



# High School Checklist: Freshman through Senior Year

Quenosha Payton / [Find the College Right for You! »](#)

You can save yourself a lot of stress if you start thinking about what you would like to do in college while you are still in high school. The earlier you prepare, the more time you will have to adjust your plans if you change your mind or to dig deeper into what you know you're passionate about.

Not sure how to prepare for college in high school? This checklist lays out what you should do freshman through senior year of high school, 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.

With a clear plan, you won't have to worry about juggling high school with the intimidating process of preparing for college. You can never be too prepared, so make your life easier by following these steps and reading the other articles referenced in this one.

This four-year plan will set you up for success when the time to apply actually comes. Even if you are already a year or two into high school, this list can still help you make sure you're on track!

Don't worry if you feel like you have no idea how to start—that's why we're here! No one expects you to be an expert at something you haven't done before, so keep in mind that you can always refer back to this checklist, read these articles, and—most importantly—*ask questions!* Your advisors and counselors will be happy to help you with your college application process.

*Navigating the college process takes proper planning and early action! Here's a short checklist to help you keep track of important tasks to complete in each year of your high school journey.*

## Freshman Year

The best time to start your college decision making process is during your freshman year of high school. Yes, really! 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.

During your freshman year you can meet with your counselor to learn about your graduation requirements, you can evaluate how you're doing academically, you can get involved in different extracurricular activities, and you can sign up for new and exciting things to learn in the summer!

- Meet with your [school counselor](#) and find out your high school's graduation requirements
  - Ask your counselor the [Top 5 questions](#) listed in the 4-year plan
  - Print & Ask these [Top 50 Questions to Ask Your School Counselor](#)
- Perform a Self-evaluation
  - Ask yourself the [Top 10 Questions to Ask Yourself](#)
- Get Active! Choose a few [electives and extracurricular activities](#) to get involved in
- Decide if you'd like to take the [ACT Aspire exam](#) to evaluate your academic strengths
- Volunteer or learn a new hobby during your summer break

## Sophomore Year

By the time you're a sophomore, you may have already realized why preparing for college requires a four-year plan. Your current school work and activities are beginning to pile up, so it's natural for you not to think about anything but the present. Check back with your counselor and see how you are doing academically and whether you're on track with your yearly plan.

A couple of recommended sophomore tasks include taking the PSAT to familiarize yourself with the ACT and SAT testing format as well as beginning the search for where you might want to go for college and what you might want to do professionally. This sophomore-year checklist also contains a few links to give you even more information on what you need to know to prepare.

You don't need to wait on anyone else to get started with these steps. Keep asking questions and taking initiative!

- **Meet with your school counselor** for a follow-up on your grades from freshman year
- Implement any advice gained from your school counselor check-in into your yearly plan
- Take the **PSAT/NMSQT® or PSAT™ 10** to get familiar with the testing format and time constraints before taking the SAT/ACT your junior year
- Get more involved if you can by adding extracurricular activities to your schedule (**Guide to Choosing the Best High School Extracurricular Activities & Electives**)
- Add electives to your schedule that allow you to explore areas of study that you might be interested in
- **Research your future career**
  - Learn its education requirements
  - Expecting annual earnings for the next 3-5 years
  - Review **LinkedIn** profiles of people currently in that profession to see the steps they took to get there
- Start your college search!
  - **Decide what you want and need in a college**
  - Research and develop a list of 20 colleges that offer your major and fit those needs you'd like to attend
  - Request information from those colleges
  - Review their acceptance/graduation rates, **financial aid**, **scholarships resources**, and **tuition costs**

## Junior Year

Junior year of high school is usually the most difficult. 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.

Continue to meet with your counselor and ask questions to make sure you're academically secure to graduate high school. You can also make sure you know the academic requirements for the colleges and universities you might want to attend and see if you are academically secure for those, too.

What's more, you can attend college fairs and narrow down your choices, you can visit and tour them, you can apply for scholarships and job shadow, you can update your résumé, and you can talk to your parents about finances. Your junior year is also when you can take and/or retake the ACT and SAT. That's a lot to do, but your teachers and counselors know about your to-dos and are ready to help and cheer you on.

By the end of the year, you should have a pretty good idea of your top colleges of choice and maybe an idea of your desired career. Your junior year can be stressful, but these steps can help it feel more manageable.

- Meet with your **school counselor** at the beginning of each 9-weeks
  - During the first meeting review your grades from the previous year
    - Find out what your current **GPA** is
    - Ask if you're on track to graduate on time
    - Inquire about local scholarships
    - **Decide when to take the SAT/ACT**
- Re-visit your college list and try and narrow it down to a top 10
- Attend **college fairs**
- Consider **job-shadowing** a few professionals working in your dream career
- Apply for some **scholarships**
- **Visit colleges** from your list and start reaching out to admission counselors for more information
- Take the SAT and/or ACT (**each more than once**)
- **Sit down with your parents to talk about finances and commitments**
- Enroll in test prep (**Free Test Prep Resources**)
- Update your **activity résumé** at the end of the year
- Make summer plans
  - **Re-access and review your chosen career path**
  - Visit colleges (**How to Plan & Prepare for Your College Visit**)
  - Consider getting a Summer job
  - Earn community service hours by volunteering
  - Job shadow a professional
- At the end of the year narrow down your college list to top 7 schools
- Brainstorm **college essay topics** and create outlines (**What Makes a Great College Application Essay**)

## 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 apply to the colleges you narrowed your choices down to. You can also continue to retake the SAT or ACT. And, of course, make sure you keep in touch with your advisor to ensure you're on track for graduation.

- Meet with your school counselor to review your current academic standing and learn if there are any **new scholarships** available
- **Retake the SAT/ACT**, if needed
- Research **deadlines for the FAFSA and State Financial Aid**
- Complete the **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®)** in October
- Apply for State Financial Aid Before the Deadline (**How to Find and Apply for State Financial Aid: A Complete Guide**)
- Narrow your college list down to top 5 and find their application forms, deadlines, and enrollment requirements

- [\*\*Begin applying to colleges\*\*](#)
- Ask for [\*\*letters of recommendations\*\*](#)
- Write [\*\*college application essays\*\*](#)
- Finalize your activities resume to submit to colleges ([\*\*How to Write an Activities Resume for College Applications\*\*](#))
- Complete college applications ([\*\*A College Applications Guide\*\*](#))
- Find and apply for local and national scholarships ([\*\*The Mega List of Scholarships You Should Apply For\*\*](#))
- Submit [\*\*college applications\*\*](#)
- Review [\*\*financial aid\*\*](#) packages offered by the schools who accepted your application ([\*\*How to Evaluate Your Financial Aid Award Letter\*\*](#))
- [\*\*Revisit your top colleges before accepting\*\*](#) if needed
- Make your final college choice and enroll ([\*\*Accepted to Multiple Colleges? Here's How to Confirm—and Reject—Your Admission\*\*](#))
- Finish high school strong ([\*\*avoid senioritis\*\*](#))

High school can be the fastest four years of your life, so a clear plan to prepare for college can keep you from rushing through your college search and applications. Good luck!

## **More Helpful Reads**

[\*\*How to Create a Four-Year Plan for High School Freshmen\*\*](#)

[\*\*College Readiness Tests: PSAT/NMSQT® and PSAT™ 10 Guide\*\*](#)

[\*\*Why You Should Visit Your School Counselor \(Early College Prep\)\*\*](#)

[\*\*Should You Apply to College Early?\*\*](#)