

MCNEAL SAMS COLLEGE CONSULTING NEWS AND NOTES

JUNIOR CHECKLIST

- RESEARCH:** The spring of your junior year is the time to develop and hone the list of schools you should consider. That means researching schools. Your consultant will help you identify where to start and how to conduct effective research.
- VISIT:** Plan to visit colleges this spring. Not sure where to go? Meet with your consultant to discuss options and look at these tips for maximizing your visit.
- RELAX:** It is time for Spring Break after all! Make sure you take some time to relax and refresh so you are ready to end your junior year strong!



IT'S MARCH MADNESS

No, we are not talking about the basketball tournament, though we like our brackets, too. And we are not talking about your upcoming spring break plans. (We hope you have a blast!) In the college choice journey, March marks the end of the admission cycle for the seniors. All admission decisions will be released to students by April 1. Colleges, and college consultants, don't stop, though. We are both on to thinking about the next cycle, and YOU.

The first sign of the 2024-2025 college application season has arrived. The Common Application announced this week that they are retaining the same essay prompts used this year.

The Common Application is an application form used by more than 1000 colleges in the United States and beyond. The application is composed of two key elements, the "Common App" section and the "My Colleges" section. The questions in the Common App section are sent to all schools to which you apply using the Common Application. The My Colleges section is where colleges add their own questions for you to answer.

In the Common App section, you will find questions regarding your demographics, academic, activities, and a writing section. The writing section is where what is known as the "personal statement" is located. This is your primary application essay, and your chance to tell the colleges who you are and what matters to you.

Sound daunting? Don't worry. You and your college consultant will invest a good deal of time developing the focus of your essay, an outline of the messages you want to convey, and polishing your drafts. We will help you each step of the way.

Curious about the essay prompts? [You can review them here.](#) You will see that the possibilities for answering one of the prompts are endless. Don't worry about that for now; just enjoy your spring break!



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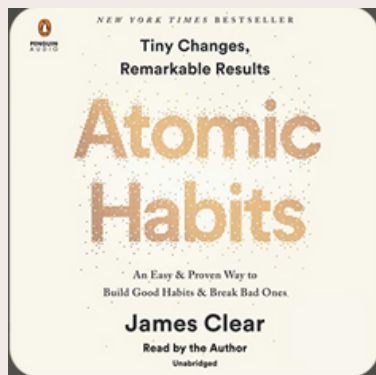
NEWS AND NOTES

TALK AROUND TOWN

Some items we have found interesting recently:

Article: A thoughtful piece on [developing your college list](#) from Brennan Barnard.

Blog: In his [Admissions Blog](#), Rick Clark writes about psychological studies explaining why parents and students are tempted to use rankings to drive college preferences, and how this can short-circuit consideration of critical variables informing a good fit.



Book: Atomic Habits outlines many ideas and practices applicable to managing a challenging task, like the writing of college essays or adapting to a college course workload.

WHAT MAKES YOU CURIOUS?

Reflect on an idea or experience that makes you genuinely excited about learning.

Describe why you are interested in studying the major you have selected. If you selected undecided please describe your areas of possible academic interest.

Tell us about something that really sparks your intellectual interest and curiosity and compels you to explore more.

Supplemental application essay prompts like these are common. Admissions offices aren't just focusing on what you *already* know—they can see that in your transcript and grades—they want to know *what intrigues you* academically. Colleges and universities exist to increase our knowledge and understanding of the world around us. Furthermore, they need to fill classrooms with students the professors want to teach.

As a junior, you have some time to think about these questions before you begin drafting essays. Here are some ways to begin exploring these topics:

- Think about papers you found interesting to write; labs you loved; assigned reading that caught your attention; reading you've done on your own. Be specific (not just "I love math because there's always one right answer"). Why did you enjoy these experiences? How did they challenge and stretch you as a learner?
- Recall a time when you were actively involved in a classroom discussion. What captured your attention?
- Perhaps you have an academic interest that has grown out of an activity you've done. Maybe an injury led you to a fascination with sports medicine. A trip to the art museum sparked curiosity about Impressionist paintings. Traveling to another country prompted you to think about the nature of language and linguistics. How has that influenced your academic focus?
- Keep your eyes and ears open! If you find you're puzzled by something you observe, ask questions. Rather than dismissing something you don't understand because it's "too hard" or you think you "won't use this in real life," stop and think.

Yes, this takes some time. But we are here to help! Colleges and universities want to accept students who have a passion for learning and discovery. Prove that you're one of those students!

KINDNESS CORNER

THE
HAPPINESS
QUOTIENT

Is your dinner table becoming a college choice minefield? One of our families of juniors has the perfect solution. The family sets aside one hour per week to discuss college. They head to a nearby restaurant and cover everything that concerns them: the timeline, application details, what-to-think-about-and-when. When the hour is over, that's it for the week. **Period.** It keeps the application process from seeping into every other conversation and leaves room for the other elements of family life that are so important. Follow their lead and experience a sense of calm!