Getting Ready for College: A Four-Year Checklist for High School Teens

The high school years can be a busy time, and it's easy to lose track of the many steps involved in the college search and application process. To help you and your student stay on track, we've compiled a list of what your college-bound teen should be doing each year.



Checklist for High School Freshmen and Sophomores

Freshmen should plan to:

- [ ] Take challenging classes in core academic courses.
- [ ] Work with their school counselor to create a yearly schedule for meeting graduation requirements.
- [ ] Talk to an advisor or school counselor about taking AP and honors courses.
- [ ] Get involved with community-based and leadership-oriented activities.
- [ ] Explore and identify career fields of interest through online research and by attending career fairs and other events.
- [ ] Explore The Four Steps to College.
- [ ] Keep a running list of accomplishments, awards, and recognitions to use in preparing a resume and college applications.
- [ ] Keep in mind that many of these freshman-year activities should continue through all four years of high school. Career planning, in particular, will merit careful, ongoing research; students may need help refining their goals as they learn new information.

Sophomores should:

- [ ] Attend college and career information events.

- [ ] Research funding for college, including scholarships, grants, loans, etc.
- [ ] Reach out to mentors in the fields of interest.
- [ ] Continue exploring college and career options.
- [ ] Consider taking a practice test to prepare for the PSAT.

High School Junior Checklist

In fall semester, juniors need to:

- [ ] Take the PSAT. Students must take the test in 11th grade to qualify for National Merit scholarships and programs.
- [ ] Attend in-person or online college fairs and college prep presentations.
- [ ] Explore careers and their earning potentials in the Occupational Outlook Handbook.

In spring semester, juniors should:

- [ ] Register for college admission exams such as the SAT and ACT; take practice tests to prepare before the big day.
- [ ] Research ways to pay for college.
- [ ] Identify scholarship opportunities to pursue; note deadlines on calendar.
- [ ] Contact colleges to request information and applications.

High School Senior Checklist

During the summer, soon-to-be seniors should:

- [ ] Start college visits.
- [ ] Narrow down the colleges being considered.
- [ ] Make decisions regarding early decision or early action programs.
- [ ] Enter and/or update information in the FAFSA4caster.

In fall semester, seniors will need to:

- [ ] Register for and take (or retake) the SAT and/or ACT, if not already done.
- [ ] Complete and submit college applications prior to deadlines.
- [ ] Complete and submit scholarship applications prior to deadlines.
- [ ] Request transcripts and letters of recommendation.

- [ ] Register for a Federal Student Aid PIN.
- [ ] Meet with a counselor to verify that graduation requirements will be met on schedule.

During the winter months, seniors should:

- [ ] Work with parents to complete and submit the FAFSA.
- [ ] Review and make any necessary changes/corrections to the Student Aid Report.
- [ ] Finish submitting scholarship applications.

In spring semester, seniors will need to:

- [ ] Visit colleges on their “short list.”
- [ ] Consider college acceptances; compare financial aid packages offered.
- [ ] Call college financial aid representatives with questions.
- [ ] Decide on the college to attend and contact its offices.
- [ ] Make informed decisions about student loans.

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