Your Senior Year College Planning Guide

Use this guide to work through the key deadlines and decisions of senior year, one month at a time.

SENIOR YEAR GOAL

Submit thoughtful applications on your own timeline — and choose the college where you will thrive — while still enjoying your final year of high school.

Senior Year at a Glance

1. **June – August**
   Finalize your college list, draft your essays, and set up your application plan.
2. **September**
   Finalize early-round strategy and continue refining essays and applications.
3. **October**
   Submit October deadlines and prepare remaining Early Action and Early Decision applications.
4. **November – December**
   Complete early applications, continue Regular Decision work, and respond to early decisions.
5. **January – February**
   Submit remaining applications, confirm materials are received, and follow up as needed.
6. **March – May**
   Compare your options, make your decision, and complete enrollment steps.

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

STAGE 1 OF 6

June – August

CONSIDER

> *Is your college list balanced — likely, target, and reach?*

> *What do you want your essays to reveal about you?*

> *Which application plans (ED, EA, REA, RD) fit your goals?*

> *What will make this summer meaningful beyond applications?*

DO

- [ ] Finalize a balanced college list of 8–12 schools.
- [ ] Draft your personal statement; aim for a strong version by mid-August.
- [ ] Build a tracker for requirements, essays, and deadlines.
- [ ] Take or retake the SAT/ACT* if you haven't reached your target.
- [ ] List the supplemental essays required by each school.
- [ ] Review financial aid requirements and note school-specific deadlines.
- [ ] August 1: applications open — create accounts and complete your Common App profile.
- [ ] Choose one email address for applications and check it regularly.

STAGE 2 OF 6

September

CONSIDER

> *Which schools have the earliest deadlines — some fall as early as October 15?*

> *Do your essays sound like you?*

> *Do your recommenders and counselor have what they need from you?*

DO

- [ ] Refine your personal statement; begin supplements, earliest deadlines first.
- [ ] Have a trusted reader review essays for clarity, voice, and consistency.
- [ ] Confirm your Early Decision / Early Action plan.
- [ ] Check in with recommenders; request a counselor letter if needed.
- [ ] Schedule interviews where colleges offer them.
- [ ] Research merit scholarships and note their deadlines, which may be earlier.
- [ ] Register for a final fall SAT/ACT* if needed; October is often the last sitting for early-round scores.

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

STAGE 3 OF 6

October

CONSIDER

Which of your schools have October 15 deadlines?

Does each college require official scores, or accept self-reported?

Which financial aid forms does each school require, and when?

DO

- [ ] Submit applications with October 15 deadlines — several Early Action and Early Decision plans close this day.
- [ ] Finalize remaining ED/EA applications ahead of November deadlines.
- [ ] Send official score reports where required, allowing time for processing.
- [ ] Confirm school-required materials are in process.
- [ ] Complete any remaining testing* if needed.
- [ ] Submit the FAFSA and CSS Profile when they open, as required by each college.
- [ ] Create each college's applicant portal as soon as setup instructions arrive.

STAGE 4 OF 6

November – December

CONSIDER

Are Regular Decision essays progressing?

Have any colleges sent portal setup instructions or follow-up requests?

If an early decision does not go your way, what is your next step?

DO

- [ ] Submit remaining Early Action / Early Decision applications by each college's deadline.
- [ ] Check the email address used for applications regularly.
- [ ] Create each college's applicant portal when setup instructions arrive.
- [ ] Review applicant portals for missing materials or follow-up requests.
- [ ] Note December 1 deadlines for arts portfolios and some scholarships.
- [ ] Continue Regular Decision essays and prioritize upcoming deadlines.
- [ ] When possible, complete Regular Decision applications before winter break.
- [ ] Respond to early decisions as they arrive.
- [ ] If admitted ED, follow the binding agreement, withdraw other applications, and notify your counselor.

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

STAGE 5 OF 6

January – February

CONSIDER

Are there any remaining application, scholarship, or honors deadlines?

Do any applicant portals show missing or incomplete materials?

If deferred, does the college invite updates or a letter of continued interest?

DO

- [ ] Submit remaining Regular Decision and ED II applications by each college's deadline (most fall Jan. 1–15; some Feb. 1).
- [ ] Confirm each college's exact submission deadline and time zone before submitting.
- [ ] Continue checking application email and applicant portals.
- [ ] Follow up on missing materials as needed.
- [ ] Respond promptly to college requests.
- [ ] Track remaining scholarship and honors program deadlines.
- [ ] If deferred, follow the college's instructions and send an update if appropriate.
- [ ] Keep grades strong; midyear reports may still be required.

STAGE 6 OF 6

March – May

CONSIDER

Which offer fits best — academically, financially, and personally?

How do the financial aid awards compare?

Where can you see yourself growing over the next four years?

DO

- [ ] Most decisions arrive by early April — compare offers on fit, cost, and opportunity.
- [ ] Continue checking email and applicant portals for decisions and next steps.
- [ ] Revisit campuses or attend admitted-student events if you can.
- [ ] Review financial aid awards together as a family.
- [ ] If waitlisted, follow the college's instructions and decide whether you want to remain under consideration.
- [ ] May 1: National Decision Day — submit your enrollment deposit.
- [ ] After committing, decline other offers and withdraw remaining applications.
- [ ] Take AP/IB exams if applicable; scores may be used for placement or credit.
- [ ] Notify your counselor of your decision; send your final transcript and complete housing and orientation steps.

NEXT: PREPARE FOR COLLEGE

Complete enrollment, housing, orientation, and transition steps.

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