



KAPMAP

**THINKING ABOUT THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS
PROCESS AND WONDERING WHERE TO START?**

This comprehensive, month-by-month guide will help you successfully navigate this exciting time with confidence.

FRESHMAN YEAR

Build a strong foundation. Work to the best of your ability—this year counts!



AUGUST

Put your e-reader to good use—or pick up a book!

Mysteries, best sellers, biographies... your choice. Reading will help you across all academic subjects. Plus, it improves vocab and writing skills.



OCTOBER

Create a LinkedIn profile. [LinkedIn is now the high school hotspot](#) for keeping track of your accomplishments. Volunteered for the coat drive? Add it to your profile. Won a math award? Congrats! Add every little highlight. This is your resume-in-the-making.



DECEMBER

It's time for your first high school midterms. These tests matter, and they'll help you develop sharp study skills throughout high school and beyond. Start out strong, and stay a step ahead.



FEBRUARY

Learn about the different course levels your school offers. What's the difference between honors and AP courses, AP and IB? How are they weighted when calculating GPA? Think about next year's schedule and how you can build a solid transcript while still keeping time for the things you enjoy.



APRIL

Get to know your teachers—you might take courses with some of them again in the future. Participate in class, ask thoughtful questions about the assignments, and find out what you need to know for final exams—they're right around the corner! The more you play an active role, the easier it will become to contribute.



JUNE

Update your LinkedIn profile and jot down a few notes about freshman year. What went well? What could have gone better? Think back on which tactics—flash cards? study groups? drills?—worked best for you. Really focus on your time management skills; you'll thank yourself later.

JULY

What does your web presence look like? Google yourself, adjust your social privacy settings, and delete anything that could be considered inappropriate. Why? A 2014 Kaplan Test Prep survey found that 35% of college admissions officers browse social media to learn more about applicants. Always [project your best self when you're online](#).



SEPTEMBER

Get involved in activities. Love athletics? Dive into the swim team. Globally minded? Spanish Club could be perfect. Shutterbug? Click your way onto yearbook. Extracurriculars are great for your social life, time management, and college applications.



NOVEMBER

Start talking money. How do you and your family plan to pay for college? Are you all on the same page? Start the conversation now by using the Federal Student Aid Calculator to estimate your eligibility for aid.



JANUARY

Do a New Year's self-assessment. How did you do last term, and in which areas would you like to improve? If needed, figure out how you can reallocate your time or get extra help. Consider one-on-one instruction or a study group.



MARCH

Set aside an afternoon to visit your guidance counselors. Introduce yourself, talk about next year's classes, and see what they recommend for standardized test dates. Will you be taking the PSAT/NMSQT® in the fall? Data shows that students who take the PSAT score higher on the SAT® than those who don't. Start building your confidence by learning more about the test, time management, and [PSAT prep options](#).



MAY

Start thinking about college life—where you might want to go and what you might want to study. Talk to seniors about where they're headed and what they're excited about. [Follow colleges on social media](#) and browse their websites. Visit a nearby campus for a sporting event, play, or even a walk around the commons.



SOPHOMORE YEAR

Make your mark. Do your best academically, get to know your teachers, and explore where your extracurricular interests and strengths lie.



AUGUST

Find an online calendar that works for you and sync it with your mobile devices. It's a terrific tool that will help you develop smart habits and stay a step ahead. What's your weekly work schedule? Any athletic events coming up? What about [PSAT registration](#)? [PSAT prep](#)? Add mobile notifications to stay on the ball, and look out for patterns in your schedule to help you plan for sophomore year.



OCTOBER

Taking the PSAT this year? Check in with your guidance counselor early in the month about registration and fees. Brush up on your PSAT prep by reviewing test questions. On PSAT Test Day, show up well rested with all your materials in hand.



DECEMBER

Most schools use an online platform for helping their students apply to college. What does your school use? Find out from your guidance counselor, and then explore this resource on your own. Become familiar with the steps involved, and read some facts and figures that might help you make important decisions, like what you want to study and where you want to go.



FEBRUARY

Look into taking some AP and IB courses. They may be more rigorous, but they can yield higher, weighted GPAs that look great on applications. Also, some colleges waive intro courses in certain subjects for strong performance in more challenging classes. Each college is different—look into your favorites to see how they handle these credits.



APRIL

Stay on top of those extracurriculars. Consider running for a leadership role in one or more of them for next year. It will broaden your horizons and look great on your LinkedIn profile. Now is also the ideal time to secure a summer job or look into an immersion program.



JUNE

Ready to be an upperclassman? Touch base with your counselor about next year's goals and [which standardized tests](#) will be best for you based on your desired colleges and areas of interest. Consider a summer prep course for the junior year PSAT, which can qualify you for National Merit scholarships. Create a spreadsheet of your top-choice schools so you can compare location, acceptance requirements, size, program strengths, and more.

JULY

Make this summer count, but keep some time for yourself—a great exercise in time management. Just as you got involved at school, [try part-time volunteer work](#). Call assisted living centers, hospitals, vet clinics, and nonprofits to learn about opportunities. Once you make a commitment, stick with it.



SEPTEMBER

You've tested the waters; now dive into those clubs. Which activities did you really get into, and which might you prefer to drop? Maybe there's even something new you'd like to try? You can't do everything, so think quality over quantity, personal reward over resume-builder.



NOVEMBER

Continue to develop your study skills in fun new ways. For example, what's your learning style? [Your study style](#)? Take online assessments and quizzes to find out your strengths, and see if the results surprise you. Think about this while planning out your courses for next term, junior year, and beyond.



JANUARY

Your PSAT results are in! How did you do? You have plenty of time to focus on areas of improvement before you take the SAT or ACT®. Look into [test prep options](#) to find out which method of study—an online course, an in-person course, or one-on-one instruction—will work best with your learning style. If time during the school year is tight, opt for a summer course.



MARCH

Excelling in a particular subject or honors course? Check with your guidance counselor to see if [SAT Subject Tests](#) are right for you. These hour-long standardized exams are encouraged or required by some colleges to show your areas of interest and where you really excel. Register early and give yourself lots of time to prep.



MAY

Poke around online for [scholarship info](#). There are all kinds of opportunities. Many are need-based, while others reward excellence in academics, the arts, athletics, community service, and more. Find out things you can do—enter a writing contest, volunteer at a charitable event—to improve your chances.



JUNIOR YEAR

Proceed with purpose. Stay on top of academics and testing while exploring colleges that match your goals and abilities.



AUGUST

Plan out your junior year on your online calendar. Which exams will you take, and when? Include standardized test dates (don't forget AP and IB exams), test prep, extracurricular commitments, athletic events, and your volunteer and work schedule. Have the schedule ready to go over with your guidance counselor when school starts up.



OCTOBER

Get ready for the first administration of the new PSAT. Remember that your junior year PSAT score can qualify you for National Merit recognition, which opens the door to many scholarships. Register, do your last minute prep, [take a practice test](#), and show up feeling confident. You've got this. While your mind is on testing, now's the time to [register](#) for your SAT, ACT ([either or both](#)), and SAT Subject Tests. Sign up early; testing centers can fill up!



DECEMBER

Check your high school course load, and take inventory of college prerequisites—particularly when it comes to foreign language and science. Are you on track to fit everything in? Any opportunities to introduce an AP or IB course to help boost your GPA? Your current teachers and guidance counselor should be great resources for helping you plan.



FEBRUARY

Visit eight to ten colleges between now and September. Schools offer [info sessions and campus tours](#) designed for this purpose. While summer is also a convenient time, planning visits in the winter and spring will let you see schools in session. It's a great time to connect with current students, ask questions, and explore with an open mind. While you're checking things off, when is the last time you [updated your LinkedIn profile](#)? Have you signed up for AP/IB exams and SAT Subject Tests?



APRIL

Ask teachers to write your letters of recommendation. Don't just choose your favorites, but consider who knows you best. Since they will have other letters to write, [secure commitments now](#). Make the job as easy as possible for them, providing transcripts from high school and any college courses you might have taken. Turn your LinkedIn profile into a resume you can hand over. Being prepared will make the whole process—and the request itself—easier.



JUNE

Take stock of your college expenses. In addition to tuition and room and board, there are books, travel, and leisure. Understand the [types of aid available](#). Review your test results with your guidance counselor. Did you hit your target score? Congrats! If not, you can take them again. Which prep will be best for your second go: an online course, an in-person course, one-on-one instruction, or even an intensive summer program? Fall will be busy; [sign up now](#).

JULY

Get serious about summer test prep now that you have more time. As the class of 2017, you have options. You can take the [current SAT](#), [the new SAT](#), or [the ACT](#). Want an easy place to start? Take [free practice tests](#) for these exams, or for the PSAT. They will familiarize you with the question types, formats, and time limits of the exams.



SEPTEMBER

Distinguish yourself in one of your clubs. Not everyone can be team captain or class president, but there are many ways to set yourself apart. Editor-in-chief already taken? Focus on display ads. Someone else in line for stage manager? Develop a system for props and costumes. You can contribute—and learn—a lot behind the scenes. Update your LinkedIn profile with your new achievements.



NOVEMBER

Attend college fairs and meet reps from a range of schools. Be ready to extend your hand and introduce yourself—this is where networking starts! Feel free to ask some unconventional questions in addition to the standard ones about courses, admissions, and financial aid. For example, what are some school traditions? Can you design your own major? Are there sunny lawns and cozy coffee shops for studying? Decide what excites you about college life, and find out where to get it.



JANUARY

Revisit last June's list of top-choice colleges. Your PSAT scores should be in, so you and your counselor can figure out which programs best meet your credentials, interests, and other preferences. Aim high, and keep at least one safe bet in your back pocket. Based on your PSAT results, think about what will work best for your [SAT, ACT, and Subject Test Prep](#). If you plan to [take the redesigned SAT](#) in March 2016 or later, now's the time to get serious about it. It's a [new test](#) and you want to be ready.



MARCH

Test prep isn't your only priority. Now is also the time to learn the difference between early action and early decision. If you [plan to apply anywhere early](#), tighten your timeline for tests, essays, and more. Set up interviews through admissions offices—either on the school's campus or locally with alumni. [Do a mock interview](#) with a teacher or guidance counselor first. Send personalized thank you notes later that refer to specific points discussed. Restate how you would contribute to the school's community.



MAY

Brush up for May and June SAT and ACT tests. Take a few [free online practice exams](#) and determine where to focus your [last-minute prep](#). When it comes to studying, this is a big month for your classes, too. Finish junior year strong—these grades are the final record you'll have if applying anywhere for early admissions.



SENIOR YEAR

Your journey is just beginning! Be thoughtful in choosing a college that's the right fit for you.



AUGUST

Draft your college essay. Read the questions in your [application essays](#), think of meaningful experiences you've had, and then let your unique voice and individuality come through. Revisit your initial draft every week. Add, take away, tweak, or rewrite until you're satisfied. Have at least two people edit the essay—someone who knows you well and a professional editor.



OCTOBER

Check in on your recommendations. Do your teachers have everything they need from you? What about application deadlines? Are you tracking everything on your calendar? Fit in a local info session about [financial aid](#), and remind your parents to fill out their tax forms early next year so estimated info can be used on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).



DECEMBER

Finish your last-minute prep for your [final standardized test retakes](#), and complete those exams. While you're at it, wrap up any outstanding on-campus or alumni interviews you've set up. Will you be getting answers from your [early action, early decision, or rolling admission schools](#)? Adjust your remaining applications based on the news.



FEBRUARY

Start following up on the status of your applications. Most schools have password-protected portals where you can check your submissions. Make sure all materials have been received and all packages are complete. While you're following up, send sincere, handwritten thank you notes to the teachers who wrote your recommendations. Not only will they appreciate the gesture, but they deserve it!



APRIL

Decision time! Really think about this. What did you learn from interviews, current students, and college visits? Can you picture yourself at the campus coffee shop or dining hall? Are you ready to buy the sweatshirt? When you make your final decision, send in your acceptance and deposit. Inform the other schools that you will not be attending; you could be opening up a spot for someone else. Still a little more prep around the corner—[get ready for your AP exams!](#) You can earn extra college credits and skip some courses.



JUNE

Congratulations—you made it! Start preparing for college. Attend an orientation or join online class groups. Figure out bank accounts, health insurance, dorm needs, employment, and all the details that will come with starting college. Make a shopping list, and start to gather all the items you'll need for college life. Have fun with it! You can feel good about embarking upon your college experience.

JULY

Keep polishing your LinkedIn profile and resume with achievements in and out of the classroom. Your finished piece will be both a snapshot of your high school career and [one part of your college application](#). Taking or retaking the ACT or SAT? Be prepared—not just with your materials on Test Day, but with the process for submitting your scores. While you're at it, find out what system your high school uses for sending transcripts and get familiar with it.



SEPTEMBER

Establish your game plan for submitting applications. Now is the time to note which of your prospective schools use the [Common Application](#) and which don't. Applying anywhere early? Be positive, but don't ignore your other applications. Fall in love with more than one prospect.



NOVEMBER

Check in with your guidance counselor. Bring a list that addresses the following:

- Should you be retaking any standardized tests?
- Does your essay exceed expectations? If not, keep tweaking, or go in a different direction.
- Are your recommendations in? Follow up on any that are missing.
- Set a deadline for your regular admission application packet.
- Submit early applications on time! Most are due early November.



JANUARY

Keep those grades up. Do your prospective schools require mid-year transcripts? Will they be sent automatically, or do you need to follow up? Check with your guidance counselor. [Universities pay attention to these](#), so submit them on time. It's also time to [send in the FAFSA](#), as well as any other financial aid applications your schools require. The earlier you provide the info, the sooner you'll be considered for aid—and the more aid available.



MARCH

Decisions typically come out this month—some electronically and others by mail. Waiting can be tough, but be patient; it won't be long now. Remember that peers are also receiving news this month, so [keep public reactions to news measured and appropriate](#). If you're feeling down about not getting in somewhere you wanted, remember that it's just part of the process. This is why you select several schools where you'd be happy to go.



MAY

Waitlisted? Be patient. Decide how long you're willing to wait for a spot to open up before moving on to your next option. If you want to go for it, talk to your guidance counselor about how you can improve your application. Have you gotten higher test scores since applying? More volunteer experience? Explain your new situation to the school. One way to boost your status is to study for finals: this last batch of grades still count. Then, sit back and enjoy the last milestones of high school.

