

10 WAYS TO JUMPSTART COLLEGE PLANNING

It's easy to get overwhelmed when thinking about college. You need to figure out ways to make yourself a more desirable college applicant, study effectively for those standardized tests looming in the near future and come up with an action plan that will determine where you'll be applying to, and how you'll pay for it. If you've only just begun your high school career, don't waste a great opportunity to start taking the steps now to jumpstart college planning. It's never too early to consider the classes that will look good on the transcripts you'll be sending as a prospective applicant, for example, or making sure your academic record looks as good as it can. With enrollments increasing at many of the top schools, college is only becoming more competitive, and it'll serve you well to start thinking about where you see yourself after your high school graduation early. If you're approaching the end of your high school career, it's still not too late to improve how you'll come across on that college application and get ready for a busy year of big decisions.

Check out our 10 ways to jumpstart college planning below to help you feel a little less stressed about what you need to do before applying – and getting into – college, and browse through our site for helpful information and tips on every step of the college and financial aid application process.

1. Get Involved

Getting ready for college isn't all work. Find something you really like doing, then dive into it. Maybe you're drawn to sports, student council, music, art ... you get the picture. You'll develop skills and be more appealing to colleges (they like students who'll add something to campus life).

2. Do the Work

If you expect to go to college later, expect to study now. No one can do it for you. Don't talk the college talk – "I'll go to college to get a great career" – without walking the walk

3. Take Challenging Courses

Colleges look at your grades, sure, but also at how difficult your courses are. They want to see that you've challenged yourself. Plus, if you pursue advanced courses, such as [AP®](#), you may be able to get college credit.

4. Get Help

Having trouble in a class? Many schools have peer tutors, students in upper grades who'll help you (for free). Talk to teachers or counselors – let them know you want extra help.

5. Read

Read at least 30 minutes every day, beyond study and homework. Read what interests you – magazines, novels, whatever. People who read more know more. And when you take PSAT/NMSQT™, [ACT](#), and [SAT®](#) tests, knowing more will really pay off.

6. Don't Delay

You take the PSAT/NMSQT or ACT as a junior (or even as a sophomore). So you have a few semesters before then to take the solid math and other courses that get you ready.

7. Get the College-Bound Facts

How do you know all the right moves to get into college? Ask someone who's done it. Get to know your counselors. Ask a career planner at a local college, or a trusted teacher. Do Web research.

8. Involve Your Family

When parents or guardians haven't been to college themselves, they may think they can't help you. That's not true. They can talk to counselors and help you stay on the right path.

9. Look For a Mentor

If you don't find support at home, look for other adults who can lend their enthusiasm and help make sure you succeed. You might look to a counselor, a teacher, or someone else you trust.

10. Confront Personal Roadblocks

If you have a problem that's really getting in the way of schoolwork, try to sort it out. Talking to friends helps. Or look for an adult – parent, coach, nurse, counselor – who can offer advice.
