

Grade-by-Grade Checklist

College admissions has never been more complicated or more personal. This checklist offers a high-level look at what to focus on each year of high school. It's meant as a starting point, not an exhaustive plan. Remember, every student's path and priorities look a little different. We are always happy to talk through yours.

Foundation

9th Grade

- ☐ Meet with a college advisor to build a four-year academic plan
- ☐ Focus on your grades to build a strong cumulative GPA early
- ☐ Choose a course load that challenges without overwhelming
- ☐ Try new extracurricular activities — depth matters more than breadth later
- ☐ Start building strong study habits and an organizational system
- ☐ Begin light, low-pressure conversations about college and career interests
- ☐ Talk as a family about the general cost of college

Momentum

10th Grade

- ☐ Keep your grades high (by the end of this year, half your high school record is set)
- ☐ Take on more rigorous coursework (honors, AP, or dual-credit where appropriate)
- ☐ Take the PSAT or PreACT if your school offers it
- ☐ Deepen involvement and seek early leadership roles in activities you love
- ☐ Start a running list of colleges that interest you for any reason at all
- ☐ Attend local college fairs to see what different schools offer
- ☐ Research the SAT vs. ACT and start light test-prep planning
- ☐ Begin building an activity resume of awards, sports, clubs, and volunteer work

If you would like personalized guidance and support through the process, reach out!
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Exploration

11th Grade

- ☐ Arguably the most important academic year, keep your grades high and take strive for rigorous courses
- ☐ Take the SAT and/or ACT, with a retake plan if needed
- ☐ Think about what is more important to you in a school (size, location, culture, cost, majors, etc.)
- ☐ Build a preliminary list of 10-15 schools (a mix of reach, target, and likely)
- ☐ Start visiting campuses
- ☐ Attending financial aid information nights
- ☐ Meet with college representatives if they visit your school
- ☐ Review early application deadlines (Early Decision/Early Action)
- ☐ Create your personal “brag sheet” to help teachers write great recommendation letters
- ☐ Ask one or two core-class teachers for recommendation letters (towards the end of the year)
- ☐ Brainstorm personal statement topics, with the goal to draft this over the summer
- ☐ Research financial aid and scholarship options for your list
- ☐ Setup your Common App account (and others if needed)

Momentum

10th Grade

- ☐ Finalize your college list and application strategy (ED/EA/RD)
- ☐ Submit the FAFSA (and CSS Profile, if required) as soon as it opens
- ☐ Finalize your personal statement and all required supplements
- ☐ Complete your activities list carefully, prioritizing based on interest and including leadership
- ☐ Follow up on missing recommendation letters
- ☐ Submit grades/transcripts
- ☐ Request test scores
- ☐ Track every deadline across every application
- ☐ Finalize the Common App with a few weeks to spare
- ☐ Search and apply for outside scholarships
- ☐ Request final transcripts and test scores
- ☐ Compare financial aid offers carefully before committing
- ☐ Consider visiting your top 1-2 schools one more time
- ☐ Commit to your school and submit your enrollment deposit by decision day