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College Admissions

11th Grade

In 11th grade, the college preparation process accelerates and you need to start paying careful attention to looming deadlines and application requirements. Realize that in 11th grade you don't need to choose exactly where to apply yet, but you do need to have a plan mapped out for achieving your broad educational goals.

The 10 items in the list below will help you keep track of what's important for college admissions in your junior year.

1. In October, Take the PSAT

Colleges won't see your PSAT scores, but a good score on the exam can translate into thousands of dollars. Also, the exam will give you a good sense of your preparedness for the SAT. Take a look at some [college profiles](#) and see if your PSAT scores are in line with the SAT ranges listed for the schools you like. If not, you still have plenty of time to improve your test-taking skills. Be sure to read more about [why the PSAT matters](#). Even students who don't plan on taking the SAT should take the PSAT because of the scholarship opportunities it creates.

2. Take Advantage of AP and Other Upper-Level Course Offerings

No piece of your college application carries more weight than your academic record. If you can take AP courses in 11th grade, do so. If you can take a course at a local college, do so. If you can study a subject in greater depth than what's required, do so. Your success in upper-level and college-level courses is a clear indicator that you have the skills to succeed in college.

3. Keep Your Grades Up

11th grade is probably your most important year for earning high grades in challenging courses. If you had a few marginal grades in 9th or 10th grade, improvement in 11th grade shows a college that you've learned how to be a good student. Many of your senior year grades come too late to play a big role on your application, so junior year is essential. A drop in your grades in 11th grade shows a move in the wrong direction, and it will raise red flags for the college admissions folks.

4. Keep Going With a Foreign Language

If you find language study frustrating or difficult, it's tempting to give up on it and shop around for other classes. Don't. Not only will mastery of a language serve you well in your life, but it will also impress the college admissions folks and open up more options for you when you eventually get to college. Be sure to read more about [language requirements for college applicants](#).

5. Assume a Leadership Role in an Extracurricular Activity

Colleges like to see that you're a band section leader, a team captain or an event organizer. Realize that you don't need to be a prodigy to be a leader -- a second-string football player or third-chair trumpet player can be a leader in fundraising or community outreach. Think about ways that you can contribute to your organization or community. Colleges are looking for future leaders, not passive bystanders.

6. In the Spring, take the SAT and/or ACT

Keep track of [SAT registration deadlines and test dates](#) (and [ACT dates](#)). While not essential, it's a good idea to take the SAT or ACT in your junior year. If you don't get [good scores](#), you can spend some time in the summer building your skills before retaking the exam in the fall. Colleges consider only your highest scores.

7. Visit Colleges and Browse the Web

By the summer of your junior year, you want to begin hammering out the list of colleges to which you'll apply. Take advantage of every opportunity to [visit a college campus](#). Browse the web to learn more about different types of colleges. Read through the brochures you receive in the spring after taking the PSAT. Try to figure out if your personality is better suited for a [small college or large university](#).

8. In the Spring, Meet with Your Counselor and Draft a College List

Once you have some junior year grades and your PSAT scores, you'll be able to start predicting which colleges and universities will be [reach schools](#), [match schools](#) and [safety schools](#). Look over the [college profiles](#) to see average acceptance rates and SAT/ACT score ranges. For now, a list of 15 or 20 schools is a good starting point. You'll want to [narrow down the list](#) before you begin applying in senior year. Meet with your guidance counselor to get feedback and suggestions on your list.

9. Take SAT II and AP Exams as Appropriate

If you can take AP exams in your junior year, they can be a huge plus on your college application. Any 4s and 5s you earn show you are truly ready for college. Senior year APs are great for earning college credits, but they come too late to show up on your college application. Also, a lot of the more competitive colleges require a couple SAT II subject tests. Take these soon after your coursework so that the material is fresh in your mind.

10. Make the Most of Your Summer

You'll want to [visit colleges](#) in the summer, but don't make that your entire summer plan (for one, it's not something that you can put on your college applications). Whatever your interests and passions, try to do something rewarding that taps into them. A well-spent junior summer can take many forms - employment, volunteer work, travel, summer programs at colleges, sports or music camp... If your summer plans introduce you to new experiences and make you challenge yourself, you've planned well.