

# SEPTEMBER 2025 NEWSLETTER

MCNEAL SAMS  
COLLEGE CONSULTING



## WHO WE ARE

McNeal Sams College Consulting provides expert, personalized guidance to students and families throughout the college admissions process. With decades of experience in counseling, admissions and career services, our team helps students identify best-fit schools and build strong, strategic applications.

## EARLY DEADLINES

While it is only September, many schools offer a variety of application plans that have deadlines beginning as early as October 15. Early Action, Early Decision and Priority application programs often give a student a better chance of being admitted or earning merit scholarships. To qualify for the early deadline programs, students must submit all components of the required application materials by the deadline. Work closely with your McNeal Sams consultant AND your high school counselor to ensure your application and supplemental materials are submitted by the deadline.

## PSAT IN OCTOBER

The PSAT testing window is Oct. 1-31. Each school chooses its administration date. This is a particularly important test for Juniors. It offers SAT prep, and it also helps applicants qualify for scholarships through the National Merit Scholarship Program. Be sure to register for your school's PSAT test and prepare for it.

## IMPORTANT DATES

**Sept. 12** - Early registration deadline for ACT testing on Oct. 18  
**Sept. 13** - SAT testing  
**Sept. 19** - Early registration deadline for SAT testing on Oct. 4  
**Sept. 30** - Late registration closes for ACT testing on Oct. 18  
**Oct. 4** - SAT testing

## WHY READING THE DIRECTIONS MIGHT BE YOUR SECRET SUPERPOWER



When's the last time you skimmed through a set of directions instead of actually reading them? Maybe it was for a homework assignment, setting up your new phone, or even filling out an online form. We've all done it. In the moment, skipping the instructions feels like a shortcut. But more often than not, it costs us extra time, stress or mistakes we didn't need to make.

College admission is no different than assembling a piece of IKEA furniture. You don't want to discover you have left over components for your application after you hit submit. Each college has its own requirements about what you must submit and deadlines to complete your application. Reading the instructions on the school's website is important. There, you can find details about testing, essays, resumes and how to be considered for different majors and special programs.

Being the person who slows down and actually reads the directions is becoming rare, which means it can set you apart in school, in college applications, and later in life.

As a society, we're simply not reading as much as we used to:

- Only 16 percent of Americans reported reading for fun on a given day in 2023, down from 28 percent in 2004.
- Reading scores are sliding too. On the national assessment, nearly 40 percent of fourth graders now score below the "basic" level in reading, the highest percentage in more than 20 years.
- More than 90 percent of people accept "terms and conditions" without reading them (and let's be honest, you've probably done it).
- Only 9 percent of adults say they actually read those documents. Among younger adults (18-34), it drops to 3 percent.
- Even with important contracts, 68 percent of people admit they don't read or fully understand them before signing.

Here's the upside to taking your time: if most people are rushing, skimming, and skipping steps, then choosing to slow down and read the directions carefully becomes a real advantage. It's such a small habit, but it can save you from big headaches. By reading the directions, you will make fewer mistakes, feel more confident as you proceed, and stand out amongst your peers.

# SEPTEMBER TO-DO LISTS

## Seniors

- Send Official Test Scores: If any of your colleges require official test scores, you must send them directly from the testing agencies. This process can take 4-6 weeks, so do it now!
- Request your Teacher Recommendations: If you have not done so already, be sure to ask for your teacher recommendation letters. Ask them in person first, then be sure to follow the procedures of your school for recommendations.
- Every high school will have its own processes for requesting transcripts and sending supporting documents to colleges for the colleges you are applying to. Make sure you understand and follow these processes for timely processing of your applications. SIDE TIP: Set up a meeting with your high school counselor to update them on your college choice journey.
- Your grades still matter! Keep showing admission offices you are ready to succeed in college.

## Juniors

- Take advantage of the opportunity to meet with college admission representatives who are visiting your high school this fall. Stop by your guidance office to find out who is visiting when and how to participate.
- Admission testing begins in earnest for you this year. You will take a PSAT in October. If your school does not offer a Practice ACT this fall, let your college consultant know. We can arrange for you to take one so we can help you choose on which test to focus your preparation and an appropriate testing plan.

- Sign up for the SAT and ACT "Questions of the Day." It's a great, free way to do some test preparation and build your testing confidence.
- This year is important in terms of grades for college admission offices. Buckle down and put a plan in place to earn the best grades you can.

## Sophomores

- Most high schools will offer you the opportunity to take the PSAT at some point this year. It REALLY is just a practice. Please share them with your college consultant when they become available.
- The No. 1 factor considered by college admission committees when reviewing applications is how a student took advantage of the academic opportunities available in high school (and of course followed immediately by how you perform in your classes). Continue to focus on earning the best grades possible.
- Begin to engage more completely in your activities. Take on added responsibilities for at least one of your activities.

## Freshmen

- Set goals for what you want to accomplish in high school. Number One should be earning the best grades you can.
- Find at least two clubs to join at school.
- Get involved in at least one service activity in your community.