

Year by Year: "What To Do" Summary

Freshman Year:

- Focus on your academics
- Work hard in swim practice, focusing on strong work ethic and character
- Adjust to High School life
- Start an ongoing **Personal File system** (including brief descriptions and tracking hours): grades, awards, honors, activities, employment, community service and of course, USA Swimming "Top Times Reports".
- Meet with your college counselor to make sure your course load is both on track and appropriately challenging for college admissions.

Sophomore Year:

- Focus on your academics
- Continue to work hard in swim practice and be a leader both in and outside of the pool
- Continue developing your **Personal File**
- As you travel around the state and country, begin to "visit" college campuses journaling your impressions of each school, its location, the students, the facilities, philosophy, special programs, logistics, dorms, etc.
- Fall: consider registering and taking a practice PSAT exam (October each year)
- Subject Tests/AP Tests: depending on your courses, take Subject Tests and AP exams in May/June
- Begin accumulating information about various colleges and programs and create your **own filing system for each school**. Research and print out college team and conference results to get a feel as to what level of collegiate swimming would be a good athletic "fit". Attend a few local college swim meets (BSU would be good choices) to get a feel for collegiate competition and varying levels of competition. Meets are typically in November and January. **Collegeswimming.com** provides historical conference results and may be a good starting point for research.
- Recommended: register for a summer SAT prep course (Junior year is notoriously busy and test prep is one less thing to load onto your already full plate)
- Meet with your college counselor. Consider Junior Year courses that will prepare you for SAT Subject Tests and/or AP exams in Spring of Junior Year. Colleges much prefer students who challenge themselves.

Junior Year:

- Focus on your academics! Courses get harder! Junior year academic performance is especially important. Study hard for your final exams! Seriously consider which courses and academic areas are of future interest to you and make sure your courses and course load satisfy college entrance requirements.
- Decide on your "official name" and be consistent with your social security card (apply for one if you don't already have one), transcript, college entrance tests, college applications and financial aid forms.
- Train hard and continue to perform successfully as an athlete and as a leader
- Attend college representative presentations at your school and especially for schools that you think you will be interested in attending. Sign in! You may want to consider taking a business card from the representative. It is a good idea to email them later reminding them of your attendance at the presentation and your interest in their school. It is also good to ask them an interesting question to confirm your genuine interest.
- October: Register and Take the **PSAT** at your high school. Rest well the night before. This exam is the typically the first standardized test result the coaches receive and they will use it to preliminarily "qualify" applicants. Junior Year PSAT test results are what determine who qualifies for the National Merit

Scholarship Program. Results are distributed at school during December. Review the PSAT results to help prepare you for the SAT 1 which you may take as early as January.

- November: If you are prepared, consider registering for the January **SAT**. Request the Question and Answer Service as it provides important feedback as to your strengths and weaknesses on the exam. Note: if the testing site location is important to you, make sure to register early as test sites in the more desirable locations.
- Evaluate swim programs that might be of interest to you and for which you might be a good fit. Continue to research team and conference results. If your times fit well into the conference championship results, you may want to look at several teams within that conference
- Clean up your Facebook/Social Networking sites. Make sure the email address you will use for college applications and communications with coaches is “professional”
- Plan your senior year curriculum making sure to include at least four of the following: social studies, English, math, laboratory science and a foreign language. If you can handle honor and AP courses, it is to your advantage to take them. However, do not overload academically as your grades are very important and you need time for training and social activities, too. Conversely, do not underload as that reflects poorly on your motivation as a student. Depending on the college, certain AP test scores may translate into course credit, actual credits towards graduation or both.
- Develop your **Sports Resume** and **Cover Letter**
- Submit Sports Resumes and College on-line Athletic Questionnaires to prospective coaches
- Prepare your SA coaches by letting them know which schools you have contacted. It is not unusual for college coaches to contact club coaches before contacting the athletes themselves
- Send Follow up emails to Coaches and update them monthly
- Visit college campuses, take admissions tours and schedule on-campus meetings with coaches. Weekends, Winter Break and Spring Break are good times to do this (depending on your peak meets) but discuss with your coaches before hand.
- Develop your own **criteria for choosing your right academic “fit”**. Talk to people!
- Develop your own **criteria for choosing the right athletic “fit”**. Talk to Swimmers who swim in college!
- Discuss the cost of college and any parameters/constraints with your parents. How much can you afford? Review different funding options.
- Take the SAT and/or ACT exams and SAT Subject Tests (as required by the colleges you might be applying to). Subject Tests (aka the SAT 2s) are offered in January, March, May and June, however, not all subjects are offered at each date – check the schedule on the College Board website. It is recommended that you take the ACT in April or June (refer to websites for actual dates). Consider retaking these exams later in the spring/fall keeping in mind that it is optimal to be finished with standardized testing by June of your senior year. While many colleges will take the highest individual scores from separate test dates (cumulative), some colleges request all test scores be sent and some will only consider scores from a single test date. Take the SAT 2 in late spring (Subject Tests: most colleges require 2 tests, sometimes 3, in different subject areas ie History, Math, Literature, Foreign Language, Science). Map out your standardized testing plan for SAT, ACT, AP exams and Subject Tests. With the exception of foreign languages that you will be taking senior year, it is recommended that you take Subject tests in late spring of the year that you are taking the requisite course. Though three are allowed, taking more than two subject tests during a single test date is preferred.
- Take AP Exams in May. Register earlier.
- Review your resume and if you think necessary, consider summer employment or community service opportunities that “round out” your application.
- Spring: Register with **NCAA Eligibility Center** and send required documentation (official transcripts, standardized test scores, etc)
- Spring: line up two teachers who would be willing to write “excellent” **letters of recommendation** for you in the fall. These letters of recommendation are a very very important part of your overall application. How you approach them may truly make a difference in your success.
- Optional: Register on recruiting websites ie collegeswimming.com

Summer Between Junior and Senior Year:

- Obtain a copy of your Unofficial Transcript for your **Personal File**. Many high school offices are closed during the summer months. Plan accordingly.
- Prepare all information needed to prepare counselors/teachers to write their **Letters of Recommendation** (some high schools require both student and parent “brag sheets”)
- If you are not satisfied with your Standardized test results, consider prepping for the Fall tests.
- Continue making “unofficial” visits to colleges and coaches. Journal!
- Continue to email coaches with updates. If you are interested in going on a recruit trip to a specific school, let the coach know that their school is one of your top choices. Continue to reconfirm your interest in their program and your interest in a recruiting trip.
- Immediately respond to any correspondence from college coaches. If you do not receive initial responses to calls or resumes or submissions of on-line questionnaires, you may want to call or email the coach to make sure it was received.
- Coaches may begin contacting athletes directly beginning July 1st. Be prepared to talk to these coaches. Have a sheet of paper/pencil and questions available for these calls. Take notes and especially remember the name of who contacted you.
- Use your summer wisely: volunteer, work, take a class or travel. Colleges are interested in how you spend your time.
- Fine tune your list of **college criteria** and your list of **athletic criteria**
- Target 10-15 schools that are both an academic and an athletic fit. In recent years, the number of schools that students apply to has increased from 4-5 to at least 8-10 if not applying ED and/or being actively recruited
- Schedule a meeting with your coach to discuss your application
- Prepare a file on each school you are applying to. As application essay topics come on-line, develop a consolidated list of all essay questions that you will need to answer. In addition to brochures, each file should at least contain contact information for both the coach and admissions offices (names, address, email address, phone numbers and fax numbers) and a list of all the deadlines and required information/tests

Consolidated List of Application Essay Questions:

By the middle of summer, almost all colleges will have their applications/essay and personal statements available on-line. Print out a copy of each application and make a consolidated list of the essay questions/personal statements required from each of the schools you will be applying to (including the number of words required). At a minimum, begin to brainstorm your college essay topics. Ideally, 2-3 essays can be modified to satisfy most of the essay questions on the list or, of course, a student may write separate essays for each application (You are allowed to have different versions of the Common Application). In a perfect world, all these essays would be completed by the start of Senior Year as it will allow you to focus on your academics, filling out the applications and recruit trips. However, it is not a perfect world, so focus on completing all the things that you can do at this time. In brainstorming essay topics, remember that if the person next to you could write the exact same essay, then it probably isn't a good depiction of you. The essay reader has very little time to read each essay (reading hundreds in an evening!). Their goal is learn 2-3 additional things about you that they could not glean from the application ie personality traits or characteristics, special hobbies or music taste, etc. Perhaps it is easier to speak from your heart about a specific event that happened to you or an “ah ha” academic moment that might illustrate some things about you as a unique individual? In many cases, the best essays are written in just ten or fifteen minutes. Word to the wise: avoid “the big trip” or “the big swim” essays as it is really hard to make them original. The College Board website is a good place to start to learn more

about writing these essays. There are also numerous books you can read on the topic (however there is a risk that after reading all those books of essay, you may lose your own voice!)

Senior Year:

- Prepare an overall **“Application Grid”** which includes the names of each school, deadlines for applications, documents and letters of recommendation required, type of application ie common, deadlines for all financial aid applications, etc. Also note when acceptance letters are expected to be sent.
- Take additional Standardized tests, if needed
- Familiarize yourself with the Admissions, School and Recruiting websites to gather team and team information available for each college that you are considering applying to. Know why you want to apply to each school.
- Go on **recruit trips!**
- Follow-up with coaches immediately! Reconfirm your interest in their program.
- Continue to work hard in school. Fall grades are very important to colleges/coaches.
- Follow up/double check to make sure that letters of recommendation, transcripts and applications are received in a timely manner (financial aid information too)
- Submit applications in a timely manner ie in advance of the deadlines (remember, if computers crash, it is always right around deadline time). Before submitting, make a photocopy of your application for your file (note: for some schools, you are not able to see the application once it is submitted). Make sure to keep track of any information the colleges may send you re: application ID numbers, student ID numbers, instructions for logging onto Admissions websites, passwords, financial aid, housing instructions, orientation information, etc. Know how each college is going to communicate with you.
- January: File the Free Application for Federal Student (FAFSA) as soon as possible after January 1st. This is not an easy form to fill out and requires a solid handle on what the current year tax returns will look like. Once submitted, it is very time consuming to make corrections. Check with your prospective colleges about additional **financial aid** application forms and requirements.
- Determine how you will hear from each college you have applied to as dates and communications vary greatly: traditional mail, emails, student logging into an Admissions website, etc.
- Check emails frequently for correspondence from each college.
- May 1st is the acceptance date for most schools. It is important that you notify each college that you were accepted to as your choice. If you accept college admittance before hearing from any other schools, it is important to withdraw your application from those schools.
- Congratulations! Buy college gear!

The Application Grid (a working tool):

We recommend that you make a large grid of deadlines and requirements for all the schools you will be applying to (poster size?). This will provide you a visual aid, an application map and a checklist to use during the Application time period. As applications are submitted, test scores and transcripts sent and letters of recommendation are requested/sent, check them off on the grid. We recommend that the grid include:

- Name of the School
- Type of Application – School specific vs common application
- Specific Deadlines – regular decisions, rolling, early decision, early action, etc.
- Letters of Recommendation – how many and from whom ie teachers, counselor, friend, other
- Standardized Test Reports – SAT, ACT, IB, AP (all or
- Official Transcripts
- Essay questions and Personal Statements and required length of responses

Proofread your revisions			
Interviews			
Interview at college campuses			
Alumni interview			
Send thank-you notes to interviewers			
Send and Track Your Application			
Make copies of all application materials			
Tell school counselor that you applied			
Pay application fee			
Sign application and send			
Confirm receipt of application materials			
Send supplemental material, if needed			
Financial Aid Forms			
Priority financial aid deadline			
Regular financial aid deadline			
Submit FAFSA			
Submit PROFILE, if needed			
Submit institutional aid form, if needed			
Submit state aid form, if needed			
After You Send Your Application			
Receive letter from office of admission			
Receive financial aid award letter			

Meet deadline to accept admission and send deposit			
Accept financial aid offer			
Notify the other colleges you will not attend			