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Student Checklist

A Clear Step-by-Step Roadmap from 9th Grade to College Acceptance Letters



Student Checklist

This checklist is designed to remove confusion and stress by breaking the college process into clear stages, specific actions, and realistic timelines. You ***don't*** need to do everything at once – you just need to do the *right things* at the *right times*.

By Dr. Nathan Hurwitz

University Professor ♦ Author ♦ Mentor ♦ Admissions Consultant



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The College Admissions Student Checklist

Print this page to mark off everything as you complete it!

- 1. Focus on Academic Habits (Not Just Grades)** - - Begin in 9th grade (revisit and refine throughout high school)
- 2. Explore Interests Without Pressure** - 9th–10th grade exploration (narrow focus by late 10th grade)
- 3. Build Relationships with Teachers** - Start early (definitely by 10th grade)
- 4. Begin Thinking About College Fit** - Spring of 10th grade (through 11th grade)
- 5. Create a Preliminary Résumé** - End of 10th grade (update every semester)
- 6. Plan Standardized Testing (SAT/ACT)** - Diagnostic: late 10th / early 11th/ Primary testing: spring or fall of 11th
- 7. Visit Colleges (Virtually or In Person)** - Summer after 10th grade and throughout 11th grade
- 8. Finalize a Balanced College List** - Late spring/summer before 12th grade
- 9. Begin Essay Brainstorming (Before Writing)** - Summer before 12th grade
- 10. Request Letters of Recommendation** - End of 11th grade/early 12th grade
- 11. Draft, Revise, and Finalize Essays** - Drafting: summer / early fall (Final versions: fall of 12th grade)
- 12. Complete Applications Carefully** - Fall of 12th grade (Earlier for Early Action / Early Decision)
- 13. Prepare for Interviews (If offered)** - Spring of 12th Grade
- 14. Compare Offers Thoughtfully** - March–April of 12th grade
- 15. Make a Confident Final Decision** - May 1 (most schools)



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A Note to Parents from Nathan Hurwitz

The college admissions process has changed considerably, often causing stress or overwhelming families. This guide is designed to help you understand the steps, support your student, and know what to expect as we work together. My primary goal is to reduce anxiety, clarify the process, and empower your student to confidently express their identity. I look forward to discussing your student and collaborating with you to support your family through this exciting transition.

Nathan Hurwitz

If you are looking for “hands-on” support, contact me to schedule a consultation and take the next steps with confidence.



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Phase 1: Building Foundations

This phase isn't about college applications yet—and that's the point. What you do now quietly sets you up to feel **confident instead of stressed** later.

1. Get Good at Schooling (Not Just Getting Grades)

What this looks like:

- Figuring out study habits that actually work for *you*
- Learning how to manage time, deadlines, and bigger assignments
- Asking for help early instead of waiting until you're overwhelmed

Why this matters:

Colleges don't expect perfection—but they *do* notice growth. When your habits are solid early on, your grades tend to improve naturally as classes get harder.

When to focus on this:

- ✓ Start in 9th grade
- ✓ Keep improving it every year

2. Try Things—Without Overthinking Them

What to do:

- Explore clubs, sports, arts, volunteering, or a part-time job
- Pay attention to what you actually enjoy—not what you think looks “college-worthy”

Why this matters:

Colleges can spot résumé-padding instantly. What they *love* is genuine interest. When you care about something, you stick with it—and that's where leadership and strong stories come from later.



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When to do this:

- ✓ Explore throughout 9th and 10th grade
- ✓ Start narrowing your focus by the end of 10th grade

3. Let Teachers Get to Know You

What to do:

- Participate in class (you don't have to talk nonstop—just be engaged)
- Ask questions when you're curious or confused
- Get feedback on your work

Why this matters:

Later on, you'll need recommendation letters. The best ones come from teachers who know *how you think*, not just what grade you earned.

When this matters most:

- ✓ Start early
- ✓ Especially important in 10th grade

A Quick Reality Check

You don't need to do *more* right now—you just need to do things **on purpose**. Getting guidance early can help you build strong habits, explore the right things, and avoid a lot of last-minute stress later.

That's exactly what the **Student Starter Kit** is designed to help with—and it's where smart college planning actually begins.



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Phase 2: Direction & Preparation

Mid-10th Grade – 11th Grade

This is the phase where things start to feel *real*—but not overwhelming. You’re not choosing colleges yet. You’re learning how to make **smart, informed choices** later.

4. Start Thinking About College *Fit*

What to focus on:

- Learn the difference between large vs. small schools
- Think about location, majors, campus culture, and how you learn best
- Notice what feels exciting—and what doesn’t

Why this matters:

The “best” college isn’t the most famous one—it’s the place where **you’ll actually thrive**. Fit matters more than rankings.

When to start:

- ✓ Spring of 10th grade
- ✓ Keep refining through 11th grade

5. Build Your First Activities Résumé

What to do:

- List clubs, sports, jobs, volunteering, leadership, and awards
- For each, note *what you did* and *what you learned*



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Why this matters:

This document becomes the foundation for applications, essays, interviews, and recommendations. Starting early saves you from scrambling later.

When to do this:

- ✓ By the end of 10th grade
- ✓ Update it every semester

6. Make a Smart Testing Plan (SAT/ACT)

What to do:

- Take a diagnostic practice test (no pressure—it's just information)
- Decide whether the SAT or ACT fits you better
- Map out a prep plan that fits your schedule and goals

Why this matters:

Testing should **support** your application—not take over your life. A clear plan keeps stress low and progress steady.

When to do this:

- ✓ Diagnostic: late 10th or early 11th grade
- ✓ Main testing: spring or fall of 11th grade

7. Visit Colleges (Online or In Person)

What to do:

- Attend campus tours or virtual info sessions
- Take notes on academics, students, vibe, and campus life

Why this matters:

Visits help you figure out what you actually like—and they make future “Why This College?” essays much easier to write.



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When to do this:

- ✓ Summer after 10th grade
- ✓ Throughout 11th grade

Quick Student Tip

This phase isn't about having everything figured out—it's about **getting clearer**. With the right structure and guidance, this is where confusion turns into confidence and random effort turns into a real plan.



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Phase 3: Application Strategy

Late 11th Grade – Early 12th Grade

This is where everything you've been building starts to come together. The goal here isn't pressure—it's **clarity**. When you know what you're doing and why, stress drops fast.

8. Lock In a Balanced College List

What to do:

- Build a list that includes **reach**, **target**, and **likely** schools
- Make sure each school fits you academically, socially, and financially

Why this matters:

A smart list gives you **real options**—and confidence. It's not about chasing prestige; it's about setting yourself up for success and choice.

When to do this:

- ✓ Late spring of 11th grade
- ✓ Finalize during the summer before 12th grade

9. Start Essay Brainstorming (Before You Write Anything)

What to do:

- Think about experiences that actually mattered to you
- Look for moments of growth, learning, or changed perspective
- Don't rush into drafting yet

Why this matters:

Great essays don't come from trying to sound impressive. They come from **clear thinking and honest reflection**. Writing gets much easier once the ideas are right.



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When to do this:

- ✓ Summer before 12th grade

10. Ask for Letters of Recommendation

What to do:

- Ask teachers who know you well—not just the ones who gave you high grades
- Share your activities résumé and some context about your goals
- Ask politely, clearly, and early

Why this matters:

Strong recommendation letters show colleges who you are in the classroom and beyond—your curiosity, work ethic, and impact on others.

When to do this:

- ✓ End of 11th grade
- ✓ Or early fall of 12th grade at the latest

Quick Student Tip

This phase feels intense for a lot of students—but it doesn’t have to. With the right structure and guidance, this is when everything starts to feel **organized, intentional, and under control**.

That’s exactly where working with an experienced college admissions consultant can make the biggest difference.



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Phase 4: Execution & Submission

12th Grade

This is the phase where everything gets submitted—but it doesn’t have to feel frantic. With a plan in place, this part becomes about **finishing strong**, not scrambling.

11. Write, Revise, and Finalize Your Essays

What to do:

- Write drafts with support and clear direction
- Revise for clarity, depth, and focus
- Make sure the voice always sounds like *you*

Why this matters:

In competitive admissions, essays are often what set students apart. They’re where colleges get to understand *who you are*, not just what you’ve done.

When to do this:

- ✓ Drafting: summer or early fall
- ✓ Final versions: fall of 12th grade

12. Complete Applications—Carefully and Calmly

What to do:

- Fill out every section thoughtfully
- Proofread everything (then proofread again)
- Submit before deadlines whenever possible

Why this matters:

Small mistakes don’t ruin applications—but they can create unnecessary doubt. Careful, early submission builds confidence on both sides.



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When to do this:

- ✓ Fall of 12th grade
- ✓ Earlier for Early Action or Early Decision schools

13. Prepare for Interviews (If You're Offered One)

What to do:

- Practice talking about your interests and goals
- Learn how to sound confident, natural, and prepared—not rehearsed

Why this matters:

Interviews put a human face on your application. They're a chance to show curiosity, maturity, and personality.

When to do this:

- ✓ Fall and winter of 12th grade

Quick Student Tip

This phase feels intense because it matters—but you don't have to carry it alone. With the right structure and coaching, this is where students feel **prepared, confident, and in control** rather than stressed and second-guessing themselves.



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Phase 5: Decisions & Next Steps

Spring of 12th Grade

You've done the work. This phase isn't about pressure—it's about choosing the place where you'll grow, feel supported, and actually enjoy the next four years.

14. Compare Your Offers—Thoughtfully

What to do:

- Look closely at academics, cost, campus support, and student life
- Attend admitted-student events (in person or online)
- Ask any final questions you still have

Why this matters:

Getting accepted is exciting—but the real goal is finding a school where you'll be **successful, supported, and happy**.

When to do this:

✓ March–April of 12th grade

15. Make Your Final Decision with Confidence

What to do:

- Choose the school where you feel you'll thrive—academically and personally
- Submit your enrollment deposit and housing forms

Why this matters:

This isn't just a decision—it's the start of your next chapter. Choosing with clarity and confidence makes that transition smoother and more exciting.



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When to do this:

✓ By May 1 (for most schools)

A Final Thought on Your Choice

There's no such thing as a "perfect" choice—only the **right choice for you**. With clear guidance and thoughtful reflection, this moment becomes less stressful and more empowering.

That's the mindset behind the **Student Starter Kit**—and the kind of support that can make this decision feel right, not rushed.



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A Final Note For Students

You are not behind.

You are not expected to do this alone.

And you do not need to be perfect to succeed.

A clear process—and the right guidance—can turn a stressful experience into one that builds confidence, self-knowledge, and pride.

Contact now to set up your initial consultation

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