



This is an excerpt from

The Guide: A College Admissions and Financial Aid Guide for All Students.

You can access and download the full version of The Guide at our website: fairopportunityproject.org

The College Application Process: An Overview

The college application is a complex process that requires a lot of planning, time, and effort. This guide is all about prepping you to control the college application process and find the scholarships and aid you need. Doing so requires a deep understanding of the elements of the college application, what matters in a college application, and how to present yourself to schools. We'll never lose sight of the reality that college is expensive, and have dedicated ourselves to collecting resources you can use to reduce the cost.

Remember: this guide is for you. Print it, highlight it, write all over it – do whatever you need to identify the information that helps you. Take advantage of all of the free resources we mention here, and use them in the way that's best for you.

College Application Timeline

Sophomore Year/Sophomore Summer

1. Start preparing for standardized tests. Although much of high school happens before you take the first standardized test of your application, the formal college application really starts with your first standardized test. During sophomore year and sophomore summer, you should start preparing for standardized tests that you will take at some point in your junior year. Preparation can include taking the PSAT, going through SAT/ACT prep materials (available both online and in book stores), going to summer school at your high school, or taking a SAT/ACT prep course. By beginning to prepare, you improve your chance of success. Practice leads to results!
2. Get to know your school counselor. The Common Application, and therefore most colleges, require a letter of recommendation from your school counselor. Many students do not get to know their school counselor, and therefore end up with a bland recommendation. Making time to meet with and befriend your counselor will go a long way in helping you succeed in high school and when applying to college.
3. Sign-up for a virtual mentor. For additional, one-on-one support, sign up for our [free mentorship program](#), [CollegePoint](#) (check your eligibility [here](#)) or [Strive for College](#).

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Junior Year

1. Sign up and take standardized tests. Sign up to take your first SAT/ACT tests in between October and January. You should aim to be able to take at least two SAT/ACT tests during your junior year. If applicable, take at least one round of SAT IIs (SAT Subject Tests) during your junior year. Chapter 3 includes in-depth information about taking and affording standardized tests.
2. Get to know your teachers. Teachers are good sources of advice, strong role models, and will write letters of recommendation when your college applications begin.
3. Meet with your school counselor. Your school counselor will often be your go-to person for answers regarding where you can pick up your transcript, where you can request fee waivers, and much more. Schedule a meeting with your school counselor and start an ongoing conversation about the college application process.

Junior Summer

1. Create a working college list. Start making a list of colleges. The list doesn't have to be long – a list of one or two schools is great, but more is welcome. This process involves researching each college, its affordability, and its application requirements. Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 have much more information on this process.
2. Consider writers for your letters of recommendation. During junior summer, you should start thinking about whom you will ask for letters of recommendation. Chapter 6 goes into this subject in more detail.
3. Create a student resume. This gives you the chance to brag about yourself. This is not the place to be modest, or shy! This area is meant to highlight all that you've done. List all of your honors, achievements, initiatives, awards, etc. This will be extremely helpful to your recommenders later on, and you may even be able to send it into certain colleges. In addition, don't hesitate to include places where you've worked. Resumes are just ways to assert who you are, and admissions counselors love seeing whether you scooped ice cream or took your turn at lawn mowing. [TopCV](#) and [LiveCareer](#) are two of many online resume generators. Microsoft Word also offers a [free resume template](#).
4. Start writing college essays. Start brainstorming topics, maybe even writing an early draft. The essay is a significant part of the college application and requires a fair amount of time and effort – get as much done as you can during the summer! We describe the process of writing a college essay and how you

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should approach it in Chapter 8. Look to Section IV for successful college essays.

5. Make a scholarship list. An important part of affording college is applying to scholarships. Although some scholarship deadlines are in the fall, many are in the spring. Apply for those that are available and start making a list of those that are due in the spring, with their respective deadlines. We've included lots of valuable information about scholarships in Chapter 13.

Senior Fall

1. Meet with your high school counselor. Schedule a meeting with your college counselor (or CAP advisor) to go over your working college list and the college application process.
2. Finalize SAT / SAT Subject / ACT Tests. By senior fall, you should be finishing up standardized tests. Make sure to check the standardized test submission guidelines for each college. Certain schools require tests that others don't!
3. College application. Work on completing your college applications during senior fall. Deadlines are sometimes as early as October. We'll get to more important information about the different parts of the college application in Chapter 7.
4. Apply to scholarships. While you wait for college admissions results, you shouldn't let "senioritis" hit quite yet. Even if you get into the college of your dreams, you need to be able to afford it. There are literally thousands of scholarships for high school seniors that serve this exact purpose. Apply for scholarships on your list from the fall and continue using websites with lists of scholarships.