

Master timeline: college admissions

Throughout high school (freshman - senior year)

- **Focus on your grades**—Your high school transcript is considered one of the most important parts of your college application, and good grades will distinguish you from many other applicants.
- **Explore and commit to extracurricular and leadership activities**—Freshman year is a great time to try several different extracurricular activities to see which ones are most interesting to you. Once you decide what you like, dedicate more time to fewer activities in order to become deeply involved.
- **Find summer volunteer opportunities/jobs/internships**—Summer is a great time to earn extra money for college while exploring different career fields.
- **If possible, meet regularly with your school counselor**—Getting to know your school counselor early in your high school career makes it easier to talk about your plans for high school, college, and career.
- **Begin an ongoing dialogue with your parents about how to pay for college**—Start discussing ASAP, both in terms of why you want to go to college and how you're going to pay for it. That way, you and your family will be comfortable with the topic when it's crunch time in 11th and 12th grade.
- **Start saving for college**—Even if you can only put aside a few dollars each month, every little bit helps, and creating a college savings account makes the idea of going on to higher education much more real.
- **Search and apply for non-traditional scholarships (those available before you are a senior in high school)**—Though most scholarships are available only for seniors applying to college, there are some scholarships available regardless of where you are in your high school career.

Junior year, fall (September to November)

- **Take the PSAT**—Take the PSAT as a junior to practice for the SAT and qualify for the National Merit Scholarship program. Khan Academy provides free personalized PSAT practice at [Official SAT Practice on Khan Academy](#).
- **Prepare for the SAT and/or ACT**—Begin preparing for the SAT and/or ACT at the start of junior year. It is a good idea to take a full length practice test of each, and use the results to help you decide which test is best for you. Many students take their test of choice two or three times, with the final test in early fall of their senior year. Check out the fantastic SAT prep resources we have for you at [Official SAT Practice on Khan Academy!](#)
- **Learn more about colleges**—Use online search tools, attend college fairs, speak with college reps, and ask friends already in college for their thoughts on different colleges to begin formulating an opinion of where you want to go. Continue this process throughout junior and senior year. College Board has created a great resource for your college search at [BigFuture](#).
- **Make local visits to college campuses**—Take time in the fall of your junior year to visit local colleges. Even if these aren't schools you want to attend, this will provide you with an initial sense of what college is like. College Board provides a helpful campus visit guide at [BigFuture](#).

Junior year, winter (December to February)

- **Start developing your list of target colleges**—Identify 10 to 15 colleges of interest with the goal of having several schools at varying levels of selectivity: some "probables" (sometimes referred to as "safety schools") some "match," and some "reach" options. Continue updating this list throughout junior year and at the beginning of senior year.
- **If possible, set up appointments to visit and speak with representatives at your target colleges**—Call ahead to admissions offices of colleges you want to visit. Note that certain colleges offer "fly-in" programs to cover cost of travel for students with financial need. Continue setting up

appointments throughout junior and senior year, but don't worry if it's not possible for you to visit your target colleges. College Board provides a helpful campus visit guide at [BigFuture](#).

- **Search for traditional scholarships**—Once you are midway through your junior year, it's time to begin searching for more traditional scholarships that are specifically made available to students in their senior year of high school. Continue searching throughout junior and senior year. College Board provides financial aid tips at [BigFuture](#).

Junior year, spring (March to May)

- **Take the SAT and/or ACT**—All high school juniors in D11 will take the SAT's in the Spring.

Junior year, summer (June to August)

- **If possible, visit target colleges**—If possible, travel to top target colleges the summer after junior year to visit dorms, classes, and recreation centers. Check individual college websites for details on info sessions, tour times, and interview opportunities.
- **Determine the application deadlines for each of your target schools**—Early decision and early action applications are typically due in November of your senior year, while most regular admissions applications are due between January 1 and March 1. The Common App, usually available at the beginning of August, will consolidate the deadlines for you.
- **Begin preparing for your interview**—Research the colleges where you plan to apply, identify those that may offer optional interviews, and begin practicing for the interviews with an available teacher or friend.
- **Begin drafting college application essays**—Senior year is very busy, so the summer after junior year is a great time to begin college application essays.
- **Identify potential teachers to provide recommendation letters**—During the summer after junior year, begin identifying potential recommenders. These should be teachers from your core classes (math, science, history, English, or world languages) who know you best.
- **Prepare materials for your teachers' letters of recommendation**—Prepare a few bullet points for your teachers, explaining why you chose them as recommenders and how you believe you excelled academically in their classes.
- **Outline your financial aid plan**—Use the financial aid calculators found on individual college websites, also known as net price calculators, to determine how much your family will need to contribute for your college education. Create a list of all the financial aid options you plan to pursue along with the deadlines for each.
- **Apply for traditional scholarships**—Many seniors apply to more than 30 scholarships. Don't shy away from local options or ones that require essays. Since fewer students apply for these, you often have a better chance. Begin applying between junior and senior year and continue throughout the school year.
- More information about each of these topics can be found at [BigFuture](#).

Senior year, fall (September to November)

- **Take the SAT and/or ACT**—If you feel like you can improve on your initial SAT and/or ACT results, take the tests for the second (or at most, third) time in the fall of senior year. If you are worried about the cost of the test, ask your guidance counselor for a fee waiver!
- **Revise college application essays**—Once senior year begins, ask a teacher to proofread your application essays and then make any revisions and prepare final drafts before college applications are due.
- **Ask for letters of recommendation**—At least a month prior to the deadline, provide your recommenders with bullet points listing how you excelled academically in their classes along with

the letter of recommendation forms and stamped envelopes addressed to the colleges where you are applying.

- **Gather all application materials**—Make sure you, or your guidance counselor, have the necessary materials for college admissions including forms, test scores, essays, recommendations, and transcripts. If you are worried about the cost of the application, ask your guidance counselor or college of interest for a fee waiver!
- **Submit regular decision applications**— During [Free College Application Days in October](#).
- **Fill out and submit the FAFSA**—FAFSA, the main determinant of federal financial aid, can be submitted after October 1 of your senior year. Submit ASAP, as some schools give aid on a first-come, first-serve basis. This is a required part of ICAP for D11 Seniors.
- **Submit early decision application, if desired**—Early decision applications, usually due in November, require a binding commitment in exchange for early acceptance.
- **Submit early action applications**—For early action schools, you receive a decision early but can wait for the regular decision deposit deadline to make your final choice.
- **Submit CSS PROFILE if applying early**— Though the FAFSA cannot be submitted until after October 1, certain schools require the [CSS PROFILE](#) in the fall if you plan to go through their early application process.
- **Ensure official SAT and/or ACT score reports are sent to early application schools**—In addition to your application forms, letters of recommendation, essays, and other requested materials, your early decision application will require you to go to the College Board (SAT) and ACT Student (ACT) websites to send colleges your official test score reports.
- **Go into early admissions interviews confident** — Interviews for some early action/decision schools happen in the fall, but don't stress out. You've done your research; now it's just about having a conversation!

Senior year, winter (December to February)

- **Receive response on early applications**—Most applications submitted through early programs will receive a decision by December. If you submit your financial aid forms on time, you should receive an estimated financial aid package as well.
- **Submit enrollment deposit for early decision school, if desired**—If you've decided to apply early decision and the school's financial aid package meets your need, enrollment deposits are often due in winter of your senior year. If you're worried about the cost of the deposit, talk to the school about a fee-waiver.
- **Submit regular decision applications**—Most colleges have regular decision due dates sometime between January 1 and March 1 of each year.
- **Ensure official SAT and ACT score reports are sent to regular decision schools** - In addition to your application forms, letters of recommendation, essays, and other requested materials, your regular decision application will require you to go to the College Board (SAT) and ACT Student (ACT) websites to send colleges your official test score reports.
- **Go into the regular decision interview confident**—Interviews for some regular decision schools happen in the winter, but don't stress out. You've done your research; now it's just about having a conversation!
- **Fill out and submit the CSS PROFILE or other school-based aid forms**—Certain schools require the CSS PROFILE in addition to FAFSA to determine financial aid. Submit ASAP, as schools often give aid on a first-come, first-serve basis. More information about the FAFSA can be found on [BigFuture](#).

Senior year, spring (March to May)

- **Update your FAFSA and CSS PROFILE applications**—Revise your financial aid applications with data from your most recent year tax returns if this information was estimated on your initial FAFSA / CSS PROFILE.
- **Send tax transcript for verification, if requested**—Certain colleges may require verification of your financial information. Follow up your financial aid applications by sending the requesting college copies of your or your parents' tax transcripts.
- **Receive decision on regular applications**—Regular decision applicants typically receive an accept/reject/wait-list response in March or April.
- **Compare financial aid packages from multiple schools**—Once you are accepted, colleges will offer a financial aid package consisting of grants along with suggested loans and work-study.
- **Consider work-study**—Many students consider work-study options offered by their college if they cannot fully cover the cost of attendance through grants and scholarships. You can indicate your interest for work-study on the FAFSA and by contacting your college's financial aid office.
- **Consider loans**—Many students consider loans for college if they cannot fully cover the cost of attendance through grants, scholarships, and work-study. The best deals are often from subsidized federal loans, specifically Stafford loans (now often called Direct Loans) and Perkins loans.
- **Consider a financial aid appeal**—If your family's circumstance has changed, or if a college's financial aid package does not meet your need, reach out to the financial aid office ASAP to appeal the offer.
- **Submit your enrollment deposit**—The final date to submit a deposit and lock in your place for regular decision applications is typically May 1. If you're worried about the cost of the deposit, talk to the school about a fee-waiver.

Senior year, summer (June to August)

- **Complete ongoing enrollment paperwork for your college**—Once you've decided on a college, you will receive updates regarding orientation, scheduling, housing, etc. Complete all paperwork by the necessary deadlines.
- **Conduct work-study job search**—Coordinate with the financial aid office to identify work-study options. Finalize your job search the summer before college begins or in the fall of your college freshman year.