

College Admissions Tasks & Timeline

9TH GRADE

The best first step for a student who wants to go to college is to decide to go to college! Most colleges accept the majority of applicants, so if students spend the next few years building their academic resumes and researching colleges at which they will thrive, they are likely to have multiple options to choose from upon graduating from high school. Use this document to help keep on track.

Academic

Get the best possible grades! Talk with a teacher or administrator to make sure that the most challenging classes will be an option.

If summer or online courses are an option that can allow students to complete requirements early, freeing up time in later grades for advanced electives, consider doing some now.

Testing

9th grade is likely too early to take the ACT or SAT, but since both tests purport to assess how much a student has learned in high school, now would be a good time to begin learning about the tests, and perhaps trying to decide which one might be best.

Applying

There are thousands of degree-granting schools in America. Use this year to begin learning about different **types** of schools (public universities; private colleges; large; small; urban; rural), and if possible, try to visit some this year to see if you can picture yourself there.

Financial

Begin talking with parents or guardians about how much the family can afford “out of pocket” for college.

Families might consider attending info sessions at school, from the state education agency, or perhaps from a consultant to prepare for college costs.

10TH GRADE

This is an important year for students to build their self-discipline and study skills. Between academics, extra-curricular responsibilities, and social life, it can be a challenge to set aside the time to study and research future college options. If students train themselves to make the time, it will pay off!

Colleges will be interested in learning about “extra-curriculars,” but in many cases they will be less interested in what students do than in seeing that students kept themselves busy outside of class. Jobs and family obligations can be just as “good” as sports and clubs.

Academic

Get the best possible grades! Begin to build relationships with your favorite teachers. Eventually, they will write letters of recommendation and if they can describe your strong study habits and participation it will help.

If your school offers honors, AP, and/or IB courses, try to get some on your schedule as a junior (if you think you can do well in them).

Testing

Many students will take the Pre-ACT or PSAT this year. Use it as practice! When the results come back, study them to see how to do better.

Begin some test prep, either self-paced or through a class or a tutor. Many options exist to assist you—take advantage of the help!

Applying

Use search tools to try to find colleges with features that match your interests. Visiting colleges should be a priority when planning any family vacations or trips.

If colleges visit your school, or if a college fair happens in your town, go and introduce yourself to the representatives and try to learn more about their institutions.

Financial

Your family’s tax information for **this year** will be the basis of financial aid awards if you go to college immediately after 12th grade.

If possible, get a part-time job to earn college funds.

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11TH GRADE

This is a big year. It is likely that students will begin standardized testing in earnest and this is also the last full academic year that will be on their application transcripts.

Students who are serious about college should plan to allocate the same amount of time per week for the college process as they do for an academic class. Doing so will allow them to do the research and preparation necessary to meet their goals.

By the end of June before 12th grade, students' lists of colleges to which they will apply should be complete.

Academic

Get the best possible grades! As the year progresses, identify two teachers to ask for recommendation letters, preferably in different core courses (such as English & Math, or Science & History).

If you have the chance to take AP tests or to gain other forms of academic distinction, make sure to do your best!

Testing

As your list takes shape, you should have a good idea of what scores you should be aiming for.

If you take the PSAT or Pre-ACT, use the results to prepare for a real test.

Ramp up the test prep to make sure you can reach the score you want in as few tries as possible.

Academic

Get the best possible grades! Colleges will admit you at mid-year, but if your academic performance falls off in the second half, they might revoke their decision.

Some colleges might waive certain requirements based on higher level high school courses. Check with your colleges to see if this is an option for you.

Testing

If necessary, take one last ACT or SAT to make sure that your score is comfortably within the range of accepted students' scores at your colleges. Also, investigate if "merit aid" is based on test scores. If so, you might want to take a final test to reach that level—the payoff can be significant!

Applying

Students should spend time building their lists. Talk with school counselors, advisors, or other trusted adults for help.

By now, you should have an idea of how your grades and test scores compare to accepted students at all of your options.

Financial

Applying to college could cost upwards of \$75 per application, so keep earning money to pay these fees if needed.

If your family qualifies for fee waivers on standardized tests, you will also get waivers for application costs. See your school counselor for details.

Applying

Complete your applications on time. If you and your counselor(s) agree that an Early Action, Early Decision, or Rolling Admission deadline is best for you, you might have to spend lots of time in September and October working on applications. Either way, you should be finished with all your applications by the new year.

Financial

Going to college will involve a lot of miscellaneous costs. Make a budget early in the year and save up. Decide which housing and meal options make sense for your family's budget.

You'll need to pay a deposit at **one** college by May 1st.

12TH GRADE

This is the year it all comes together. Students will be taking difficult courses and finishing up standardized testing while also completing college applications and making final visits to their prospective schools to gauge the "fit," all while finishing up high school and potentially playing key roles in extracurricular activities. It can be a challenge to meet all these obligations, but good habits built in earlier years will sustain students now.

Make sure to finish strong! Right or wrong, people will remember you for how your last year went more than they will for everything that preceded it.