College Application Timeline

How to use this page: Work through each milestone by grade year. Check off tasks as you complete them, and use the Resources section at the bottom for test prep, essay help, financial aid, and college search tools. Starting early — even in 9th grade — puts you in the strongest position when applications open senior year.

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Grade	When	Milestone	Details	Status
9th Grade	Fall	Meet with your school counselor	Discuss 4-year course plan and graduation requirements	Not Started
9th Grade	Fall	Start a resume / activities list	Track extracurriculars, sports, clubs, volunteer work, and jobs from day one	Not Started
9th Grade	Ongoing	Focus on grades	GPA matters — especially in core subjects (English, Math, Science, History, Foreign Language)	Not Started
9th Grade	Spring	Explore interests & clubs	Try new activities; colleges value depth and commitment over time	Not Started
9th Grade	Summer	Read widely & pursue a passion project	Summer reading and personal projects build intellectual curiosity for essays later	Not Started
10th Grade	Fall	Take the PSAT 10 (optional)	Good low-stakes practice for the SAT; identifies areas to improve	Not Started
10th Grade	Fall	Research AP/IB/Honors course options	Plan which advanced courses to take junior and senior year	Not Started
10th Grade	Ongoing	Continue building your activities list	Update your resume each semester with new roles, hours, and accomplishments	Not Started
10th Grade	Spring	Begin college research	Make a broad list of schools — big/small, urban/rural, reach/match/safety	Not Started

10th Grade	Summer	Visit colleges if possible	Campus visits (virtual or in-person) help you understand fit early	Not Started
11th Grade	Fall	Register for PSAT/NMSQT	Taken in October; qualifies you for National Merit Scholarship consideration	Not Started
11th Grade	Fall	Begin SAT/ACT prep	Use Khan Academy (free SAT prep) or a prep course; aim to test in spring	Not Started
11th Grade	Winter	Narrow your college list	Research 10–15 schools; note application requirements, deadlines, and financial aid policies	Not Started
11th Grade	Spring	Take SAT and/or ACT	Most students test in March–June of junior year; plan to retake if needed	Not Started
11th Grade	Spring	Request letters of recommendation	Ask teachers and counselors who know you well — give them plenty of notice	Not Started
11th Grade	Spring	Attend college fairs and info sessions	Meet admissions reps and ask questions; note what stands out about each school	Not Started
11th Grade	Summer	Draft your Common App personal statement	Brainstorm topics, write multiple drafts, get feedback from a trusted reader	Not Started
11th Grade	Summer	Research scholarships	Start a list of scholarships with deadlines; many open to juniors and rising seniors	Not Started
11th Grade	Summer	Finalize college list	Aim for ~8–12 schools: 2–3 reach, 4–5 match, 2–3 safety	Not Started
12th Grade	Fall	Finalize and submit Early Decision/Action apps	ED/EA deadlines typically Nov 1 or Nov 15; submit all materials well before the deadline	Not Started
12th Grade	Fall	Complete FAFSA	Opens Oct 1 — submit as early as possible; required for federal aid, many state grants, and most schools	Not Started

12th Grade	Fall	Submit CSS Profile (if required)	Required by ~400 private colleges for institutional aid; deadlines vary by school	Not Started
12th Grade	Fall	Finalize supplemental essays	Most schools require 1–3 short supplemental essays in addition to the personal statement	Not Started
12th Grade	Winter	Submit Regular Decision applications	Most RD deadlines are Jan 1 or Jan 15; double-check each school's portal for completeness	Not Started
12th Grade	Winter	Apply for scholarships	Many major scholarship deadlines fall between December and February	Not Started
12th Grade	Spring	Compare financial aid award letters	Use net price calculators; compare total cost of attendance, not just sticker price	Not Started
12th Grade	Spring	Make your final decision	Commit by May 1 (National Decision Day); notify all other schools of your decision	Not Started
12th Grade	Spring	Send final transcript	Ask your counselor to send your final transcript to your chosen school after graduation	Not Started

📚 Resources

📝 Test Prep

- **Khan Academy SAT Prep** — Free, official SAT practice linked to your PSAT results
- **ACT Academy** — Free ACT prep from the test makers
- **College Board** — Register for SAT, AP exams, and access score reports
- **ACT.org** — Register for the ACT and access prep resources

✍️ Essay Writing

- **Common App** — The main platform for applying to 900+ colleges; includes the personal statement
- **Coalition App** — Alternative application platform used by some schools

- **Purdue OWL** — Free writing guides and grammar help
- **Grammarly** — AI writing assistant for proofreading essays

💰 Financial Aid & Scholarships

- **FAFSA** — Free Application for Federal Student Aid; opens Oct 1 each year
- **CSS Profile** — Required by many private colleges for institutional aid
- **Scholarships.com** — Searchable scholarship database
- **Fastweb** — Personalized scholarship matching
- **BigFuture by College Board** — Scholarship search + financial aid planning tools
- **Net Price Calculator** — Compare true costs across schools

🔍 College Search

- **BigFuture** — College search, major explorer, and application planning
- **Naviance** — Used by many high schools for college planning and applications
- **Niche** — Rankings, reviews, and fit scores for colleges
- **US News College Rankings** — Widely referenced college rankings and profiles
- **Common Data Set** — Detailed admissions statistics published by each college
- **Virtual College Tours (YouVisit)** — Virtual campus tours for schools you can't visit in person

Key Dates to Remember

- **Oct 1** — FAFSA opens (submit ASAP)
- **Oct** — PSAT/NMSQT (11th grade)
- **Nov 1 / Nov 15** — Early Decision & Early Action deadlines
- **Jan 1 / Jan 15** — Regular Decision deadlines
- **Feb–Apr** — Scholarship deadlines
- **Apr 1** — Most admissions decisions released
- **May 1** — National College Decision Day