

College Prep Timeline for 11th Graders

PLANNING FOR COLLEGE: HOW TO START PREPARING FOR COLLEGE ADMISSIONS IN YOUR JUNIOR YEAR.

Your junior year is one of the most important years of your high school education when you are getting ready for college admissions.

For those who started planning for college in freshman or sophomore year, it's now just a matter of keeping up the pace. For those who didn't, junior year is the time to re-focus your efforts on your education and start preparing for college.

Your junior year grades may be the last grades colleges see when they are evaluating your high school transcript (if you apply to college in the fall of your senior year), so make sure they represent your true ability.

When you apply to college your senior year, you will need to submit: test scores, your high school transcript and letters of recommendation. Your junior year is the most important time to improve all three.

How can you be sure you're planning for college successfully? This calendar will help you make sure nothing slips through the cracks.

FALL (August-October)

- If you have not already, register at your high school for the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) in October. In addition to preparing you for the SAT Reasoning Test, a high score on the PSAT can qualify you for national merit scholarships to help pay for college. Learn more about the SATs.
- Meet with your guidance counselor to make sure you're on the right track. Ask if you're taking the right classes for the type of major you want to pursue in college, how you can make your transcript more attractive to schools, and if there are any programs or classes you can enroll in to help you prepare for college classes.
- Keep up that grade point average (GPA) (What is a GPA?). If you've been preparing for college by getting good grades since freshman year, your GPA should be in good standing now. If not, now is the time to make sure you do your best. Your grade point average could be the difference between getting accepted into the university of your choice or not. Learn more about your GPA.
- With college admissions comes financial costs. Ask your guidance counselor about what kinds of scholarships and financial aid you may be eligible for. Also, familiarize yourself with the Free Application for Federal Financial Aid (FAFSA) form now to make it easier to fill out next year.
- Different careers require different types of degrees: Some just require an associates degree while others require a bachelors degree. Learn what degree and major is necessary for the career you're interested in pursuing. Use the Campus Explorer college search to find colleges that meet your needs.

WINTER (November-February)

- Decide when you're going to take the SAT Reasoning Test and which SAT Subject Tests you should take. Overall, only about one-third of all four-year colleges require the SAT Subject Tests. On each test day, you can either take the SAT Reasoning Test or up to three of the subject tests, so make sure you have time to take all the tests, and retake them if necessary to get your scores up.
- Go to college fairs, get in touch with current or former students, and use the Campus Explorer college search and school comparison tool to find and narrow colleges. When you find a college, start your official college list. Choose two or three "reach" schools and two or three "safety" schools:

-- Visit ctcl.org for a college search process and read the article on "How to Choose a College That's Right for You" in the NPR link.

- Register now for a spring or summer ACT test.

- Prepare and study hard for all the college admissions tests you are planning on taking to give yourself the best chance at success the first time you take them.

SPRING (March-May)

- Request information from the colleges you're interested in, and visit the schools that look the most promising.
- Register and study for the SAT Reasoning Test and SAT Subject Tests.
- Taking AP classes? Start preparing for the AP tests you're taking in May.
- Find a summer job or a special academic program, like a summer school, that can develop your leadership skills or teach you more about the majors you're interested in.
- Meet with your guidance counselor again to plan out your senior year class schedule, keeping in mind the requirements of the schools on your college list.

SUMMER (June, July)

- Visit universities to take campus tours and meet with admissions officers. If you're going to apply for financial aid, meet with financial aid counselors as well.
- If you want to improve your test scores, enroll in an SAT Reasoning Test or ACT preparation course.

TIPS & TACTICS

- Keep a calendar of all of your deadlines and test dates. As you decide which schools you want to apply to, add the dates for their deadlines for admissions and financial aid.
- You can take the college admissions tests as many times as you want, and colleges will look at your highest score. So it does not hurt your admission chances to take them in the spring or summer of your junior year to find out what your testing strengths and weaknesses are.
- Make sure you're taking all the required courses you need for college. Many top four-year colleges prefer your high school education to include classes in English, math, science, social studies and foreign language all four years.
- Evaluate your extra-curricular activities, keeping in mind that quality is more important than quantity. In addition to your transcript, schools look at how you spend your free time to see that you've made a meaningful contribution and a long-term commitment to an organization, cause or hobby.
- Keep up your list of your awards and extracurricular activities, along with the dates you participated and the names and contact information of people who you might want to ask to write a letter of recommendation for you. Keeping track of all of this information now will make it easier for you to remember during the college admissions process.
- Do you have to take the SAT or ACT your junior year? No, but if you wait until your senior year, you are limiting yourself and adding more to your already busy senior year. Better to take them in the spring and retake them your senior year if you are not happy with the results.