

Junior Year (11th)

* **Make school your top priority!** This is most important academic year for your college applications. Colleges will pay close attention to which courses you are taking and how well you are doing in them.

* **Narrow down your list of colleges.** Barring any terrible surprises, you should have a fairly good sense of your GPA and test scores by now, and therefore of which schools are within reach. Start visiting colleges that you're serious about and weigh your options. If any school is far and away your top choice, consider applying Early Decision (binding) next fall – but be sure you're sure!

* **Check your top choice colleges' testing requirements.** While most schools don't require Subject Tests anymore, there are still some that do — which can be a rude awakening for any student who has assumed the Subject Tests are irrelevant. Still, while most don't *require* the Subject Tests, a good number “recommend” them — and ALL accept them. So even if your top schools don't require (or even recommend) these tests, strong scores will only strengthen your application.

* **Take the College Board's PSAT.** Not only is it good practice for the real SAT, it also makes you eligible for National Merit Scholarships and awards.

* **Put together a standardized testing schedule.** If at all possible, you want to be done with standardized testing by the end of junior year. Senior year is busy enough with the challenging academics, let alone the college applications, essays, and interviews you'll be juggling! Before anything else, though, determine whether the SAT or ACT is a better fit for you — a lot of students focus all their time and energy on the “wrong” test and never reach their potential. They play to different sets of strengths and weaknesses, so consider them carefully. Plan to take the SAT or ACT (or both) at least twice this year: typically, shortly after the winter holidays and then again in late spring (with time in between to learn from the mistakes made on the first test). If need be, you can always retake in the fall, but that should be a last resort. Subject Tests and AP exams should be taken in May/June, but take diagnostic tests in March to assess your preparedness. If there are gaps, this allows you ample time to fill them. (Note: If you think you might be eligible for extended time, submit paperwork documenting your learning differences to College Board and/or ACT as soon as possible. The approval process can drag out if there is insufficient evidence, and you don't want this to impact your testing schedule, or worst of all, your scores.)

* **Stay involved in your extracurriculars.** Show consistency – stick with at least one or two primary activities and aim to get more involved as time goes on, not less. If your school has a community service requirement, don't stop just because you meet it – continue your involvement throughout the next couple years.

* **Request letters of recommendation.** Most colleges require at least one (often two or three) letters of recommendation from an applicant's teachers. Don't wait until the last minute senior year to ask your teachers for this favor – they only have time to write so many letters, so be sure

that you are among the first to ask. Colleges will often accept letters from coaches, bosses, and/or other adults who know you outside the classroom.

* **Spend your summer doing something productive.** A lot of colleges will ask how you spent this summer, and you want to be prepared with a solid answer. Whether you held down a job, landed an internship, got involved in community service, took a class at the local community college, or competed in the Junior Olympics, they'll be impressed. Just don't sit around playing video games and lounging at the beach 24/7!

* **Start brainstorming for your application essays.** Talk to your friends and family about events/moments that changed or inspired you, anecdotes that exemplify you, or idiosyncrasies that make you *you*. An outside perspective will help you avoid the typical "I have nothing to say" reaction to these prompts and see yourself in a new light. Additionally, there are typically far more essays than you expect, so an idea bank will be a welcome aid when it's crunch time!

(from www.gecollegeprep.com)