

Getting the Most Out of High School





Dear Student,

Your high school years will be some of the most memorable years of your life! You'll remember forever the friends, classes, activities, and fun you have in high school.

This booklet will tell you what you need to do to get the most out of these years. If you follow the advice presented in this book, you're sure to have a great high school experience!

We asked a number of seniors for their ideas on how to get the most out of high school. Quotes from these students appear throughout this booklet. They have some excellent tips and advice for you!

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Know Your School

To get the most out of high school, it's important to know the ins and outs of your school. The following are some things you should know.



School calendar

Every school has a calendar that shows when each grading period begins and ends, and when school will be closed for holidays and breaks. School calendars also show when open houses, exams, and conferences are scheduled. Get a copy of your school's calendar and write the important dates in your student planner. Also put these dates on your calendar at home and/or the calendar on your phone.

Attendance and tardy policies

All schools have policies that encourage regular attendance. Know what your school's attendance and tardy policies are. Also, know what you need to do if you're absent or late.

To succeed in high school, you must have good attendance. It doesn't matter how good you are about making up your work—you can never make up all of the information and discussions you miss, even if you're absent for only a day. Unless you have an extended illness or a medical condition, you shouldn't miss more than a few days of school a year.

Rules for Life

It doesn't matter whether you're in high school, college, or working at a job, you are expected to be there on time every day. You are also expected to dress appropriately, be courteous to the people around you, and give your best effort each day. *School rules are really "rules for life."*

Code of conduct/school rules

In order to provide students with a safe environment that encourages learning, schools have rules regarding student conduct and behavior. Most students understand that rules are necessary, and they follow them. For the students who don't follow the rules, there are consequences.

Consequences can range from detention to expulsion. The severity of the consequence generally depends on the seriousness of the offense and the student's past history. While school rules vary, no high school allows weapons, drugs, violence, smoking, alcohol, or bullying.

Athletic eligibility requirements

In addition to state athletic eligibility requirements, many schools have their own requirements that students must meet in order to play a sport. Athletes, for example, may be required to maintain a minimum GPA in a certain number of classes. If you have a question or concern about eligibility, see your counselor, principal, coach, or athletic director.

Where to get help

In order to get the most out of your high school years, take advantage of the many people, services, and resources available to you.

If you look around your school, you'll find teachers, principals, counselors, librarians, tutors, coaches, and secretaries. All of these people are there to help you have the best high school experience possible. If you have a question, concern, or problem, talk to the appropriate person.

If you don't know who to talk to, see your counselor. Your counselor can help you with anything from choosing your classes and planning for college to personal issues and advice. *For more on how your counselor can help you, watch this short video*



The person who can help you the most with any problem or concern is a parent. If you're having a problem with a class, teacher, or another student, tell a parent right away.

Understand Your Academic Record

It's important that you understand your school's academic requirements, and that you also understand the terms GPA, class rank, and transcript.



Grade point average (GPA)

Your grade point average (GPA) is important because colleges and employers will use it to help them determine what kind of student or employee you will be.

Your GPA is simply the average of your semester (or end-of-term) grades, starting with your freshman year. Most high schools use a 4.0 scale in which an A=4, B=3, C=2, and D=1. Students who have all As have a 4.0 grade point average. Students who have Bs in half their courses and Cs in the rest have a 2.5 GPA.

Some schools have “weighted” grades for honors, AP (Advanced Placement), and/or IB (International Baccalaureate) courses. If a high school has weighted grades, then a grade in a weighted course is worth more than it is in a non-weighted course. For example, an A in an honors course might be worth five points instead of the usual four points.

While a variety of methods are used to calculate grade point averages, the higher your grades, the higher your GPA.

Class rank

Approximately half the high schools in the U.S. rank their students. Class rank shows where students stand academically in relation to the other members of their class. The student with the highest GPA is number one, the student with the next highest GPA is number two, and so on.

Because GPAs are used to calculate class rank, you must have a high GPA in order to have an impressive class rank.

High school transcript

A high school transcript is a document that details a student's academic achievement in grades 9–12. Although the information included on a transcript varies from school to school, high school transcripts often contain the following information:



- ▶ grades and credits for each course completed, beginning with grade 9
- ▶ current cumulative GPA and class rank
- ▶ anticipated graduation date
- ▶ state test scores (if required for graduation)
- ▶ college admission test scores (ACT, SAT)

An *official* transcript has a signature, stamp, or seal verifying its authenticity. An *unofficial* transcript is exactly the same as an official transcript, except that it has no signature, stamp, or seal. Students can usually get an unofficial transcript (to check credits or take on a college visit) through their guidance/counseling office.

Transcripts are used when a school, organization, or college needs a copy of a student's high school record. For example, if you were to transfer to another school, your new high school would need to have a record of the courses you've taken, your grades, and the credits you've earned. To obtain this information, your new high school would ask your current school to send them an official transcript.

Colleges need a transcript in order to determine whether an applicant meets their admission requirements. Therefore, colleges require that an official transcript be submitted along with a student's application for admission. A transcript is also generally required when a student applies for a scholarship.

For tips on how to build an impressive high school record, watch this short video.



Know How to Get Good Grades

If you come to school every day and do the following, you're certain to have grades you can be proud of.

Be organized

Being organized makes your day run more smoothly, and it saves you time.

- ▶ Use a student planner every day.
- ▶ Keep your locker and backpack neat.
- ▶ Organize class notes in binders or notebooks.
- ▶ Get everything organized for the next day before you go to bed.

"Using a planner keeps me organized. It also helps me get things done on time." James



Manage your time well

With good time management you have less stress and more free time.

- ▶ Use any extra time in school to get started on homework.
- ▶ Create a study plan that works for you.
- ▶ Allow more time for homework than you think you'll need.

"Each day I make a to-do list for myself. I prioritize the items on the list to make sure that I do the most important things first." Kayla

Be successful in the classroom

If you pay attention in class, you have less to learn on your own.

- ▶ Be in class on time every day.
- ▶ Learn how to adapt to different teaching styles.
- ▶ Bring everything you need with you.
- ▶ Always do all of your homework.
- ▶ Participate in class discussions

"I pay attention in class, do all of my homework, and I ask for help if I don't understand something." Gabriela



Take good notes

Having good notes to study from will help you do better on tests.

- ▶ Pay attention and think about what your teacher is saying.
- ▶ Recognize and write down the information that's important.
- ▶ Take notes that are neat and easy to read.
- ▶ If you're absent, get copies of the notes you missed.

"I go back over my notes and highlight the information that's most important. It makes studying for tests a lot easier." Antonio

Know how to read a textbook

To help you remember what you read, go through these three steps.

- ▶ **SURVEY** – Before you start to read, look over the headings and the words in **bold** and *italic* print.
- ▶ **READ** – Read the entire assignment.
- ▶ **REVIEW** – When you're done, do a quick review of what you've read.

"I have a couple of classes with a lot of reading. I really try not to get behind—it's just too hard to catch up." Jacob

Study smart

Students who study smart spend less time studying, and yet they get better grades.

- ▶ Find a quiet place to study.
- ▶ Focus on one thing at a time.
- ▶ Break large assignments down into smaller parts.
- ▶ Do difficult assignments first, while you're still fresh and alert.

"Before I start to study, I make a plan. I figure out what I need to do and the order I'm going to do it." Ada



Use test-taking strategies

Using a few test-taking strategies will help you get better test grades.

- ▶ Before you start, look over the entire test and make a plan.
- ▶ Mark any questions you want to return to.

"As soon as I get my test, I write anything I need to remember at the top of the page." Terrell

For more tips on how to ace your tests, watch this quick video.



Set Goals

Setting goals is important for people of all ages. Get in the habit of setting both short-term and long-term goals.

Goals help you determine where you want to go and what you want to accomplish. They give you focus, direction, and purpose. Having a goal also helps you determine a plan of action.

Set goals that are SMART

While goals can be **short-term** (get a B on your history test) or **long-term** (graduate with a 3.0 grade point average), every goal should be **SMART**: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant, and **T**ime-bound.

Specific goals are well-defined and clear-cut. Instead of, "I'll do better in school," a more specific goal would be, "I want to earn a 3.0 GPA."

Measurable goals make it easier to know how successful you are. Instead of, "I will get in shape," a better goal would be, "I will be able to walk a mile in less than 20 minutes."

Achievable goals set you up for success because they're goals you can realistically accomplish. Improving your math grade one letter is achievable. Raising your grade from a D to an A probably isn't.

Relevant goals are goals that are worth your time and effort. For example, learning a new computer program is a more worthwhile goal than beating a video game score.

Time-bound goals have a definite time or date they are to be accomplished. "Complete my science project by Friday" is more motivating than "Complete my science project."

Write down your goals

At the beginning of each term, write down two academic and two personal goals. Research shows that you're much more likely to achieve a goal that's written down.



Have a Growth Mindset

Sometimes your successes, failures, talents, and shortcomings are defined by how you look at them—and by the mindset you have.

Fixed vs. growth mindset

A fixed mindset is the belief that you either are or aren't good at something. A growth mindset, on the other hand, means you believe that with effort, you can develop and improve your skills and abilities. Here are some examples.



Fixed mindset	Growth mindset
If you aren't good at something right away, you probably just don't have a "knack" for it.	Anyone can be good at something as long as they practice and work hard at it.
It's better to stick with what you know so you don't fail.	Stepping out of your comfort zone helps you learn and grow.
Failure is something to fear.	Failure is an opportunity to learn.

Ways to build a growth mindset

Remember the power of yet. When you feel frustrated because something isn't going well, adding the word *yet* reminds you to be patient and keep at it. "I don't know how to do this...yet."

Use positive self-talk. When you talk to yourself, be kind. If the voice in your head is negative or critical, change the message and use self-talk that's positive and encouraging.

Have a can-do attitude. Fear of failure holds so many people back in life. When you believe that you can do whatever you set your mind to, you open yourself up to exciting new experiences and growth.

Learn from your mistakes. When you make a mistake, you can be upset with yourself—or you can accept that mistakes happen and figure out what you can do differently next time.

Get Involved



High school is like anything else—the more you put into you put into it, the more you get out of it.

Students who are involved in school activities generally do better academically, and they enjoy school more. Being involved in school activities provides you with the opportunity to do the following:

Spend time with friends and meet new people

“Being in the marching band is great. We’re all friends and we have a really good time.” Bella

Enjoy school more

“I didn’t like school that much last year. This year I’m an office assistant and I’m on the track team. I know more people now, and school is a lot more fun.” Darnell

Become a leader

“Being on student council has helped me gain confidence and develop some leadership skills.” Kate

Relieve stress

“I get rid of a lot of stress during basketball practice. It’s great to be with my friends and just forget about school for a while.” Corinna

Provide a valuable service

“My work on the school newspaper is really important to me. I feel like I am doing something useful.” Jasmine

Try something new

“My speech teacher told me that I should try out for the school play. I’d never been in a play before, but it was a lot of fun.” Brad

Have activities to put on applications

“I take photos for our school yearbook and I’m on the field hockey team. My counselor tells me that my activities will look good on college and scholarship applications.” Maritza

Make Good Choices

When you make good choices and decisions, you reap the rewards. Make poor choices and decisions, and you suffer the consequences.

As a high school student, you probably know that it can be hard to always make the right choice. But often, taking just a few seconds to consider what you're about to do can keep you from doing something you will regret. When you're in a situation that requires you to make a quick decision, ask yourself:

- ▶ Is this the right thing to do?
- ▶ Is this a safe thing to do?
- ▶ Will I feel good about myself if I do this?



If the answer to any of these questions is no, then more than likely, what you are about to do will have negative consequences for you and others. It's time to take a step back and reconsider.

Deal with peer pressure

It's hard to consider consequences in high-pressure situations. The excitement of a situation and/or pressure from peers can sometimes drive young people to act without thinking clearly. This is why taking a few seconds to ask yourself the three questions above is so important.

Consequences can be costly. One bad decision can get you into trouble with your family, school, or boss. It can cause you to lose a friendship, relationship, college admission, scholarship, job, and even your freedom. Hurting someone, getting seriously hurt yourself, or getting into legal trouble are all real consequences to bad decisions. *It's just not worth it.*

When you're in the heat of the moment and are considering doing something you know isn't a good idea, think about your dreams, goals, and values—and about the life you want. Think about something you're looking forward to and consider how this decision might impact that.

If a decision could get you in trouble, or is one you might regret, then you know what you should do.

Deal with Stress

While high school can be fun and busy, it can also be very stressful. Too much stress can make it difficult to take advantage of all that high school has to offer.

When you're feeling stressed out, try one of these relaxation techniques.

- ▶ Take a deep breath, and then slowly release it. Do this until you feel your body relax.
- ▶ Starting at the top of your head, flex and then relax each part of your body.
- ▶ Think of a place where you feel relaxed. Close your eyes and visualize being there.



Whenever you're under a lot of stress, spend time with your family and friends and talk to them about what's going on. Talking is good because it helps you sort things out. Also, try to figure out what you can do to make your life less stressful. If you've taken on more than you can handle, look for activities or obligations that you can eliminate, cut down on, or postpone.

When you're feeling stressed, take good care of yourself. Get plenty of sleep, eat right, and get some exercise. (Physical activity can actually reduce stress.) Also, try to keep a sense of humor, and do things that help you feel calm and relaxed (go someplace quiet, take a bath, read a book, or play with a pet).

We asked our group of seniors what they do to relieve stress. Here are a some of their responses.

"I go outside and take a walk." Minh

"I get rid of my stress on the soccer field." Terrell

"I find a quiet place and listen to music." Kate

If you're ever under so much stress that you can't sleep or eat, or you feel overwhelmed, talk to a parent or to your counselor. They can help you.

For some simple calming techniques, watch this short video.



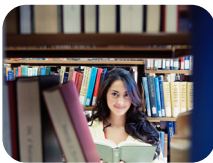
Think About Your Future

There are many factors that will determine what kinds of opportunities will come your way in life. The biggest factor, however, will be your education. Which of the following education options might be right for you?



Four-year college

A four-year college education, or bachelor's degree, can open doors and provide a wide range of career options and opportunities. While four-year colleges vary in size, costs, requirements, and the majors they offer, all four-year colleges seek students who are prepared for college-level work. *Students who plan to attend a four-year college need to follow a college prep program in high school and work hard to get good grades.*



Two-year college

Most two-year colleges are community colleges. Two-year colleges provide affordable, career-oriented programs that enable students to begin their careers after two years or less of college. Law enforcement, culinary arts, and engineering technology are just a few of the career fields students can prepare for by going to a two-year college. Students can also start at a two-year college and transfer to a four-year college.



Career or trade school

Career and trade schools offer short-term training programs in career fields such as cosmetology, auto body technology, and dental assisting. While some programs last only a few weeks, others take up to two years to complete. Career and trade schools are privately owned, and they can be expensive. Students need to carefully check the accreditation of any school they're considering.

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