

The senior year application timeline

Most of what goes wrong in applications is timing, not ability. Here is when each piece needs to happen, work backwards from your earliest deadline, not from January.

SPRING OF JUNIOR YEAR

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| ☐ Build the first school list
Ten to fifteen, honestly sorted into reach, match and likely. | ☐ Sit or re-sit tests if you are submitting scores |
| ☐ Ask teachers for recommendations
Before they leave for summer. You will be first in the queue. | ☐ Start the personal statement
A summer draft is worth three rushed ones in October. |

SUMMER

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| ☐ Draft and redraft the main essay
Three or four passes, with a week between each. | ☐ Build the activities list
Every role, hours and years. Do it once, use it everywhere. |
| ☐ Visit campuses if you can
Even two changes the list more than any brochure. | ☐ Create your application accounts |

SEPTEMBER

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| ☐ Finalise the school list
Confirm every deadline and type, they are not all the same. | ☐ Request transcripts |
| ☐ Confirm recommenders and give them your materials
Resume, deadlines, and what you want emphasised. | ☐ Start the supplemental essays
These are where applications are actually won and lost. |

OCTOBER

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| ☐ FAFSA opens 1 October
Some aid is first-come. State and school priority deadlines can be earlier. | ☐ Check every recommendation has been submitted
Do not assume. Check the portal. |
| ☐ Submit Early Decision / Early Action
Usually 1 or 15 November, finish a fortnight early. | ☐ Send test scores if you are submitting them |

NOVEMBER TO JANUARY

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| ☐ Regular Decision deadlines
Most fall between 1 and 15 January. | ☐ CSS Profile where required |
| ☐ Scholarship applications
Separate deadlines, separate essays, often earlier than you expect. | ☐ Keep your grades up
Offers are conditional. Senior spring still counts. |

SPRING

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| ☐ Compare real costs, not sticker prices
Aid letters are not comparable until you normalise them. | ☐ Reply by 1 May
The standard national reply date. |
| ☐ Visit again if you are deciding between two | ☐ Send the deposit and thank your recommenders
Both matter. One is manners. |

THE FIVE THAT COST PEOPLE PLACES

- ☐ **Leaving supplements until December**
The main essay gets months; supplements get a weekend. It shows, and supplements are where fit is judged.
- ☐ **Assuming a recommendation was submitted**
Portals show status. Check it yourself, twice, and follow up politely.
- ☐ **Applying Early Decision to compare offers**
ED is binding. If aid matters, apply Early Action or Regular instead.
- ☐ **Missing a scholarship deadline that sat earlier than the application**
Money deadlines are frequently weeks ahead of admissions ones.
- ☐ **A list with no genuine likely schools**
Three or four you would actually be happy to attend, and would very probably get into.

WORK BACKWARDS, NOT FORWARDS

Find your single earliest deadline, usually an Early Action date or a scholarship, and subtract two weeks. That is your real finish line for the main essay, the activities list and every recommendation. Everything on this timeline hangs off that one date, not off January.

Using this with the HavenKept Admissions Planner: **Colleges** holds the list with each deadline, **Essays** and **Recommendations** track status per school, **Scholarships & FAFSA** keeps the money side separate, and **Decision Center** and **Acceptance Tracker** take over in the spring.