

Stay on track: **Your stress-free guide for applying to college**



in partnership with
sallie mae

Junior year

September

Have the “college” talk with your parents

Where do you want to go? What major? How much can you spend?

October

Take the PSAT®/PreACT®

It can give you an idea of where you fall in the college applicant pool. Plus, your scores may make you eligible for national scholarships.

November

Consider how you'll pay for college

Scholarships? Financial aid? Student loans? A combo? Start looking into your options.

December

Consider taking the ACT®/SAT®

Some schools require a test score to be considered for admission, and these tests may help qualify you for additional scholarships.

March

Make a list

Keep a focused list of schools you're interested in. Start planning campus visits for the spring and summer.

Consider taking Advanced Placement (AP®) courses

AP courses may give you a leg up if you are considering attending a selective or highly selective college/university. Have the conversation with your high school counselor and parents to see if they are right for you and your situation.

Senior year

August

Start your college application essays

With your top schools in mind, start drafting your work and be sure to leave yourself time for edits and reviews.

September

Secure letters of recommendation

Reach out to teachers, coaches, and employers who would be happy to write you a glowing review. Don't forget to send them a thank you note afterwards!

October

Consider re-taking standardized tests

You can re-take your exams to try to raise your scores.

Apply for financial aid

Financial aid is first-come, first served, so you should submit the FAFSA® once the application opens in the fall.

November

Stay on top of application deadlines

Don't let the date for early application sneak up on you. Many schools have different application deadlines; make sure you know when everything is due.

January

Apps are due

January 1 is the universal deadline for most schools, so make sure yours are in. If you applied early action, you could get your decision letter any day.

February

Mail's here

Keep an eye out for your college acceptance letters.

March

Watch for financial aid offers

Start reviewing the financial aid offers you've received from the schools that have accepted you. Compare them to see which school offers the best financial aid package.

April

Decision time

After deciding where you'd like to go, make sure to stay on top of communications from your school. Deposits, forms, and housing apps are all due prior to leaving in the fall.

May

Make a budget

Talk with your parents to figure out how much you'll expect to earn and pay while at school. Having a budget will start you on the journey toward financial responsibility.

Summer

Final to-do items

This is the time to attend orientation, register for your classes, and make sure the tuition bill is paid. It's also the time to have fun!

FAFSA is a registered service mark of U.S. Department of Education, Federal Student Aid.

© 2025 Sallie Mae Bank. Sallie Mae, the Sallie Mae logo, and other Sallie Mae names and logos are service marks or registered service marks of Sallie Mae Bank. All other names and logos used are the trademarks or service marks of their respective owners. SLM Corporation and its subsidiaries, including Sallie Mae Bank, are not sponsored by or agencies of the United States of America. W768700 0925