alia

SAMPLE ROADMAP



COLLEGE ROADMAP

# Maya R.

The Spence School, New York · Class of 2027

PREPARED FOR THE R. FAMILY · SEPTEMBER 2023

Alia Education

01 — AT A GLANCE

# Maya’s roadmap at a glance

The Builder · The Spence School, New York · Class of 2027 · Started 9th-grade fall · Sep 2023

**Maya is a builder with a humanist's instincts. Over four years we'll keep her a humanist who builds, not another applicant who codes, and turn Studyloop, and the research and leadership ahead, into one clear story for Stanford-level schools.**

| 9th | 3.8 | 1 | 4 yrs |
|---|---|---|---|
| Grade when we started | 8th-grade GPA | App already built (Studyloop) | Of runway |

## WHAT MATTERS MOST

1. Don't let her become “the CS kid.” Pair every tech project with a human reason.
2. At Spence, rigor runs through accelerated math and research. Earn both.
3. Her test weakness is pacing. Start low-stakes practice early.

## THE FIRST THREE MOVES

| | |
|---|---|
| **Sep 2023** | Join the student tech help desk |
| **Oct 2023** | Choose a humanities elective for spring |
| **Jan 2024** | Get her app its first real user |

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02 — MEET YOUR COUNSELOR

# Meet Rishi Narula



FOUNDER, CEO, AND LEAD COUNSELOR

Rishi has spent eight years in college admissions, guiding hundreds of students into the most selective schools in the world, including the world's top 50 universities. He holds a BS in Mathematics from Duke and has built tutoring and college counseling practices from the ground up, keeping pace with an admissions and development landscape that changes every year.

**8 years**
in college admissions

**100s**
of students admitted to the world's top 50 universities

**Narrative first.** Rishi builds one compelling story for each student, then designs a coherent application around it, so coursework, summer programs, internships, the activity list and every essay each prove a different part of the same story. He is a teacher at heart, too: he has tutored everything from 8th-grade executive functioning to master's-level linear algebra and computer science, so students know him first as someone who helps them learn. Rishi lives in Brooklyn with his wife and daughter.

INCLUDED IN YOUR CUSTOM PACKAGE

- **A dedicated counselor.** Rishi leads your plan from kickoff to decision day.
- **Regular meetings.** Scheduled around your student's year, and weekly or as needed during application season.
- **Unlimited communication.** Text and email Rishi between meetings, whenever a question comes up.
- **Essay review by former admissions officers.** From the first brainstorm to the final read. Every word stays the student's own.
- **Submission support.** Every application submitted on or ahead of its deadline, with every required piece in place.
- **A living roadmap.** We revisit and update this plan at every check-in, through the final decision.

03 — WHERE THINGS STAND

# Where Maya stands today

An honest read on every part of the application, and what each one needs.

| AREA | TODAY | WHAT WE SEE | STATUS |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Academics** | **A– average** | 3.8 in 8th grade. A's in math and English. A B+ in Spanish is the only soft spot. | On track |
| **Course rigor** | **Strong** | On Spence's accelerated math track. Spence has no APs, so rigor shows in accelerated math and advanced electives. | On track |
| **Testing** | **Not yet** | No tests yet. Timed reading is her known weakness, so we start low-stakes practice in 10th. | Build |
| **Activities** | **Promising** | One app already built. No leadership or outside validation yet. | Build |
| **Recommendations** | **Unknown** | No teacher knows her well yet. Pick two relationships to invest in by 10th. | Build |
| **Voice / essays** | **Raw** | Funny and precise when she talks. Her writing is still formal and safe. | Build |

### IS MAYA COMPETITIVE?

Is Maya competitive for Stanford, Princeton and Harvard? Not yet, and no 9th grader is. Her trajectory is. Students who start where she is and follow this plan typically finish with an A transcript at the school's highest rigor, a 1500+ test score, a recognized project, and two recommenders who can describe her mind. That's the profile those schools admit. The variable is depth: one real thing, done for four years, beats ten things done for one.

### STRENGTHS TO LEAD WITH

- **Ships real products.** Built Studyloop in 8th grade, an app that turns class notes into practice quizzes. Classmates already use it.
- **A researcher's questions.** She keeps asking why classmates trust AI answers she doesn't. That's a research topic in waiting.
- **Teachers' go-to.** Teachers already ask her to fix classroom tech. The student tech help desk is the natural next step.

### GAPS WE'LL CLOSE

- **Timed-test pressure.** Reading & Writing drags the score. It's a pacing problem, not a knowledge problem.
- **The "CS kid" trap.** Framed as a coder, she reads like 10,000 other applicants to Stanford.
- **No service story yet.** Teaching younger kids to code is the obvious place to start.

04 — THE HIGH SCHOOL

# The high school, and why it matters

Every application is read in the context of its school. Readers compare a student to their classmates, not to the whole country.

**The Spence School · Upper East Side, Manhattan (girls, K–12)**

| GRADE SIZE | GRADING | RIGOR OFFERED |
|---|---|---|
| **~66 seniors** | **Unweighted 4.0, no A+, no rank or awards** | **No APs. Advanced courses go past AP; only math is accelerated** |

| COUNSELING | COLLEGE RESULTS | REPUTATION |
|---|---|---|
| **Three college counselors for one small class** | **Harvard, Princeton, Brown and Stanford all appear on recent matriculation lists** | **Readers know it well. Its school profile explains why there are no APs.** |

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR MAYA

1. With no APs, the “most demanding” box on the counselor form comes down to accelerated math, advanced CS and the senior science electives. She takes them all.
2. In a class of about 66, several classmates will apply to the same reaches. Maya has to be the one with a different story, not a stronger version of the same one.
3. With small caseloads, the counselor letter is personal and heavily read. Maya should get to know her counselor early, so the letter has specifics.
4. No rank and no A+ means readers look at the transcript itself. A’s in the hardest courses, plus Spence’s research program, carry the weight.

### HOW WE READ THE SCHOOL

**School profile.** We read the official profile that goes to every college, so we know exactly how rigor and grades are described.

**Teacher asks.** We time and frame each recommendation request, and give each teacher the evidence to cite.

05 — STORYLINE

# Storyline & hook

The #1 factor in application quality. Every piece of the file should tell the same story from a different angle.

THE HOOK

## The humanist who builds.

### THE ELEVATOR PITCH, IN THREE SENTENCES

1. Maya builds tools that help people think, starting with Studyloop, an app that turns class notes into practice quizzes.
2. She'll study why people trust (or shouldn't trust) the machines they use, at Spence and then in a university lab.
3. She wants to design technology that makes people smarter, not lazier. That's why Symbolic Systems.

**01**
**The Builder**
Studyloop: a product with users, feedback loops and a roadmap of its own.

**02**
**The Humanist**
Lab research on trust: when should a student believe the machine, and when shouldn't she?

**03**
**The Steward**
The help desk and the AI committee. She makes technology work for a whole community.

### HOW EACH PART OF THE APPLICATION TELLS IT

| | |
|---|---|
| **Activity list** | App first. Lab second. Help desk third. All three are building. |
| **Personal statement** | "The broken-things drawer": she'd rather write the manual than follow it |
| **Supplements** | Learning: AI and trust. Roommate: her labeling habit. Contribution: the help desk. |
| **Recommenders** | Math teacher (rigor), English teacher (the humanist half) |
| **Summers** | Each one adds proof: teaching, building, then research |

### WHAT WE'RE NOT SAYING

× "I've loved computers since I was five."

× "I want to be a software engineer."

× "AI is the future."

### HOW WE FRAME THE MAJOR

Symbolic Systems (Stanford) · Cognitive Science · Human-Computer Interaction. Never "Computer Science" on its own.

06 — GRADES & RIGOR

# Grades, rigor & academic profile

Readers check two things on a transcript: the grades, and whether the student took the hardest courses available to them.

## COURSE PLAN (PLANNED, USING SPENCE'S CATALOG)

| SUBJECT | 9TH | 10TH | 11TH | 12TH |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Math** | Math 3 (Accel) | Math 4 (Accel) | Math 5 (Accel) | Calculus (Accel) |
| **Science** | Physics | Chemistry | Biology | Adv Physics: Modern |
| **English** | English 9 | English 10 | English elective | World Lit elective |
| **History** | World History | Modern Europe | U.S. History | History elective |
| **Language** | Spanish II | Spanish III | Spanish IV | Advanced Spanish |
| **CS / Elective** | Computer Science I | Computer Science II | Adv CS: Algorithm Design | Statistics |

## GPA PATH (UNWEIGHTED): 8TH ACTUAL, THEN TARGETS

| 8th · actual | 9th · target | 10th · target | 11th · target |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3.80 | 3.85 | 3.90 | 3.93 |

## PLAN OF ATTACK

| | |
|---|---|
| **Spanish (the soft spot)** | Weekly 30-minute conversation tutor. Aim for an A– by spring of 10th. |
| **Timed reading** | Read one long-form article a week and summarize it in 3 sentences. This builds speed for the SAT and junior English. |
| **Teacher relationships** | Office hours with her math and English teachers twice a semester, starting now |

We set per-class goals each semester and review report cards together. When a class slips, there's a plan within a week, not a conversation in June.

07 — TESTING

# Standardized testing

SAT or ACT, when to test, what to aim for, and when to stop.

**The choice:** SAT. Her math is a strength and the digital format suits her, though the ACT's pace would expose her slower reading.

| Practice PSAT, Oct 2024 | SAT #1, Mar 2026 | SAT #2, Jun 2026 |
|---|---|---|
| **Baseline only** | **Target 1490+** | **Target 1530+** |

## THE PLAN

- → Untimed practice in 10th. Timed sections start in fall of 11th.
- → 8 weeks of reading and writing drills before March: 3 hours a week
- → Stop at 1520+. More testing past that point won't help her application.
- → No AP exams needed. Spence's profile tells colleges it has no APs.

## TESTING POLICIES ON THE LIST (RECHECKED EACH AUGUST)

| SCHOOL | TESTING POLICY | SCHOOL | TESTING POLICY |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Stanford** | Required | **Carnegie Mellon** | Flexible |
| **Princeton** | Optional* | **Cornell** | Required |
| **Harvard** | Required | **Michigan** | Flexible |
| **Brown** | Required | | |

**Bottom line:** Stanford, Harvard and Brown require scores. A 1520+ puts her in their competitive range. Submit everywhere.

08 — ACTIVITIES

# Activities & signature project

The planned list by senior fall, in application order. The first three lines carry the story.

| ACTIVITY | TIME | WHAT IT SHOWS |
|---|---|---|
| **Founder, Studyloop (AI quiz app)** | 6 hrs/wk · 40 wks | Built in 8th. Beta in 10th. Pilot with 40 students in 11th. |
| **Research intern, university HCI lab** | 30 hrs/wk · 6 wks | Starts summer after 11th: how students decide to trust AI |
| **Lead, student tech help desk** | 3 hrs/wk · 35 wks | Joins in 9th, leads by 11th. Trains new volunteers. |
| **School AI advisory committee** | 1 hr/wk · 30 wks | Target for 10th. Help write the school's AI guidelines. |
| **Instructor, Byte Club (Saturday coding for girls)** | 3 hrs/wk · 20 wks | Starts teaching the summer after 9th |
| **Layout editor, literary magazine** | 2 hrs/wk · 30 wks | The humanist side, with a deliverable |
| **Tutor, middle-school math** | 2 hrs/wk · 30 wks | Service, with a teaching thread |
| **Cello, school orchestra** | 4 hrs/wk · 40 wks | Since age 8. Listed honestly and briefly. |

SIGNATURE PROJECT · 2 WEEKS

## Studyloop goes live

A 2-week pilot with 40 ninth graders, Jan 2026

| | |
|---|---|
| **Days 1–3** | Recruit two teacher partners and 40 ninth graders. Define one metric: quiz scores before and after. |
| **Days 4–10** | Run the pilot. Collect usage logs and a 5-question student survey. |
| **Days 11–14** | Write a 2-page findings memo. Present it at a faculty meeting. |

**Real-world proof:** A department head signs off on the pilot, and the faculty hear the results. Best case: the school adopts it for 9th-grade physics.

09 — SUMMERS

# Summer strategy

Summers are where the story gets proven. We plan each one a year ahead and edit every program application.

AFTER 9TH

### Teach at Byte Club, a free coding workshop for middle schoolers

Apply by March. Proves she can teach, not just build.

AFTER 10TH

### Build version 2 of the app, plus tutoring

A free summer, deliberately. Shipping the product is the point.

AFTER 11TH

### Research in a university HCI lab

Email 8 professors in January. Aim for a poster by August.

**Our rule:** No $10,000 pre-college programs. Readers can tell when a summer was bought. Every summer here produces something she made.

| RECOGNITION TARGET | PLAN |
|---|---|
| **Congressional App Challenge** | Submit Studyloop |
| **NCWIT Aspirations in Computing** | Strong fit and a national signal |
| **Regional research symposium** | Present the lab work as a poster |

**December–January.** Research programs, labs and jobs together.

**February–March.** Applications and essays go out, edited by our team.

**May.** Lock the plan, plus a backup if a program says no.

10 — ESSAYS

# Essays

The personal statement, the stories we'll draw on, and how the supplements divide the work.

PERSONAL STATEMENT

## “The broken-things drawer”

**OPEN**
A kitchen drawer full of dead gadgets she's been “about to fix” since age nine.

**TURN**
The first one she brings back to life, and the hand-drawn manual she writes for it.

**CRISIS**
Her research prototype fails in week three, with no manual in sight.

**LAND**
She'd rather write the manual than follow one. Failure is the fastest teacher she's had.

### STORY BANK (TO COLLECT)

- Studyloop’s worst bug, and the student who found it
- Training the help desk's newest volunteer
- The AI committee meeting where she disagreed with a teacher
- Cello: nine years of practicing the same 8 bars
- Teaching a 12-year-old to write her first loop

### SUPPLEMENT THEMES

| | |
|---|---|
| **Stanford · Roommate letter** | Her habit of labeling everything, including the roommate |
| **Stanford · What matters to you** | The help desk, and the teachers it quietly rescued |
| **Stanford · Intellectual vitality** | Why people trust a confident machine more than a hesitant one |

**Avoid:** Opening with a childhood love of computers, or a list of programming languages.

**Our process:** brainstorm with the student survey, outline, three drafts, then a read by former admissions officers. Every word is the student's own.

11 — COLLEGE LIST

# College list & application strategy

THE EARLY-ROUND CALL · OUR BEST FIT TODAY

## Stanford REA: Symbolic Systems.

1. Symbolic Systems blends cognitive science, design and computing. It describes her story almost word for word.
2. The research she's aiming for, on how people trust AI, lines up with faculty she can name.
3. Restrictive Early Action keeps Early Action at public universities, like Michigan, open.

### Reach Top choice + peers

**Stanford**
Symbolic Systems is her story in one major

**Princeton**
The cognitive science certificate, plus a culture of independent work

**Harvard**
Mind, Brain and Behavior, plus a CS secondary

**Brown**
The Open Curriculum lets her design CS plus cognitive science

### Target A step below

**Carnegie Mellon**
The HCI program is the field's original home

**Cornell**
Information Science at the intersection of people and technology

**Michigan**
A School of Information with real research access

### Safety Chosen with you

A thoughtful safety list depends on final grades, budget, distance and must-haves. We build it with the family once those are clear.

**Demonstrated interest:** Visit Stanford, Princeton and Brown in the spring of 11th grade. Attend virtual information sessions for the rest. Email one professor at each reach school about their research in the fall of 12th grade.

**This can change, and should.** The early choice is our best fit with what we know today. We revisit it at every check-in as grades, scores, visits and interests evolve. Nothing locks until the student is sure.

12 — REQUIREMENTS

# Application requirements

Every school on Maya's reach and target list: the round, the deadline, and the writing it takes.

| SCHOOL | PLAN · DEADLINE | TESTING | ADMIT RATE | ESSAYS | WHAT'S ASKED |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Stanford** | REA · Nov 1 | Required | 3.8% | 8 | 5 short answers (50 words) + 3 essays (250) |
| **Princeton** | RD · Jan 1 | Optional* | 4.4% | 6 | 3 essays (250–500) + 3 short answers |
| **Harvard** | RD · Jan 1 | Required | 4.2% | 5 | 5 short answers (150 words each) |
| **Brown** | RD · Jan 5 | Required | 6.3% | 6 | 3 essays (250) + 3 short answers |
| **Carnegie Mellon** | RD · Jan 5 | Flexible | 11.1% | 3 | 3 short essays (300) |
| **Cornell** | RD · Jan 2 | Required | 8.4% | 2 | University essay + college-specific essay |
| **Michigan** | EA · Nov 1 | Flexible | 16.4% | 2 | Community essay + why-major essay |

**33**
pieces of writing: 1 personal statement plus 32 supplements

**7**
applications, each with its own portal, checklist and deadline

**3+**
recommendations per school: counselor and two teachers, plus mid-year reports

**How we keep it manageable:** essays are mapped across schools so one strong story serves several prompts. Early applications get finished first, then regular supplements are written in batches by theme, and every piece gets a read from a former admissions officer.

Source: Alia college database, latest cycle; admit rates from each school's Common Data Set (fall 2025). Requirements are rechecked each August until she applies. Testing labels: Required, Optional (test-optional), Flexible (policy varies by program or applicant). *Princeton's policy for the next cycle is confirmed each August. Safety schools add to these totals.

13 — FINANCIAL AID

# Financial aid & cost

How cost factors into the list, which forms are due when, and how the early round affects aid.

| | |
|---|---|
| **What you told us** | Need-based aid is unlikely. You want to understand cost and value, and merit where it exists. |
| **Need-based aid** | Stanford, Princeton, Harvard and Brown give need-based aid only. Run each school's Net Price Calculator in 11th to confirm. |
| **Merit** | Few schools on this list give merit aid. Michigan's honors and scholarship programs are worth a look. |
| **Forms** | CSS Profile and FAFSA open in the fall of senior year. File both, even if you don't expect aid: some merit and outside scholarships require them. |
| **Early round** | REA is non-binding, so you can compare aid offers in April. Binding ED would remove that option. |

**JUNIOR SPRING**
Run the Net Price Calculator for every school on the list

**SENIOR FALL**
File the FAFSA and CSS Profile. Early-round schools set their own aid deadlines.

**SENIOR SPRING**
Compare aid offers side by side, and appeal where it makes sense

**Need-based vs. merit.** Need-based aid depends on family finances and is calculated from the FAFSA and CSS Profile. Merit aid rewards the student's record and is often automatic. Most of the most selective schools offer need-based aid only, so merit opportunities usually sit in the Target column.

We're not financial advisors. We coordinate timing and strategy with the family and, where helpful, the family's financial advisor.

14 — IF PLANS CHANGE

# If plans change

Deferrals, waitlists and surprises happen to strong applicants every year. The difference is having the next move ready.

| | |
|---|---|
| **If Stanford defers** | Send a short update letter in January (new research results, any award). The Ivy RD applications are already drafted from September. |
| **If she's waitlisted** | One letter of continued interest. One new piece of news. A commitment line only to her true first choice. |
| **If testing stalls under 1500** | Submit to schools where testing is flexible, and let the research and essays carry the file. |
| **If the app pilot fails** | A failed pilot is still a story. Write about what she learned and rebuilt. |

### Deferred

A short update letter in January with real news. Mid-year grades do the heavy lifting.

### Waitlisted

One letter of continued interest. A commitment line only for a true first choice.

### Denied

The next round is already drafted. We move the same day.

**Support runs through the final decision,** including waitlist strategy and comparing offers.

15 — TIMELINE

# 9th grade

2023–24

Meetings every 3–4 weeks

| | |
|---|---|
| **Sep 2023** | Kickoff: student survey and parent questionnaire |
| **Sep 2023** | **Kickoff. Four-year plan set.** |
| **Oct 2023** | A goal for every class, plus a plan for the hardest one |
| **Nov 2023** | Commit to two activities for the year |
| **Jan 2024** | Semester check-in: reset goals, fix what slipped |
| **Feb 2024** | Course selection for 10th, plus her research program application |
| **Mar 2024** | Summer plan drafted: one program, one project |
| **Apr 2024** | Summer applications in, essays edited by the team |
| **Jun 2024** | **Teach at Byte Club.** |

15 — TIMELINE

# 10th grade

2024–25

Meetings every 3–4 weeks

- **Sep 2024** — **Start Computer Science II.**
- **Oct 2024** — Practice PSAT, untimed and low-stakes
- **Dec 2024** — Scope the first real project
- **Jan 2025** — **Studyloop beta goes out.**
- **Feb 2025** — Course selection for 11th, the rigor year
- **Mar 2025** — Summer program applications edited and sent
- **May 2025** — Final exams
- **Jun 2025** — SAT/ACT diagnostic. Pick a test and a tutor.

15 — TIMELINE

# 11th grade

2025–26

**Meetings every 1–2 weeks**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Sep 2025** | Testing plan locked: dates, tutor, target score |
| **Oct 2025** | PSAT/NMSQT |
| **Dec 2025** | First draft of 8–10 colleges |
| **Jan 2026** | **Studyloop pilot with 40 students.** |
| **Mar 2026** | **SAT #1.** |
| **Apr 2026** | College list refined. Early-round options mapped. |
| **May 2026** | Final exams. Ask two teachers for recommendations. |
| **Jun 2026** | Essay brainstorm: survey and questionnaire |

15 — TIMELINE

# Senior year

Summer 2026 – June 2027

**Meeting weekly or as needed in application season**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Jun 2026** | **SAT #2. Lab research begins.** |
| **Jul 2026** | Personal statement drafts begin |
| **Aug 1, 2026** | **Common App opens.** |
| **Sep 2026** | Early strategy final. Recommenders briefed with evidence. |
| **Oct 20, 2026** | **Application final.** |
| **Nov 1, 2026** | **Stanford REA submitted.** |
| **Dec 2026** | Early decisions arrive. Regular supplements done in a batch. |
| **Jan 1, 2027** | Regular-decision applications submitted |
| **Mar 2027** | Decisions arrive. Compare offers side by side. |
| **May 1, 2027** | Commit by May 1 |
| **Jun 1, 2027** | Final waitlist decisions |