospective students during this time.

The ACT Fee Waiver Program
*The cost of the test should never be a cost for your future. Qualifying students take the ACT and send their score reports to schools for free through the fee waiver program. Reach out to your counselor and **learn how to apply!***

GET YOUR NAME IN THE GAME

By opting in to ACT Recruit Me in MyACT, you improve your visibility to colleges recruiting students. ACT Recruit Me is a free service that can broaden your college search and improve financial aid opportunities. [Learn more about ACT Recruit Me](#).

RETEST IN JUNE OR JULY

57% of students who take the test more than once increase their score. This may be a great time for you to spend a few weeks doing test prep before taking the ACT again. Should you test again? Read more about [reasons to retest](#).

START THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Don't wait until the last minute! Begin brainstorming essay ideas (see if the colleges on your list provide writing prompts), contact references, and identify people you'll ask for recommendation letters. Use the [Ultimate Guide to Applying for College eBook](#) as a guide.

RESEARCH ADMISSIONS DEADLINES

Get your helmet on and strap in, because your senior year is going to go fast! Learn [how college admissions deadlines work](#) now, before you miss an opportunity.

SENIOR YEAR:

Finish Strong & Get Ready For The Next Level

SIGN UP FOR THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FOR SENIORS

Stay on top of your senior year with helpful articles and important dates [sent directly to your inbox](#).

STAY ON TRACK WITH THE RIGHT CLASSES

[Meet with your counselor](#) to help schedule your core classes. Review your coursework and plan for the rest of high school. Take a close look at college prerequisites (particularly around foreign language and science) and make sure your schedule includes the classes you need for college.

ACHIEVE YOUR BEST SCORE

Every point matters. Increasing your ACT score by one point could close the gap between your application and an acceptance letter. Improving your score could also help you qualify for more scholarship money. Consider taking the ACT in September or October so you can get your scores back in time to use before application deadlines.

APPLY FOR FINANCIAL AID

Talk to your counselor or your top colleges' financial aid offices. Get all the financial aid application forms and watch for deadlines. Complete the FAFSA as soon as possible after October 1. Research and apply for scholarships and grants. Review the [financial aid eBook](#) for more tips.

COMPARE THE COLLEGES ON YOUR LIST

Have you weighed pros and cons carefully? Which colleges meet your needs? [Continue visiting colleges and college websites](#). Organize your college choices into a detailed pro/con list. Pay special attention to colleges with the longest "pro" list.

COLLECT APPLICATION MATERIALS

Obtain application forms, transcripts, and test scores, and collect letters of recommendation.

COMPLETE APPLICATION ESSAYS

Application essays are an effective way for you to communicate unique strengths to admissions officials. Some colleges will have specific prompts they want you to answer. Others will ask for you to just describe your story. Whatever it is, be yourself, speak in your voice, and don't try to fit in a bunch of fancy words from the thesaurus. [Consider these tips to writing a stellar essay](#).





FINALIZE YOUR APPLICATION RESUME

If you have kept an ongoing list of your accomplishments, this should be simple, but don't worry if you haven't! Follow this step by step guide to [crafting an application resume that stands out](#).

APPLY TO COLLEGE

Review the [Ultimate Guide to Applying for College eBook](#) and submit your applications to your top-choice colleges.

FINALIZE YOUR FINANCIAL AID PLAN

Review your financial aid package from the schools you applied to, determine the net cost of attendance, and use this information as you make your final decisions. [Learn more about estimating the cost of college and comparing your offers](#).

SAY THANK YOU

Write handwritten notes to everybody who helped you with your applications.

AVOID THE SENIOR SLIDE

Letting your grades drop can affect scholarship opportunities and college admission decisions. Remember, colleges can determine admission based on your class rank, GPA, test scores, school involvement, and your coursework (it's important to take challenging classes throughout your senior year).

MAKE YOUR FINAL DECISIONS

Check with parents, counselors, and mentors and ask them to help confirm your decision. Then contact your chosen college to confirm.

NOTIFY COLLEGES

Once you've made a final decision and your acceptance has been confirmed by your college choice, be sure to notify all other colleges to which you've applied that you won't be attending. Often, colleges are holding scholarship money for you, and confirming your choice to go elsewhere can give other students an opportunity.

CONGRATULATIONS, GRADUATE!

Use the summer to prepare for your next step!

