Your Junior Year College Planning Guide

Use this guide to stay focused on the key decisions and tasks of junior year, from early planning to application preparation.

JUNIOR YEAR GOAL

Deepen your academic and extracurricular interests, pursue meaningful experiences, make progress on testing, and develop a thoughtful college list before application season begins.*

Junior Year at a Glance

1. **Spring & Summer Before Junior Year**
   Set your direction: interests, experiences, and a testing plan.
2. **Fall & Winter of Junior Year**
   Sustain strong academics, deepen your involvement, and research colleges.
3. **Spring of Junior Year**
   Refine your college list, plan senior-year courses, and wrap up testing.
4. **Summer Before Senior Year**
   Turn your preparation into an application plan and begin essays.

Key Things to Have in Motion Junior Year

Core workstreams to keep moving throughout the year.

- [ ] A preliminary college list
- [ ] A testing plan
- [ ] A running activities, awards, and accomplishments list
- [ ] Potential recommenders identified
- [ ] Early personal statement brainstorming underway

If applicable based on the student's testing plans and the policies of colleges under consideration.

STAGE 1 OF 4

Spring & Summer Before Junior Year

CONSIDER

Which academic and extracurricular interests will you deepen?

What might you want to study, and why?

Which college settings and programs appeal to you?

What do you want to learn or experience this summer?

DO

- [ ] Identify 1–2 interests to deepen.
- [ ] Choose meaningful summer work, service, or projects.
- [ ] Take an SAT/ACT diagnostic*.
- [ ] Map your personal calendar for junior year.
- [ ] Map out your SAT/ACT prep and testing plan.
- [ ] Start an activities, accomplishments, and awards list.

STAGE 2 OF 4

Fall & Winter of Junior Year

CONSIDER

Are your courses challenging, and are you performing at your best?

Where can you take on more responsibility or make a greater impact?

How are your intended major and college preferences evolving?

Which teachers know your work and strengths well?

DO

- [ ] Maintain strong grades and appropriate course rigor.
- [ ] Deepen an interest through a project, role, or experience.
- [ ] Continue SAT/ACT prep; register for planned exams*.
- [ ] Research colleges; build a preliminary list and plan visits.
- [ ] Discuss costs as a family; use net price calculators.
- [ ] Meet your school counselor about courses and college plans.
- [ ] Update your activities list.
- [ ] Identify possible recommenders.
- [ ] Research summer programs and their application deadlines.

**If applicable based on the student's testing plans and the policies of colleges under consideration.*

STAGE 3 OF 4

Spring of Junior Year

CONSIDER

Which colleges fit best after your research and visits?

Which senior-year courses support your interests and goals?

Which teachers can speak to your growth and contributions?

Which experiences could become essay topics or summer pursuits?

DO

- [ ] Visit colleges.
- [ ] Refine your college list.
- [ ] Choose senior-year courses with your counselor.
- [ ] Aim to finish SAT/ACT testing* by spring or summer.
- [ ] Take AP/IB exams if applicable.
- [ ] Ask teachers for recommendations before school ends.
- [ ] Follow your school's recommendation process.
- [ ] Update activities with roles, impact, and time commitments.
- [ ] Brainstorm personal statement and supplement ideas.
- [ ] Confirm summer plans to deepen an interest or skill.

STAGE 4 OF 4

Summer Before Senior Year

CONSIDER

Is your college list balanced academically, financially, and personally?

Which application plans fit your goals and budget?

If considering Early Decision, is your first choice affordable?

What should your essays reveal, and is any testing still needed?

DO

- [ ] Finalize a balanced working college list.
- [ ] Choose application plans: ED, EA, REA, rolling, or RD.
- [ ] Build a tracker for requirements and deadlines.
- [ ] Check essay, testing, and interview requirements.
- [ ] Open application accounts; get acquainted and complete your Common App profile.
- [ ] Draft your personal statement and supplements.
- [ ] Polish your activities list and resume, if needed.
- [ ] Complete any remaining testing* if needed.
- [ ] Continue meaningful summer work or experiences.
- [ ] Track scholarships and their deadlines.
- [ ] August 1: many applications officially open.

COMPANION RESOURCE

Next up: Senior Year Application Guide

**If applicable based on the student's testing plans and the policies of colleges under consideration.*