

College planning for ninth- and 10th-graders

There are some steps you can take as a ninth- and 10th-grader to make sure you're on the right track for college. Here's a list to help you navigate the college planning process:

GRADE 9

- 1. Create a four-year high school plan.** Think about what you'd like to accomplish in the next four years.
 - Make sure you know what high school courses are required by colleges, and that you're taking the right classes as early as ninth grade. You can ask your counselor about what those "right" classes are.
 - Get to know the levels of courses offered by your school.
- 2. Start thinking about your life after school, including the types of jobs that might interest you.** Of course these will change — often — but it's good to start thinking about the possibilities.
 - Identify your interests — likes and dislikes — not just in classes but in all areas. This will help you focus on your goals.
 - Talk to other people about careers you might find interesting. Try talking to your school counselor, teachers, recent college graduates who are working, professionals in the community, etc.
- 3. Participate in extracurricular activities.** Academics aren't everything. Explore your interests in a sport, school club, music or drama group, or community volunteer activity.
 - Remember that colleges would rather see real involvement in one activity than a loose connection to several of them.
 - If you're interested in playing sports in college, research the National College Athletic Association eligibility requirements. The NCAA requires completion of certain core courses; you can find the specifics at www.ncaaclearinghouse.net.
- 4. Meet with your high school counselor.** Your counselor knows how to help you get the most out of high school. Be sure to take some time during the school year to discuss post-high school plans with him or her.
- 5. Save for college.** It's not too late to put money aside for college. Every little bit helps!
- 6. Explore summer opportunities.** Look for a job, internship or volunteer position that will help you learn about a field of interest.

GRADE 10

1. **Meet with your high school counselor — again.** Make sure you meet with your school counselor to ensure your course schedule is challenging enough to prepare you for college.
 - Check into any prerequisites for advanced-level junior- and senior-year courses.
2. **Ask if the PSAT/NMSQT® is offered to 10th-graders.** While this test is usually given in the 11th grade, it is also often offered in the 10th grade. That's because it provides valuable feedback through the Student Score Report; you can then work on any academic weaknesses while there is still plenty of time to improve upon them.
3. **Are you interested in attending a U.S. military academy?** If so, you should request a precandidate questionnaire.
4. **Attend college and career fairs.** These often take place in the fall, at your school or in your area.
5. **Keep up your participation in school activities or volunteer efforts.** Extracurricular activities can help you develop time-management skills and enrich your high school experience.
6. **Tour college campuses.** If possible, take advantage of vacation or other family travel time to visit colleges and see what they're like.
 - Even if you have no interest in attending the college you are visiting, it will help you learn what to look for in a college.



College planning calendar for juniors

FALL

Start with you: Make lists of your abilities, social/cultural preferences and personal qualities. List things you may want to study and do in college.

Learn about colleges. Look at their Web sites (www.collegeboard.com has links). Talk to friends, family, teachers and recent grads of your school now in college. List college features that interest you.

Resource check: Visit the counseling office and meet the counselors there. Is there a college night for students and families? When will college representatives visit your school? (Put the dates in your calendar.) Examine catalogs and guides.

At school, sign up early to take the PSAT/NMSQT®, which is given in October. If you plan to ask for testing accommodations (because of a disability), be sure your eligibility is approved by the College Board. Check with your school counselor.

Make a file to manage your college search, testing and application data.

If appropriate (for example, if you're interested in drama, music, art, sports, etc.), start to gather material for a portfolio.

With your family, start to learn about financial aid. Read the Department of Education's Funding Your Education (about federal aid programs). Use Getting Financial Aid published by the College Board and the financial aid calculator at www.collegeboard.com to estimate how much aid you might receive.

WINTER

Make a family appointment with your counselor to discuss ways to improve your college-preparation and selection processes.

Sign up to take the SAT® in the spring. Register online or through your school. Fee waivers are available for students with financial need. To prepare, download practice booklets from www.collegeboard.com. You can also take it again next fall.

Begin a search for financial aid sources. National sources include the College Board Scholarship Handbook and electronic sources. Don't overlook local and state aid sources (ask a counselor or check your public library).

Ask a counselor or teacher about taking the SAT Subject Tests™ in the spring. You should take them while course material is still fresh in your mind. You can download "Taking the SAT Subject Tests," which offers test-prep advice, from www.collegeboard.com.

If you're in Advanced Placement Program® (AP®) classes, register for AP Exams, given in May. You can earn college credit for courses not given in the AP Program by taking CLEP® tests at a college test center. See www.collegeboard.com to learn more.

SPRING

Visit some local colleges — large, small, public and private. Get a feel for what works for you. Attend college fairs, too.

Scan local newspapers to see which civic, cultural and service organizations in your area award financial aid to graduating seniors. Start a file.

Develop a list of 15 or 20 colleges that attract you. Request viewbooks and information about financial aid and academic programs that interest you. Visit some colleges over your spring break.

If you are considering military academies or ROTC scholarships, contact your counselor before leaving school for the summer. If you want a four-year ROTC scholarship, you should begin the application process the summer before your senior year.

SUMMER

If you are an athlete planning to continue playing a sport in college, register with the NCAA Eligibility Center (www.ncaaclearinghouse.net).

Find a full-time or part-time job, or participate in a camp or summer college program.

Visit colleges. Take campus tours and, at colleges you're serious about, make appointments to have interviews with admissions counselors.

Create a résumé—a record of your accomplishments, activities and work experiences since you started high school.

Download applications (or request paper copies) from colleges to which you'll apply. Check application dates — large universities may have early dates or rolling admissions.

Source: The College Board.



College planning calendar for seniors

SEPTEMBER

- Narrow your list of colleges to five to 10. Meet with a counselor about them and, if you've not yet done so, download college applications and financial aid forms. Plan to visit as many of these colleges as possible.
- Create a master list or calendar that includes:
 - tests you'll take and their fees, dates and registration deadlines
 - college application due dates
 - financial aid application forms required and their deadlines (aid applications may be due before college applications)
 - other materials you'll need (recommendations, transcripts, etc.)
 - your high school's own application processing deadlines
- If you can't afford application or test fees, a counselor can help you request a fee waiver.
- If you have not had your SAT[®] scores sent to the college to which you are applying, be sure to contact the College Board to have them sent.

OCTOBER

- Try to finalize your college choices.
- Prepare Early Decision, Early Action or rolling admissions applications as soon as possible.
- Ask for counselor or teacher recommendations if you need them. Give each teacher or counselor an outline of your academic record and your extracurricular activities. For each recommendation, provide a stamped, addressed envelope and any college forms required.
- If you're submitting essays, write first drafts and ask teachers and others to read them. If you're applying for Early Decision, finish the essays for that application now.
- If you have not had your SAT scores sent to the college to which you are applying, be sure to contact the College Board to have them sent.

NOVEMBER

- Nov. 1-15: For Early Decision admissions, colleges may require test scores and applications between these dates.
- Complete at least one college application by Thanksgiving.
- Counselors send transcripts to colleges. Give counselors the proper forms at least two weeks before colleges require them.

DECEMBER

- As you finish and send your applications and essays, be sure to keep copies.
- If your college wants to see seventh-semester grades, be sure to give the form to your counselor.

JANUARY

- If you apply to colleges online, be sure to have your high school send a transcript — it goes to colleges separately by mail.

FEBRUARY

- No senioritis, please! Accepting colleges *do* look at second-semester senior grades.

MARCH

- Keep active in school. If you are wait-listed, the college will want to know what you have accomplished between the time you applied and the time you learned of its decision.

APRIL

- You should receive acceptance letters and financial aid offers by mid-April. If you've not done so yet, visit your final college before accepting. As soon as you decide, notify your counselor of your choice.
- If you have questions about housing offers, talk to your counselor or call the college.

MAY

- May 1: Colleges cannot require a deposit or commitment to attend before May 1. By that postmarked date, you must inform every college of your acceptance or rejection of the offer of admission and/or financial aid. (Questions? Talk to your counselor.)
- Send your deposit to one college only.
- Wait-listed by a college? If you will enroll if accepted, tell the admissions director your intent and ask how to strengthen your application. Need financial aid? Ask whether funds will be available if you're accepted.
- Work with a counselor to resolve any admissions or financial aid problems.

JUNE

- Ask your high school to send a final transcript to your college.

Source: The College Board.

