

COLLEGE PREP FOR ALL FOUR YEARS OF HIGH SCHOOL

First-year, sophomore, junior, or senior: No matter where you are in high school, these are the things you can and should be doing during the college search and application process. Following these steps will make your life so much easier, plus you'll be super prepared for college and life after graduation!

FIRST YEAR

- Get involved!** Colleges want students who are passionate about extracurriculars and giving back. Try signing up for a few **extracurricular activities** and find ways to get involved in your community through your church, youth group, or other organizations.
- Start developing good time management skills.** When you're in college, you'll be responsible for your own schedule, meeting assignment deadlines, and fitting in all of your obligations. The more practice you get with **managing your time wisely** now, the better.
- Take your schoolwork seriously.** Most colleges look at prospective students' grades from freshman to senior year. You'll be helping your future self out if you **start developing good study habits** now.
- Take advanced courses if you can.** If your school offers weighted classes before junior year, take advantage of them. **Challenging yourself your first year** of high school (and beyond) is a good thing!

SOPHOMORE YEAR

- Get a job.** If your schedule allows, try to **get a part-time job** after school, on weekends, or during the summer. It will teach you responsibility and all-important time management skills, plus earn you money!
- Take the PSAT.** It's excellent practice for the SAT, and high scores on the PSAT might put you in the running for a **National Merit Scholarship**.
- Start researching college costs,** including tuition, books, room, and board. Then look into different financial aid options, like **grants and scholarships**—some of which are available for high school underclassmen!
- Start thinking about your future.** You still have time to decide, but it's helpful to start thinking about what makes you happy and what your future goals might be to help **ease you into the college search process**.

JUNIOR YEAR

- Attend college fairs.** You can speak to representatives from all kinds of schools and learn more about their programs, gather reading material, and ask questions.
- Plan to take AP courses** if your high school offers them. Admission counselors really appreciate when students **take challenging classes**, and you may be able to earn college credit if you score high enough on your AP exams.
- Take the SAT or ACT.** **Many colleges are now test-optional**, meaning you don't have to submit SAT or ACT scores to apply. However, it's still a good idea to take a test just in case you decide to apply to a college or university that requires scores for admission.
- Start researching colleges in general.** There's no such thing as knowing too much about a college, and really **diving into your college research** junior year gives you time to make a thoughtful, informed decision.
- Visit colleges (if possible).** Whether it's an open house or a campus tour and interview, it's important to visit the schools you're considering so you can see if they're the right fit for you. (If campuses are closed, there are always **virtual tours!**)
- Start thinking about your admission essays.** The summer before senior year is a great time to brainstorm and **start writing!**

SENIOR YEAR

- Narrow down your list of potential colleges** to a handful (five to 10) that meet your criteria and fill your need for **safety, match, and dream/reach schools**.
- File the FAFSA.** The Free Application for Federal Student Aid is typically available for the upcoming school year starting October 1 (pending no delays), and you should **file it as soon as possible**. Most aid is distributed on a first-come, first-served basis, and you never know what scholarships, loans, grants, or work-study programs you may be eligible for!
- Fill out and submit your applications** once you have your final college list. Also make sure you meet **application deadlines**—especially if you're applying early—and you have your necessary recommendation letters, admission essays, and other materials.
- Come up with a Plan B.** You may have a certain school, major, job, or location in mind, but even if your heart is set on Plan A, stay open-minded and **consider alternatives** if things don't go the way you expected.
- Make your final college decision.** All four years of high school have led to this moment! Take your time reviewing your financial aid award letters and **making your final college choice**.

Start (and finish!) your college and scholarship search on



feedback@collegexpress.com