

College Application Planner

A practical senior-year system for researching colleges, managing applications, tracking requirements, organizing financial-aid tasks, and making a confident enrollment decision.

HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR VAULT

Plan. Prepare. Progress. Use this planner alongside each college's official admissions portal, your school counselor, and current federal/state financial-aid resources.

Student: _____

Graduation year: _____ Target enrollment: _____

Educational guidance and planning resource. This planner does not complete applications, essays, coursework, or other academic work on a student's behalf.

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How to Use This Planner

College applications are easier to manage when the process is treated as a project rather than a collection of disconnected deadlines. This planner gives you one place to organize your college list, requirements, essays, recommendations, testing decisions, financial-aid steps, application status, and final enrollment choice.

Recommended workflow

- Start with the Student Profile and define what matters most to you.
- Build a broad college list, then research fit, affordability, and admissions requirements.
- Create one master deadline calendar before writing essays or requesting recommendations.
- Track every application requirement separately; never assume all colleges require the same materials.
- Complete financial-aid tasks alongside admissions tasks rather than waiting for admission decisions.
- Review your dashboard weekly until every submitted application reaches a final decision.
- Compare final offers using net cost, academic fit, support, outcomes, and personal priorities - not prestige alone.

Important

Admissions requirements, testing policies, FAFSA processes, institutional deadlines, and financial-aid rules can change. Always verify current requirements on the college's official website and, for federal aid, StudentAid.gov.

Your Application Command Center

Area	Your status	Next action
College list	Not started / In progress / Final	
Application accounts	Not started / In progress / Complete	
Essays	Not started / Drafting / Reviewing / Final	
Recommendations	Not requested / Requested / Received	
Transcript & school forms	Not requested / Requested / Sent	
Testing	Decision needed / Scheduled / Sent / Not submitting	
Financial aid	Not started / In progress / Submitted	
Scholarships	Searching / Applying / Awarded	
Decisions	Waiting / Admitted / Waitlisted / Denied	
Enrollment	Comparing / Deposited / Complete	

1. Student Profile & Priorities

Before comparing colleges, define what you are actually looking for. Your priorities will become the criteria you use later when deciding where to apply and where to enroll.

Academic snapshot

Item	Current information	Action / question
Cumulative GPA		
Weighted GPA (if applicable)		
Class rank (if reported)		
Strongest subjects		
Most challenging subjects		
Advanced/Honors/AP/IB/Dual Enrollment		
SAT/ACT status		
Potential major(s)		
Career interests		

My college priorities

Priority	Importance (1-5)	What would 'good fit' look like?
Academic programs		
Affordability / net cost		
Location / distance		
Campus size		
Housing		
Student support		
Career services		
Internships / experiential learning		
Campus culture		
Other		

2. Build Your College Long List

Begin wider than your final application list. A long list lets you investigate options before eliminating schools too early.

College	City/State	Major offered?	Estimated fit	Research next

Balanced list

Avoid building a list made entirely of highly selective schools. Admissions outcomes can be unpredictable. Use current institutional data and guidance from your counselor to create a balanced set of options where you would genuinely be willing to attend.

3. College Research Profile 1

College information	Notes
College / university	
Location	
Admissions website	
Application platform	
Potential major / program	
Application plan (EA/ED/RD/etc.)	
Official deadline	
Application fee / waiver	
Testing policy	
Required school documents	
Recommendation requirements	
Essay/supplement requirements	
Portfolio/audition (if applicable)	

Fit and affordability research

Question	Research notes
What attracts me academically?	
What concerns me academically?	
Housing/campus environment	
Student support/resources	
Internship/career opportunities	
Published cost information	
Scholarship/aid opportunities	
Questions to ask admissions	

3. College Research Profile 2

College information	Notes
College / university	
Location	
Admissions website	
Application platform	
Potential major / program	
Application plan (EA/ED/RD/etc.)	
Official deadline	
Application fee / waiver	
Testing policy	
Required school documents	
Recommendation requirements	
Essay/supplement requirements	
Portfolio/audition (if applicable)	

Fit and affordability research

Question	Research notes
What attracts me academically?	
What concerns me academically?	
Housing/campus environment	
Student support/resources	
Internship/career opportunities	
Published cost information	
Scholarship/aid opportunities	
Questions to ask admissions	

3. College Research Profile 3

College information	Notes
College / university	
Location	
Admissions website	
Application platform	
Potential major / program	
Application plan (EA/ED/RD/etc.)	
Official deadline	
Application fee / waiver	
Testing policy	
Required school documents	
Recommendation requirements	
Essay/supplement requirements	
Portfolio/audition (if applicable)	

Fit and affordability research

Question	Research notes
What attracts me academically?	
What concerns me academically?	
Housing/campus environment	
Student support/resources	
Internship/career opportunities	
Published cost information	
Scholarship/aid opportunities	
Questions to ask admissions	

3. College Research Profile 4

College information	Notes
College / university	
Location	
Admissions website	
Application platform	
Potential major / program	
Application plan (EA/ED/RD/etc.)	
Official deadline	
Application fee / waiver	
Testing policy	
Required school documents	
Recommendation requirements	
Essay/supplement requirements	
Portfolio/audition (if applicable)	

Fit and affordability research

Question	Research notes
What attracts me academically?	
What concerns me academically?	
Housing/campus environment	
Student support/resources	
Internship/career opportunities	
Published cost information	
Scholarship/aid opportunities	
Questions to ask admissions	

4. Master Deadline Calendar

Record the official deadline and your personal target date. Your target should normally be earlier so you have time to handle technical problems, missing documents, or last-minute corrections.

College	Application plan	Official deadline	My target date	Submitted
				☐
				☐
				☐
				☐
				☐
				☐
				☐
				☐
				☐
				☐
				☐
				☐

Other critical deadlines

Task	Deadline	My target	Complete
FAFSA / federal aid step			☐
State aid deadline			☐
Institutional aid forms			☐
Scholarship priority deadline			☐
Housing application			☐
Honors program			☐
Portfolio / audition			☐
Enrollment deposit			☐

5. Application Requirements Matrix

Use one row per college. A blank requirement should mean 'verified not required,' not 'I have not checked yet.'

College	App	Transcript	Recs	Essay	Supplements	Test	Other

Document control checklist

- I verified each requirement on the official admissions website.
- My name, email, birth date, and other identifying information are consistent across application records.
- I know how my high school submits transcripts and counselor materials.
- I know whether midyear and final transcripts are required.
- I saved confirmation pages/emails after submission.

6. Activities, Honors & Experience Inventory

Build a master inventory before entering activities into applications. Focus on what you did, your level of responsibility, time commitment, growth, and measurable impact when appropriate.

Activity / role	Grades	Hrs/wk	Wks/yr	Leadership / contribution / impact

Honors and recognition

Honor / award	Level	Grade/year	Why it matters / context

7. Personal Statement Planning

The goal is not to sound impressive; it is to help the reader understand something meaningful about you that the rest of the application does not fully show.

Story inventory

Possible story / moment	What happened?	What does it reveal about me?

Draft quality check

- The essay answers the actual prompt.
- It contains specific details rather than only broad claims.
- My voice sounds natural and age-appropriate.
- The reflection explains why the experience mattered.
- The essay adds information not already obvious from my activities list.
- I removed unnecessary repetition and vague opening statements.
- A trusted reviewer checked clarity without rewriting the essay in someone else's voice.
- The final version is proofread and within the required word limit.

Academic integrity

Use feedback to strengthen your own writing. Do not submit an essay written by another person or generated in a way that violates an institution's application policies.

8. Supplemental Essay Tracker

College	Prompt/topic	Limit	Draft	Review	Final
			■	■	■
			■	■	■
			■	■	■
			■	■	■
			■	■	■
			■	■	■
			■	■	■
			■	■	■
			■	■	■
			■	■	■
			■	■	■
			■	■	■

Common supplemental themes to prepare for

- Why this college / why this program?
- Academic interest or intended major
- Community, identity, background, or perspective
- Meaningful activity or responsibility
- Challenge, setback, or growth
- Contribution you hope to make
- Short-answer interests, books, media, or experiences

9. Recommendation Management

Choose recommenders who know your work and character well and can provide specific examples. Follow each college's rules about who may submit recommendations.

Recommender	Role/subject	Colleges	Requested	Due	Received	Thanked
			■		■	■
			■		■	■
			■		■	■
			■		■	■
			■		■	■
			■		■	■

Information I can provide my recommender

- My resume/activity list
- My intended major/career interests
- A short reminder of meaningful work or growth in their class/activity
- The official deadline and submission method
- Any school-specific instructions

10. Transcript, School Forms & Testing

College	Transcript requested	Counselor form	Midyear report	Final transcript	Test decision
	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	☐	

Testing decision notes

For each institution, verify its current testing policy. If scores are optional, consider the strength of your scores in context and follow current institutional guidance. Do not assume one testing strategy is appropriate for every college.

College	Current policy	My score(s)	Submit?	Reason

11. Financial Aid Preparation

Admissions and affordability should be planned together. A college is not financially understood until you review the aid offer and calculate the amount your household would actually need to cover.

Verify current rules

Use StudentAid.gov and each college’s financial-aid office for current FAFSA procedures, deadlines, required forms, and definitions. State and institutional aid can have separate deadlines.

Financial-aid task tracker

Task	Source to verify	Deadline	Status / notes
Create/confirm required StudentAid.gov accounts	StudentAid.gov		
Gather required financial information	StudentAid.gov		
Submit FAFSA	StudentAid.gov		
Review FAFSA Submission Summary / follow-up	StudentAid.gov		
Complete institutional aid form(s), if required	College financial-aid office		
Complete state aid steps, if applicable	Official state source		
Review verification requests	College financial-aid office		
Compare aid offers	Each college		

12. Scholarship Application Tracker

Scholarship	Amount	Deadline	Requirements	Submitted	Result
				■	
				■	
				■	
				■	
				■	
				■	
				■	
				■	
				■	
				■	
				■	
				■	
				■	
				■	
				■	
				■	

Scholarship file checklist

- Reusable activities/resume file
- Unofficial transcript copy for planning (official if required)
- Reusable personal background notes
- Essay idea bank
- Recommendation plan
- Award confirmation records
- Calendar reminders for recurring/local scholarships

13. Pre-Submission Quality Control

Use this checklist for every application before pressing Submit.

- Correct college and application plan selected.
- Legal name and contact information are accurate.
- Academic history is complete and matches school records as required.
- Activities/honors entries are accurate and proofread.
- Intended major/program selection is correct.
- Essay uploaded/pasted into the correct field and formatting reviewed.
- Supplemental responses match the correct college.
- Recommendations/counselor materials are requested or assigned correctly.
- Testing choice is intentional and matches current policy.
- Application fee or approved waiver is handled.
- I reviewed the certification/affirmation before submitting.
- I saved the submission confirmation and portal instructions.

Final review notes

14. Application Submission Tracker

College	Submitted	Portal active	Materials complete	Decision date	Decision
	■	■	■		
	■	■	■		
	■	■	■		
	■	■	■		
	■	■	■		
	■	■	■		
	■	■	■		
	■	■	■		
	■	■	■		
	■	■	■		
	■	■	■		
	■	■	■		

After submission

Check each college's applicant portal. A submitted application can still be incomplete if a transcript, recommendation, test score, or other required item has not been received.

15. Applicant Portal & Follow-Up Log

College	Portal URL / note	Missing item / request	Action taken	Date resolved

Communication log

Date	College/office	Contact / topic	What I learned	Follow-up

16. Admissions Decision Tracker

College	Decision	Aid offer received	Visit/event	Appeal/follow-up	Next deadline
		■	■		
		■	■		
		■	■		
		■	■		
		■	■		
		■	■		
		■	■		
		■	■		
		■	■		
		■	■		
		■	■		
		■	■		
		■	■		

If waitlisted

- Read the college's waitlist instructions carefully.
- Decide whether I genuinely want to remain on the waitlist.
- Submit only the updates/materials the institution permits.
- Deposit at another college by its deadline if needed.
- Avoid assuming a waitlist will convert to admission.

17. Financial Aid Offer Comparison

Compare offers using the same categories. Separate grants/scholarships from loans and work expectations. Focus on estimated net cost and what must actually be paid or borrowed.

Category	College A	College B	College C
Published cost of attendance			
Grants/scholarships			
Federal/state aid			
Institutional aid			
Student loans			
Parent/private loans			
Work-study / work expectation			
Estimated net cost			
Out-of-pocket gap			
Renewal conditions			

Questions for the financial-aid office

18. Final College Decision Matrix

Choose your own weights. A factor that matters greatly to you should count more than one that is merely nice to have. Score each college consistently.

Criterion	Weight 1-5	College A 1-5	College B 1-5	College C 1-5
Academic program				
Net cost / affordability				
Career/internship support				
Student support				
Location				
Campus environment				
Housing				
Personal fit				
Other				

Decision reflection

Which option best supports my academic goals, financial reality, and personal well-being - and why?

19. Enrollment & Transition Checklist

- Accept admission using the institution's official process.
- Submit enrollment deposit if required and affordable.
- Decline other offers respectfully after deciding.
- Complete housing application and deposit if applicable.
- Complete required financial-aid follow-up.
- Complete orientation registration.
- Submit final transcript when required.
- Send final AP/IB/dual-enrollment records if applicable.
- Complete placement/testing requirements if applicable.
- Review immunization/health documentation requirements.
- Set up student email and portal accounts.
- Review billing dates and payment-plan options.
- Review academic calendar and move-in/start dates.
- Connect with disability/accessibility services early if needed.
- Save copies of important admissions and financial-aid records.

My transition priorities

20. Weekly Application Sprint

Use this page repeatedly during application season. Pick a small number of high-value tasks and finish them before adding more.

This week's priority	Specific action	Due	Done
			■
			■
			■
			■
			■
			■
			■

Time blocks

Day	Application task	Planned time	Actual / notes
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

End-of-week review

■ What did I complete?

■ What is blocked or waiting on someone else?

■ What are my top three priorities next week?

21. Family / Counselor Planning Meeting

Use this page to make expectations visible and reduce confusion about deadlines, costs, responsibilities, and communication.

Topic	Decision / question	Who owns next step?	Due
Final college list			
Application costs/waivers			
Transcript/school forms			
Recommendations			
Financial-aid forms			
Family affordability range			
Campus visits			
Scholarships			
Final decision process			

Questions I still need answered

22. Notes & Research 1

22. Notes & Research 2

22. Notes & Research 3

Your Application Finish Line

A strong college application process is not about creating a perfect profile. It is about presenting accurate information, meeting requirements, making thoughtful choices, and keeping your options organized enough to evaluate them clearly.

Final completion checklist

- My final college list is balanced and intentional.
- Every application requirement was verified from an official source.
- Every submitted application has a confirmation record.
- I monitored applicant portals for missing materials.
- Financial-aid tasks were completed and tracked.
- I compared offers using net cost, fit, support, and outcomes.
- I made my enrollment decision by the applicable deadline.
- I completed the transition steps required by my chosen college.

Continue your journey

Use the other High School Senior Vault resources - College Comparison Workbook, Scholarship Tracker, FAFSA Preparation Guide, Choosing Your Major Workbook, and College Budget Template - to deepen each part of the planning process.

SBH Academic Vault

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