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Stay on track: Your stress-free guide for applying to college

Junior year

September

Have the "college" talk with your parents. Where do you want to go? What major? How much can you spend?

October

Take the PSAT! It can give you an idea of where you fall in the college applicant pool. Plus, your scores may make you eligible for national scholarships.

November

Consider how you'll pay for college. Take a look at different types of loans and scholarships. From the exceptionally tall to the llama enthusiast, there's a scholarship opportunity for everyone!

December

Take the ACT/SAT. These tests are crucial to figuring out which schools are a good match for you. Be sure to take practice tests and even a prep course to ensure that you get your best score possible.

March

Make a file for each school. Check out college fairs and visit campuses. Then compare information about each school's academics, financial aid, and campus life.

Senior year

August

Start your essays! With your top schools in mind, start drafting your work and be sure to leave yourself time for edits, edits, and more edits.

September

Secure letters of recommendation. Reach out to teachers, coaches, and employers who would be happy to write you a glowing review. Don't forget to send them a thank you note afterwards!

October

Submit your FAFSA. Some student aid programs award funds on a first-come, first-served basis so don't wait too long to submit your FAFSA.

Consider re-taking standardized tests. You can also re-take your SAT to try to raise your score.

November

Stay on top of deadlines. Don't let the date for early application sneak up on you. Many schools have different application deadlines; make sure you know when everything is due.

January

Apps are due! January 1st is the universal deadline for most schools' applications, so make sure yours are in. If you applied early action, you could get your decision letter any day.

February

Mail's here! Keep an eye out for your college acceptance letters.

March

Watch for financial aid offers. This is when you'll get financial aid offers from the schools that have accepted you. Compare them to see which offers the best financial aid package.

April

Decision time! After deciding where you'd like to go, make sure to stay on top of communications from your school. Deposits, forms, and housing apps are all due prior to leaving in the fall.

May

Make a budget. Talk with your parents to figure out how much you'll expect to earn and pay while at school. Having a budget will start you on the journey toward financial responsibility.

Summer

Final to-do items. This is the time to attend orientation, register for your classes, and make sure the tuition bill is paid. It's also the time to have fun—and have an amazing time!