

College Applications Master Timeline

Freshman & Sophomore Years

Read, read, read! Students who make reading a habit prepare themselves well for reading, writing and math problem sections of college admissions exams.

Take your schoolwork seriously. Also take courses that will challenge (but not overwhelm) you.

Get involved. Explore clubs, sports, music or art and follow your passion.

Get ready for the SAT or ACT. In your sophomore year, your school will likely be offering the PSAT or the pre-ACT. Taking these tests is good practice.

Summer After Sophomore Year

Take a practice SAT or ACT. All colleges accept both the ACT and SAT so it's a worth your time to consider both tests as one may be a better fit for you! Once you score your test, look up the percentile table and compare the SAT and ACT percentiles to see if you scored significantly higher on one versus the other.

Start SAT or ACT test prep. Starting test prep over the summer is a great time to build a skill foundation without the stress of keeping up with schoolwork and extracurricular activities. While many students prep on their own, now is also the time to understand if you may have more success with a tutor.

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Fall Of Junior Year

Take the PSAT or Pre-ACT. This is another opportunity to practice for the real thing! PSAT scores will be used to determine eligibility for National Merit Scholarships.

Continue to prep for the SAT or ACT. Since you've built a foundation over the summer, now is the time to hone your skills in the areas of the test you still need to improve upon.

Learn about colleges. Especially consider visiting local schools so you start to get a feel for urban vs non-urban campuses, small schools vs big schools, etc.

Winter Of Junior Year

Register for your first SAT or ACT. If you have taken enough practice exams and are ready to take a February or March exam, register for one. If you still think you need some more prep and practice, take one in the spring.

Make a target college list. A balanced list will include schools that fall into three categories: Reach, Match and Probable. Make sure you have a professional-looking email address and get on school mailing lists and follow them on social media.

Begin scholarship research.

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Spring Of Junior Year

Take the SAT or ACT.

Register and take SAT Subject Tests. Now that you have a target list of schools, research whether subject tests are required. It's always best to take them as the courses wrap up in May or June.

Prep and ask for Letters of Recommendation. It may seem early, but counselors and teachers will appreciate you asking for these before everyone leaves for summer break.

Summer After Junior Year

Visit target colleges, if possible. Be prepared by bringing a thoughtful list of questions.

Research application deadlines. Now is also the time to consider whether you would like to apply Early Decision or Early Action. Early Decision is binding so think through the pros and cons carefully.

Draft essays and prep for interviews. Do not procrastinate on this! Summer is the best time to write those essays. Looming application deadlines and your coursework will make it challenging to write high quality essays in the fall.

Begin to apply for scholarships.

Continue to prep for the SAT or ACT. If you haven't yet hit your target score, there are still several fall test dates available.

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Fall Of Senior Year

Gather all application materials.

Re-take the SAT or ACT.

Finalize essays and interview.

Apply Early Action or Early Decision.

Submit your FAFSA. It is available on October 1st and aid is often given first come, first served.

Submit CSS profile, if applying Early Action or Early Decision

Send your test scores. Not all test scores have to be submitted but many schools will “super score” the SAT if you submit scores from multiple tests.

Winter Of Senior Year

Receive Early Decision and Early Action decisions.

Submit regular applications.

Send any new test scores. Again, if you only improved your score in one section of the exam, it may be worth submitting if your target schools “super score” exam results.

Submit your FAFSA, if you haven't done so already.

Submit your CSS profile, if required.

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Spring Of Senior Year

Receive regular application decisions.

Compare offers of financial aid.

Consider work study and loan options to supplement your financial aid package.

Consider appealing financial aid. Too few students appeal financial aid. If your circumstances have changed since you submitted your FAFSA or if the package does not meet your need, call the school's financial aid office.

Submit your deposit. Congrats! You made it. Breathe a sigh of relief.