



Junior Year Checklist—College Preparation

Use this checklist to make sure you are doing everything necessary to apply to college and make the most of your junior year.

SPRING

- Dual Credit/AP:** Consider taking Dual Credit or Advanced Placement (AP) courses during your senior year. This will help you prepare for college and can allow you to earn college credit while in high school. Doing so will show colleges that you are challenging yourself by taking advanced courses.
- Senior Schedule:** Make sure that you are challenging yourself and taking the necessary academic courses. Senior year is not the time to neglect your classes. Colleges and scholarship committees typically ask what courses you're taking your senior year. Check to ensure that your senior year courses meet college entrance requirements. Keep in mind that college entrance requirements do not necessarily correspond with high school graduation requirements.
- AP Tests:** Register and take any AP tests that you are prepared for during the school year. This could ease your college schedule and finances because you could earn credit for college courses while in high school.
- Big Future:** Start narrowing your career and college search by visiting bigfuture.collegeboard.org
- SAT/ACT:** Register for and take your exams for college admissions. Check with the colleges in which you are interested to see what tests they require.
 - **SAT:** www.collegeboard.org
 - **ACT:** www.act.org

Students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch will also qualify for SAT and ACT fee waivers. A fee waiver permits the student to register for up to two tests for free (regular registration only). See your counselor for more information or visit:

SAT: www.sat.org/fee-waivers

ACT: <http://www.actstudent.org/faq/feewaiver.html>

- Military Academies:** If you are interested in applying for a military academy, meet with your counselor before you leave school for the summer break.

SUMMER (after junior year)

- College Visits:** Visit some college campuses to get a feel for what the campus looks like. It is best to contact the admissions office so you can register for a tour of the campus and meet with some current students.
- Narrow your choices:** Continue to think about which colleges you want to attend and ask yourself important questions about why you want to apply to specific schools. Work to have at least five colleges on your “must apply to” list.

- ❑ **Begin your college essays:** Most colleges and scholarship committees will require you to write a personal essay with your application. Begin to brainstorm ideas. Think of impactful experiences you have had, reflect upon the challenges you have faced, and look forward to your future during and after college.
- ❑ **Engage:** Don't spend the summer just lounging by the pool and playing video games. Summer is your opportunity to do something meaningful like working a job, volunteering, performing community service, traveling, participating in summer enrichment programs, or taking a dual credit summer class. Do something with your time so that you will be a competitive college applicant.
- ❑ **Find the money:** Begin searching for ways to fund your education. Keep a file of scholarships and other sources available. Use the FAFSA4caster financial aid estimator and compare the results to the actual costs at the colleges to which you apply. Supplement any aid the FAFSA4caster estimates you might receive by applying for scholarships. Your goal is to minimize the amount of loans you borrow and out-of-pocket expenses you must pay.

If you qualify for an SAT or ACT fee waiver, you also qualify to have up to four application fees waived. See your counselor for the appropriate forms.

- ❑ **NCAA Eligibility:** If you are an athlete planning to continue playing a sport in college, register with the NCAA Eligibility Center at www.ncaaclearinghouse.net.
- ❑ **Stay Connected:** Visit the PHS Counseling Center website regularly for updates and scholarship information. Follow the PHS Counseling Center on Twitter for information tweeted out during the summer.



NCAA Clearinghouse

Athletes planning on continuing to play sports in college must register with the NCAA Clearinghouse.

If you wish to participate in NCAA Division I or II athletics, you need to be certified by the NCAA Eligibility Center. You need to qualify academically and you will also need to be cleared as an amateur student-athlete.

You are responsible for achieving and protecting your eligibility status!

In order to be an eligible college athlete, you must do all of the following:

- Register with the NCAA at www.eligibilitycenter.org
- Ask the PHS registrar to send an official transcript to the NCAA Eligibility Center at the end of your junior year.
- Take the ACT or SAT and use the code "9999" to have your official scores sent directly to the NCAA Eligibility Center. Test scores that appear on transcripts will not be accepted.
- Check with your high school counselor to make sure you are on track to graduate on time with your class and are taking the required amount of NCAA-approved core courses.
- Request final amateurism certification during your senior year (beginning April 1).
- Ask the PHS registrar to submit your final transcript with proof of graduation to the NCAA Eligibility Center.



Grade-Point Average

Only courses that appear on your high school's list of NCAA Courses will be used in the calculation of your core GPA.

Division I:

- A sliding scale is used to match test scores and core GPAs. The sliding scale can be found at www.2point3.org or on page 10 of the Guide for the College-Bound Student-Athlete found at www.eligibilitycenter.org.
- For students enrolling on or after August 1, 2016, the Division 1 GPA required to be eligible for competition is 2.300.
- For students enrolling on or after August 1, 2016, the Division 1 GPA required to receive athletics aid and practice is 2.000-2.299.

Division II:

- The Division II core GPA requirement is a minimum of 2.000.



Essay Writing

Writing your essay is an important part of gaining admissions and earning scholarships.

Top Ten Tips for Writing a College Essay

(adapted from NACACnet.org)

Start early. The more time you have, the less stress you'll have. You'll have plenty of time to give the essay your best effort.

Be yourself. Take a moment to think about what interests you, what you love to talk about, what makes you sit up and take notice if it's mentioned in class or on TV. Then write about it. One of the biggest mistakes students make is "writing what they think others want to hear, rather than about an issue, event, or person that really had significance for them," says an admission and financial aid officer at a New York college.

Be honest. You're running late (see #1), you can't think of what to write, and someone e-mails you a heartwarming story. With just a tweak here and there, it could be a great essay, you think. It's what you would have written if you'd just had enough time. Don't be fooled! College admission officers have read hundreds, even thousands of essays. They are masters at discovering any form of plagiarism. Adapting an e-mail story, buying an essay from some Internet site, getting someone else to write your essay—admission people have seen it all. Don't risk your college career by taking the easy way out.

Take a risk. On the other hand, some risks can pay off. Don't settle for the essay that everyone else is writing. Imagine an admission officer up late, reading the fiftieth essay of the day, yours. Do you want that person to nod off because he or she has already read ten essays on that topic? "The danger lies not in writing bad essays but in writing common essays, the one that admission officers are going to read dozens of," says an associate director at a Pennsylvania high school. "My advice? Ask your friends what they are writing, and then don't write about that!"

Keep in focus. This is your chance to tell admission officers exactly why they should admit you. Unfortunately, some students try to list every single reason, their stellar academic record, their athletic prowess, their community service, all in a page or two. When that happens, the essay looks like a grocery list. Even though the Common Application main essay has only a suggested minimum of 250 words, and no upper limit, every admissions officer has a big stack to read every day; he or she expects to spend only a couple of minutes on the essay. If you go over 700 words, you are straining their patience, which no one should want to do. Instead, read the essay question carefully and jot down a few ideas. Then choose the one that looks like the most fun to write about. Stick to that main theme throughout the essay. You don't have to list all your achievements—that's what the rest of the application is for. Use the essay in a creative way to help the admission officers get to know you as a person.

Write and rewrite. Don't try to write a masterpiece on your first try. It's not possible, and all that pressure is likely to give you writer's block. For your first draft, write anything that comes to mind about your topic. Don't worry too much about grammar or spelling. Just get it down on paper (or computer screen). Then let it "rest" for a few hours or a few days. When you come back to the draft, look for ways to make it more focused and better written. Some people are "fat" writers: they write long, wordy first drafts that need to be shortened later. Others are "skinny" writers: they write short and simple first drafts and then need to add details or examples to "flesh out" the skeleton. Either way, don't be afraid to make major changes at this stage. Are

there details that don't really relate to the topic? Cut them. Do you need another example? Put it in.

Here are two other things to try, suggested by one college counselor:

- Remove the introductory and concluding paragraphs, and then see if your essay seems stronger. These paragraphs are often the most likely to have unnecessary detail.
- Go through the essay and cut out every "very" and every "many." Words like these are vague, and your writing is often stronger without them.

Get a second opinion. Even best-selling novelists ask other people to read their manuscripts before they're sent to the publisher. When you've rewritten the essay to your satisfaction, find someone who can give you advice on how to make it even better. Choose a person you respect and who knows something about writing, a favorite English teacher, a parent, or a friend who writes for the school paper. Ask them to tell you what they like best about your essay, and what you can do to improve it. Criticism of your writing can be tough to hear, but try to listen with an open mind. You don't have to make every change suggested, after all, it's your essay and no one else's, but you should seriously consider each suggestion.

Proofread. Finally, you're ready to send your essay. Not so fast! Read it over one more time, looking for those little errors that can creep in as you write or edit. If you're using a computer, also run a spell check. Sometimes, it can be difficult to catch minor typos—you've read the essay so many times that you see what should be there rather than what is there. To make sure you catch everything, try reading your essay out loud or having someone else read it out loud to you. Another strategy is to read the essay backward, from the last sentence to the first. That makes it just unfamiliar enough for errors to stand out.

Be accurate. Applying online is just as serious as applying "the old-fashioned way." It may feel like you're sending e-mail, but you're not. "One thing I've often seen is that students who apply online submit sub-par essays," says an Oregon director of admission. He has found that essays submitted online tend to be much shorter than those submitted on paper. In addition, students often use e-mail language, no capitalization, or abbreviations such as "BTW" or "thanx," which are not appropriate to a formal document. Make sure that you put as much effort into an online essay as you would if you were sending it snail mail.

Don't expect too much from an essay. The application essay is important, but it's not the only thing that is considered. "Can [the essay] make a difference in getting the 'thin versus thick' envelope? Absolutely," says the New York director. "But that is the exception rather than the rule." That's because admission officers look at the whole package, your academics, extracurricular activities, standardized tests, and other factors. A great essay rarely makes up for a weak academic record. On the other hand, a mediocre essay won't necessarily consign your application to the "deny" list. So make your essay as well-written as you can, but don't put so much pressure on yourself that the rest of the application fades in importance.



U.S. Military

Serving and protecting your country
has its benefits.

Some students choose to serve in the U.S. military to obtain career training, education, and numerous additional benefits. Pearland High School hosts military recruiters throughout the year. Recruiters often come to the campus to discuss military options, opportunities, and benefits. If you are interested in finding out more about being a member of our armed forces, speak directly to a recruiter or visit one of the following websites:

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| U.S. Air Force | www.af.mil |
| U.S. Army | www.army.mil |
| U.S. Coast Guard | www.uscg.mil |
| U.S. Marines | www.usmc.mil |
| U.S. Navy | www.navy.mil |

Joining the U.S. military is typically a four-step process:

1. **Speak to a recruiter.** Talking to a recruiter does not obligate you to enlist. It merely gives you information to help you make an informed decision on whether or not you want to commit, which branch is the best fit for you, and what career opportunities are available to you. You may also inquire about early entry programs that allow you to go to boot camp during the summer between your junior and senior year.
2. **Take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB).** The ASVAB is a multiple-aptitude battery that measures developed abilities and helps predict future academic and occupational success in the military. It is administered annually to more than one million military applicants, high school, and post-secondary students. Practice tests are available in local libraries, bookstores, and online.
www.military.com/ASVAB
3. **Enlist:** If you score high enough on the ASVAB, you can choose to enlist and pursue the career categories you meet. After enlisting, a physical exam will be arranged.
4. **Graduate from high school.** You must be a high school graduate in order to enter any branch of the U.S. military.

If you are interested in applying to one of the five U.S. military academies, you need to meet with your counselor as soon as possible. Admission to military academies is very different from college admissions and military enlistment...it's both! Be sure to visit the website of the academy in which you are interested:

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| U.S. Military Academy – West Point | www.usma.edu |
| U.S. Naval Academy | www.usna.edu |
| U.S. Air Force Academy | www.academyadmissions.com |
| U.S. Coast Guard Academy | www.cga.edu |
| U.S. Merchant Marine Academy | www.usmma.edu |