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5 Things High School Seniors Should Be Doing Now

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If you are a rising high school senior, you probably thought you had all summer to get prepared for the upcoming college admission frenzy. But guess what? You're running out of time.

To avoid the time crunch in the fall, here are five things you can do now:

1. Examine school prices: I think it's reckless to apply to a school if you don't have some sense of what kind of price you would have to pay. Sticker prices, however, are often meaningless. At private colleges and universities, for instance, 88 percent of students receive some type of price break.

The good news is that it's becoming much easier to determine what the tab will be in advance by using federally mandated net price calculators. These calculators will provide you with a good idea of what the price will be at an institution based on your academic profile and your parents' finance data. With the exception of the super rich, I don't think anyone should apply to colleges without using these calculators first.

While the federal deadline to install these calculators on school websites is late October, lots of schools already have their calculators up and running.

[Read more about [net price calculators](#).]

2. Check deadlines: Use a calendar to keep track of deadlines for applications and financial aid. When there is a choice, you'll have to decide whether to apply early decision, early action or regular decision. When you apply early, the school might require that you submit your financial aid application far in advance.

[Learn about [overlooked ways to pay](#) for college.]

3. Get started on the essay: Writing the college essay is one of the most nerve-racking chores that face high school seniors. If you start now, you're more likely to be able to devote the time to do a superb job.

If you are applying to a school that uses the Common Application, you can obtain a list of the six essay questions by visiting the organization's website. My favorite is "Topic of your choice."

While you can often use the same essay for multiple schools, be prepared to answer a college's supplemental questions. A biggie goes something like this: "Why do you want to attend our school?" You won't be able to ace this question unless you really understand the college, and that requires research.

[See 10 tips for writing [college admission essays](#).]

4. Don't overlook the supplemental materials: If you are an artist, musician, or actor, applying to colleges can be even more time consuming. You typically will have to send a résumé noting your artistic background and accomplishments, as well as a portfolio that can be captured on a CD or DVD. If your portfolio isn't finished, start now.

[Get more tips about the [college application process](#).]

5. Research: If you haven't begun researching schools, get started now. An easy first step is to request

admission materials from school websites. In addition, spend time on the college's admission website, where you will often find academic profiles of the freshmen class, notable facts about the school, information on financial aid and scholarships. Plenty of schools will also offer virtual tour and opportunities for online chats.

[Find more [statistics and details](#) about colleges.]

Equally important, you should poke around online at a school's relevant academic departments.

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