

Succeeding in Class

Successful students understand that when they're prepared, engaged, and involved in their classes, their grades are better and they enjoy their classes more. Here are some tips to help you succeed in all of your classes.



Tips for class success

Be prepared

When you come to class, have all of your homework and reading done. Be alert, well-rested, and ready to learn. Put away anything that isn't directly related to what you're doing in that class and give your teacher your full attention.

Participate

The best way to stay engaged in your classes is to be an active participant. Ask and answer questions, and participate in discussions.

There is nothing a teacher likes more than a student who is genuinely motivated and engaged in the classroom experience. Be that student!

Take good notes

Most test questions come from information that's been presented in class, so it's important to have good notes to study from. Taking notes also helps you pay attention and stay focused. When you're taking notes, you don't have time to think about or do anything else.

For more notetaking tips, watch this short video.



VIDEO

Getting Organized

Being organized saves time and helps your day run more smoothly. When you're organized, you also have less stress and feel more in control of your life.



Being organized will not only make you a better student now, it will also help you succeed in college, in your career, and in life.

Organization tips

Use a planner

Take a planner to every class. Record assignments, tests, special events, holidays, and breaks. Also use your planner to break large assignments and projects down into more manageable parts.

Have a system for organizing papers

It doesn't matter whether you use folders, spiral notebooks, or three-ring binders. The important thing is that you have a system for organizing your papers and class notes that works for you—and that you have a specific place for every paper.

Organize your study area

When you're organized, you have the tools you need when you need them. Equip and organize your study area with paper, pencils, highlighters, a calculator, and anything else you may need.

Eliminate clutter

Throw out anything you don't want or need. Put the papers you want to keep in a home file and keep your study area clean and neat.

Managing Your Time

We all have the same amount of time each day. How we use this time is time management. When you use your time well, you have time for the things you need to do *and* for the things you want to do.



Here are some tips for managing your time.

Create a weekly schedule

A schedule like this one will help you plan out your days so that you're able to do everything you need to do—and still have time for fun.

First, write in all scheduled chores and activities. You can then see when you have blocks of time for homework and studying—and when you have time for relaxation and social activities.

	Mon	Tues
2:00 pm		
4:00 pm		
5:00 pm		
6:00 pm		
7:00 pm		
8:00 pm		
10:00 pm		

Identify wasted chunks of time

If you have time between classes, before practice, or at a part-time job, try to use that time wisely. Run an errand, study, or just relax. The important thing is that you think about how you can best use the time you have.

Combine tasks

Study while you're doing laundry, go over a speech while cleaning your room, or review your notes while you're waiting for a ride.

Taking Good Notes

Taking notes helps you stay focused on the information being presented. Also, because quizzes and tests usually cover material that's been discussed in class, having good notes to study from can help you improve your grades.



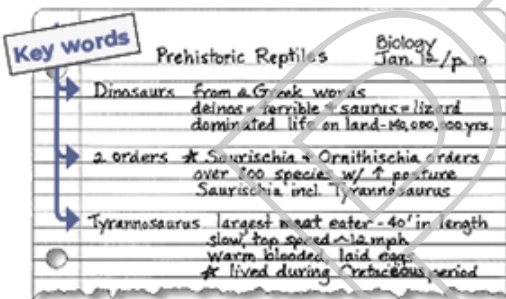
Be organized

Whether you use three-ring binders, spiral notebooks, or a laptop for class notes, the important thing is that you have a system for taking and organizing notes that works for you.

Format your notes

Start a new page for each day and class. Label each page with the class, date, page number, and topic. Use only one side of each page and skip lines between ideas/topics—this will give you space if you want to add something later.

Also, leave a wide space on the left side of each page for key words (names, events, dates). Adding key words will help you organize your thoughts and make your notes easier to understand.



Studying Smart

The key to success is not studying a lot—it's studying smart. Students who "study smart" know how to make the most of their study time.



Here's how studying smart can help you get your assignments completed more efficiently and earn higher grades.

Study tips

Where, when, and how you study play a big part in how productive your study time will be.

Choose a good place to study

Your study area should be quiet, comfortable, well-lit, and have a surface for writing. Equip your study area with the supplies you need.

Eliminate distractions

Silence your phone and only use your tablet or laptop for study-related purposes. Consider downloading an app, such as SelfControl, that limits the use of your phone for a specified time. *By eliminating distractions you force yourself to do one thing only—study.*

Choose a good time to study

Know when you study best and try to organize your day so that you're able to study when you are the most alert and productive.

Resist the urge to procrastinate

Don't put your studying off until later, don't make excuses, and don't wait until you're "in the mood."

Taking Tests

Doing well on tests involves more than just studying the material. You also need to be a smart test-taker.



Test-taking tips

Get off to a good start

- ▶ While you are waiting for the test to begin, stay calm and think positive thoughts. If you're nervous or anxious, take several deep breaths.
- ▶ As soon as you get your test, write anything you want to remember at the top (such as names, dates, or mathematical formulas).

Develop a plan

Before you begin, quickly look over the entire test and decide how much time you'll spend on each section or question. For example, if a test has 25 multiple choice and 2 essay questions, and you have 50 minutes to complete it, you could plan to spend 10 minutes on the multiple choice questions and 20 minutes on each essay.

Don't get stuck on difficult questions

Don't spend too much time on any one question. Put a dot or check mark by the answers you aren't sure of and go back to them later.

Check your answers

If you have time, check all of your answers—even the ones you know are correct. You may find that you've made a careless mistake. *Always use all of the time you're given.*

Writing Papers

To succeed in school, you must be able to clearly communicate your thoughts and ideas in writing. Here are some strategies and tips to help you write an outstanding paper.



How to write a great paper

1. Choose a topic

Choose a topic that you're familiar with or want to learn more about. Make sure that your topic isn't too broad and that there's plenty of information readily available.

2. Gather information

Create a system for organizing your information. Use index cards, a notebook, and/or printouts from online sources. Be sure to record details (title, author, page number, URL) for each source.

3. Organize your ideas

Before you begin writing, make an outline or a diagram of your ideas. Put the main ideas in the order you want to present them, and write your supporting ideas under each main idea.

4. Write the first draft

Expand your outline ideas into paragraphs. Don't worry about making mistakes—just focus on getting your ideas down.



When writing a paper, it's important that you do your own work and cite your sources. To learn more, watch this video on academic integrity.

VIDEO

Dealing with Stress

As a college-bound student, you have a lot on your plate: classes, studying, social obligations, and perhaps a part-time job. At times, all of this may cause you to feel overwhelmed and stressed.



While some stress is normal and should be expected, constant and extreme stress can take a toll on your physical and mental health. Learning to cope with stress in healthy ways will help you succeed in your classes and enjoy life more.

What is stress?

Stress is your body's reaction to change, demands, and/or difficult situations. When you experience stress, your body responds naturally in both physical and psychological ways.

Symptoms of extreme stress

The human body and mind are designed to withstand normal levels of stress. However, if you're under extreme stress for a long period of time, you can experience symptoms that are problematic. These may include:

- ▶ trouble sleeping.
- ▶ feelings of sadness and depression.
- ▶ headaches and/or an upset stomach.
- ▶ eating too much or too little.
- ▶ feelings of dread and/or panic.
- ▶ high blood pressure.
- ▶ chest pain and tightness.
- ▶ panic attacks.

Staying Motivated

We all get stuck sometimes. After all, school can be tough, and maintaining the focus and effort necessary to succeed in your classes can be difficult.



Here are some tips for staying motivated.

Surround yourself with positive people

We come across all kinds of people in life. Some are positive influences, and some are not. Try to avoid people who are negative or critical. Instead, choose to be around people who support and encourage you. These are the people who will help you achieve your goals and realize your dreams.

Set goals

Goals provide focus and direction. Create short-term academic goals (*get an A or B on your math test*) and long-term academic goals (*graduate with a 3.0+ GPA*). Create some personal goals as well (*work out three times a week*).

Practice positive self-talk

We all have an "inner voice," and when things aren't going well, that voice can be negative and critical. You can help yourself stay positive and motivated just by changing your self-talk. Replace "*I'm terrible at math*" with "*I'm smart—I can do this.*" Changing how you think will change how you feel and act. For more tips on staying positive, watch this short video.



VIDEO



Your High School Record

Your high school record shows colleges what kind of a student you are and what makes you unique.



Here are some tips for building a high school record that will put you on the path to college.

Take the right classes

Choose your high school courses carefully. Take courses that will help you prepare for college, and courses that will help you develop your skills in your areas of interest.

Most four-year colleges recommend that students take the following high school courses:

- ▶ 4 years of English
- ▶ 3–4 years of math (including Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II)
- ▶ 3–4 years of science
- ▶ 2–3 years of one foreign language
- ▶ 3 years of social studies
- ▶ 1 year of fine or performing arts

Competitive colleges consider the above to be the minimum requirements. They recommend that students take advanced and honors classes whenever possible. Students who haven't taken several of the above classes may want to start at a two-year college or at a branch campus.

If you have any questions, talk to your school counselor or Talent Search advisor.



For information on making a four-year high school plan, watch this short video.

VIDEO



Why Go to College?

As a Talent Search student, you know that while going to college is important, it takes a lot of hard work to get there. From time to time, you may find yourself wondering, "Is it really worth it?" The short answer is...yes!



Here are some reasons why going to college is a goal that's worth working toward.

More career opportunities

A college education can open doors and prepare you for a career that is personally satisfying, financially rewarding, and a perfect match for your interests and values. *With a college degree, the sky is the limit!*

More money

Statistics show that four-year college graduates earn almost twice as much as high school graduates. That comes out to \$1,000,000 or more over a lifetime.

Having a higher income provides financial stability and more money for the things that are important to you, like hobbies, travel, and entertainment.

New people and experiences

Going to college will give you the opportunity to study a variety of subjects, try new things, expand your skills, and meet new people. Most importantly, college gives you the opportunity to become the person you aspire to be.



College Options

Most careers require education and/or training beyond a general high school education. Some careers require two or four years of college; others require only one year of training or education.



Here are some things to think about as you consider your college options.

Types of colleges

There are several different kinds of colleges: four-year colleges, two-year colleges, career/trade schools, and specialty colleges. Most of the students who continue their education beyond high school attend a two- or four-year college.

Two-year colleges

Most two-year colleges are community colleges. These colleges provide affordable programs that make it possible for students to begin their career after two years of college or less. Two-year colleges offer two types of programs.

Career-oriented programs

These programs prepare students for a specific career. Many of these programs are two-year programs; others take one year or less to complete.

University parallel programs

Students who want a four-year degree often start at a two-year college. This is a good option for students who don't feel ready to attend a four-year college, and also for students who want to save money. Students in these programs take courses they know will transfer to a four-year college.

College Timeline

There are specific things high school students need to do to plan and prepare for college.

The following information will tell you what you need to do each year to stay on the path to college.



9th Grade

- ▶ Work hard in your classes. All of your freshman grades will become part of your permanent high school record. This record (called a transcript) will be sent to any college you apply to. Your freshman grades will also be used to calculate your high school grade point average (GPA).
- ▶ Develop a four-year high school plan. This plan should list all of the courses you intend to take each year. Make sure your four-year plan includes the recommended college prep courses.
- ▶ Talk to your family, Talent Search advisor, and school counselor about your plans to attend college, and ask for their support.

10th Grade

- ▶ Continue to work hard in your classes and develop your skills and interests.
- ▶ Make informal visits to colleges to get a feel for what different campuses are like.
- ▶ Start thinking about what you are looking for in a college, such as location and cost.

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



VIDEO

Choosing a College

Choosing a college is about finding a college that's a good fit for you. The following questions and information will help you determine what's important to you in a college so that you can make the best choice.



Type of college

Four-year colleges offer a wide variety of majors and programs. Two-year colleges offer affordable one- and two-year programs that prepare students for a specific career. Students can also start at a two-year college and transfer to a four-year college to earn their bachelor's degree.

What type of college are you interested in?

- four-year college two-year college

Campus size

Larger colleges offer lots of majors, programs, and activities; smaller colleges usually have smaller classes and a more personal feel.

What size college do you want to attend?

- small medium large

Location

Where do you want to attend college?

- close to home out of state
 in my home state close to nature
 near a big city other _____

College Visits

Making a college visit is the best way to find out if a college is going to be a good fit for you.



The following tips will help you get the most out of your college visits.

Plan your visit

Once you've chosen a college you want to visit, check their website or call the admissions office to see when they have student visitation days and/or open houses scheduled. If you want to visit at a different time, contact the admissions office to set up a visit. The admissions office can schedule appointments and arrange for you to take a campus tour.

Learn all you can

Prepare for your visit ahead of time by learning as much as you can about the college. Explore the website and take a virtual tour. Make a list of everything you want to see and do, and come up with a list of questions you want to ask. You might also ask your Talent Search advisor and counselor about their thoughts on the college.

Talk to people

Schedule appointments with people who can answer your questions, such as admissions counselors, department chairs, and financial aid counselors. Also talk to students. Ask them what they like and don't like about the college, and what they do on the weekends.

ACT and SAT

The ACT and SAT are tests that many colleges require as part of the application process. Here's what you need to know about these important tests.



About the ACT and SAT

What do the tests cover? The ACT consists of four multiple-choice tests: English, Reading, Math, and Science. The SAT has two sections: Reading and Writing, and Math.

When are the tests given? The ACT is given in September, October, December, February, April, June, and July. The SAT is given in August, October, November, December, March, May, and June.

When should you take these tests? It's best to take one of these tests in the spring of your junior year. If you want to improve your scores, you can then retake the test in the fall of your senior year.

How are the tests scored? On the ACT, students receive a composite score (1–36) and a score on each of the four sections. On the SAT, students receive a total score (400–1600) and two section scores.

Should you take the ACT, SAT, or both? Many experts recommend that you take a full-length practice test for each, determine which one you're likely to do better on, and then devote all of your time and energy to preparing for that test.

Many colleges now have test-optional policies. However, unless you're certain you will not need to submit test scores, plan to take the ACT and/or SAT.

Understanding College Admissions

The college application and admissions process generally begins early in your senior year. The information below will give you a general idea of how it works, and the steps you should follow.



The College Admissions Process

STEP 1 – Submission

All colleges have admissions information and applications on their website. You may also be able to apply using the Common App. Be sure to submit everything that's required before the deadline.

STEP 2 – Review

The college admissions office will put all of the information regarding your application into a file. When all of the required documents have been received, your application will be evaluated by an admissions committee.

STEP 3 – Notification

Once your application has been evaluated, the college will let you know whether you have been accepted, rejected, waitlisted, or deferred.

STEP 4 – Your decision

After comparing all of your college and financial aid offers, you decide which college you want to attend.

For tips on how to complete an impressive college application, watch this short video.



VIDEO

Applying to College

College applications are a group of documents highlighting your academic achievements, skills, unique characteristics, and goals. Your college application is a representation of you, and it's important that you present yourself in the best possible light. Here's what you need to know about applying to college.



College Applications

Colleges generally require that applicants submit some or all of the following as part of the application process:

- ▶ the college's application form
- ▶ your high school transcript—which will include all of your high school courses and grades, and your GPA
- ▶ your ACT and/or SAT test scores
- ▶ a list of the school and community activities you've participated in
- ▶ recommendation letters from teachers, counselors, or other adults who know you well

If you're applying to more than one college that accepts the Common App, completing this online application can save you a lot of time. The Common App is accepted by 1,000+ colleges.

For more information on the Common App, watch this video or visit commonapp.org.



VIDEO



Paying for College

College can be expensive, but there are things you can do to make college affordable. If you need help paying for college, learn about financial aid, fill out a FAFSA, and explore ways to cut college costs.



College costs

When thinking about the cost of attendance (COA) for a particular college, be sure to include tuition, fees, books, room and board, transportation, and personal expenses. Here are the average COA "sticker prices" for 2023–2024.

4-year in-state public college—\$28,825

4-year private college—\$60,425

2-year public college—\$19,875

Most college students receive some form of financial aid (grants, scholarships, work-study, loans) and pay less than the above amounts.

Apply for financial aid

To get money to help you pay for college, do the following your senior year.

- 1. Complete college applications.**
Complete admission applications in the fall of your senior year.
- 2. Complete the FAFSA. This is very important.**
For information, go to fafsa.gov.
- 3. Apply for scholarships.** Search for scholarships at fastweb.com and scholarships.com.

To learn more about financial aid, watch this short video.



VIDEO



Understanding Financial Aid

Financial aid is money that is given, earned, or lent to help students pay for college. Financial aid makes it possible for millions of students to attend college.



The four types of financial aid

Grants are funds given, usually because of financial need. Grants do not have to be paid back. The Pell Grant, for example, provides billions of dollars each year to income-eligible families.

When students and parents submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), they automatically apply for a Pell Grant (free money).

Scholarships are generally awarded for academic achievement or an outstanding talent or skill. Scholarships do not need to be repaid.

Loans are funds borrowed from a lender (such as a bank, college, or the federal government). Loans must be paid back. *Over half of all financial aid awarded is in the form of a loan.*

Work-study programs provide college students who have financial need with part-time jobs to help fund their education.

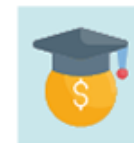
Any family who needs help paying for college needs to complete a FAFSA. This is very important! Many students who could have gotten free money for college didn't receive it because they didn't complete a FAFSA. Don't be one of those students!



The FAFSA

If you need help paying for college, it's important that you fill out a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

If you have questions about the FAFSA, talk to your Talent Search advisor or counselor. For more information, visit fafsa.gov.



What is the FAFSA?

The FAFSA is the application you need to fill out in order to receive any financial aid for college from the federal government.

Why is the FAFSA important?

Because most financial aid is given to students with financial need, it's necessary to have a way to determine which students actually need money for college. The information from the FAFSA helps the government and colleges determine who is eligible for financial aid.

How will the FAFSA help me?

Students who have financial need and complete a FAFSA become eligible to receive federal grants (free money), low-interest loans, and work-study. Colleges and states also use information from the FAFSA to determine eligibility for their aid.

When do I fill it out?

College-bound students should complete a FAFSA in the fall/winter of their senior year.

Many students who could have gotten free money for college didn't receive it because they didn't complete a FAFSA. Don't be one of those students!



Being a First-Generation College Student

A first-generation college student is someone whose parents have not earned a bachelor's degree. Being a first-generation college student is something you should be proud of, but it can come with its own set of challenges.



It's ok to have mixed emotions

It's not unusual for first-generation students to have conflicting feelings about going to college. These mixed emotions often include excitement, fear, pride, pressure, and even guilt. If you have any of these emotions, know that they are normal, and that there are many students who share your feelings, fears, and doubts.

Know that going to college is the best thing you can do for your future—and that there are people who can help you every step of the way.

Reach out to others

You're not the only student in your high school who will be a first-generation college student, and you won't be the only one on campus. Reach out to others in your situation, and find comfort and kinship in your similar experiences.

Also reach out to your Talent Search advisor, school counselor, family members, and favorite teacher(s). Ask for their help and support. *They all want to see you succeed!*



Financial Literacy

Learning how to manage your money is one of the most important skills you will learn in life.



Building good financial habits now will put you ahead of the game and on your way to financial success!

Be a smart spender

Think about the things you spend your money on and differentiate between wants and needs. Before you make a purchase, ask yourself, *"Is this something I need?"* If it's not, make sure that you're being selective, and that you are spending your money on things that are really important to you.

Have a budget

A budget is a plan that helps you decide how you are going to spend your money over a designated period of time. To create a budget, you can use a simple pen and paper system, or you can use a budgeting app. Every time you make a purchase, withdraw cash, or make a deposit, you simply enter it in your app or worksheet.

Save your money

Look at saving money as "paying yourself first." Whenever you receive money, deposit some of it directly into your savings account before spending it on anything else.

Saving money is a gradual process, and it's okay to start small. Over time, your savings will grow.



Smart Spending

The financial decisions you make today can have a major impact (positive or negative) on your future. Now is a great time to learn how to manage your money and become a smart spender.



Here's what you need to know about smart spending.

Recognize wants vs. needs

Needs are things that are necessary for living, such as food, clothing, and shelter. Wants are things you don't need to have, but would like to have or do (such as a larger TV, new phone, or concert tickets).

Businesses work hard to convince you that you don't just want what they're selling—you need it. Smart consumers are aware of these sales tactics and don't let them influence their decisions.

Be a smart consumer

Take your time. Wait a day or two before making a purchase. Waiting helps eliminate bad decisions.

Do your research. Read customer reviews and do some comparison shopping.

Beware of hidden charges. Some companies use extravagant shipping and handling charges to hide the actual cost of their products.

Don't purchase extended warranties or protection plans. Businesses love for you to buy these, but they are seldom a good deal for the customer.