

Senior Year

Senior year is finally here, and it's full of things to do to get ready for college. Use this senior year checklist to keep track of your progress and upcoming deadlines for testing, admissions and financial aid.

August

- Sign up for the ACT (if you didn't take it as a junior, or if you aren't satisfied with your score, or if you've learned a lot since you first took it.)
- Review ACT test results and retest if necessary.

August – December

- Visit with your school counselor to make sure you are on track to graduate and fulfill college admission requirements.
- Keep working hard all year; second semester grades can affect scholarship eligibility.
- Ask for personal references from teachers, school counselors, or employers early in the year or at least two weeks before application deadlines.
- Visit with admissions counselors who come to your high school.
- Attend a college fair.
- Apply for admission to the colleges you have chosen.
- Avoid common college application mistakes (see below.)
- Find out if you qualify for scholarships at each college you have applied to.
- Learn about the financial aid process.
- Check the school website for scholarship information.

January – May

- If you need it, get help completing the FAFSA (www.fafsa.ed.gov.)
- Ask your guidance office in January to send first semester transcripts to schools where you applied. In June, they will need to send final transcripts to the college you will attend.
- Visit colleges that have invited you to enroll.
- Decide which college to attend, and notify the school of your decision.
- Keep track of and observe deadlines for sending in all required fees and paperwork.
- Notify schools you will not attend of your decision.
- Continue to look for scholarship opportunities.
- Keep track of important financial aid and scholarship deadlines.
- Compare financial aid packages from different schools.
- Sign and send in a promissory note if you are borrowing money.

Top 10 College Application Mistakes

Senior year is hectic, but don't let that affect the quality of your college applications. Take your time, pay attention to detail and plan ahead so you can meet the deadlines.

Following are some of the top responses from counselors and admissions staff who shared the most common mistakes on college applications.

1. **Misspellings and grammatical errors**—This is a big pet peeve of admissions people. Misspellings on something as important as the application shows that either you don't care or you aren't good at spelling. Some students even misspell their intended major. But don't stop with a spell check. Proofread for grammatical errors, too.
2. **Applying online, but the application isn't actually submitted**—If you apply online, you should receive confirmation that the college or university received it. Confirmation could be an email message, a Web page response or a credit card receipt. Follow through and make sure that your application has been received.
3. **Forgotten signatures**—Make sure you sign and date the form. Often students overlook that part of the form if it's on the back. Check that all spaces are completed.
4. **Not reading carefully**—For example, if the form asks what County you live in, don't misread it as Country and write United States.
5. **Listing extracurricular activities that aren't**—Those that make the list include sports, the arts, formal organizations and volunteer work. Talking on the phone and hanging out with friends don't make the cut. Make sure your activity information is accurate. Colleges may check with your high school.
6. **Not telling your school counselor where you've applied**—Let your counselor know which colleges you're applying to and ask her to send your transcript.
7. **Writing illegibly**—First impressions count, so take your time and use your best handwriting. It will make a better impression.
8. **Using an email address that friends might laugh about, but colleges won't**—Select a professional email address. Keep your fun address for friends, but select an address using your name for college admissions.
9. **Not checking your email regularly**—If you've given an email address, the college will use it. You don't want to miss out on anything because you didn't read your email.
10. **Letting Mom or Dad help you fill out your application**—Admissions people know if your parents help, whether you have two different styles of handwriting or your admissions essay sounds more like a 45-year-old than a 17-year-old. It's fine to get advice, but do the work yourself.