



College Planning: 9th/10th Grade

There are some steps you can take as a ninth- and a 10th-grader to make sure you're on the right track for college. This list will help you navigate the college planning process.

9TH GRADE

- Create a four-year high school plan.** Think about what you'd like to accomplish in the next four years.
 - Make sure you know which high school courses are required by colleges, and that you're taking the right classes as early as the ninth grade. You can ask your counselor about what those "right" classes are.
 - Get to know the levels of courses offered by your school.
- Start thinking about your life after school,** including the types of jobs that might interest you. Of course, these will change — often — but it's good to start thinking about the possibilities.
 - Identify your interests — likes and dislikes — not just in classes but also in every area. This will help you focus on your goals.
 - Talk to other people, such as your school counselor, teachers, recent college graduates who are working, professionals in the community, etc., about careers you might find interesting.
- Meet with your high school counselor.** Your counselor knows how to help you get the most out of high school. Be sure to take some time during the school year to discuss post-high-school plans with him or her.
- Participate in extracurricular activities.** Academics aren't everything. Explore your interest in a sport, school club, music or drama group, or community volunteer activity.
 - Remember that colleges would rather see real involvement in one activity instead of a loose connection to several.
 - If you're interested in playing sports in college, research the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) eligibility requirements. The NCAA requires completion of certain core courses; you can find the specifics at ncaaclearinghouse.net.
- Save for college.** It's not too late to put money aside for college. Every little bit helps! Learning about financial aid early on can also help you down the road.
- Explore summer opportunities.** Look for a job, internship, or volunteer position that will help you learn about a field of interest.
- Get familiar with the PSAT-related assessments and SAT®.** Most four-year colleges consider applicants' scores on college admission test. Download the free Daily Practice for the New SAT app to get a feel for the kinds of questions you might face on test day.
- Take the PSAT™ 8/9.** If your school offers it, sign up to take the first of the College Board assessments to set a baseline. This test will help you build up your skills to take the SAT in 11th or 12th grade.

10TH GRADE

- Meet with your high school counselor — again.**
Be sure to meet with your school counselor to ensure that your course schedule is challenging enough to prepare you for college.
 - Check into any prerequisites for advanced-level junior- and senior-year courses.
- Take the PSAT/NMSQT® or PSAT™ 10.** Depending on your school, you might have the opportunity to take the PSAT/NMSQT in October or the PSAT 10 in February or March. It provides valuable feedback on your college readiness and a free, personalized plan to help you start getting ready for the SAT — and for college.
- Ask if the PSAT/NMSQT is offered to 10th-graders.**
Although this test is usually given in the 11th grade, it is also often offered in the 10th grade. That's because it provides valuable feedback through the Student Score Report. You can then work on any of your academic weaknesses while there is still plenty of time to make improvements.
- Are you interested in attending a U.S. military academy?**
If so, you should request a precandidate questionnaire.
- Along with your family, do some research about how to obtain financial aid.** Many students use financial aid to cover college costs. Find out what financial aid is, where it comes from, and how you can apply for it. Read the U.S. Department of Education's *Funding Your Education* (about federal aid programs).
- Attend college and career fairs.** The fairs often take place in the fall at your school or in your area.
- Participate in school activities or volunteer efforts.**
Extracurricular activities can help you develop time-management skills and enrich your high school experience.
- Talk to your counselor** about your plans for life after high school. He or she can help you plan your schedule, search for colleges, and navigate the financial aid process. The more your counselor knows about you, the more he or she can help you along the way.
- Tour college campuses.** If possible, take advantage of vacation or other family travel time to visit colleges and see what they're like. Even if you have no interest in attending the college you are visiting, it will help you learn what to look for in a college.



College Planning: 11th Grade

Junior year marks a turning point. This is because for most students and families, it's when college planning activities kick into high gear. Here are some things you can do this year to stay on track for college.

FALL

- Start with you:** Make lists of your abilities, social/cultural preferences, and personal qualities. List things you may want to study and do in college.
- Learn about colleges.** Look at their websites and find colleges at bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search. Talk to friends, family members, teachers, and recent grads of your school now in college. List the college features that interest you.
- Resource check:** Visit the counseling office and meet the counselors there. Is there a college night for students and families? When will college representatives visit your school? (Put the dates in your calendar.) Examine catalogs and guides.
- At school, speak to your counselor about taking the PSAT/NMSQT[®],** which is given in October. If you plan to ask for testing accommodations (because of a disability), be sure the College Board has approved your eligibility.
- Make a file to manage your college search, testing, and application data.** If appropriate (for example, if you're interested in drama, music, art, sports, etc.), start to gather material for a portfolio.
- Estimate your financial aid need.** Financial aid can help you afford college. Use the College Board's *Getting Financial Aid* and the financial aid calculator at bigfuture.org to estimate how much aid you might receive.

WINTER

- Sign up to take the SAT[®] in the spring.** You can register online or through your school. SAT fee waivers are available to eligible students. To prepare for the SAT, you can access free, personalized SAT practice tools at satpractice.org, including thousands of interactive questions, video lessons, practice tests, and more.
- Begin a search for financial aid sources.** National sources include the College Board's Scholarship Search and electronic sources. Don't overlook local and state aid sources. (Ask a counselor for help or check your public library.)
- With your family, make an appointment with your counselor** to discuss ways to improve your college-preparation and selection processes.
- Ask a counselor or teacher about taking the SAT Subject Tests[™] in the spring.** You should take them while course material is still fresh in your mind. You can download *The SAT Subject Tests Student Guide*, which offers test-prep advice, from SATSubjectTests.org.
- Explore AP[®].** The Advanced Placement[®] Program helps hundreds of thousands of high school students achieve their college dreams each year. Get the facts at apstudent.collegeboard.org/exploreap. If you're in AP classes, register for the AP Exams given in May.
- Opt in to the College Board Opportunity Scholarships at cb.org/opportunity.** You can earn scholarships ranging from \$500 to \$2,000 by completing individual college planning steps. Complete all six steps and you'll be eligible for the \$40,000 scholarship.

SPRING

- Contact your counselor** before leaving school for the summer if you are considering military academies or ROTC scholarships. If you want a four-year ROTC scholarship, you should begin the application process the summer before your senior year.
- Develop a list of 15 or 20 colleges that are of interest to you.** You can find many colleges at which you'll be happy and get a great education. The college search is about exploring who you are and what you want and then finding colleges that will meet your goals.
- Stay open to all the possibilities—don't limit your search.** To find the best college for you, you should apply to colleges of varying selectivity. Selective colleges admit a portion of students who apply. Some colleges are highly selective while others are less selective. Make sure to apply to public, private, in-state, and out-of-state schools so that you have plenty of options from which to choose.
- Take the SAT.** The test is typically offered in March, May, and June. Make sure you start preparing for the test several months in advance using the tools available at satpractice.org. And remember, if you're not happy with your scores when you get them, you might want to test again in the fall. Many students take the test a second time as seniors, and they usually do better.
- Start to gather documents for financial aid:** Be sure to keep a copy of your tax returns handy. You'll use these to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which opens on Oct. 1.

SUMMER

- Register with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Eligibility Center** if you are an athlete planning to continue playing a sport in college (ncaaclearinghouse.net).
- Get your FSA ID:** Before you can fill out your FAFSA, you need to get a username and password (also known as an FSA ID).
- Find a full-time or part-time job,** or participate in a summer camp or summer college program.
- Visit colleges.** When planning your campus visits, make sure to allow time to explore each college. While you're there, talk to as many people as possible. These can include college admission staff, professors, and students. Take campus tours and, at colleges you're serious about, make appointments to have interviews with admission counselors.
- Create a résumé**—a record of your academic accomplishments, extracurricular activities, and work experiences since you started high school.
- Download applications.** Go to the website of each college's admission office and either complete the application online or request a paper application from colleges to which you'll apply. Check application dates—large universities may have early dates or rolling admission.
- Visit some local colleges**—large, small, public, and private. A visit to a college campus can help you decide if that college is right for you. Make a plan ahead of time to get the most from your visit. Check out the campus checklist at bigfuture.org. Attend college fairs, too.
- Scan local newspapers** to see which civic, cultural, and service organizations in your area award financial aid to graduating seniors. Start a file.

Visit bigfuture.org for more information.



Family Action Plan: 12th Grade

Senior year is a whirlwind of activity. It's a big year for your child—balancing schoolwork, extracurricular obligations, and the college application process. Use the suggestions below so you and your child can meet these challenges.

SUMMER

- Visit colleges together.** If you haven't already, make plans to check out the campuses of colleges that interest your child. Use the [Campus Visit Checklist](#) to learn how to get the most out of these experiences.
- Ask how you can help your senior finalize a college list.** You can help your 12th grader choose which colleges to apply to by weighing how well each college meets their needs. Learn [how to finalize a college list](#).
- Find out a college's actual cost.** Once your 12th grader has a list of a few colleges of interest, use the [Net Price Calculator](#) together to discover the potential for financial aid and the true out-of-pocket cost—or net price—of each college.
- Encourage your child to get started on applications.** Together you can get the easy stuff out of the way by filling in as much required information on college applications as possible. Read about [how to get started on applications](#).
- Help your child decide about applying early.** If your senior is set on going to a certain college, they should think about whether applying early is a good option. Now is the time to decide because early applications are usually due in November. Read about the pros and cons of [applying early](#).
- Gather financial documents:** To apply for most financial aid, your child will need to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). You'll need your most recent tax returns and an FSA ID to complete the FAFSA, which opens October 1.
- Encourage your child to opt in to the College Board Opportunity Scholarships.** Your child can earn scholarships ranging from \$500 to \$2,000 by completing individual college planning steps. When they complete all six steps, they'll be eligible for a \$40,000 scholarship. Visit [cb.org/opportunity](#) to learn more.

FALL

- Encourage your child to meet with the school counselor.** This year, your 12th grader will work with the counselor to complete and submit college applications. Learn more about [the counselor's role in applying to college](#).
- Create a calendar with your child.** This should include application deadlines and other important dates. Your child can find specific colleges' deadlines in [College Search](#). Your child can save colleges in a list to get a custom online calendar that shows the deadlines of those colleges.
- Get your child ready for college admission tests.** Many seniors retake college admission tests, such as the SAT[®], in the fall. Learn more about helping your 12th grader [prepare for admission tests](#).
- Help your child find and apply for scholarships.** Your high school student can find out about scholarship opportunities from the school counselor and how to request and complete scholarship applications and submit them on time. Learn more about [scholarships](#).

FALL (CONTINUED)

- Offer to look over your senior's college applications.** But remember that this is your child's work, so remain in the role of adviser and proofreader. Respect your child's voice.
- Complete the FAFSA.** The government and many colleges use the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to award aid. Now it's easier than ever to fill out this form because you can automatically transfer your tax information online from the IRS to the FAFSA. Read [How to Complete the FAFSA](#) to learn more.
- Complete the CSS Profile™, if required.** If your child needs to submit the CSS Profile to a college or scholarship program, be sure to find out the priority deadline and submit it by that date. Read [How to Complete the CSS Profile](#).
- Encourage your child to set up college interviews.** An interview is a great way for your child to learn more about a college and for a college to learn more about your child. Get an overview of the [interview process](#).

WINTER

- Work together to apply for financial aid.** Have your child contact the financial aid offices at the colleges of interest to find out what forms students must submit to apply for aid. Make sure your child applies for aid by or before any stated deadlines. Funds are limited, so the earlier you apply, the better.
- Learn about college loan options together.** Borrowing money for college can be a smart choice—especially if your high school student gets a low-interest federal loan. Learn more about the [parent's role in borrowing money](#).
- Encourage your senior to take SAT Subject Tests™.** These tests can showcase your child's interests and achievements—and many colleges require or recommend that applicants take one or more Subject Test. Read more about [SAT Subject Tests](#).
- Encourage your child to take AP® Exams.** If your 12th grader takes AP or other advanced classes, have your child talk with teachers now about taking these tests in May. Read more about the [AP Program](#).

SPRING

- Help your child process college responses.** Once your 12th grader starts hearing from colleges about admission and financial aid, you need to help your child decide what to do. Read about [how to choose a college](#).
- Review financial aid offers together.** Your 12th grader will need your help to read through financial aid award letters and figure out which package works best. Be sure your child pays attention to and meets any deadlines for acceptance. Get more information on [financial aid awards](#).
- Help your child complete the paperwork to accept a college's offer of admittance.** These steps should be taken once your child has decided which college to attend: review the offer, accept that college's offer, mail a tuition deposit, and submit other required paperwork. Learn more about your high school senior's [next steps](#).

Visit bigfuture.org for more information.