

NHS Post-Secondary College Timeline & Checklist



How to get the college application process started?

Six commonly asked questions that are important for students to be able to think about:

1. **Why do you want to go to college?**
 - a. Reason: Encourages thoughtful reflection to individualize the college search process by understanding personal motivations and goals.
2. **What excites you about going to college? What are you looking for in this next chapter of your life?**
 - a. Reason: Helps students connect with their aspirations and envision their future, ensuring a more meaningful decision-making process.
3. **What do you want to study or take for a major?**
 - a. Reason: Reinforces that the primary purpose of college is education. Exploring academic interests helps guide students toward relevant majors, which can influence the schools they consider and their chances of admission.
4. **Do you care about location?**
 - a. Reason: Encourages students to reflect on proximity to home, logistics of travel, and preferences for urban, suburban, or rural settings. Visits and demonstrated interest also play a role in building a balanced college list.
5. **Have you discussed the cost and your family's budget?**
 - a. Reason: Highlights the importance of financial planning, considering merit scholarships, financial aid, and overall affordability when selecting colleges.
6. **What else do you want your ideal college to have?**
 - a. Reason: Encourages students to visualize their ideal college experience, factoring in extracurriculars, class sizes, internship/study abroad opportunities, and other personal preferences.

College Timeline and Checklist

Fall - Junior Year: Setting the Foundation

1. **Explore Options:**
 - Using SchooLinks start research colleges, trade schools, military options, or direct workforce entry.
 - Take Campus Tours whenever and as much as possible
 - Talk to your school counselor about post-secondary goals.
 - Take or retake career assessments to identify interests and skills.
 - Set a time each week as a family to sit down and talk about college stuff
2. **Start Building a List:**
 - Create a list of possible colleges that interest you and research them.
 - Create a Google Folder for all your College Search
 - Add a Spreadsheet to keep track of your colleges, what you like and don't like about them, any campus visit notes, GPA, test optional, majors, location, application type, deadlines, expected difficulty, interest level, supplements, and cost of attendance.
 - Create a google doc for your essay and one for your supplemental essays
 - Share these docs or folder with your parents
 - Research admission requirements (Average GPA and or SAT/ACT), costs, and application deadlines, application type (EA, ED, Regular, Rolling)
3. **Academics:**
 - Focus on maintaining or improving your GPA.
 - Take challenging courses that align with your goals (AP, DE, Honors).
4. **Standardized Testing:**
 - Take the PSAT at school in Oct to qualify for scholarships and prep for the SAT.

Winter

1. **Begin Test Prep:**
 - Start studying for the SAT/ACT using free resources like Khan Academy.
 - Consider taking a prep course or using practice tests.
2. **Register for the SAT/ACT**
 - Sign into your College Board account or ACT account to register
3. **Financial Planning:**
 - Discuss with your family how to pay for college or trade school.
 - Work with our partners at College Affordable
 - Research scholarships, grants, and financial aid.
4. **Extracurriculars:**
 - Stay involved in clubs, sports, or part-time jobs.
 - Seek leadership roles or meaningful community service.
5. **Visit Schools/Programs:**
 - Plan visits to colleges, trade schools during February break or weekends.
 - Attend open houses or virtual tours

Spring

1. **Take the SAT/ACT:**
 - Register and take your first SAT/ACT. Retake in the fall if needed.
2. **Visit Schools/Programs:**
 - Plan visits to colleges, trade schools, or other programs during April break or weekends.
 - Attend open houses or virtual tours
 - April - Attend NHS College & Career Fair
3. **Work on Your Personal Statement for assignment in English class:**
 - Create the 1st draft of your college essay or personal statement.
4. **Update your Resume in SchooLinks:**
 - Include extracurriculars, volunteer work, awards, and skills.
5. **Teacher Recommendations:**
 - Identify teachers who know you well and can write strong recommendation letters.
 - Verbally ask them at the end of May or early June.

Summer

1. **Finalize Your List:**
 - Narrow your list to 8–12 colleges/universities you would be interested in attending and spending the next 4 to 6 years.
2. **Work more on Your Personal Statement:**
 - 2nd draft of your college essay or personal statement.
3. **Gain Experience:**
 - Volunteer, intern, or work to strengthen your resume.
 - Attend summer programs or camps related to your career interests.

Fall - Senior Year: Executing the Plan

1. **Finalize Applications:**
 - Complete early decision or early action applications by October/November deadlines.
 - Finalize essays and have them reviewed by a counselor or teacher.
2. **Take/Retake Tests:**
 - Take or retake the SAT/ACT if needed.
3. **Request Letters of Recommendation:**
 - Provide teachers with your resume and a clear deadline.
4. **Financial Aid:**
 - Complete the FAFSA as soon as it opens (October 1).
 - Research and apply for scholarships.
5. **Attend Info Sessions:**

- Attend any last-minute college fairs or info nights.

Winter

1. **Submit Regular Decision Applications:**
 - Ensure all applications are submitted by January deadlines.
2. **Follow Up:**
 - Check that schools have received all materials, including transcripts and test scores.
3. **Scholarships:**
 - Continue applying for scholarships.
4. **Interviews:**
 - Prepare for interviews with admissions counselors or program representatives.

Spring

1. **Review Offers:**
 - Compare acceptance letters and financial aid packages.
 - Visit schools again if needed before making a decision.
2. **Decide:**
 - Make your final decision by May 1.
3. **Celebrate:**
 - Notify schools you won't attend.
 - Share your success with family and friends.

Summer Before College

1. **Finalize Plans:**
 - Register for orientation and housing.
 - Complete any placement tests or medical forms.
2. **Work and Save:**
 - Work a summer job to save for expenses.
3. **Get Ready:**
 - Buy necessary supplies and plan for the transition to your new school/program.

22 Major Difference in High School vs. College: How Life Changes

1. Class Structure and Schedule

High School: Classes follow a set daily schedule (e.g., 7:30 AM to 2:30 PM) with minimal variation. Teachers guide the structure.

College: Students create their own schedule. Classes may vary daily, with gaps in between, and can take place during mornings, afternoons, or evenings.

Why: College offers greater autonomy to help students manage their time and responsibilities independently.

2. Academic Expectations

High School: Teachers provide frequent reminders of assignments and offer detailed guidance. Homework is assigned daily.

College: Professors expect students to manage deadlines independently, and coursework often relies more on long-term projects, exams, and fewer assignments.

Why: College emphasizes self-discipline and critical thinking skills for higher-level learning.

3. Teacher/Professor Interaction

High School: Teachers monitor student progress closely, often reaching out when a student struggles. They're generally more accessible during school hours.

College: Professors expect students to seek help during office hours or email for assistance. Interaction is more formal and student-initiated.

Why: College prepares students for professional relationships and self-advocacy.

4. Social Life and Community

High School: Students interact with the same group of peers daily and often live at home, limiting their exposure to diverse experiences.

College: Students meet peers from different backgrounds, and social opportunities often revolve around clubs, Greek life, and campus events. Living on campus fosters independence.

Why: College provides a diverse environment for personal growth and networking.

5. Responsibility and Independence

High School: Parents and teachers help students stay organized and accountable.

College: Students are fully responsible for managing their academics, finances, and personal life.

Why: The college experience is designed to transition students into adulthood.

6. Financial Responsibility

High School: Most costs (textbooks, lunch, transportation) are covered, and students rarely manage significant finances.

College: Students are responsible for tuition, housing, meals, textbooks, and more, often requiring budgeting or working part-time.

Why: College teaches financial literacy and the importance of managing expenses.

7. Living Arrangements

High School: Students typically live at home with family.

College: Many students live in dorms or off-campus housing, often for the first time managing chores, meals, and personal responsibilities.

Why: Living independently fosters life skills and maturity.

8. Extracurricular Opportunities

High School: Activities are often school-organized, like sports, clubs, or student council, with limited variety.

College: A vast array of clubs, organizations, internships, and study-abroad opportunities are available to explore diverse interests.

Why: Colleges prioritize holistic development and exploration.

9. Grading Systems

High School: Grades are based on a mix of tests, homework, class participation, and effort.

College: Grades are often weighed heavily on a few exams, papers, or projects. Participation is usually less emphasized.

Why: College assessments focus on mastery of material over consistency of effort.

10. Parental Involvement

High School: Parents are actively involved in their child's academics and may communicate with teachers.

College: Due to privacy laws (FERPA), parents can't access academic records or intervene without the student's consent.

Why: College promotes student independence and ownership of their education.

11. Career Preparation

High School: Career guidance is often introductory, focusing on exploring interests and basic skills.

College: Students receive specialized support, such as internships, research opportunities, career fairs, and resume-building resources.

Why: College aligns more directly with career readiness.

Here are **four additional differences** between high school and college:

12. Class Size

High School: Classes are typically small, with about 20–30 students, allowing for more personal interaction with teachers.

College: Classes can range from small seminars (10–20 students) to large lecture halls with 100+ students.

Why: College accommodates larger student populations, and larger classes challenge students to adapt to different learning environments.

13. Attendance Policies

High School: Attendance is mandatory, and parents are notified about absences.

College: Attendance policies vary by professor, but students are expected to manage their own attendance, and frequent absences may affect grades.

Why: College attendance policies encourage accountability and decision-making.

14. Access to Resources

High School: Resources like counselors, libraries, and extracurriculars are provided on a smaller scale, often directed by school staff.

College: Students have access to extensive resources, such as career centers, mental health services, academic advisors, research labs, and fitness centers, but they must take initiative to use them.

Why: Colleges emphasize self-directed use of resources to develop independence.

15. Freedom to Choose

High School: Students follow a predetermined curriculum with limited electives and flexibility.

College: Students can choose their major, minor, and electives, often designing a path that aligns with their goals and interests.

Why: College encourages exploration and specialization to support long-term success.

16. Time Management

High School: Time is structured for students, with classes, activities, and homework fitting into a predictable daily schedule.

College: Students have to manage their own time, balancing classes, study time, work, and social activities, often with less structured guidance.

Why: College forces students to develop prioritization and time-management skills.

17. Depth of Learning

High School: Classes focus on broad overviews of subjects, often preparing students for standardized tests.

College: Classes dive deeper into specialized topics, requiring critical analysis, independent research, and original thought.

Why: College coursework aims to build expertise in chosen fields and encourage intellectual exploration.

18. Extracurricular Depth and Leadership

High School: Leadership opportunities are limited to student council, sports teams, or clubs, often involving fewer participants.

College: Students can take on leadership roles in a wider array of organizations, including research labs, student government, Greek life, or national associations.

Why: College provides more opportunities for leadership, collaboration, and community impact.

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20. Food and Dining

High School: Meals are typically prepared at home or offered in the school cafeteria with limited variety.

College: Students navigate meal plans, dining halls, or cooking for themselves, often with more choices and personal responsibility.

Why: This builds independence and introduces students to managing health and diet.

21. Academic Advising and Planning

High School: Guidance counselors assist with course selection and college planning, but choices are generally limited to a standard high school curriculum.

College: Academic advisors help students plan a personalized path, considering major requirements, career goals, and electives.

Why: College academic planning is tailored to individual career and personal goals, requiring more student input.

22. Rules and Discipline

High School: Rules and policies are strict, with teachers and staff monitoring behavior closely.

College: Students are treated as adults, with the expectation they'll follow policies (e.g., academic integrity, conduct) independently. Consequences for violations can be severe.

Why: College expects maturity and accountability for actions.