

# College Planning: 11th Grade

Junior year marks a turning point. This is because for most students and families, it's when college planning activities kick into high gear. Here are some things you can do this year to stay on track for college.

## 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 websites and find colleges at [bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search](http://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search). Talk to friends, family members, teachers, and recent grads of your school now in college. List the 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, speak to your counselor about taking the PSAT/NMSQT<sup>®</sup>,** which is given in October. If you plan to ask for testing accommodations (because of a disability), be sure the College Board has approved your eligibility.
- 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.
- Estimate your financial aid need.** Financial aid can help you afford college. Use the College Board's *Getting Financial Aid* and the financial aid calculator at [bigfuture.org](http://bigfuture.org) to estimate how much aid you might receive.

## WINTER

- Sign up to take the SAT<sup>®</sup> in the spring.** You can register online or through your school. SAT fee waivers are available to eligible students. To prepare for the SAT, you can access free, personalized SAT practice tools at [satpractice.org](http://satpractice.org), including thousands of interactive questions, video lessons, practice tests, and more.
- Begin a search for financial aid sources.** National sources include the College Board's Scholarship Search and electronic sources. Don't overlook local and state aid sources. (Ask a counselor for help or check your public library.)
- With your family, make an appointment with your counselor** to discuss ways to improve your college-preparation and selection processes.
- Ask a counselor or teacher about taking the SAT Subject Tests<sup>™</sup> in the spring.** You should take them while course material is still fresh in your mind. You can download *The SAT Subject Tests Student Guide*, which offers test-prep advice, from [SATSubjectTests.org](http://SATSubjectTests.org).
- Explore AP<sup>®</sup>.** The Advanced Placement Program<sup>®</sup> helps hundreds of thousands of high school students achieve their college dreams each year. Get the facts at [apstudent.collegeboard.org/exploreap](http://apstudent.collegeboard.org/exploreap). If you're in AP classes, register for the AP Exams given in May.

## SPRING

- Contact your counselor** before leaving school for the summer if you are considering military academies or ROTC scholarships. If you want a four-year ROTC scholarship, you should begin the application process the summer before your senior year.
- Develop a list of 15 or 20 colleges that are of interest to you.** You can find many colleges at which you'll be happy and get a great education. The college search is about exploring who you are and what you want and then finding colleges that will meet your goals.
- Stay open to all the possibilities — don't limit your search.** To find the best college for you, you should apply to colleges of varying selectivity. Selective colleges admit a portion of students who apply. Some colleges are highly selective while others are less selective. Make sure to apply to public, private, in-state, and out-of-state schools so that you have plenty of options from which to choose.
- Take the SAT.** The test is typically offered in March, May, and June. Make sure you start preparing for the test several months in advance using the tools available at [satpractice.org](http://satpractice.org). And remember, if you're not happy with your scores when you get them, you might want to test again in the fall. Many students take the test a second time as seniors, and they usually do better.
- Start to gather documents for financial aid:** Be sure to keep a copy of your tax returns handy. You'll use these to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which opens on Oct. 1.

## SUMMER

- Register with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Eligibility Center** if you are an athlete planning to continue playing a sport in college ([ncaaclearinghouse.net](http://ncaaclearinghouse.net)).
- Get your FSA ID:** Before you can fill out your FAFSA, you need to get a username and password (also known as an FSA ID).
- Find a full-time or part-time job,** or participate in a summer camp or summer college program.
- Visit colleges.** When planning your campus visits, make sure to allow time to explore each college. While you're there, talk to as many people as possible. These can include college admission staff, professors, and students. Take campus tours and, at colleges you're serious about, make appointments to have interviews with admission counselors.
- Create a résumé** — a record of your academic accomplishments, extracurricular activities, and work experiences since you started high school.
- Download applications.** Go to the website of each college's admission office and either complete the application online or request a paper application from colleges to which you'll apply. Check application dates — large universities may have early dates or rolling admission.
- Visit some local colleges** — large, small, public, and private. A visit to a college campus can help you decide if that college is right for you. Make a plan ahead of time to get the most from your visit. Check out the campus checklist at [bigfuture.collegeboard.org/find-colleges/campus-visit-guide/campus-visit-checklist](http://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/find-colleges/campus-visit-guide/campus-visit-checklist). 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.

Visit [bigfuture.org](http://bigfuture.org) for more information.

# College Planning: 12th Grade

Want to know if you're on track in the college application process? This checklist shows you what you should be doing, and when.

## FALL

- Narrow your list of colleges to between five and 10.**  
Meet with a counselor about your college choices 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
  - Required financial aid application forms and their deadlines (aid applications may be due before college applications)
  - Other materials you'll need (recommendations, transcripts, etc.)
  - Your high school's application processing deadlines
- Ask a counselor** to help you request a fee waiver if you can't afford application or test fees.
- Take the SAT® one more time:** Many seniors retake the SAT in the fall. Additional course work since your last test could help you boost your performance. Plus you already know what to expect on test day.
- Be sure** to have your SAT scores sent to the colleges to which you are applying.
- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA):** To apply for most financial aid, you'll need to complete the FAFSA. Oct. 1 is the first day you can file the FAFSA.
- Complete the CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE®:**  
PROFILE is an online application used by certain colleges and scholarship programs to determine eligibility for their aid dollars.
- Prepare** early decision/early action or rolling admission applications as soon as possible. Nov. 1–15: Colleges may require test scores and applications between these dates for early decision admission.
- Ask a counselor or teacher** for 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.
- Write first drafts** and ask teachers and others to read them if you're submitting essays. If you're applying for early decision, finish the essays for that application now.
- Complete** at least one college application by Thanksgiving.
- Ask counselors** to send your transcripts to colleges. Give counselors the proper forms at least two weeks before the colleges require them.

## WINTER

- Keep photocopies** as you finish and send your applications and essays.
- Give the correct form** to your counselor if the college wants to see second-semester grades.
- Have your high school send a transcript**—it is sent separately by mail to colleges if you apply online to colleges.

## SPRING

- Keep active in school.** If you are waitlisted, the college will want to know what you have accomplished between the time you applied and the time you learned of its decision.
- Visit your final college before accepting.** You should receive acceptance letters and financial aid offers by mid-April. Notify your counselor of your choice. If you have questions about housing offers, talk to your counselor or call the college.
- Inform every college** of your acceptance or rejection of the offer of admission and/or financial aid by May 1. Colleges cannot require your deposit or your commitment to attend before May 1. Talk to your counselor or adviser if you have questions.
- Send your deposit** to one college only.
- Take any AP® Exams.** Show what you've learned in your AP classes. A successful score could even earn you credit, advanced placement, or both in college.
- Waitlisted by a college?** If you intend to enroll if you are accepted, tell the admission 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 admission or financial aid problems.
- Ask your high school** to send a final transcript to your college.
- Review your financial aid awards:** Not all financial aid awards are the same, so it's important to choose the aid package that's best for you and your family. Be sure to note what you have to do to continue receiving financial aid from year to year, and how your aid might change in future years.



# College: How to Get There From Here

We know you're ready for college—your academic track record has proven that. Now it's time to apply. Here are some tips on how to get started.

## Apply to four or more colleges.

AT LEAST

**1****SAFETY**

A college you're confident you can get into.

AT LEAST

**2****GOOD FITS**

Colleges you have a pretty good chance of getting into.

AT LEAST

**1****REACH**

A college that you have a chance of getting into, but it's a stretch.

Applying to two colleges instead of one makes it **40% MORE LIKELY** that you'll enroll in a four-year college. If you apply to more than two, then your chances of enrolling will be even better.

## Never rule out applying to a college because you think it's too expensive.

There are scholarships and financial aid packages available at almost all four-year colleges.

The estimated average grant aid for four-year colleges in 2016-17

**PUBLIC COLLEGES**

**MORE THAN \$4,700**

**PRIVATE NONPROFIT COLLEGES**

**MORE THAN \$18,600**

Many students receive much more than the average aid.

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) opens October 1.

## When looking at colleges, consider the following:

### ACADEMIC

What are the average SAT<sup>®</sup> scores and GPA of students admitted to the school? Does it have any prerequisites? Apply to colleges that are a good academic fit—whether they're a safe bet or a little out of reach.

### GRADUATION RATE

Do most students graduate in four years? If not, why not?

### LOCATION

Do you prefer a big city, suburb, or small town?

### MAJORS

Does the college offer a variety of majors that interest you?

### SIZE

Do you want a smaller campus with smaller class sizes or a larger school with a wider variety of programs, such as a state university?

### ACADEMIC RESOURCES

Does the college's library meet your needs? Does the campus use the latest technology? What about lab facilities?

### CAMPUS LIFE AND SERVICES

What are the housing options? Are there social activities, cultural events, clubs, or athletics that interest you? What support services are available on campus to help with social, health, academic, and financial challenges?

## Take a college tour.

Set up campus visits. These visits are always free, but if you can't travel, take a virtual tour, or visit a local college. Even if you don't tour your first-choice college, you'll get an idea of what campus life is really like.

# College Application Timeline

Want to know if you're on track in the college application process? This timeline shows you what you should be doing, and when.

## SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER—PREPARE

- Sign up for updates at [bigfuture.org](http://bigfuture.org).**
- Talk to your school counselor or adviser** about the college search and application process.
- College requirements:** Make a list of the application, testing, and financial aid requirements for each college.
- Letters of recommendation:** Decide who to ask, and reach out to them early so they have time to write good letters. If you have a résumé or list of accomplishments, be sure to send it to them.
- Application essays:** Look over essays you have already written for inspiration. Share your ideas with parents, teachers, or other trusted adults, so they can help you craft the strongest essays possible.
- Register for the SAT:** If you haven't taken it yet, or would like to take it again, it's not too late! Sign up now, and be sure to send score reports to colleges.
- Opt in to Student Search Service®:** More than 1,100 colleges use this service and are looking for students like you.
- Complete the FAFSA, which opens October 1:** It's necessary if you're applying for federal and state grants and loans. Funds are limited, so make sure to file by the financial aid priority filing dates.
- Complete the CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE®, which also opens October 1:** Certain colleges use it to see if you qualify for additional grants and scholarships. (There's a fee for application.)

## NOVEMBER/DECEMBER—APPLY TO COLLEGES

- Work on your applications:** Some have deadlines as early as November.
- Send your SAT and AP® scores:** This ensures that colleges have the most complete set of your information to review for admission, as well as scholarship awards, course placement, or selection to a specific program or major.
- Consider college application services:** Application systems like the Coalition Application, Common Application, and Universal College Application let you complete one application online and submit it to several colleges.
- Send transcripts:** Ask for your transcripts to be sent to your chosen colleges.

## JANUARY/FEBRUARY—EXPLORE FINANCIAL AID OPTIONS

- Compare award letters:** After examining the financial aid packages you're offered, you'll see that schools may be more affordable than you thought.
- Search for scholarships:** Scholarships provide money for college that you don't need to repay. And they're not just for academic superstars.

## MARCH/APRIL—DECIDE!

- Get information:** Dig a little deeper to help you make the best choice. Ask questions. Create a list of any questions you still have about the colleges you're considering.
- Review acceptance letters:** Go over all offers of admission, consider the pros and cons of each school, and pick the college that's the best fit for you.

Visit [bigfuture.org](http://bigfuture.org) for more information.



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