

COLLEGE PLANNING CHECKLIST

FRESHMAN and SOPHOMORE YEARS

1. Think about your list of classes. Make sure you are enrolled in the appropriate college-prep or tech-prep classes, and that you're taking key core requirements, such as English, math, science, history, and a foreign language.
2. Make sure your high school counselor knows your face and name.
3. Take classes, including homework, seriously from the beginning of your high school career. Remember that your final high school GPA (the one submitted to colleges during your senior year) includes your grades from 9th-12th grades.
4. Seek out tutoring before or after school for the courses you may be struggling with.
5. Get involved in extracurricular activities. Colleges are looking for students that are involved in their schools and communities.
6. Start saving money. Save at least $\frac{1}{4}$ of your income or allowance to help with college expenses. Consider a college savings plan.
7. Take advantage of career day opportunities at school.
8. Start a portfolio of all academic and extracurricular awards as well as community service hours and achievements. In short: If you're involved in it, track it and document it in your portfolio. This will be a good source of information when filling out applications your senior year.

JUNIOR YEAR

FALL SEMESTER

9. Make lists of your abilities, social/cultural preferences, and personal qualities. List things you may want to study and do in college.
10. Learn about college and colleges. Look at websites and other resources. Talk to friends, family, teachers, and recent graduates of Cotter now in college. List the college features that interest you and those that do not.
11. Research careers and majors and which universities offer these programs.
12. Think about what your "best fit" school would look like (what size, where located, types of classes, extracurricular programs, etc.).
13. Drawing on the information gleaned in points 1-4, make a list of 15-20 schools in which you are interested. This list should be changeable for the next few months.
14. Visit the website of each school on your list and register to receive information from the school. This establishes your interest in the school at an early date and sometimes is a consideration in admissions decisions. If, in the next few months, you add schools to your list, repeat this step.
15. Make a file to manage your college search, testing, and application data.
16. Establish an account with the ACT (<http://www.actstudent.org/>) and with the College Board, makers of the SAT (<https://www.collegeboard.org/>). These sites provide information on colleges, the college application process, review for the respective exams, etc. **YOU MUST HAVE AN ACCOUNT TO REGISTER FOR EITHER THE ACT OR SAT. AND YOU MUST HAVE AN SAT OR ACT SCORE TO QUALIFY FOR THE HEF SCHOLARSHIP AWARDED TO GRADUATING SENIORS.**
17. Attend all college and university presentations available to you. Ask questions. REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE NOT NECESSARILY FINDING OUT ABOUT A SPECIFIC SCHOOL, BUT

LEARNING ABOUT SPECIFIC TYPES OF SCHOOLS AND THEIR PROCESSES AND REQUIREMENTS FOR ADMISSION.

18. Take the PSAT and use the results to evaluate your strengths and weaknesses and to guide your preparation for later SATs and ACTs.
19. Continue to do your best in all your classes.
20. If appropriate (interested in drama, arts, dance, music, sports, etc.) start to gather material for a portfolio, highlight tape, etc.
21. Explore the costs of the schools on your list. Also, research institution-specific financial aid.
22. Talk as a family about available financial resources. Decide if financial need is going to play a part in determining your final college list.
23. If necessary, with your family, start to learn about government-funded, need-based financial aid. Read the Department of Education's *Funding Your Education* (available for download at <https://www.studentaid.ed.gov/resources>). Use the financial aid calculator available at the College Board to see how much aid you might receive (<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college/paying-your-share/expected-family-contribution-calculator>).
24. Register, THROUGH THE ACCOUNTS YOU CREATED PREVIOUSLY, to take the ACT in February or April **and** the SAT in January or March. Remember that you will need to upload an appropriate picture as part of the registration process.

SPRING SEMESTER

25. Meet with your advisor to consider your current list of colleges. Together, evaluate the list in light of your transcript, your financial situation, your standardized test scores, and any other factors that might influence your applications to those schools.
26. Narrow the original list to 7-10 schools. If any of these schools require SAT Subject Tests, register for the administrations in May or June. (Remember that you can take three on a given day, but that you cannot take the SAT Subject Test(s) and the "real" SAT on the same day. Plan accordingly.)
27. Request letters of recommendation from faculty members who may be leaving Cotter.
28. By the end of the school year, make sure you have taken both the ACT and the SAT at least once each. Plan to focus any further testing next school year on the one of the two on which you performed best originally, assuming your college choices accept both.

SUMMER

29. Make the most of your summer. Internships, jobs, camps, service projects, summer college programs, and college visits will all look great on college applications.
30. Create a resume—a record of accomplishments, activities, and work experiences which you have achieved or in which you have been involved since you started high school.

SENIOR YEAR

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER

31. Finalize your college list and create a master calendar that includes all the applicable information regarding the applications for these schools. The calendar should include:
 - Tests you still may need to take and their registration deadlines;
 - The application choice (Early Decision, Early Action, Regular Decision, etc.) for each college and the due date for that choice;

- Financial aid forms required by the specific colleges and the deadlines for these.
32. **Ask your teachers for any needed recommendations.** REMEMBER TO GIVE TEACHERS AT LEAST TWO WEEKS NOTICE FOR WRITING THESE LETTERS. Provide each of your recommenders a copy of your resume to help them craft individualized letters.

OCTOBER

33. If using the Common Application, complete it and “invite” your teachers and counselor to complete their respective portions.
34. Write first drafts of your application essays and have teachers and/or trusted others read and comment upon them. Revise.
35. Fill out the FAFSA as soon after October 1 as possible. (<https://fafsa.ed.gov/>)

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER

36. If you are applying Early Decision, Early Action, or to a school with Rolling Admission, your applications should be submitted by November 1.
37. If any of the schools on your final college list require it, complete the CSS Profile need-based financial aid form. (<http://student.collegeboard.org/css-financial-aid-profile>)
38. Keep up-to-date with any scholarship application due dates. Work on these applications and/or college applications weekly.
39. Finish all applications possible by January.

JANUARY-MARCH

40. Apply to any appropriate scholarships with spring deadlines.
41. Continue with your studies. Accepting colleges do look at your second semester grades.

APRIL

42. You should receive college acceptances and financial aid offers by mid-April.

MAY

43. If you have not already done so, finalize your college decision by officially accepting admission to the college of your choice.

JUNE

44. The counseling office will send your final transcript and other necessary paperwork to your new college or university.