



The College Application Process and Timeline

Begin by determining what you want from college, and which colleges will provide that to you. This will allow you to select the best places to apply. You should have a range of schools on your list. Some that you are almost certain to get into, some you have a good chance of getting into, and one or two where you have a slim (but reasonable) chance of getting in.

You can start building your college list as early as you want, but the earlier you begin, the more time you will have, and the less you will have to cram and rush as deadlines draw near.

IMPORTANT NOTE

The Common App refreshes each year at the end of July, so don't bother adding schools before then. That doesn't mean you have to wait until August to begin working on your application though!

You do not need to have a finalized college list as soon as the Common App opens, but you should start inputting your information early, so you aren't scrambling to do it all at the deadline.

IMPORTANT NOTE

If you are on free or reduced lunch, you qualify for fee waivers when submitting your applications to colleges. Speak with your counselor about confirming this status with your applications.

The Process



You should finish filling out the main information sections of the Common App before you begin filling out school-specific information. Pay careful attention to the Activities section. Schools place a lot of weight on what you've done outside the classroom, and this is the best place to show that off.



You can begin writing your personal statement at the end of your junior year, over the summer, or in the fall of your senior year. Whenever you begin writing, make sure to set aside time editing, both by yourself, and with help (including a teacher or school counselor). The personal statement is the single piece of writing which goes out to every school, so it should be the most polished one you can create.



Some schools will require additional essays from you. These are called supplementals, and you should only focus on them once you have finished your personal statement. Some colleges won't require any, while some may have four new essays for you.



Some students take Standardized Tests at the end of their junior year, others in the fall of their senior year. Both approaches are valid, but if you want to take the tests multiple times to get the best possible scores, you should start taking them sooner rather than later.



You will need letters of recommendation, from two teachers and your counselor. You should request these near the beginning of your senior year. Requesting these letters at the last minute is disrespectful of your teacher's time, and may result in a refusal, depending how many students have already requested recommendation letters from the same teacher.



Timeline

The process above is our suggested order of operations. When you should start and finish these tasks depends on when you want to submit applications. Regardless of which timeline you use, you should keep a clear calendar, and have a solid plan for which tasks will be finished when.

Applications may be submitted early, around the beginning of November. This is called Early Action or Early Decision. Early Action just lets you submit your application earlier, and hear back earlier as well. Early Decision binds you to attend the school if they admit you, but also gives you a boost in admissions chances. You are only allowed to apply to one school Early Decision.

If you decide to apply early, even to some schools, you can reduce the amount of work you are doing at any time, in return for starting earlier, and possibly working on admissions materials for longer. Applying regular decision gives you more time to prepare, but also more time to wait to hear back.

In either case, you should begin thinking about college applications by the end of your Junior year, and begin working on them by the beginning of your senior year.

