

# About.com

## College Admissions

### 10th Grade

Your college applications are still a couple years off when you start 10th grade, but you need to keep your long-term goals in mind. Work on keeping your grades up, taking challenging courses, and gaining depth in your extracurricular activities.

Below are ten things to think about in 10th grade:

#### 1. Continue to Take Challenging Courses

An "A" in AP Biology is more impressive than an "A" in gym or shop. Your success in challenging academic courses provides the college admissions folks with the best evidence of your ability to succeed in college. In fact, many admissions officers will strip out your less meaningful grades when they calculate your high school GPA.

#### 2. Grades, Grades, Grades

Throughout high school, nothing matters more than your academic record. If you're aiming for a highly selective college, every low grade you earn might be limiting your options (but don't panic -- students with the occasional "C" still have plenty of options). Work on self-discipline and time management in an effort to earn the highest grades possible.

#### 3. Put Effort Into Extracurricular Activities

By the time you apply to colleges, you should be able to demonstrate depth and leadership in an extracurricular area. Colleges will be more impressed with the applicant who played first-chair clarinet in the All-State Band than the applicant who took a year of music, a year of dance, three months of chess club and a weekend volunteering at a soup kitchen. Think about what it is that you'll bring to a college community. A long but shallow list of extracurricular involvement really doesn't amount to anything meaningful.

#### 4. Continue Studying a Foreign Language

Colleges will be much more impressed by students who can read *Madame Bovary* in French than those who have a shallow smattering of "bonjours" and "mercis." Depth in a single language is a better choice than introductory courses to two or three languages. Be sure to read more about [college admissions language requirements](#).

#### 5. Take a Trial Run of the PSAT

This is entirely optional, but if your school allows it, you should consider taking the PSAT in October of 10th grade. The consequences of doing poorly are zero, and the practice can help you figure out what type of preparation you need before PSAT and SAT time in your junior and senior years. The PSAT won't be part of your college application, but be sure to read [why the PSAT matters](#). If you're planning on the ACT instead of the SAT, ask your school about taking the PLAN.

#### **6. Take SAT II and AP Exams as Appropriate**

You're more likely to take these exams in your junior and senior years, but more and more students are taking them earlier, especially as high schools increase their AP offerings. It's worth studying for these exams -- many colleges require a couple SAT II scores, and a 4 or 5 on an AP exam can earn you course credit and give you more options in college.

#### **7. Familiarize Yourself with the Common Application**

Look over [the common application](#) so that you know exactly what information you're going to need when you apply to colleges. You don't want senior year to roll around and only then discover that you have gaping holes in your high school record.

#### **8. Visit Colleges and Browse the Web**

Your sophomore year is a good time to do some low-pressure exploration of the college options out there. If you find yourself near a campus, stop by and take the tour. If you have more than an hour, follow these [college visit tips](#) to get the most out of your time on campus. Also, lots of schools offer informative virtual tours on their websites. This preliminary research will help you make good decisions in your junior and senior years.

#### **9. Keep Reading**

This is good advice for any grade. The more you read, the stronger your verbal, writing and critical thinking abilities will be. Reading beyond your homework will help you do well in school, on the ACT and SAT, and in college. You'll be improving your vocabulary, training your ear to recognize strong language, and introducing yourself to new ideas.

#### **10. Have a Summer Plan**

There's no formula for what defines a productive summer, but you should make sure you do something that leads to personal growth and valuable experiences. The options are many: volunteer work, a summer music program at a local college, a bike tour down the West Coast, apprenticing with a local politician, living with a host family abroad, working in the family business... Whatever your passions and interests, try to plan your summer to tap into them.