

Family Checklist for Senior Year

A checklist to help every senior become a four-year college graduate, a two-year college graduate, or a certified tradesman or woman.

For All Students

- Keep those grades up:** Have a designated study area and remove all distractions (including your phone, Netflix, YouTube, Instagram, games, etc.) Use an academic planner to write down assignments and test dates. Your goal is zero late or missing assignments! Sit in the front row each class, if possible. Seek help from your teachers and attend review sessions at school or with friends.
- Evaluate your transcript.** Should you add classes in the trades? Is more rigor needed? Rigorous classes impress colleges and benefit ACT/SAT scores. Meet with your counselor regularly, an invaluable resource and mentor.
- Explore your interests and career opportunities:** Think about what interests you and then learn more about it. Locate job-shadowing opportunities. A day with an electrician or an accountant can change your life path. Have cost/benefit conversations about your choices. A pre-med major can attend *any* college (that offers science). An aspiring welder probably needs a two-year welding degree at a community college. Take this quick assessment: [future trades or college majors](#).
- Continue to participate in extracurriculars:** Join clubs, sports, debate, speech, theater, FBLA, etc. to foster engagement, friendships, and self-growth. Colleges (and employers) value deep interest and growth in extracurriculars. Quality matters more than quantity— focus your energy!
- Attend all parent-teacher conferences:** [Consider asking these questions](#).
- Develop independence and self-advocacy:** Go over scenarios about how to approach a teacher, coach, or mentor respectfully. Address adults independently (without parents) as much as possible. Read [this article](#) on the parents' role.

For the four-year and two-year college bound student

- Take [Dual Enrollment & AP Classes](#) if available: Earn college credit while in high school. Always take the May AP test for each AP class you take— a 4 or 5 on the AP test triggers college credit— which means less time to graduate from college.

- Plan and prepare for the coming year’s ACTs and/or SATs:

[Learn about the tests here.](#)

- Summer before Senior Year – take either test one or two times.
- Fall of Senior Year – take either test one or two times.

Take either test four times total and prepare hard each time. Jumping that score is the best-paying job a student can have!

- Narrow down your college choices:

1. Schedule [College Visits](#): If possible, schedule these while school is in session so that you can visit classes and experience the student life. However, [virtual tours](#) can suffice. Request a meeting with a professor from an academic department of interest and an athletic coach. Arrive prepared with informed questions.
2. Find your [“Best-Fit” College](#) – the right college at the right price.
3. Plan for your [Financial Safety School\(s\)](#) – at least one college that will fit the family budget.

- Market your extracurricular skill:** Email a note, with links to a resume and a 90-second video of you, showcasing that skill to coaches or directors at the colleges that interest you. Choose a college where you can pursue your extracurricular passion: a happy, engaged college student is more likely to graduate.

- Continue to add to your [Activities Resume](#): (A sample is in *OnToCollege’s Platinum Guide for College*– available in your counselor’s office.) Include academic successes and awards, club/athletic awards, leadership positions, and struggles (which often serve as solid application essay material). Track community service hours for future scholarship and college applications.

- Attend college planning events:** Watch your school communications for college nights, NCAA compliance events, workshops about financial aid, and college fairs.
- Research [community colleges](#):** For some students, a great option is an affordable two-year college degree (and then perhaps transferring to get the four-year degree.) Start community college that summer semester right after high school graduation.
- Discuss the cost of college and your resources.** Have the Money Talk with your parents, an honest conversation about what the family can contribute each year for college.
 1. Complete the [FAFSA](#) form, on or just after October 1 of senior year (and then each year through college). To maximize eventual need-based aid eligibility, have your parents consult now with a financial advisor with expertise in college finance.
 2. Ask your counselor where to find local and national scholarships. Ask a parent to [help you find and apply for scholarships](#).
 3. Remember that the student can contribute up to \$11,000 per year: [\\$11k Paves The Way](#) (maximum \$5500 loan each year, minimum earnings of \$3000 each summer, and the \$2500 annual American Opportunity Tax Credit.) Then, for spending money in college, you (the student) can work 5-10 hours per week on campus.
 4. If possible, contribute monthly to a [529 College Savings Plan](#).
- Learn about [early action](#), [early decision](#), and a gap year:** Talk with your counselor about this.
- Write your [application essays](#):** Late summer before senior year, write revealing, authentic, vulnerable application essays. A bland, superficial application essay can undo thirteen years of academic work, while a candid, fun, moving essay can vault you into contention for scholarships and admission. The essays matter more than ever. (Contact [OnToCollege](#) if you'd like personalized help.)
- Ask for [recommendation letters](#):** Choose which teachers to ask for a recommendation for admissions and scholarship applications—usually one from English or Social Studies and one from Science or Math. Select teachers from your junior or senior year. Ask them early senior year at the latest!

- **Prepare for your freshman year of college:**
 1. Learn how to decipher and compare your [financial aid offers](#).
 2. Submit enrollment paperwork and your deposit to your college of choice.
 3. Make the most of your college experience:
 - Graduate on time and borrow at most \$5,500 each year. \$22,000 can be paid off by age 31 for about \$250 a month.
 - Choose small classes and great teachers. Find the best professors and sit in the front row every class.
 - Attend office hours each week. Visit weekly with your professors to find your mentors.
 - Meaningfully participate in one extra-curricular skill. Make the most of your free time in college.
 - Work 5-10 hours per week on campus. Find a position particularly on the weekends and around peers.
 - Become bilingual (and a computer language counts!) A semester or year abroad can be a life changer.
 - Find real-world experience. Get internships directly related to your chosen field.