

10th Grade: College Planning Timeline

For this year, you'll want to stay on track with your high school classes and activities and begin to narrow down the plan for your future.

Fall: Take the PSAT and explore careers

Take a practice PSAT.

Taking the PSAT as a sophomore will help prepare you for the real thing next year. It also allows you to release your name to colleges so you can start receiving brochures from them.

Start getting ready for the ACT.

Ask your guidance counselor about the PLAN assessment program offered by American College Testing. This program helps determine your study habits and academic progress and interests; it will also prepare you for the ACT.

Stay on track with your courses.

Work with your guidance counselor to make sure you're enrolled in the courses you need to prepare you for college or a career. Move on to the next level of classes in the core subjects (English, math, science, history, and a foreign language).

Begin learning about the college admissions process.

Get familiar with general college entrance requirements. The guidance counselor's office, the library, college Web sites, and advice articles are all good sources of information.

Continue exploring potential careers.

Explore your career options in more detail—research possible careers to learn about the tasks, education, and training necessary for each occupation.

Winter: Read and Write

Take on new roles.

Stay involved with your extracurricular activities and work toward leadership positions in the activities you like best. Become involved in community service and other volunteer activities.

Read, read, read.

Developing your reading skills will help prepare you for tests and make you a well-rounded individual. Read as many books as you can and read the newspaper to learn about current affairs.

Practice your writing.

You'll need good writing skills no matter what path you pursue, so work on those skills now to get prepared. Find a teacher or another adult who can advise and encourage you to write well.

Get advice from your counselor.

Meet with your guidance counselor to make sure you're staying on track. You can also discuss your PSAT scores and ask about postsecondary enrollment options and Advanced Placement (AP) courses.

Spring/Summer: Keep your grades up and reach out to colleges

Keep your grades up.

There's probably a lot competing for your attention, but it's important to remain focused on doing well in your classes. Remember that your grades affect your GPA and class rank—two factors that colleges consider in the admissions process.

Start your college search.

Use our college search tools to decide what factors are important to you and see a list of colleges that matches your criteria. Attend college fairs and read the material you get from all types of schools—you may see something you like.

Contact colleges that interest you.

Write to schools and ask for more information about their academic requirements and any programs or activities that you're interested in. It's especially important to start this process now if you think you want to attend a military academy.

Consider taking SAT Subject Tests.

It's often best to take these types of tests while the material is still fresh in your mind. In May or June, you may want to take SAT Subject Tests in the courses you took this year.

Get a summer job.

Finding steady summer work will look good to prospective colleges and employers. Putting the money you earn away for college will also help you get a head start on a personal savings plan.

Source: Peterson's College Planning Timelines