

College Preparation Checklist

for High School Students & Parents



You have lots of options for your life after high school.

If you want to attend college, you can begin working toward it on your very first day of high school, or even earlier if you wish! Follow the checklist below as you move from one year in high school to the next. If you are already in high school, look back at the previous year(s) and check those items off first. It's easier to start early, but it is never too late to begin the journey. Start checking things off today!

FRESHMAN YEAR

- Make an appointment with your school counselor to review your [Virginia Academic and Career Plan](#).** Share your career interests. Ask about courses and graduation requirements, and the standard and advanced diplomas. Counselors also can offer information about community organizations and resources that may help you prepare for college.
- Keep your grades up!** Transcripts are required for most college and scholarship applications. Be sure to include all grades earned each year of high school, credits acquired and other academic credentials earned.
- Create a personal activity résumé** (file where you can store copies of report cards, recognitions received, list of school and community organizations supported and/or offices held, volunteer activities and paid jobs. Continue to add to your file throughout your high school career.
- Talk with your family about how you will afford college.** Make a plan to begin saving. A 529 College Savings Plan is one way to put aside money for higher education expenses. Learn more at virginia529.com. Explore scholarships (available at various grade levels, not just for seniors), dual enrollment, advance courses and career and technical certifications.
- Talk to others about your interests and possible careers.** Ask people you meet about their jobs and career path. Visit vawizard.org to explore career options and the education that is needed and available in Virginia for each.
- Start looking at college websites and attend college fairs/presentations** to become familiar with general college admissions requirements and offerings. College tours are offered for free.

SOPHOMORE YEAR

- Consider registering for the Preliminary SAT® or ACT®, which are standardized tests that provide practice for the SAT/ACT.** High performance on these tests can qualify you for national merit scholarships. Talk to your school counselor about the possibility of a test fee waiver to

take advantage of practice opportunities for standardized tests. Inquire about school or community resources for studying for Pre-ACT, PSAT and SAT/ACT tests. Visit the College Board's [Khan academy](#) or www.actstudent.org for free practice tests.

Meet with your school counselor. Make sure graduation requirements are being met. Ask about opportunities for improvement and college and career exploration.

Continue to work hard in your courses. Consider taking honors, dual enrollment and/or advanced placement courses, if eligible. These options demonstrate academic rigor and may help save time and money once enrolled in college.

Join clubs, teams or volunteer organizations in your community. Many colleges and scholarships consider these activities when reviewing applications. Try to find a volunteer opportunity that is reoccurring (weekly or monthly). This helps to demonstrate commitment and responsibility.

Participate in available open house college visits and/or plan your own by contacting the admission office at your colleges of interest. Many colleges also offer virtual college campus tours on their website. Talk to current students and or alumni and ask about campus living and their college experiences.

JUNIOR YEAR

Register for the Preliminary SAT®/National Merit® Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT®). Scores from the fall PSAT/NMSQT® will be automatically entered into a scholarship competition. As a test-taker, you can request that interested colleges send pamphlets and brochures with more information about their offerings. For more information about the PSAT, including test dates and scoring information, visit www.collegeboard.com. Ask your counselor about testing dates at your school/ community. Continue taking practice tests.

Attend college fairs/presentations and begin to research colleges more seriously. Consider your likes, dislikes and career interests to find the right fit for your future. Ask your counselor if there is a [College Nights in Virginia](#) event in your area to learn basic college and financial aid information and a chance to win a scholarship. If you are a student athlete, visit the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) website at ncaa.org and download a free copy of the [NCAA Guide for the College-Bound Student-Athlete](#).

Meet with your counselor routinely and begin to narrow your list of colleges of interest, review admissions requirements and identify scholarship and career shadowing opportunities. Inquire about advanced-level courses again, if available? [Download and review Virginia's Opportunity booklet before meeting with your counselor](#) and ask any questions you may have.

Work toward serving as an officer and taking leadership roles in extracurricular and volunteer activities.

Consider applying for a job to save money for college. Employment also demonstrates responsibility and helps you to gain valuable work skills and potential college and scholarship references.

Sign up for the spring ACT® and/or SAT, which many colleges require for admission. Some schools have test optional admittance, but may still require the test for specific academic programs. Check with your colleges of interest to be sure that you understand the test requirements and forward scores accordingly. You may request to send up to four colleges ACT® and/or SAT® score reports for free. Many scholarship applications also request scores. If test costs are not covered by your school and paying the fee is a barrier, see your school counselor and ask about the possibility of receiving a test fee waiver.

SENIOR YEAR

Register for the fall ACT® and/or SAT® if you would like to try to improve your scores. Be sure to resend your test scores to your colleges of interest.

Make a list of colleges of interest to apply to. Include one “reach” (more selective) school and at least one “safety” school (sure shot). Include your local community college on the list. Develop a calendar for completing applications on time. Share your plans with someone who can help hold you accountable.

Meet with your school counselor to review admissions requirements for colleges of interest. Find out how your test scores, grades and budget align with college requirements.

Update your activity résumé and use it as a reference or attachment, if allowed, when completing college and scholarship applications.

Identify and ask teachers, counselors, supervisors, mentors, etc., to provide you with letters of recommendation. Give them at least two-weeks’ notice. Share your activity résumé with them to provide them with more information about you.

Learn more about financial aid options, including scholarships, work-study, grants and loans. Attend college fairs and financial aid information meetings. Check out the resources available at finaid.org, fastweb.com, studentaid.ed.gov and schev.edu/financialaid (Virginia). Beware of scholarship scams. For information on how to avoid scams, visit the Federal Trade Commission at www.ftc.gov/bcp/menus/consumer/education/scholarships.shtm. Ask your employer, church, volunteer agency and/or other local organizations about scholarships they may offer.

Find out if your colleges of interest participate in the federal student aid program and learn more about the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#). The application MUST be

completed at [FAFSA.gov](https://fafsa.gov) by all students and parents who wish to apply for federal student aid to help pay for college. Students should submit their FAFSA as soon as possible after October 1 in their senior year. The FAFSA has sections for the student and parent/guardian to complete.

Refer to your acceptance letter(s) to confirm how and when you must respond to colleges with your decision of where you will attend. (College decisions are usually due around May 1.) Talk with family, friends and counselors about your college options. Consider the size, location, and majors offered to find the right fit. Include comparing the financial aid award packages and your expected contributions for each to make sure it is affordable and a good match for you.

Stay focused! Final grades will be submitted to your selected college.

Make sure you pay the required deposit(s) -- by the deadlines -- for enrollment and room and board at the institution you select. Check with your college's admissions and/or financial aid offices to make sure you have satisfied all requirements and know about other upcoming responsibilities.

Plan to attend new student orientation during the summer. Ask for days off work (if needed), plan for transportation and budget for any required orientation fees.

Show up! Arrive on campus on the designated date, time and place and plan to do your best... **you are a college student now!!**

Important Deadlines and Notes:

