

11th Grade Checklist for College Planning



Fall

- **Take your practice standardized test, and decide on ACT vs. SAT**
 - Take the PSAT in October. Taking this test qualifies you for the National Merit Scholars program, which could earn you money for college.
 - Decide which test highlights your strengths more, the SAT or ACT. (Note: Some colleges won't even require test scores, so depending on your college list, you might get to choose "neither.")
- **Begin your scholarship search.**

As busy as junior year seems, it gets even crazier senior year! So start applying for scholarships now. Get a personalized scholarship list by signing up for [Going Merry](#). (It's free!)
- **Keep involved & begin to lead.**

Try to gain leadership roles in your extracurricular, sports, or community service activities. If you haven't joined any student clubs, now is the time!
- **Evaluate your tertiary education options.**

You could go to a vocational-technical school, a career college, a two-year community college, a four-year university/college, or a military college. Decide on a general path forward.
- **College athletics (if applicable):**

If you want to play Division I or II sports in college, start the certification process. Check that your courses meet the NCAA curriculum requirements.

Winter

- **Register for the SAT/ACT for the Spring, and begin studying for it (if applicable)**

After registering, start studying. You can take free official [practice SAT tests here](#), or [practice ACT tests here](#). Also ask your counselor how to request test fee waivers if you are lower-income.
- **Continue applying for scholarships.**

There are deadlines throughout the year, so even if you took a look in the Fall, take a second look now.
- **Research college majors and careers.**

Knowing what you want to study can help you choose the rest of your high school classes, narrow down colleges (to ones with your intended major), and write your college essays next year.
- **Learn about colleges.**

Check out college websites, and download (or request mailed) catalogs. Try to get a sense of what matters to you in a college (for example: size, location, sports, religious affiliation). And don't forget to research their costs of attendance. To help, [Going Merry](#) has information about select financial aid programs.

Spring

- **Take the SAT/ACT (if applicable).**

The SAT is typically offered in March, May, and June. Taking it now allows you time to retake the test in the fall, if you're unhappy with your score.
- **Create a target college long-list.**

This should include 15-20 schools that you'll continue to do more research on over the summer. You can slim down your list later-- but make sure this initial group includes a mix of reach, match, and safety schools. You can use [this simplified template](#) or [this more in-depth template](#). Also, make sure you think about college affordability from the beginning. Use Net Price Calculators, and check out financial aid information on [Going Merry](#).
- **Ask for letters of recommendation (LORs).**

Most schools require 1-2 teacher LORs, and some schools also allow you to submit LORs from other adults, like employers, sports coaches, activity leaders, or other mentors. [Here's some advice](#) on deciding whom to ask and what info to give them.
- **Line up your summer plans.**

This might be a job, internship, course, or summer camp. Colleges love to see students make the most out of their summers.
- **Continue applying for scholarships.**

Need essay inspiration? Read [examples of winning essays](#), and then apply for scholarships [yourself](#).

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Summer

College Applications Prep

- ☐ **Visit college campuses.**
Take a campus tour, and talk to people (students, professors, or admissions staff) to get a real feel for what it'd be like to attend college there. For your top-choice colleges, schedule a personal interview with an admissions officer. (When you apply, you might get a slight advantage for having done this.)
- ☐ **Start your college app spreadsheet.**
Get organized! Note application deadlines, questions and essay prompts, costs, and average stats for admitted students (e.g. GPA, test scores) to gauge your chances. Also write down any minimum requirements for merit scholarships to give yourself clear targets for grades or test scores for your senior year.
- ☐ **Draft your main college essay(s).**
Many colleges are on the Common App, meaning you can choose any of their prompts for your main [personal statement](#). Aim to have your first draft ready before senior year starts.

Financial Aid & Scholarships

- ☐ **Gather documents and sign up for the FAFSA® (the federal financial aid form).**
Although the 2024-25 FAFSA® doesn't open until December you can get your FSA ID (that is, your username) and password ahead of time. You can also begin gathering other documents you need, like your parents' tax returns.
- ☐ **Learn more about financial aid.**
Once senior year rolls around, you'll be focused on college apps. Get up to speed on the financial aid process now, so you don't accidentally miss deadlines! Psst - [This guide](#) might help.
- ☐ **Continue applying for scholarships.**
Students sometimes forget about scholarships during the summer, which means there's usually less competition to actually win! [Apply here](#).
- ☐ **Military ROTC Scholarships (if applicable):**
If you're interested in an ROTC scholarship, begin the process now.

Senior Year

Fall

- ☐ **Take standardized tests (if applicable)**
(Re-)take the SAT/ACT, SAT subject tests, and AP Tests. Or consider [test-optional colleges](#).
- ☐ **Apply early (or to UC/Cal State system).**
Most early decision/action deadlines are in November. UC & Cal State apps are due Nov 30.

Winter

- ☐ **Complete all your financial aid forms.**
Submit your FAFSA® (on [fafsa.gov](#)) and your [state's financial aid form](#) (if there is one). Some colleges also require the CSS Profile or a college-specific form. And don't forget about [external scholarships](#)!
- ☐ **Apply for colleges Regular Decision,**
Popular deadlines are Jan 1, Jan 15, and Mar 1, though some schools have rolling deadlines.
- ☐ **Hear back from any EA/ED applications.**
If you applied early action/decision, you'll likely get your admissions decision and financial aid offer.

Spring

- ☐ **Hear back and decide on your college!**
Get your RD admissions decisions--and decide which college you'll attend.
- ☐ **Evaluate your financial aid offer(s).**
Compare offers, and possibly write an [appeals letter](#) to request additional financial aid.
- ☐ **Provide additional documentation (if required)**
If relevant, submit your final high school transcript and your official test scores.
- ☐ **Come up with a plan for any financial gaps.**
This may include a summer job, student loans, or [scholarships](#).