



COLLEGE ADMISSIONS GUIDE

FOR STUDENTS + PARENTS

A month-by-month guide with tips to ensure success



Don't waste freshman year watching from the sidelines — make it count!

AUG



Get everything ready for high school so that you can hit the ground running. Finish summer reading, buy school supplies, stop by a few days early to find your classrooms, and set goals.

OCT



Get to know your guidance counselor. Make an appointment with yours sooner rather than later, so that he or she will have a fuller sense of who you are, and how you've grown, by the time you embark on the college search process.

DEC



Give yourself plenty of time to review for each exam. High school exams are comprehensive, so you'll need to reach all the way back to things you learned in August. Schedule a few study sessions for each exam in advance. Remember to space out your study sessions and use breaks skillfully; cramming is not an effective strategy!

FEB



Don't waste February wishing for spring — set a goal to accomplish by the 28th. With only a month of the semester under your belt, it's not too late to boost your grades, raise your hand more, or organize your binders to stay on top of your assignments.

APR



When planning your sophomore course load, strike a balance between challenging yourself and setting yourself up for success. Check in with your teachers and see if they'll recommend you for honors math or AP history. Make sure not to bite off more than you can chew, though. It's important to challenge yourself and set yourself up for success, so shoot for balance!

JUN



Get a head start on summer reading this month. Becoming an avid reader will give you an edge in all your subjects and make a world of difference when you take the SAT or ACT.

SEP



Follow your passion, try something new — just get involved, whatever you do! High school is a chance to pursue what you love at a higher level and discover new interests. Who knows? Maybe you're a journalist in the making or an actress on the cusp of her breakout.

NOV



Self-assess — what are you rocking and where can you improve? With a few months of high school under your belt, take time to evaluate how things are going. Productive self-assessment involves reinforcing strengths and acknowledging areas of opportunity.

JAN



Take time to learn about course offerings and prerequisites. When you apply to college, admissions teams will want to see if you've challenged yourself. Consider which subjects you'd like to take at a higher level, and ask your teachers how you can prove that you're ready.

MAR



Leaders don't rise to the top by luck — they put in the work. It's not too soon to take steps toward running the show as an upperclassman. Volunteer for more responsibility in a club. Join something that seemed exciting, but intimidating, in August.

MAY



Consider your social media presence from a fresh perspective — college admissions counselors will be looking before your know it. Are you projecting your best self online? Google yourself and find out! **Social media can be leveraged** to showcase your passion and help admissions teams see what an awesome, unique, and talented person you are!

JUL



Make a list of everything you achieved last year; it's okay to brag on yourself! Did you volunteer, get a job, or learn a new sport? You'd be surprised at how easy it is to forget these victories by the time you're a senior filling out college applications, so it's important to keep a running list.

Click on the **pink links** to learn more about each tip!





Hey there, sophomore! Use this year to explore who you are.

A+

Challenge yourself to make a fresh start this year. If your freshman GPA wasn't quite up to par, make an effort to live up to your academic potential from here on out. Aced your freshman year? That's great! Keep up strong study habits in core classes and start exploring electives.

PSAT

Don't sweat the PSAT – use it as a stress-free practice run. This month you will take the PSAT. It's a standardized test similar to the SAT, but shorter. This year it's just a practice run, so use it as a chance to see how you'd fare on the SAT, without the pressure of an official score.



Use the holiday season to volunteer in your community. Whether or not your school has required service hours, [consider volunteering this month](#). Interacting with people in need puts the stress of high school in perspective and compels you to think about the world around you and how you can help improve it.



Only a few months left of school! Keep focusing on academics. Remember, your grades are the most important factor in college admissions.



It's not too soon to see where you stand on the SAT or ACT – Take a look at [Applerouth's Test Comparison Guide](#) to get a basic overview of the differences between the SAT and the ACT. Then, **test the waters with a practice exam!** The summer before junior year can be a great time to start your prep, and a practice test now will help you map out an effective study plan.



Want to get an amazing SAT or ACT score next year? You may want to start prepping this summer. Junior year has a reputation for being the toughest year, so we have a tip to lighten your load: start studying for the SAT or ACT this summer. Not sure if you are ready to prep? Call one of our experts at 866-789-7737.

AUG

SEP



Focus on your favorite extracurriculars, and ask for more responsibility. In the college admissions game, quality trumps quantity. There are lots of well-rounded students out there, but applicants with a clear passion stand out. So be honest about what inspires you, and which commitments are just resume fluff.

NOV



Start planning exam prep early, and keep honing your study style. Schedule a few study sessions for each exam, make study guides, use flashcards, form study groups if that floats your boat! **Pro tip: It's much more effective to test yourself than simply re-read material.**

JAN



Learn what your PSAT scores mean – it will give you a head start on test prep. If you did well you should consider studying for the PSAT next year – you might be a National Merit Scholar in the making.

MAR



Lay the groundwork for a successful college application process when planning your junior year course load. Along with GPA and standardized test scores, course load is one of the key factors admissions counselors consider when narrowing their application pile. Don't overload yourself, but don't shy away from challenges.

MAY



Lock down your summer plans before it's too late! As a rising junior it's important to start building your resume for college applications. There are a wide array of exciting options for high schoolers: camps, jobs, volunteer opportunities, college summer programs. The sky's the limit!

JUL



The college search process will kick into high gear this fall – start doing research so you're ready to own this season of life. Embark on some casual college research – maybe even tour a school. [Getting a sense of your geographic, student-body size, and academic preferences will lend focus to your college prep this fall.](#)

Click on the [green links](#) to learn more about each tip!





Hey there, upperclassman! This is most important year of your high school career — rise to the challenge.



AUG You're a pro at high school now – be a leader! Now that you're an upperclassman, it's time to start pursuing leadership positions. Show what you bring to the team this year, and you could be running the show as a senior.



OCT Plan out your SAT/ACT testing schedule. Now that the PSAT is under your belt, you can shift your focus to the SAT or ACT. Take a look at testing calendars and map out your dates. Consider your schedule and responsibilities when planning.



DEC Your GPA really matters this year – hunker down for finals. If you've gotten to be a pro at prepping for finals, keep up the good work! If GPA hasn't been your strong suit, use this round of finals to turn a new leaf.



FEB Use this month to consider what you love and what you don't: your college list will become more defined in the process. Do you mind cold weather? Do you learn better in small classes? Do urban environments excite you? Are sports teams important to you? Thinking about these things will help you put together your college target list.



APR Meet with your teachers and counselors to discuss next year's course load. Senior year has a reputation as a time to coast, but if you want to land a spot at your dream college, coasting shouldn't be your MO. Colleges will look at your classes from junior year and fall of senior year, so keep that course load game strong!



JUN Thinking about taking the SAT or ACT one more time? Summer is a great time to work on fine-tuning your scores. Both the SAT and ACT now have summer test dates. If you are applying Early Decision or Early Action, the July ACT or the August SAT are great options.

SEP



The PSAT is next month - and it's good practice for the SAT. No matter what your score goals are, the PSAT is a very helpful assessment that you'll want to take seriously. Just a few minutes shy of the real SAT, the PSAT can give you an accurate prediction of how you would do on the longer test.

NOV



Stop by college fairs and start building your list! Take time to learn about colleges that intrigue you and one or two you've never heard of – who knows what they might have to offer? Fairs are a great chance to chat one-on-one with reps from all over the country.

JAN



Meet with your guidance counselor to learn what your PSAT scores mean. You can use your scores to start developing your prep plan. If you haven't thought much about the SAT or the ACT yet, it's time to turn your attention in the admissions test direction. Taking a practice test is the best place to start.

MAR



Pack your bags! It's time for college visits. Spring break is a great time to plan some college road trips. Explore new parts of the country, take-in college towns and bustling cities, and weigh the pros and cons of each school. This is the fun part of applying to college, and you've earned it.

MAY



Show-off your subject savvy on AP's and SAT subject tests. AP's can get you college credit, and the SAT subjects can influence admissions decisions at highly selective schools. Think of each test as the big game you've been training for all school year.

JUL



Start brainstorming ideas for your college application essay. The essay is your chance to tell admissions counselors what makes you unique. That something doesn't have to be flashy – it just needs to be an authentic glimpse of who you are. You'd be amazed how powerful an honest essay about waiting tables or falling onstage can be.

Click on the [orange links](#) to learn more about each tip!





This is it! Next year you'll be a full-fledged college student, so savor your last lap around the track.

AUG



Complete your college list and create a spreadsheet to keep track of the deadlines for each school. Think about whether you want to apply Early Action or Early Decision. Early decision applications are binding, but [applying early can up your odds of getting in](#). **Bonus tip!** When you [ask your teachers for letters of recommendation](#), remember to pass along your resume and a synopsis of your major projects or papers in their class.

SEP



Take your final SAT or ACT this fall. For many students, this is the last chance to fine-tune your scores before college applications are due. If you still believe you've got higher scores in you – go for it! Some colleges superscore, so it never hurts to give it one last go!

OCT



Start filling out your FAFSA form. Now is a good time to download and fill out your FAFSA form. FAFSA stands for Free Application for Federal Student Aid: the form is used to determine your eligibility for varying degrees of financial aid.

NOV



Meet with your counselor to review admissions deadlines and requirements. At most schools, the early application deadline is either Nov 1st or Nov 15th. If yours is the 15th, you still have another week to put final touches on your application. Mid-month, turn your attention to the rest of your list.

DEC



Stay strong! Maintain that GPA. We know things are getting hectic with application deadlines on the horizon and finals to boot, but you've got this! Remember fall grades senior year are an integral step towards your dream school.

JAN



Talk with your parents about financing college. College applications went out January 1st for most regular decision schools. You've only got few months until you start to receive news about where you'll spend the next four years. Now is an important time to answer financial questions with your parents.

FEB



Take a moment each day to notice signs of what you are passionate about! College acceptance letters might feel slow in coming, but [you'll soon be asked to pick classes - and eventually declare a major](#). The more in touch you are with what you're good at and what makes you happy, the more productive these next four years will be.

MAR



Don't leave it to luck at this stage – keep working to make your college aspirations a reality. Right now you may feel like all you can do is wait, but that's never quite true! If you're waitlisted at a school, the admissions committee will be interested in what you've accomplished since sending in your application. If you end up having your choice of schools, nailing AP tests can impact your college course load.

APR



Consider your college options from all angles, and talk through your thoughts with people you trust. Review your financial aid offers, bounce ideas off people you trust, and weigh the pros and cons of each school you're considering.

MAY



Take your AP's, study for finals, and celebrate! The month kicks off with your last round of finals and APs and it ends with thinking of graduation parties, awards ceremonies, and a high school diploma with your name on it.

JUN



You're college-bound! Move-in day might feel a ways off, but it will be here before you know it. [Start planning for fall](#) so that you have plenty of time to get everything in order. Meet your roommate, [shop for dorm stuff](#), and [sign-up for an orientation](#). First semester is just around the corner!

JUL



Spend time with family and friends. [Make a list](#) this month of everything you want to do before you leave. Eat at your favorite local restaurants, make plans with friends, and soak-up these last few weeks at home with family. You did it graduate! You're a college freshman!

Click on the [red links](#) to learn more about each tip!

