



Freshman year checklist

Fall–Winter

College planning

- Learn the high school courses required by colleges
- Meet with your high school counselor for advice on your college plan
- Identify your interests, likes and dislikes—to help focus on your goals

Extracurricular activities

- Join a club or try out for a sports team
- Volunteer for something you find important

Spring

Academics

- Refocus your study habits and finish the year strong (<https://tinyurl.com/hs-studyskills>)
- Keep up your grades—colleges look at your grade point average (GPA)
- Set your sophomore class schedule with your counselor to include honors or Advanced Placement (AP) classes
- Create your four-year academic plan with your counselor

Career exploration

- Start searching for summer programs (e.g., academic, work, volunteer, travel)
- Spend a day at work with a family member, friend, or community member and learn about their job
- Attend career fairs or career day at your school or in your community

College exploration

- Attend local college fairs in your area or at your school
- Talk to current college students about their path to college and college life
- Try virtual campus tours (<https://campustours.com>)

Summer

Prepare for summer

- Participate in an enrichment program that expands your knowledge
- Get a job—many important skills are developed in work environments
- Volunteer with an organization you find interesting
- Apply for a service learning program
- Prepare for sophomore year by doing summer reading
- Visit college campuses

Money management

- Open a bank account and save money for college
- Take a financial education course online (www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/moneysmart/young.html)
- Talk to your parents or guardians about a college savings plan



Sophomore year checklist

Fall–Winter

Time management

- Learn how to make the most efficient use of your time
- Use SMART goals to keep you on task (www.studyright.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/SMART-Goals-Tracker.pdf)
- Include down time in your schedule

College entrance exams

- Many campuses may be test optional, check fairtest.org for the most updated list
- College placement test preparation
- Take the PSAT (Pre-SAT) to help prepare you for the SAT (www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/sat)
- Take the PLAN (Pre-ACT) to help prepare you for the ACT (<https://academy.act.org/>)

Spring

Academics

- Keep up your grades—colleges look at your grade point average (GPA)
- Plan rigorous academic courses for your junior year
- Review your four-year academic plan with your counselor
 - Enroll in Honors, Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses, which may earn college credit
 - Take college courses while in high school and earn both high school and college credit (known as dual/concurrent enrollment)

Extracurricular activities

- Join a club or try out for a sports team
- Volunteer for something you find important
- Explore summer opportunities—be mindful of application deadlines

Career exploration

- Seek summer opportunities to work or volunteer in your field of interest
- Take an interest inventory—it expands your ideas for careers you may enjoy (<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/explore-careers>)
- Have conversations with counselors, teachers, family and community members about their career paths and what they studied in college

College search

- Visit campuses—think about size, location and academic programs
- Attend local college fairs in your area (www.nacacfairs.org/attend/national-college-fairs)
- Try online college fairs and virtual campus tours (<https://campustours.com>)
- Use an online search engine to find colleges (<http://bigfuture.collegeboard.org>)

Summer

Prepare for summer

- Create a summer reading list from teacher recommendations
- Confirm your summer plans (e.g., work, academic enrichment programs, summer workshops, service learning, travel, camps, internship, campus tours)

Money management

- Learn about types of scholarships and grants (www.finaid.org, www.studentaid.gov)
- Take a financial education course (www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/moneysmart/young.html)
- Use the tools found on the College Affordability and Transparency Center website (<https://collegecost.ed.gov>) to compare and estimate your college costs
- Research Net Price Calculators on the websites of colleges and universities that appeal to you



Junior year checklist

Fall–Winter

College planning

- Meet with your college counselor about your coursework and college plans
- Become or stay involved in extracurricular activities
- Check college websites for admission requirements
- Create a professional email address to use when applying for scholarships, registering for college entrance exams, and completing college applications
- Attend college fairs and/or college information events
- Meet with college and university admissions recruiters when they visit your high school

College search

- Tour local campuses and visit non-local colleges during winter and spring breaks; consider campus size, location and academic programs
- Try online college fairs and virtual campus tours (www.collegeweeklive.com, <https://campustours.com>)
- Use college search sites to explore your college options (www.cappex.com)
- Prepare your college list, and sort by reach, match and safety schools

Career exploration

- Attend a local career fair and/or a career technical education fair
- Take an online career inventory to help connect your interests and skills with a career (<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/explore-careers>)
- Make a list of careers that may interest you and research the education level required for each profession
- Talk with professionals in careers you are curious about and ask about their work
- Enhance skills that would be useful in a career of interest through your extracurricular activities

Spring

College entrance exams

- Register and take your first college entrance exam during spring semester so you can take it again fall of senior year, if you want
 - Many campuses may be test optional, check <http://fairtest.org> for the most updated list
 - SAT, with essay option SAT (www.collegeboard.org); free SAT test prep help (www.khanacademy.org)
 - ACT, with essay option ACT (www.act.org); free ACT test prep help (<https://academy.act.org>)
 - Subject tests, recommended by some colleges for certain majors (<https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat-subject-tests>)

Academics

- Prepare for Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) exams
- Plan your senior year schedule with your counselor
- Review your college preparation coursework and GPA with a college advisor
- Create a list of teachers, coaches and other mentors who will be able to write personalized letters of recommendation

Prepare for summer

- Apply for summer jobs or internships
- Seek volunteer opportunities in your field of interest
- Register for community college courses and earn college credit while in high school, also referred to as concurrent/dual enrollment
- Review your SAT/ACT test scores to determine if retesting is needed
- Plan a test preparation schedule if you plan to retake the exams (www.khanacademy.org, <https://academy.act.org>)

Summer

College application season begins

- Check websites of colleges on your list, review admissions application process and timeline
- Draft your application essays and/or personal statement; work with a college advisor for feedback
- Prepare a scholarship resume and/or a “brag sheet” that includes all your non-academic activities and honors
- Study for summer/fall college entrance exams (SAT or ACT) if you plan to retake them
- Communicate with college admission representatives for questions you may have

College finances

- Learn about the types of financial aid (<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/types>)
- Visit College Board's BigFuture EFC Calculator to see how financial aid can help pay for your education (<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college/paying-your-share/expected-family-contribution-calculator>)
- Search and apply for scholarships (www.fastweb.com, <https://www.collegeboard.org>)
- Learn how money works; take a financial literacy course (www.fdic.gov/moneysmart)
- Use the College Scorecard to compare costs, degree programs and outcomes for the colleges you are interested in (<https://collegescorecard.ed.gov>)
- Open a bank account and save money



Senior year checklist

Fall

College planning

- Attend college information nights in your community
- Check college websites for applications, deadlines, financial aid and housing information
- Ask your counselor to evaluate your transcript for high school graduation and college eligibility
- Register to take or retake college entrance exams
 - Many campuses may be test optional, check <http://fairtest.org> for the most updated list
 - SAT, with essay option SAT (www.collegeboard.org)
 - ACT, with essay option ACT (www.act.org)
- Keep your test scores, resume and transcript organized to help in completing college applications
- Ask teachers and counselors for any required or optional letters of recommendation
- Finalize portfolios, audition materials or writing samples as required for each application
- Get feedback from a college advisor, teacher, or parent/guardian and complete revisions of all applications and essays

Financial aid

- Review the financial aid application process and timeline required by the colleges on your list
- Register for an FSA ID, which serves as your FAFSA e-signature; student's parents/guardians must also register for an FSA ID (fsaid.ed.gov)
- File the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which opens on October 1 (www.fafsa.gov)
 - Information from the 2019 tax year will be used for the entering class of 2021 as they apply for financial aid in the 2021-2022 academic year
- Attend financial aid workshops in your community for help completing the FAFSA
- Be aware that private colleges may require additional financial information from the CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE (www.collegeboard.org/profile)
- Check your state financial aid websites for more information about in-state financial aid opportunities for undocumented and DACA students
- Search and apply for scholarships (www.fastweb.com, www.bigfuture.collegeboard.org)
- Review your Student Aid Report (SAR) once FAFSA has been processed and make any needed corrections

Winter

College application follow-up

- Check your email frequently for additional information colleges might request within their timeline
- Send your mid-year transcript to colleges that request them
- Continue scholarship searches over winter break and continue to submit applications

Spring

Academics

- Keep up your grades—college admissions are conditional and can be rescinded if you do not continue academic excellence
- Check with the colleges where you have applied before considering dropping a senior year class; colleges expect you to complete all of the high school courses you listed as "in progress" on your admissions application
- Take your Advanced Placement (AP) and/or International Baccalaureate (IB) exams

Best college and financial fit

- Check your email or college admissions portal for admission decision notification
- Visit campuses that most interest you during admitted-student's day or before
- Carefully review your financial aid offer for each campus where you have received admissions and compare each offer; ask a college advisor for help in clarifying your financial aid offers
- Finalize your financial aid; accept your financial aid offer or work with the college's financial aid office to adjust it
- Discuss your options with your parents/guardians (refer to worksheet on page 5)
- Call financial aid offices to answer questions or update them on any changes to your family's financial situation
- If you'll be attending a four year college, notify and place a deposit at the college of your choice by Decision Day (May 1)—congratulations!

College admissions follow-up

- Sign into your college portal and review your task list and deadlines
- Check your email for correspondence and deadline reminders
- Request your final transcript be sent to your college choice from your high school registrar before the deadline
- Request AP and IB scores be submitted to your college choice



- Ask about college placement tests—some colleges require them for English and math; make sure to register in time and study beforehand
- Sign up for summer and/or fall orientation; some are mandatory and some have a cost
- Register for your classes during orientation
- Figure out housing—if living on campus, complete any roommate survey forms, sign the housing contract and submit a housing deposit to make sure you have a reserved room

Summer

More to do

- Work and save money during the summer and see if you can secure a campus job
- Make a budget (refer to worksheet on page 26) with your parents/guardians
- Download the college's health forms and see your doctor; colleges may require evidence of immunizations
- Plan your payments; tuition payments are due at the beginning of the semester or term so research payment options beforehand
- Make travel arrangements if you are traveling far to college; buy travel (plane, train, bus) tickets and make hotel reservations early (if necessary)
- Send thank-you notes to everyone who helped in your college process, such as counselors, college advisors and teachers who wrote letters of recommendation
- Spend with your family and friends if you will be leaving home and set expectations for while you are in college and how and when you will communicate during the school year

