

January

Nope, it's not too soon. You're halfway through your junior year, and the time has come to prepare for the college admissions process. If you haven't already done so, take a look at a real college application, review your transcript, and start talking with your teachers about writing a recommendation for you next year.

- Think about what to do this summer.
- Consider a summer internship, take a college-level course at a nearby school, or do some volunteer work.
- Stay focused on your academic performance.
- If you are taking the March SAT, think about preparing in advance.

February

Guess what's coming up? Spring break! This is a good time to start to visit college campuses. You might also be able to schedule an interview. Even if you can't visit campuses out of town, or you aren't sure where you want to apply, try to visit a local college campus or two to get a feel for the campus environment and to practice talking to admissions staff in person.

- Continue preparing for the SAT/ACT/SAT Subject Tests (whichever you are taking).
- Talk with your parents about taking a college road trip over Spring Break.

March

Start visiting colleges; if you can, schedule an interview. By now you should have a good idea of which teachers you'll want to have write letters of recommendation for you; it also doesn't hurt to start keeping a list of your high school activities so you won't forget about anything when it comes time to complete your applications. Even if you don't have time to do all this stuff during your junior year, do it over the summer. That way, you'll start your senior year ahead of the game.

- Keep preparing for the SAT/ACT/SAT Subject Tests (whichever you are taking).
- Ask a few teachers if they'd be willing to write you a letter of recommendation next year (they'll appreciate the advance notice).

April

This is a good time to take a break and think about financial aid. When you apply to college, you will also apply for financial aid (at least, most of you will). These are two separate processes. In order to receive aid from a college, you may have to complete two separate forms: the FAFSA form (which you complete no sooner than January of your senior year, and no later than March) and the financial aid/scholarship form(s) for the colleges to which you are applying. All this happens during your senior year. For now, it's important to think about aid from sources other than the colleges themselves. This means outside scholarships. Begin looking for scholarships now.

- Start researching scholarships.
- Keep preparing for the SAT/ACT/SAT Subject Tests (whichever you are taking).

May

After you receive your first semester grades and take the SAT or ACT at least once, you should have a good understanding of the credentials you'll have when you apply to college. Narrow your research by focusing on colleges that you believe might accept someone with your grades, scores, and characteristics. There's no need to decide where you want to apply for sure, but you should begin to develop some strong possibilities.

- If you're taking a June test (SAT/ACT/SAT Subject Tests), keep preparing.
- Ask a few of your teachers if they'd be willing to write you a letter of recommendation next year (they'll appreciate the advance notice).

June

Obviously, different colleges focus on different credentials. Beyond good grades and solid test scores, more selective colleges put a lot of weight on the difficulty of the courses you took, your college application essays, your high school, your activities and accomplishments, and your letters of recommendation. The time is now to gather the admissions criteria for different colleges and continue to fine-tune your list. You should start brainstorming potential application essay topics—that little essay is an application officer's window into your personality, so start thinking hard about this.

- If you haven't yet done so, finalize your list of teachers to write your letters of recommendation.
- Start brainstorming potential application essay topics.