



Prepare for College!

A year-by-year checklist for high school students from Colleges of Distinction

You can save yourself a lot of stress by thinking about your college plans all throughout high school.

The earlier you prepare, the more time you will have to adjust your plans if you change your mind or find a new passion you want to explore.

Not sure how to prepare for college in high school? These checklists will guide you from freshman through senior year with an even, manageable set of tasks, including when you should talk to your school advisor or counselor and what you should ask them, when you should start your college search, tips on deciding your major, when you should take the SAT or ACT, and more.

Find more in-depth tips for your college search at CollegesOfDistinction.com/advice

Prepare for College:

FRESHMAN YEAR

It's never too early to start preparing for college!

High school goes by so quickly, and you don't want to save all of your work for when you're just a few months away from graduating. Follow this checklist to get you started on the right foot!

Checklist

- Meet with your school counselor. Questions to ask:
 - How many credits in each subject do you need in order to graduate on time?
 - Should you consider taking AP courses?

 - Are there any courses you can take for college credit?

 - How often should you check in to make sure you're on the right track?

- Perform a self-evaluation:
 - What is your dream career?
- Do you have an idea of what you want to major in?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Get involved in extracurricular activities (clubs, fine arts, sports)
 - _____ _____
 - _____ _____
- Decide if you'd like to take the ACT Aspire exam to evaluate your academic strengths

- Volunteer or learn a new hobby during your breaks

- Start an activities résumé! Begin keeping track of your extracurriculars and volunteer work

Notes

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Prepare for College:

SOPHOMORE YEAR

As your current school work and activities are beginning to pile up, it's natural for you not to think about anything but the present.

However, there is always the opportunity to set yourself up for success. Here are some things you can do in your sophomore year to prepare for college.

Checklist

- Meet with your school counselor for a follow-up on your grades from freshman year

- Continue to meet with your counselor at the end of every grading period
- Take the PSAT/NMSQT®
 _____ _____
- Join/participate in extracurricular activities
 _____ _____
 _____ _____
- Add electives to your schedule to explore new areas of study
 _____ _____
 _____ _____
- Research the career(s) you have in mind:
 - What education will you need? Are you thinking about grad school as well?

 - Expected annual earnings for the next 3-5 years

- Review LinkedIn profiles of people currently in that profession. What steps did they take to get there?

- Start your college search!
 - What do you want from your college experience (location, size, resources)?

 - Find colleges that offer the major you're thinking about (Check out collegesofdistinction.com to help!)

 - Submit a 'request information' form from each school's website
 _____ _____
 _____ _____
 - Review acceptance/graduation rates, financial aid, scholarships, and tuition costs
- Record your academic and extracurricular successes in your activities résumé

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Prepare for College:

JUNIOR YEAR

Junior year of high school tends to be one of the most challenging.

Not only is it the year in which you take your toughest classes, but it's also the year in which talk about college prep is the most intense. But don't worry; you still have time to do what you need to do, especially if you followed the previous two checklists as an underclassman.

Checklist

- Meet with your school counselor at the beginning of each grading period
 - Review your grades from the previous year
 - Find out your current GPA
 - Make sure you're on track to graduate on time
- Search for local scholarships
- Narrow down your college list to a top 10
- Attend college fairs
 -
 -
- Job-shadow a professional working in your dream career
- Apply for scholarships
 -
 -
- Go on a college visit—and reach out to an admission counselor!
- Enroll in test prep for the SAT/ACT
- Register for the SAT/ACT
- Take the SAT and/or ACT (each more than once!)
 -
 -
- Talk to your parents to talk about financing college
- Update your activity résumé at the end of the year
- Make summer plans
 - Visit colleges
- Get a summer job and/or volunteer
- Job-shadow a professional
- Brainstorm college essay topics and create outlines
- Create a Common App account in August at commonapp.org

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Prepare for College:

SENIOR YEAR

You made it to your last year of high school!

Congratulations are in order, but don't relax just yet. It's important that you finish strong without giving in to senioritis. During your senior year, you can now start applying to college.

Checklist

- Meet with your school counselor to review your current academic standing
- Apply for scholarships
 - _____
 - _____
- Retake the SAT/ACT, if needed
 - _____
 - _____
- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®) in October at studentaid.gov
- Apply for State Financial Aid
 - Check the requirements through the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) at nasfaa.org
- Narrow down your college list down to your top 5-10. Find their application forms, deadlines, and enrollment requirements
- Begin applying to colleges
- Ask for letters of recommendation well before applications are due
 - _____
 - _____
- Write your college application essays (and get them proofread)
 - _____
 - _____
- Finalize your activities résumé to submit to colleges
- Complete your Common App and other college applications
- Submit!
- Review financial aid packages offered by the schools who accepted your application
 - _____
 - _____
- Revisit your top colleges before accepting, if needed
 - _____
 - _____
- Make your final college choice by May 1, and enroll!

- Finish high school strong—avoid senioritis!

Notes

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