

12th Grade: College Planning Timeline

Senior year is often an extremely busy time, with schoolwork, activities, and special events. Be sure to stay on track with the college admissions process. Get organized, be aware of deadlines, and don't procrastinate.

Fall

Visit the schools and complete applications

Continue to visit schools.

Fall is a great time to look at the schools on your college lists because classes are in session and you are better able to meet and talk with students and professors. You may even be able to sit in on a class or two.

Finalize your college list.

Use the information you've gathered from college visits, interviews, and your own research to decide which schools you will apply to. It is okay to apply to colleges that you think will be more difficult to get into. But it's also important to put a few safety schools (where you're sure you'll get in) on your list. Talk to counselors, teachers, and parents about your final choices.

Stay on track with your grades and extracurricular activities.

Colleges will look at what you've done in your senior year, so stay focused on doing well in your classes and maintaining a commitment to extracurricular activities.

Take standardized tests.

Register for and take the ACT, SAT, or SAT Subject Tests as necessary. Be sure you have requested (either by mail or online) that your test scores be sent to the colleges of your choice.

Keep track of deadlines.

You'll be filling out lots of forms this year, so it's important to know what form is due when. Make a calendar showing the application deadlines for admission, financial aid, and scholarships.

Ask for letters of recommendation.

Give letter of recommendation forms to the teachers you have chosen, along with stamped, addressed envelopes so your teachers can send them directly to the colleges. Note that some applications (such as the Common Application) send email requests to your teachers for you, but make certain that you have asked the teacher before the University does. Be sure to fill out your name and address and the school name on each form. Discuss your goals and ambitions with your teachers so they'll be more prepared to write about you.

Meet with your guidance counselor.

Your counselor can help you stay on track with admissions requirements. Make sure they know which colleges you want transcripts, score reports, and letters sent to. Give your counselors any necessary forms much earlier than the actual deadlines so they'll have time to send the forms in.

Complete applications.

Finish the application forms for the schools you're interested in. Proofread them and make extra copies before you send them. Make sure you and your school's guidance office have sent all necessary materials, including test scores, recommendations, transcripts, and application essays. You should plan to get all this done before winter break, so you won't be rushing to make deadlines.

Continue your scholarship search.

Apply for scholarships whose deadlines are approaching and keep searching for more scholarship and grant opportunities. Using online scholarship search tools is a great way to find potential aid. Ask colleges about what scholarships you may qualify for. The downtime after applications have been sent is a great time to focus on financial aid.

Winter

Follow up on applications and submit financial aid forms

Act on the results of early decision applications.

If you applied early decision, you'll soon find out if you were accepted. If you get in, you have to withdraw your applications from other schools. If not, keep your other applications out there and focus on those colleges.

Follow up on your applications.

Verify with your counselor that all forms are in order and have been sent out to colleges. Check with the schools to make sure they have received all your information, including test scores, transcripts, and recommendations.

Submit financial aid forms.

Fill out the FAFSA, and if necessary, the PROFILE. These forms can be obtained from your guidance counselor. No matter what your family's income level is, the FAFSA is your main priority for financial aid purposes because it will determine how much you're expected to pay. Don't send the forms until after January 1, because they can't be processed before then.

Send mid-year grade reports.

Ask your counselor to send your mid-year grade reports to the colleges that you applied to. Remember that the schools will continue to keep track of your grades, so it's important to keep working hard throughout your senior year.

Spring

Compare financial aid packages and make your final decision

Watch your mail for notification from colleges.

If you applied under the regular application process, you should receive an admissions decision by March or April. Notifications of financial aid awards should arrive by the end of April.

Check out your options if you're put on a waitlist.

Being put on a waitlist is not a rejection. Keep watching your mail; you should receive a decision by May.

In the meantime, keep your options open in case you don't get in. Check out schools that have late or rolling application deadlines.

Compare financial aid packages.

Make sure to consider each financial aid award carefully. If you have questions, don't hesitate to contact the financial aid office of the college to get more information. Financial aid is a key factor in deciding where you will attend.

Make your final college decision.

Notify all schools of your intent by May 1. If you're not sure which offer to accept, make one more campus visit to the schools you're considering. Make sure to send your deposit to your chosen school and ask your guidance counselor to send your final transcript to the college in June.

Follow up on financial aid information.

Make sure you have received a FAFSA acknowledgement. If you applied for a Pell Grant, you will receive a Student Aid Report statement. Review this notice, make a copy for your records, and send the original to the college you plan to attend. If necessary, apply for loans.

Complete enrollment paperwork for the college you will attend.

Once you accept an offer, you should receive information from the college about course scheduling, orientation sessions, housing arrangements, and other necessary forms. Be sure to complete all required paperwork by the appropriate deadlines.

Congratulations!

You've finished high school and are about to embark on an exciting new phase of life. Good luck.

Based on the Peterson's College Planning Timeline: <http://www.petersons.com/college-search/planning-list-twelfth-students.aspx>