

# Making the most of the summer before senior year

For college-bound high school students, the months between junior and senior years are crucial for jump starting the application process.

It's also a great time for discovering new interests, adding to your resume, and otherwise positioning yourself for beginning the ultimate transition from high school senior to college freshman.

The **first day** of the **last year** of high school will be here before you know it. But in the meantime, here are some ways you can make the most of the summer before senior year:

**Work.** Options range from scooping ice cream at the shore to organizing a book drive, conducting research, interning on Capitol Hill or hammering nails for [Habitat for Humanity](#). By the time you've completed junior year of high school, you should be old enough and responsible enough to work—full or part time, paid or unpaid. Work builds character, introduces career options, teaches skills, and expands your network in important ways. Don't miss the opportunity to add to your resume while learning something about yourself and others.

**Visit Colleges.** Campus tours don't stop just because undergrads are off doing other things. Now is the time to check out the last few colleges on your list and refine your ideas of how location, size or architecture affects your thinking about a particular campus. And by the way, the summer is a great time for having more relaxed conversations with admissions staff, coaches, or professors in departments you may be targeting.

**Nail Down the List.** Take a deep breath and begin eliminating schools that don't really appeal or offer what you want. Zero-in on places representing the best fit—academically, socially, **and** financially—and begin committing to a realistic list of schools to which you intend to apply.

**Demonstrate Interest.** Beyond visiting campuses, engage in a systematic demonstrated interest campaign. Be proactive by getting on mailing lists, requesting information, initiating correspondence, getting to know regional representatives and attending local events. In addition to showing your favorite schools a little love, you might just learn something important about campus culture or new initiatives colleges want to introduce to prospective applicants.

**Get Organized.** There are a zillion moving parts to the college admissions process. Get a handle on them by creating a spreadsheet of colleges on your list and noting deadlines, requirements (recommendations, test score submission, interviews), important admissions policies (non-binding early action vs. binding early decision), and application quirks (supplements, scholarships, honors programs/colleges). Also, make note of which colleges use the [Common Application](#), the [Universal College Application](#) (UCA), the [Coalition Application](#) or other school-based forms.

**Prepare your Resume.** If you don't have one already, put together a resume or a detailed written list of accomplishments and activities. Turn it into a PDF for sharing with others or uploading with applications. Explore online resume templates, such as [ZeeMee](#) or [Linked In](#). If you know colleges on your list partner with ZeeMee, consider creating a **private** account before the end of the summer

**Do the Clerical Part.** There's no reason not to complete the simple stuff early in the summer by opening applications and entering basic information. All three major platforms are capable of rolling information from one year to the next and encourage the completion of questions that are unlikely to change. So do it. The Coalition and the UCA are set up so that colleges can launch as early as **July 1**. The Common Application will be ready to go on **August 1**. Other applications and supplements will

appear on websites as the summer progresses. If you start shared elements of your applications, you will be one step ahead.

**Draft Essays.** Now is the time to begin brainstorming and drafting essays. Explore a variety of topics and don't be afraid to change direction or discard work that's going nowhere. This is the advantage of writing and reflecting during summer months before the pressures of senior year cut into Zen time. While essay prompts for personal statements have been posted for months, college-specific supplements and essays will roll out over the course of the summer. Keep checking websites and make note of prompts as they appear. And then start writing!

**Prep for Standardized Tests.** You've probably taken the [ACT](#) and/or the [SAT](#) at least once. If you didn't knock the ball out of the park the first time (and most don't), plan to prep for a retake. SAT now offers an August test, in addition to October. ACT has a test in September and in 2018 will have one in July. For the most part, scores from these tests will be returned in time for you to make the earliest of early deadlines. Get a tutor, sign-up for classes or simply sit at the kitchen table and take timed practice tests.

**Research and Apply for Scholarships.** The scholarship hunt should begin now—not after all your college applications have been submitted. A surprising number of scholarships have applications due early in the school year and use essay prompts similar to those you're working on for colleges. Use [FastWeb](#) or [Cappex](#) to get an overview of what's out there. And while you're at it, explore [FAFSA4caster](#) with your parents for a little reality testing and apply early for that all-important Federal Student Aid (FSA) ID. FAFSA goes live on October 1, but there's nothing to be gained by waiting until then to sign-up for the FSA ID.

**Secure Recommendations.** If you haven't done so already, try to get in touch with at least two core academic teachers from junior year to ask for college recommendations. You may or may not need both, but it's always a good idea to have two teachers willing to support you. Don't delay—teachers may limit the number of recommendations they're willing to write or they may want to get started before school begins. And be sure to provide recommenders with whatever background information they request—at a minimum, a resume and cover note reinforcing your appreciation and why you asked them to play this important role in your application process.

**Schedule Interviews.** Many colleges offer on-campus interviews during the summer. You want to be able to check these requirements off your list sooner rather than later. Colleges make it easy to combine interviews with campus tours, but you have to schedule **early** to get days and times that work for you.

**Position Yourself for Fall Classes.** Be aware that senior year courses and grades can be very important in admissions decisions. Colleges want to see upward trends in grades, and they care very much that you continue to challenge yourself academically. Obtain texts for any challenging or AP/IB classes and “study forward” during the summer. If necessary, give your tutor a call and go over the first few chapters of material you know will keep you up late at night come September.

**Read, Relax, Enjoy Yourself and Connect with Friends.** A year from now, you'll be packing your bags!

## About Nancy Griesemer

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