

TIMELINE FOR HIGH SCHOOL JUNIORS

FALL

THE TRANSCRIPT~

This year matters. The junior year can be the most academically challenging, and it is the last full year colleges will have to evaluate. That means putting lots of effort into your courses, and taking the most challenging classes you can. This does not mean you have to take all APs. It does mean that you can challenge yourself and focus on doing the best you can in the courses you take.

TEACHERS~

You will be asking two teachers to write recommendation letters for you as part of your applications. Teachers from the junior year (or senior fall) are ideal, so remember to forge excellent relationships with your teachers this year.

COLLEGE! GETTING READY~

The earlier you start, the less stress there will be during your senior fall. Create a spreadsheet to track your list of colleges, and think about your plans for the summer. What opportunities are available to you to follow an intellectual or other pursuit? Check application deadlines for any programs of interest.

SPRING

COLLEGE LIST AND VISITS~

Hone your spreadsheet list to include at least two safeties, two reach schools, and three or four in-range schools. If you can visit schools of interest in person, definitely do. College trips are a wonderful way to find out what colleges are like, if you like the feel of a place, what the size and surroundings are like, and whether you can see yourself thriving there. Many websites have virtual campus tours as well.

STANDARDIZED TESTING~

Many colleges and universities are test optional at this point. Taking either the SAT or ACT is still wise because if you do well, your test scores can enhance your application. Junior spring is a good time to begin. This leaves summer and fall in case you decide to test again.

PONDER YOUR ESSAY TOPIC~

The Common App publishes essay topics in January for the following application season. Read over the prompts and begin to brainstorm. Your goal is to help college admissions officers get to know the *you* behind the grades and scores. What makes you who you are? What matters to you, and how can you convey that?

SUMMER BEFORE SENIOR YEAR

WRITE!~

Do yourself a huge favor and write a draft of your Common App essay before your senior year begins. This will reduce stress and allow you to get feedback from a trusted reader and then revise. A polished essay is one of the most important elements of your application.

GET READY TO APPLY~

The Common App opens 8/1, and it's fine to start filling it out. You don't have to do the whole thing at once (you can save your work and come back to it as many times as you need). It's great to get familiar with the application well in advance of submission time.

RECOMMENDERS~

Think about two teachers you will ask for recommendation letters. One is often an English teacher you've worked with in junior year (especially if you did well and/or forged a good relationship with that person). Another should come from a teacher you've worked with recently in a subject of interest. You will send polite emails in the beginning of your senior year asking these teachers to write for you, so it's a good time to figure out who you will be asking, and perhaps a couple of backups. Some colleges will allow you to submit a supplemental recommendation from someone else in your life (a coach or music teacher, for example) with whom you've worked meaningfully over time.

SUMMER EXPERIENCE~

Attend a summer program in an area of interest, do volunteer work that is meaningful to you, and/or get a job to earn money for college. (Colleges do understand the need for students to earn money, and they see this as a valid use of your time.)

FINANCES~

Talk with your parents about affording college. If you will be applying for financial aid, discuss the FAFSA. Many schools will also require the CSS Profile, which is a more involved and time-consuming process. Both the FAFSA and the CSS require your parents' tax forms. You and your parents can estimate how much you will be expected to pay for college by completing the "net price calculator" on every college and university's website. Another resource for estimating your EFC (estimated family contribution), which focuses on highly selective institutions, is <https://myintuition.org/>