

Ninth Grade College-Planning Checklist

☐ Remind 101

Sign up to receive reminders from the CCC. Text to the number 81010, and in the subject line, type @ccc2020. Parents type @cccgrady.

☐ Academics

Have you started your college application yet? No? Actually, you have because all your grades from high school will go on your transcript, which is one of the most important parts of your application. Grades matter now, so study hard and do your best. But don't panic if your freshman grades are lower than you want—colleges won't worry too much as long as you bring low grades up.

Plan to take some AP classes in grades 10, 11, and 12—colleges care not only about your grades but also about whether you challenged yourself.

☐ Tests

No need to stress about the SAT and ACT yet. Freshmen have the option to take the PSAT in October, which is good practice (it matters more in 11th grade). Download the SAT Practice app on your phone and get a question every day.

☐ Activities

Grady offers lots of clubs, sports, and activities, so jump in and try some out. Your goal is to find an activity or two that you really enjoy; deep involvement with a few things is much better than a long list of things you tried briefly. But if you try something your freshman year that you really don't enjoy, don't stick with it just because you think it will look good on your resume. Your main activities may not be at school—they could be with church or another group, or you could be working. Colleges won't really care **what** you did, only that you spent your time engaged in something you care about and not just playing video games.

☐ College Visits

More than 150 colleges visit the CCC every year. Freshmen are welcome! Find out who's coming through Remind 101 texts, the GradyGram, the board outside CCC, or our website. If you're on vacation, visit a nearby college. You might quickly get a sense of whether you prefer small or large, urban or rural, etc.

☐ Resume

Go ahead and start a resume. It's nothing more than a list of high school activities. Download a template from the CCC website and add to it as you go. Having a resume can also help you identify gaps you might need to fill.

☐ Summer

Use your time well. Volunteer (get your community service hours done as early as you can!), read, get a part time job, or learn on your own about something that interests you, like American Sign Language or how to build a computer. Expensive summer programs are fine, but not at all necessary.

Tenth Grade College-Planning Checklist

☐ Remind 101

Sign up to receive reminders from the CCC. Text to the number 81010, and in the subject line, type @ccc2019. Parents type @cccgrady.

☐ Academics

Continue to work hard and do your best—grades matter. If you need extra help, ask your teacher. Take challenging courses.

☐ Tests

All Grady 10th graders take the PSAT in October during the school day. Pay attention to your grade—what do you need to work on before taking it next year?

Understand AP Tests vs SAT Subject Tests. If you've taken an AP class, you can take the AP Test at the end of the year (in school). A good score can earn you college credit, depending on where you attend. Some selective colleges require SAT Subject Tests. If you take an AP class, consider taking the corresponding SAT Subject Test at the end of the year while the information is still fresh. Sign up at collegeboard.com. Test dates are the same as SAT test dates.

Consider taking both the ACT and SAT in June. Don't prep, just see which you prefer and which you do better on (you can either take the actual tests or take free practice tests online). A bad score will not affect your college admission chances; colleges consider only your best score. Deciding now which test to focus on means one less thing you have to think about next year.

☐ Activities

Stay involved and think about how to move into a leadership position next year. Does your participation make a difference for the club, school, or organization?

☐ College Visits

More than 150 colleges visit the CCC every year. Sophomores are welcome! Find out who's coming through Remind 101 texts, the GradyGram, the board outside CCC, or our website. If you're on vacation, visit a nearby college. You might quickly get a sense of whether you prefer small or large, urban or rural, etc.

☐ Resume

If you haven't already, start a resume. It's nothing more than a list of high school activities. Download a template from the CCC website and add to it as you go. Having a resume can also help you identify gaps you might need to fill.

☐ Summer

Use your time well. Volunteer (aim to have your community service hours completed before junior year) read, get a part time job, or learn on your own about something that interests you. If you're interested in a particular career field, see if you can get an internship over the summer. Start inquiring in early spring.

Eleventh Grade College-Planning Checklist

□ Remind 101

Sign up to receive reminders from the CCC. Text to the number 81010, and in the subject line, type @ccc2018. Parents type @cccgrady.

□ Academics

For many college-bound students, junior year is the most challenging, academically. In many ways, it's the most important—it's the last full year of grades that will appear on your transcript when you apply to college. Work hard.

Let your teachers get to know you by speaking up in class. Your junior teachers will likely be the ones you ask to write your letters of recommendation, and those letters will be much stronger if you participate rather than sit quietly all year.

□ Begin to Compile your College List

If you know what you want in a college, great! If not, you've got a lot of company.

Begin to figure out what kind of school you'd like and what you might like to study by doing some online assessments. Find links on the CCC website to helpful tools, such as a worksheet featured in the book *College Match* by Steven Antonoff, which will help you figure out the college environment that's right for you. There are also links to sites where you can assess your skills and interests (such as GAFutures.org) and explore possible majors (such as collegemajors101.com). You do not need to know what you will major in yet, but having some idea of what you'd like to study and the type of environment you'd like to be in can help you narrow down the possibilities.

Begin to compile a list of potential schools by visiting one of the many college search engines out there, such as Collegexpress, Cappex, College Board, College Navigator, College Confidential, or Unigo. Find links on the CCC website. Type in what you're looking for, and these sites generate a list of potential matches. Try several and see if you get similar results.

Learn more about specific schools suggested by the search engines. Visit school websites and come in to the CCC to consult the Fiske Guide to Colleges and other helpful books. We also have files of information about individual schools.

Make a list of schools, either on paper, on a Word document or spreadsheet, or by making a Common App account (www.commonapp.org) and putting them on your dashboard. Throw the net wide—you'll narrow your list down later. Include some reach, probable, and safety schools.

Your goal is to end junior year with a good working list of colleges you feel would be a good fit for you—academically, financially, and socially.

Eleventh Grade College-Planning Checklist (cont.)

□ **Tests**

All juniors will take the **PSAT** in October during school. The top 1.5% or so nationally will become eligible for a National Merit Scholarship.

If you haven't already, take both the **SAT** and the **ACT** in the fall to see which you prefer. You don't have to officially take the real tests (which is an expense)—you can take free online sample tests. Decide which test is best for you, do some test prep for that one (either a paid class or free online prep such as Kahn Academy offers), and register to take it in the spring. If you get your scores back and think you could still do better, do a little more prep and take the test again in June or, at the latest, in the fall of your senior year.

Remember the list of schools you're compiling? Check their requirements. If any require **SAT Subject Tests**, register to take those by the end of junior year. Each lasts about an hour, and you can take up to three in one day. You cannot take SAT Subject Tests the same day as the SAT.

AP Tests happen in May, during school. Register in early spring. You can get college credit if you score high enough. However, if you don't want to place out of a class in college (say you took AP Chemistry but want to cement your chemistry knowledge by taking Chem 101 in college) or if you won't be pursuing the subject in college at all (AP Music Theory?), then save the money and skip the AP Test.

Your goal, ideally, is to have all testing completed by the end of junior year. Many students don't finish until fall of senior year, and that's fine, too.

□ **Activities**

Stay engaged and make sure you're making a difference to your club, sport, place of worship or work, or your family. Are you in line for a leadership position?

□ **College Visits**

More than 150 colleges visit the CCC every year. Find out who's coming through Remind 101 texts, the GradyGram, the board outside CCC, or our website. If any schools on your list are visiting, definitely come meet the rep. But don't limit yourself to schools on your list—this is the time to explore. Also, plan to attend some college fairs. The CCC lists them on the calendar on our website.

Plan a spring break trip to visit colleges, if possible. This might be your best opportunity to visit while they're in session. Summer visits are fine, too, but campus will be quieter. See the CCC website for a guide to visiting colleges.

□ **Resume**

If you haven't yet, make a resume. Download a template from the CCC website.

Eleventh Grade College-Planning Checklist (cont.)

□ **Visit the CCC**

In the spring, we offer a variety of lunchtime workshops on topics from essay-writing to interview skills. Watch for texts and read the GradyGram and the board outside the CCC so you won't miss anything.

□ **Letters of Recommendation**

In the spring, ask two teachers you've had this year if they are willing to write you a letter of recommendation. If they agree, give them your resume to remind them of your accomplishments. Ask early, but at the very least allow three weeks.

□ **Special consideration for artists, performers, athletes, and military**

Some applications require extra work and early planning. If you want to play sports in college, register online with the NCAA eligibility center, make sure you're meeting all the academic requirements, and make a video of your best moments on the field. Talk to your coach for guidance.

If you want to attend a military academy, you must secure the recommendation of your Senator or Representative. Check their websites and start early.

Artists who need portfolios or performers who need to schedule auditions or create a performance video should understand the requirements early.

□ **Get organized**

The college search brings a lot of information to manage. Figure out an organizational system that works for you. Many students create spreadsheets, and others create notebooks. You may also want a file box to save information you get in the mail. Parents can be very helpful in the area of organization!

□ **Consider Your Finances**

Ideally, you have been considering finances all along. Learn about different types of financial aid (grants, scholarships, loans, work study). The HOPE and Zell Miller Scholarships are great for high-achieving students staying in Georgia. Remember that schools offer a lot of aid, so the sticker price is not necessarily what you'll pay. And private schools usually have much more scholarship money available than public schools, so may actually cost less. Every college website has a Net Price Calculator that may help you figure out what you'll actually pay. Begin researching scholarships you would be eligible for. There are many search engines to help you, such as FastWeb, College Board, Niche, and more. Find links on the CCC website.

□ **Summer**

Try to relax and rejuvenate, in addition to your other activities. Start your Common App essay (visit commonapp.org). Visit some colleges. Refine your college list as you continue to research and learn about schools.

Your goal is to end summer with a college list and essay ready to go.

Twelfth Grade College-Planning Checklist

FALL

☐ **Remind 101**

Sign up to receive reminders from the CCC. Text to the number 81010, and in the subject line, type @ccc2017. Parents type @cccgrady.

☐ **Academics**

Continue to work hard. Grades remain important, as does the rigor of your classes. The college you decide to attend will want to see your final transcript.

☐ **Visit the CCC**

We offer workshops, college visits, essay help, and more.

☐ **Tests**

August: Register now. If you still need to take the SAT or ACT, get this out of the way as early as you can. The first SAT is offered on October 1, and the first two ACTs are offered on September 10 and October 22. Registration deadlines are about a month before each test. Do some test prep beforehand. See the CCC website for both paid classes and free online test prep options.

If any of your schools require SAT Subject Tests, take them in October.

☐ **Create a Common App Account**

August: Create an account at commonapp.org. Fill in your personal and family info and put the schools on your list into your dashboard. You can keep adding or deleting schools as you refine your list. Arrange them by deadline. Make sure you note whether any schools require supplemental essays. Note that not all schools accept the Common App (UGA does not), but almost 700 do.

☐ **Portfolio Reviews and Auditions**

If these are required, start planning and scheduling now. Your teachers can help.

☐ **Resume**

Early September: If you don't have a resume, create one now (there's a template on the CCC website). You will need it when you ask for letters of recommendation, and it will also help you when you're filling out the Common App or other applications.

☐ **Create a Parchment Account**

Mid September: Grady uses the website Parchment to send transcripts electronically. Set up your account now at parchment.com. Then you'll be ready to quickly request that your transcript be sent to the schools you apply to.

Twelfth Grade College-Planning Checklist, Fall (cont.)

□ **Write Your Common App Essay and Supplemental Essays**

August-October: The Common App requires you to write an essay. If you don't know how to get started or if you'd like help developing your essay, editing or proofing, CCC volunteers can help. Just stop in, or email cccessayhelp@gmail.com. Help is also available in Grady's Writing Center (in the media center after school) or from your teachers.

Some schools require additional supplemental essays. Check the requirements carefully. The more selective the school, the more likely you will have to write extra essays. Give yourself plenty of time to write these (which is easier to plan if you know how many you'll have to do). Come to the CCC for editing help, but at the very least, be sure to ask someone to proof them.

□ **Letters of Recommendation**

Mid September: Most schools require one counselor and two teacher recommendations, but check your schools to see if any require more. Contact two junior-year teachers of core subjects (English, science, math, social studies) and ask if they'd be willing to write a letter of recommendation. If they agree, provide your resume and let them know when your first application is due. If you asked teachers last spring to write a recommendation, remind them politely now (don't expect them to have written it over the summer) by email or in person, and provide another copy of your resume.

Ask your counselor for a letter of recommendation as well. Colleges understand that most high school counselors serve hundreds of students, so they don't expect him or her to know you personally. The counselor will speak to your academic record in the context of the school. Provide your resume to the counselor when you ask. Be sure to thank teachers and counselors!

□ **College Visits**

Attend college visits in the CCC. Find out who's coming through Remind 101 texts, the GradyGram, the board outside CCC, or our website. If any schools on your list are visiting, come meet the rep, who is likely the person who will first read your application. But don't limit yourself to schools on your list—you may still learn about a school you hadn't considered that's a great fit for you.

Continue to visit colleges on your list if you can. If you don't have a chance to see them all before you apply, you can still visit in the spring if you're admitted.

□ **Clean Up Your Online Image**

Create professional-sounding email accounts (sue.smith@gmail.com, for example, not sexy.kitty@gmail.com). Do you have potentially embarrassing photos or angry rants on social media? Delete them now.

Twelfth Grade College-Planning Checklist, Fall (cont.)

☐ **Complete the FAFSA**

October 1: The FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) becomes available on October 1. Parents should complete this as soon as possible at www.fafsa.gov. Every student must have this on file! You can link it to your IRS tax return, and the information will be filled in automatically.

☐ **Refine Your College List**

If you have not yet completed (or begun) your college list, compile a list of potential schools by visiting one of the many college search engines out there, such as Collegexpress, Cappex, College Board, College Navigator, College Confidential, or Unigo. GAFutures (formerly Georgia College 411) is great for in-state searches. Find links on the CCC website. Type in what you're looking for, and these sites generate a list of potential matches.

If you have a long list, begin to narrow it down. Delete any schools you wouldn't actually happily attend. Shoot for 5 to 9 schools to apply to. Include some reach, probable, and safety schools, based on GPA and test scores as well as cost. Don't rule out schools because of cost, though; financial aid is often available. Check to see how much merit aid your schools offer.

☐ **Scholarships**

Most financial aid will come from the school you attend. Check to see if you're automatically considered for scholarships when you apply or if a separate application is required. Consider applying to Honors programs at your schools. Be aware of outside scholarship opportunities. Many have fall deadlines.

☐ **Apply to College!**

October-January: All the pieces are in place. It's time to apply. Complete the application (either on the Common App or on a school's website), attach the essay or essays, choose your recommenders (they will have uploaded their recommendations to your Common App account), take a deep breath, and hit "submit." Note that each school on the Common App has a separate application fee, although waivers are available—see your counselor. If you don't have a waiver, you'll need a credit card to complete the application.

☐ **Send Test Scores and Transcript**

Have your ACT or SAT scores sent to each school you apply to (if you didn't designate a school when you took the test, log into your ACT or SAT account to request scores be sent, for a small fee). Visit Parchment to send your transcript to each school (this is free).

☐ **Pay Close Attention to Application Deadlines**

Early Action (EA) and Early Decision (ED) deadlines come as early as mid-October. Regular admission deadlines are usually around the first of the year. Don't wait until the last minute. Remember that EA is not binding, but if you apply to a school ED and are accepted, you are obligated to attend.

Twelfth Grade College-Planning Checklist (cont.)

SPRING

□ Hear From Colleges

If you applied Early Action or Early Decision, you will receive an admission response before winter break. You'll continue to hear about Regular Decision applications throughout the spring. Celebrate every acceptance!

□ Financial Aid

When you receive a letter of acceptance, you should receive a financial aid package as well. Each school will offer you a combination of scholarships or grants (which don't have to be paid back), loans (which do), and possibly work-study. You or your parents should call the financial aid office with any questions. Ask if there are other scholarships you can apply for or if there's any more aid available. Financial aid officers are happy to help you.

□ CSS Profile

In addition to the FAFSA, some private schools also require the CSS Profile, which is a more in-depth picture of your financial situation than the FAFSA. Check the deadlines at your schools—it's often due around February 1.

□ HOPE and Zell Miller Scholarships

If staying in-state, verify whether you are eligible for a HOPE or Zell Miller Scholarship. Make sure Grady has your social security number; this must be on file before the end of the school year in order for you to receive HOPE.

□ Pell Grants and Achieve Atlanta Scholarships

These are need-based grants, awarded based on your FAFSA application. If you're eligible, you can receive up to \$5,815 per year for a Pell Grant, and up to \$5,000 per year for an Achieve Atlanta Scholarship. It's free money.

□ Outside Scholarships

If there is a shortfall between the financial aid a school offers and what you can afford to pay, look for additional scholarships. There are thousands available. Many require an essay and have to be renewed each year. There are many search engines, such as Fastweb, College Board, Niche, and others, to help you find those you're eligible for. Check the CCC website for links.

□ Make Final Visits

If you didn't get to visit all your colleges earlier or if you want to visit your top picks again, plan a spring break trip to the colleges where you've been admitted.

□ Make Your Decision

May 1: You've received all your decisions and compared financial aid packages. This may be the most agonizing part of the process, but by May 1 you need to make your final decision and pay a deposit to hold your place. Congratulations! Don't forget to visit Parchment and have your final transcript sent to your college.