

How to Plan for College in 11th Grade: 8 Expert Tips

(Adapted from Justin Berkman's article originally posted in PrepScholar July 9, 2016)

For many students, the junior year causes tremendous anxiety because of its importance in the college planning process. Students are generally aware that what they do in the 11th grade matters to colleges, but they don't know exactly how to plan for college.

In this article, I'll thoroughly explain everything you should be doing in the 11th grade to plan for college. If you're organized and equipped with this knowledge, you'll be able to successfully complete your junior year and increase the likelihood of reaching your college goals.

Furthermore, I'll discuss aspects of college planning that you don't have to worry about in your junior year.

This Is the Most Important Year for College Planning

Because your junior year is your last full year of school before you apply to college, it's the most pivotal year in the college planning process. Your junior year grades are the last full year of grades colleges will see before they make admissions decisions. It's the last complete academic year you have to learn about colleges and the financial aid process before deciding where you'll attend.

How to Make Your Junior Year Less Stressful

Many students become incredibly anxious and stressed out during their junior year because they realize the stakes and feel overwhelmed by all their responsibilities. You can minimize your stress in 11th grade and reach your college goals by following completing the DSA gr. 11 college planning checklist on time.

What Do You Need to Do?

All college-bound juniors have a number of responsibilities during their junior years. Here are eight tips on how to plan for college and maximize your options.

#1: Take the Right Classes

Colleges, especially selective colleges, want to see that you're challenging yourself and taking some of the hardest classes that are offered at your school. You don't have to take every single honors or AP class, but to get into elite schools, you should demonstrate that you can do well in the most difficult classes. Ultimately, have a schedule of challenging classes you can do well in.

#2: Get Good Grades

Junior year grades are the most important for college admissions. If you didn't do as well as you wanted in your freshman or sophomore year, you can use your junior year to demonstrate your improvement and show that you're capable of succeeding in college.

If you don't do as well as you'd like in your junior year, it doesn't necessarily mean that your college dreams are shattered, though. You can make up for lower grades with higher test scores and exceptional achievements in your extracurricular activities.

#3: Get/Stay Involved in Extracurriculars

Other than your grades and test scores, your extracurricular activities probably have the biggest influence on the quality of your college applications. Colleges want their students to have exceptional achievements outside of the classroom, and they're looking for individuals who use their leisure time to pursue their passions.

Instead of getting involved in “everything”, it may be more advantageous to exhibit excellence in a particular activity or field.

It's more impressive for colleges to see commitment and demonstrable achievements in the same activities than getting overly involved in too many.

#4: Prepare For and Take Standardized Tests

Ideally, finish standardized tests for college by the end of the junior year. That will free up time in the senior year to focus on college applications, schoolwork, and extracurriculars.

The SAT/ACT is an important component of your college applications. Figure out your target score; and if you're trying to get into elite colleges, learn how to get a perfect score on the SAT or ACT.

This fall, focus heavily on test prep. Several options exist.

Take the SAT or ACT at least twice beginning in February. If necessary, test again senior year beginning in August.

All juniors will take the PSAT at DSA in October. This is the qualifying test for the National Merit Scholarship. Furthermore, if you're considering applying to any schools or programs that require SAT Subject Tests, you should take those at the end of the semester when the high school course is completed.

Advanced Placement testing is coordinated by Mrs. Jimenez and occurs during the first two weeks of May. Doing well on AP tests demonstrates your readiness to do college-level work, and you can receive college credit by passing AP tests.

#5: Do Extensive College Research

You should have a good idea of which colleges you want to apply to by the end of junior year. Therefore, your college research begins soon. Research tools, comparison checklists, campus visits, college fairs, and college tours, among others, are primary resources available to you. Be sure also to review the collection of resources in the DSA College Counseling section of our school's web page at www.divinesavioracademy.com

Additionally, know the schedule of college representatives visiting DSA, and follow the sign-up requirements on time. Consult with other people who are knowledgeable about the college application and selection process. Talk with your counselor, teachers, parents, college alumni, or current college students. Ask about specific colleges or the application process; if you're talking to somebody who knows you well, you can seek advice about which schools may be a good fit for you.

#6: Learn More About Financial Aid

Definitely, if you need financial aid to afford college, become knowledgeable about the financial aid process during the junior year.

Furthermore, as you're researching colleges, inform yourself about each school's financial aid. Learn which forms are required, and use websites like College Scorecard and FAFSA4Caster to get a rough idea about how much you'll have to pay to attend each school.

Understand the difference between “price” and “cost.” Don’t let a school’s *price* tag scare away. It may provide significantly more financial aid than others, resulting in your paying a lower *cost* than pricier schools. Involve your parents and learn about financial aid with them.

#7: Apply for Scholarships

If college cost is a concern for you, apply for scholarships in your junior year. Check out this expert advice: on [how to find scholarships](#). You can qualify for specific scholarships based on your background, extracurricular activities, or academic achievement.

Also, learn about [the best scholarships for juniors](#). Most scholarships require an application and an essay, but you may be able to use the same essay for multiple scholarships. If you apply for more scholarships, you’ll have a better chance of winning some scholarship money.

#8: Ask Teachers for College Recommendations

It’s a good idea to ask your teachers if they’ll write your college recommendations in the spring of your junior year. By asking them early, they’ll be more likely to agree before they start getting tons of requests in your senior year. Furthermore, you’ll give them more time to consider what they’re going to write. Before asking, make sure you know [which teachers to ask](#). Also, learn [how to ask for recommendations](#).

Generally, it’s best to ask teachers from your junior year, and ideally, at least one of your recommenders should teach a subject related to what you want to study in college. Most colleges that require recommendations want at least two from core academic subject (math, science, English, history, or foreign language) teachers.

What Not to Worry About

While you should be doing thorough college planning in the 11th grade, you don’t need to have everything figured out by the end of your junior year. Here are some specific aspects of planning for college that you don’t need to stress about in your junior year.

Picking a College

Do you meet the admissions requirements for the schools of interest to you? Find out. Google “prepscholar (name of school) admissions” to find the profile for each school. Then use the admissions calculator. With the calculator, you can plug in your GPA and standardized test scores to get an estimate the percentage chance you have of getting into that school.

Based on your odds of getting accepted, you can start dividing your list into [reach](#), [target](#), and [safety](#) schools.

Completing Your College Applications

Work on your [college application essays](#) during your junior year. (Junior English class is the perfect setting for doing so.) Finalize your essay during the summer before senior year. Applications for DSA students begin to be submitted in September and are completed by October 31. Mrs. Jimenez assists senior students individually throughout this process.