



Rising Senior College Application Checklist

With SAT & ACT Timeline | Class of 2027 | May – November 2026

Every step, in order. Nothing left to chance.

How to Use This Checklist

Work through each section month by month and check off tasks as you complete them. Items marked ⚠️ are time-sensitive — treat them as firm. All SAT dates are sourced from College Board; ACT dates from ACT.org. Verify individual school deadlines directly with each institution.

MAY 2026 — Build Your Foundation

COLLEGE LIST

- ☐ Finalize your college list — *aim for 6–10 schools across reach, target, and likely tiers*
- ☐ Research application requirements and deadlines for each school — *Common App, Coalition App, or school-specific portal*
- ☐ Note each school's EA, ED, and RD deadlines in a tracking spreadsheet
- ☐ Decide: test-optional or test-submission for each school on your list — *policies vary by school; check each admissions page individually*
- ☐ Plan campus visits or virtual tours for your top schools

RECOMMENDATION LETTERS

- ☐ Identify 2–3 teachers to request letters from — *ideally junior year teachers who know you well*
- ☐ Ask recommenders in person — *early, before summer begins*
- ☐ Provide each recommender a resume or activity summary
- ☐ Confirm your school counselor's process for the counselor recommendation
- ☐ Confirm your high school's internal deadline for recommendation requests and submissions

TESTING

- ☐ Note: June ACT registration deadline is approaching — *register at act.org; June ACT test date is mid-June*
- ☐ Review PSAT scores and identify target score gaps
- ☐ Register for the June and/or August SAT or the July ACT if a summer test is part of your plan

ESSAYS

- ☐ Begin brainstorming your Common App personal statement — *what story is only yours to tell? Start with a list of moments.*



ACCOUNTS & ACCESS

- ❑ **Create your Common App account at commonapp.org — *the 2026–2027 app opens August 1 — account can be set up now***
- ❑ Create or verify your College Board account
- ❑ Create or verify your ACT account at act.org

JUNE 2026 — Start the Core Application

PERSONAL STATEMENT

- ❑ Read all 7 Common App essay prompts at commonapp.org/apply/essay-prompts
- ❑ Choose your essay topic and write a full first draft — *250–650 words; focus on authenticity, not impressiveness*
- ❑ Read draft aloud and get feedback from a trusted reader

ACTIVITIES LIST

- ❑ Draft your 10 Common App activities in order of importance
- ❑ Write 150-character activity descriptions — *specific, action-verb-driven, quantified where possible*
- ❑ Account for summer experiences, jobs, and informal leadership

RESEARCH

- ❑ Research supplemental essay prompts for your top schools — *prompts often change year to year — check the current cycle*
- ❑ Organize all application materials, login info, and deadlines in one place

TESTING

- ❑ Take the June SAT (June 6) if registered
- ❑ Take the mid-June (June 13) ACT if registered
- ❑ Register for the August 22 SAT or July 11 ACT if a summer test is your plan

⚠ SAT dates: Aug 22, Sep 12, Oct 3, Nov 7, Dec 5. ACT dates: July 11, September 19, October 17, and December 12. Plan test dates around EA/ED deadlines.

FINANCIAL AID PREPARATION

- ❑ **Begin FAFSA preparation — gather tax documents and parent financial information**
- ⚠ The 2027–2028 FAFSA (your college year) opens October 1, 2026 — file as early as possible for maximum aid consideration
- ❑ Research merit scholarship requirements at your target schools



JULY 2026 — Build & Refine

ESSAYS

- Revise personal statement based on feedback — *second and third drafts are almost always significantly stronger*
- Read final personal statement draft aloud — it should sound like YOU
- Begin drafting supplemental essays for EA/ED schools — *"Why this school?" essays require specific, researched answers*

ACTIVITIES & RECOMMENDERS

- Finalize your activities list and confirm all descriptions are accurate
- Follow up with recommenders and provide a brag sheet — *a 1-page summary of your achievements, activities, and goals*

TESTING

- Take the July 11 ACT if registered
- Decide: Will you take the August 22 SAT or the September 12 ACT as your final attempt? — *factor in score release timing relative to your EA/ED deadlines*
- Complete at least one full-length Digital SAT practice test in the Bluebook app
- Review each school's score reporting policy (superscore vs. all scores required)

APPLICATION SETUP

- Preview the Common App platform and familiarize yourself with each section
- Begin filling in Common App profile sections: demographics, academics, family

FINANCIAL AID

- Research each school's net price calculator — *available on every school's financial aid website*
- Note institutional aid deadlines — often earlier than the application deadline

AUGUST 2026 — The Common App Opens

August 1: Common App opens for the 2026–2027 cycle.

 **Source: commonapp.org. The application resets every August 1 for the new cycle.**

COMMON APP COMPLETION

- Complete all Common App profile sections — *education, testing, activities, family, demographics*
- Upload or finalize your personal statement in the Writing section
- Enter all application details and add target schools to "My Colleges"



-
- Review school-specific questions for each school added
 - Continue drafting and refining supplemental essays

RECOMMENDATION LETTERS

- Formally request letters through the Common App system — *invites are sent electronically through the platform*
- Confirm recommenders received their invites and note any school deadlines they need
- Confirm your high school's internal deadline for recommendation requests and submissions

TESTING

- Take the August 22 SAT — *key test before EA/ED deadlines; scores release ~September 4*
- Register for the October 3 SAT or the September 19 ACT if you need one more attempt
- Request official SAT score reports to be sent to your schools — *College Board recommends requesting at least one month before deadlines*

⚠ August SAT is the strongest "last reliable chance" for EA/ED applicants. Scores release before November 1 deadlines with time to spare.

FINANCIAL AID

- **2027–2028 FAFSA (for your college year) opens October 1, 2026 — file as early as possible after it opens**

SEPTEMBER 2026 — Early Application Prep

SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAYS

- Complete and revise all supplemental essays for EA/ED schools
- Confirm word limits and prompt requirements for each school — *prompts can change year to year*
- Have a fresh reader review each supplemental essay

APPLICATION REVIEW

- Do a complete read-through of every application component
- Proofread all essays — grammar, spelling, punctuation
- Confirm GPA, honors, and academic details are accurately reported
- Verify testing section: confirm all scores are listed or opted out

MATERIALS CONFIRMATION

- Send official test scores to all EA/ED schools if required
- Confirm counselor recommendations are in progress
- Request official transcripts through your high school if required



-
- Confirm all teacher recommendations are on track

TESTING

- Take the September 12 SAT if registered — *scores release approximately September 25*
- Take the September 19 ACT if registered
- Decide: Do you need a final test in October? — *only retake if you have a clear improvement plan, and the score will arrive before your deadline*

⚠ For November 1 EA/ED deadlines: Sep 12 SAT (scores ~Sep 25) and Oct 3 SAT (scores ~Oct 16) are your last reliable options.

FINANCIAL AID

- Note each EA/ED school's financial aid submission deadline
-

OCTOBER 2026 — Submit Early Applications

November 1 is the most common EA/ED deadline. Submit at least 5–7 days early.

FINAL PRE-SUBMISSION REVIEW

- Complete read-through of every EA/ED application component
- Confirm all recommenders have submitted their letters — *Common App shows submission status in your dashboard*
- Confirm counselor has completed the school report and transcript upload
- Submit test scores officially to all EA/ED schools if required

SUBMITTING EARLY APPLICATIONS

- Submit all EA/ED applications before the deadline — *do not wait until the night of — technical issues are real*
- Screenshot or save confirmation emails for every submission
- Note each school's applicant portal login to track application status

⚠ Early Decision is binding — only apply ED to your clear first-choice school. Early Action is non-binding.

TESTING

- Take the October 3 SAT if registered — *scores release approximately October 16*
- Take the October 17 ACT if registered — *check act.org for exact date and score release timeline*
- Confirm all needed score reports have been officially sent

REGULAR DECISION PREPARATION

- Continue refining and completing RD supplemental essays
 - Finalize your full RD application list and deadlines
-



FINANCIAL AID

- **Complete 2027–2028 FAFSA at studentaid.gov — opens October 1, 2026 — file as early as possible; many states award aid first-come, first-served**

⚠ Source: studentaid.gov. The 2027–2028 cycle (covering your freshman year) opens October 1, 2026.

NOVEMBER 2026 — Final Push

EARLY DEADLINE SUBMISSIONS

- Submit all remaining November 1 and November 15 EA/ED applications
- Log into each school's portal to confirm the application is complete
- Check for any requests for additional materials from schools
- If deferred from EA: review the school's deferral policy and submit any allowed updates (grades, achievements, continued interest)

REGULAR DECISION APPLICATIONS

- Finalize all RD supplemental essays with full review and revision
- Submit applications to all RD schools before their deadlines — *most RD deadlines: January 1 or January 15, 2027*
- Confirm each RD school has received all required materials

TESTING

- Take the November 7 SAT if registered — *scores release approximately November 20; acceptable for most RD deadlines*

⚠ November SAT is generally your last practical option for Regular Decision applications with January deadlines.

PORTALS & COMMUNICATION

- Monitor all school application portals for status updates and missing items
- Monitor email — schools may request additional materials or clarification
- Respond promptly to any outreach from admissions offices

SCHOLARSHIPS

- ⚠ Many competitive scholarships have fall deadlines (Oct–Dec). Start early.
- Research and apply for external scholarships with fall deadlines — *fastweb.com, scholarships.com, and your state scholarship database*
- Check for local scholarships through your high school counseling office
- Note scholarships tied to your intended major, heritage, or community



FINANCIAL AID

- Verify each school has received your FAFSA Student Aid Report
- Confirm institutional aid deadlines for all RD schools

SENIOR YEAR ACADEMICS

- Maintain strong grades — colleges may request mid-year transcripts
- Avoid senioritis — admission can be rescinded for significant grade drops

★ **Celebrate your progress. You did the work.**

Testing Strategy

Aim for 1–2 final test attempts maximum. More attempts without a clear improvement plan rarely help and add stress.

BEST LAST-CHANCE TEST DATES

For Early Action / Early Decision (Nov 1 deadline):

- August 22 SAT — *scores release ~September 4 — strongest option*
- September 12 SAT — *scores release ~September 25*
- September 19 ACT — *check act.org for exact score release date*
- October 3 SAT — *scores release ~October 16 — workable but less buffer*

For Regular Decision (Jan 1–15 deadline):

- October 3 SAT or October 17 ACT — *safest option for RD deadlines*
- November 7 SAT — *scores release ~November 20 — generally accepted for January deadlines*
- December 5 SAT — *scores release ~December 18 — very tight for January 1 deadlines; verify with each school*

Only retake if:

- You have a targeted study plan for the specific areas costing you points
- Your goal score is realistically achievable with the prep time available
- The score release date arrives before your application deadline

⚠ **Source: satsuite.collegeboard.org (SAT dates), act.org (ACT dates). Score release timelines are approximate based on College Board's published guidelines.**



Need support at any step?

Scholar's Edge offers individualized college application coaching for rising seniors — from personal statement strategy through final submission. Our 4-Day College Application Bootcamp (June 2026) is designed to get students through personal statement drafting, activity descriptions, and school list strategy in one focused, small-group experience. Five students maximum per group.

scholarsedge.co | admin@scholarsedge.co | 682-235-9465

Disclaimer: Dates and requirements may change. Students should confirm all testing dates, financial aid deadlines, and application requirements directly with each institution and official sources (collegeboard.org, act.org, studentaid.gov).