

High SCHOOL AND *the Road Ahead*



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GraduationSource
Making Memories That Last a Lifetime

High School and the Road Ahead

An overview of what every senior should know before embarking on the journey that starts when grade school ends.

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Part 1

The Journey Begins

Welcome recent and soon-to-be high school graduates! Though your life as a high school student is coming to an end, you are about to begin a new adventure: the start of the rest of your life. To keep yourself from fear and uncertainty—and to ensure yourself the highest competitive advantage in the job market—it's important to prepare yourself for the journey.

As you approach your graduation date, your preparations will likely steer you toward one of the most important decisions you will ever make: your choice of college. Since many of your fellow graduates will be facing the same choice, the stakes are high and the competition for more selective colleges is intense. Our goal in writing this eBook is to provide a guiding overview of what you can expect and what you can do to give yourself the greatest chance of success. We've been there before—we can offer advice to get you through the challenges you're about to face.

If you're highly competitive, you will want to know your class rank (exactly where you stand, scholastically, within your graduating class) and, preferably, what percentage of the class you are ranked superior to. As you apply to college, admissions officers will look for your degree of success in high school, usually measured by 1) your grades since 9th grade (the grade at which high school typically starts) and 2) your college aptitude test scores including mathematics, critical reading, and writing.

While it's possible to achieve success with poor SAT scores (we'll talk more about this later), remember not to take this step too lightly. Standardized test scores may not be the most reliable indicators of intelligence, but they are currently the predictors of academic performance which most colleges look at to gauge your ability level. Aptitude tests are used to predict your "learned intelligence," grades, ability to learn, and willingness to work hard. They are also used as a predictor of your perseverance when you encounter unexpected roadblocks.

That's why your parents—and hopefully you—have prioritized your schoolwork as the most important way to get ahead, in college and in life. Academic projects are important to the formation of study habits which, though they don't always speak to raw intelligence, say a great deal about your attitude towards learning.

Although grades and aptitude scores are two of the biggest factors considered by admissions officers, which and how many activities you participated in while in school is important too. Involvement in extracurricular activities or being the recipient of an award can hugely increase your chance of acceptance. If, for example, you were on your school's student council, attended a prestigious music camp for one or more summers, or had your artwork displayed at a local or well-known gallery, be sure to flaunt it on your application. Participation in a sport, music or art club is also an advantage. If you were a varsity starter or team captain on a state championship football or soccer team, you will want that displayed prominently on your application. Likewise, if you were concertmaster of the orchestra or a principal instrumentalist in one of its sections, that's prime application material too. Even if you played in one or the other for more than a year, it's worth mentioning.

Involvement in various activities, especially while maintaining a stellar GPA or consistent Honor Roll status, will likely make you an "all-around (high-achieving) student" that a prestigious university or college would consider. Even if you were an average student as well as a musician, artist, or member of a sports team, you're still a "well-rounded" applicant that a lot of higher-education institutions would be glad to accept. Extracurricular activities are obvious indicators of additional marketable skills such as teamwork, leadership, and outstanding achievement—which colleges *definitely* pay attention to, even if your GPA isn't where you'd hoped.

It is particularly useful to tie extracurricular interests to your intended or desired college pursuits, so that the admissions officer considering your application understands how you can benefit from and contribute to their programs. For example, a statement like "I was interested in business and discovered in my school's Future Business Leaders of America group that I had a real knack for it. That's why I want to pursue business at your college. I'm particularly interested in the well-known program your school offers in Digital Marketing" is an effective way of showing your interest in attending a school.

If you know you want to go to college, the best methods of achieving success are maintaining a decent GPA, participating in school activities, and figuring out the direction of your desired future career. While all of these can be hard, we know the last is often the hardest. We'll do our best to help you go about it in the Parts to come. In the meantime, maybe something in your extracurricular activities will kindle your interest in a subject and make you want to study it in college—and, possibly, pursue it professionally.

Extracurricular activities often encourage you to be active in your class or peer group and act as a microcosm of adult life. Try to be active while you are working at your academics; it's good for your body and mind, helps you find your life's path, and looks good to college admissions officers. Active participation and an investment in your school reflects well on your values and work ethic. The more you stand out in one or more activities, the more a selective college will want to include your diverse interests/talents in their next class.

The road to your future isn't yet paved. Let's get started on preparing for college.



Part 2

Applying for Internships

We have a bit of advice when it comes to internships: **get one**. Whether it's at a marketing agency, doctor's office, or in any number of other organizations and fields, it's important that you try to find one. If you know in which field you plan to pursue a career, it can be useful to find work aligned with this interest while you're still in high school (or after you start college). You can apply for internships every year of high school and college and perform them both during the semester and over summers/extended breaks. Keeping your grades high can help you during the internship application process and so can being friendly with your teachers. When it comes to gaining great opportunities, fostering strong relationships never hurts.

Internships are an absolute must if you're not sure what you want to pursue as a major or career. They don't always help you to identify what you do want, but it's equally useful to know in advance what you don't. If you do some research, you may discover available internships you find interesting. If you apply for them and land one, you can start building a skill base that will be valuable when you face competition for other internships, college admissions, and future jobs.

If you lucked out and your internship kindled your interest in a subject, you'll be better prepared for selecting a college. Not only this, but you'll have access to an excellent letter of recommendation from colleagues already working in your major's field. If you're in college, an internship can lead to a full-time job; it's rare that a high school student will receive this opportunity, but not unheard of that you will be offered a spot in future opportunities, based on your hard work. As always, the more you learn in school and on the job, the better.

While at an internship, you may have the opportunity to try out different jobs, helping you to discover which of them really interests you. You will be able to ask questions about roles and decide whether more training will be necessary, should you pursue one of them after college. Some roles call for advanced degrees or certifications, making it ideal that you begin research now so you can plan on obtaining them, in the future.



For a more advanced look at internships—how to find them, apply for them, and get them—keep an eye out for our upcoming eBook, “Land That Great Internship!”

Part 3

Identifying a Major

Though some colleges require you to decide on a major before entering, your choice won't define you for life. Some students choose more general majors to narrow their focus: for example, political science and history are popular majors for students who want to (or think they want to) be lawyers after school; prospective doctors often choose biology or chemistry while prospective investment bankers choose finance.



Some majors have nothing to do with intended pursuits. Some undergrad degrees won't prevent you from getting a master's degree in an entirely different field, should you decide to switch tracks. You might decide to major in music, spend your undergrad days composing classical and jazz, then go on to law school and become a lawyer. Ideally, the two degrees (undergrad and grad) are connected, but they don't have to be. Most schools will let you attend your first year as "undeclared." This allows you to dabble in various course electives and decide what you really want, before making a commitment.

If you're unsure, whether you're undeclared or not, try out some subjects you think you may like or some that interest you. You may find you like them more than you thought or, conversely, you may hate them. As with internships, it's best to find out sooner than later so you can plan your pursuit of a career after you've had time to reflect.

Part 4

Applying for Financial Aid, Scholarships, and Grants

Financial aid is an immeasurably valuable resource when paying for college. While many students worry that the cost of a higher education will keep it out of their reach, assistance packages are available to four out of five high school graduates. Applying for aid is not only helpful but, in many cases, necessary.

One option to consider is a program's length: although a four-year degree from an accredited college/university often provides a competitive advantage (and, in some occupational fields, is necessary for an entry-level position), two years at a community college or in another accredited program can also be beneficial—and affordable—for students whose career goals match the programs.



On the other hand, many students simply apply for scholarships and aid packages, then combine these with loans. Currently over 80% of students attending four-year colleges and over 75% of students attending two-year colleges receive some form of financial aid.

If loans and financial aid don't cover the full expense, a student might also apply for a work-study program. In addition to providing further support toward an outstanding bill (or, in some cases, spending money), a student's ability to hold down a job while pursuing a degree will shine favorably as he or she bridges the gap between education and occupation. Involvement in a work-study program might even put him or her at an advantage, later on.

Any opportunity to work gives students experience in real-world conditions, providing them with an opportunity to improve their skills and see, firsthand, how valuable higher education training is. Combining classroom learning and active work experience is the best method of solidifying one's knowledge.

Another payment option may come from college-specific scholarships. While your school may offer you significant sport, activity, merit, or need-based aid, it's important to remember that nearly all scholarships are dependent on grades. This means you must maintain a specific GPA in order to continue to receive the scholarship.

In the end, payment plans are unique to each student. No matter how you finance your education, you'll need to design a plan that fits your needs. Your high school or college guidance counselor or the financial aid office at your chosen university can guide you through this process.

When assembling an estimated budget, it's important to make sure you are planning for *every* expense, not just tuition. Remember that you will have living expenses, such as rent and food, and educational expenses, such as computers and textbooks. Although tuition is the biggest part of your college cost, it's far from the only expense you'll need to prepare for.

As you begin this process, it is vital that you fill out your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Complete instructions for this process can be found at the FAFSA website, fafsa.ed.gov. Seventy-two hours after the FAFSA's completion, you will receive vital budgeting information, such as whether or not you qualify for a Pell Grant (government loans that don't need to be paid back) or federally subsidized loans (low-interest, long-term loans). If your primary concern about incurring debt is your ability to pay it back, you can also research and apply for scholarships and other non-federal grants. You can research available scholarships online at sites like studentscholarships.org. Never give up on educating yourself—don't let your finances stand in the way of your future.

In the following Part, we will review other payment options that help reduce college costs.

For a more advanced look at applying for financial aid, hunting for scholarships, and applying for grants, keep an eye out for our upcoming eBook, "The Procrastinators Guide to Getting into College"

Part 5

College Selection: Public vs. Private

As with financial aid, the decision between a public and a private university depends on personal need and preference. State-supported universities can be great for students who flourish in a communal, lecture-based environment. At an institution like the University of Maryland, you will likely spend your first year or two in a stadium-type lecture hall with 300-400 other students, while your professor teaches from a TV screen. Your opportunities for interacting with him or her will, as a result, be limited, but the school will likely also offer recommended—or mandatory—smaller study groups with a Teaching Assistant. With roughly 8,000 new students coming in each year and a total student body of close to 40,000, this is often the most effective method of running classes. Still, large class sizes do not mean that the institution’s academic standards aren’t high. It is important to remember that state schools are not a “fall back” option for students who don’t know what they want to do or can’t get in anywhere else—they can require just as much work and provide just as much reward as renowned private schools. Although an Ivy League university might confer prestige and splendor, due to its rigorous academics, competitive admissions, and reputation for turning out leaders in the profession, you do not *need* to attend one to get a demanding, rich, diverse, and meaningful education.

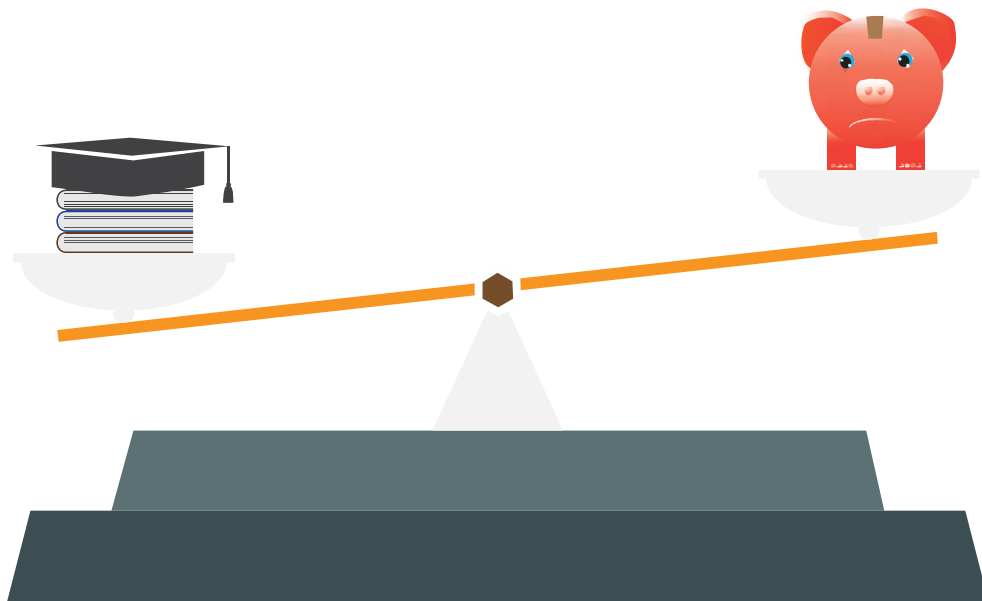


If you (or your guidance counselor) feel that you would not benefit from lecture-based classes or if you prefer the faculty attention of a smaller school, you might want to consider a private, four-year college. In either case, it is important to note that some private colleges still employ large, lecture-style classrooms. Stanford, widely

regarded as an excellent school, has programming classes of 650 students! Sometimes the benefit of a private school is not the size of the class, but the person doing the lecturing. There are a limited number of world-class experts in their fields and they generally flock to more prestigious schools. However, this is not always the case: the State University of New York has one of the most serious and impressive Nanotechnology facilities in the entire nation!

Whether you attend a public or private school and whether it offers small or large classes, the responsibility for providing the best education falls on one person: you. A dedication to studying, forming beneficial social and study groups, and remaining determined to master your material is the best method of achieving a valuable education, regardless of school or class type.

What it all boils down to is this: do your research! Talk to teachers, counselors, peers, and even students or alums of your prospective schools to decide if they're right for you. Remember: you can always transfer to another school if you don't like your first choice, but you shouldn't make any hasty decisions either. Think long and hard on this one—it's your future, after all.



Wherever you go, public or private, remember that you are paying good money to be there.

(We could write a whole guidebook on good and bad college experiences, but this is not that book. Check back with us later—we might have written it by then.)

Part 6

Degree Selection: Associate vs. Bachelor's

Another route for students who want to go to college without breaking the bank is to attend a two-year community college rather than a four-year university. Community colleges are usually not as difficult to get into as four-year schools and are considerably cheaper because they are heavily subsidized by their State and Local County.

Times have changed—or at least the realities have. Community colleges were once less favorably looked upon; some still are, but that thinking has changed, due to both economic necessity and common sense. So-called “CCs” are funded by their counties and run more cheaply than four-year schools. They offer two-year degree programs, presided over by excellent academic professors who often completed demanding university programs and have very good resumes (or the beginnings of them.) Some professors even hold PhDs from elite programs and have taken up day jobs at the community college because they enjoy teaching on the side. Spending the first two years of your college career at a CC is cheaper, making higher education more accessible, no matter what a student's financial situation.

A community college degree is also directly transferrable to most state universities, if your academic record is good. Transferring credits typically only works when you have achieved a C or better in each class and some four-year colleges only accept B's; if your goal is to transfer credits from a two-year to a four-year school, it's important to research the grades your desired school will accept.

Studying at a CC is especially beneficial if you have some idea of what you want to study—and know that you'll likely stick with it. If you keep transfer processes and your employment goals in mind, you will have a number of options available to you, when you finish the program.

Check Out this [Interesting Infographic](#) comparing these options.

Part 7

Getting the Most Education for Your Money

State-financed higher-education institutions are helpful for students with ordinary financial means because they receive subsidies from their states and are, thus, cheaper—especially for students living in-state. Private schools, though they may offer more individual attention and be more prestigious, are usually prohibitively expensive, putting them out of reach for students without some kind of substantial scholarship or grant. Private universities and colleges are advantageous in that they are usually smaller, offer better student-to-teacher ratios, and have better libraries and other facilities than their public counterparts, although it's important to note that this is not always true. Research is the key to finding the best public college for the least amount of money.

Also, it's important to note that private universities and colleges aren't always expensive. Ivy League colleges are known for their prestige, high academic standards, and high prices. Students applying to Ivy League colleges typically fall into two brackets: those from wealthy families who sometimes have “legacy” connections and those in the very top of their classes. It is possible to attend an Ivy League school without the necessary funds—but you'll need to be the best of the best.

Like state schools, private universities are responsible for the costs of faculty salaries, academic and sports facilities, science labs, libraries, and more, all of which is paid for through tuition and donations. As such, the price of a typical private university has gone up astronomically in the last 30 years. Schools like Harvard, however, are an exception to this rule: if necessary, Harvard will pay all fees and expenses for the students they want to admit, based entirely on economic need. Harvard is one of the last bastions of truly egalitarian education, enabled by their generous endowment from a long record of alumni success.

However, other Ivy League schools charge over \$50,000 in undergraduate tuition per year. The most expensive college in the US is Harvey Mudd College, charging \$64,527, not including room, board, textbooks, or other costs. Obviously, some paths to higher education are more expensive than others, putting them out of reach for many, but let's focus on more economical costs and what you can do to keep your education affordable.

According to the College Board, the average cost of college schooling per year (as of 2013-2014) varied by type of institution. For private colleges, the average cost was \$30,094, for public colleges (in-state) the average cost was \$8,893, and for public colleges (attended by out-of-state residents) the average cost was \$22,203. According to Wikipedia, the average cost of annual tuition for a two-year community college was \$3,131.

If finances are preventing you from getting the education you want, a cost-effective method might be to attend a two-year school and attain an associate degree, then transfer to a four-year, in-state public college to work on your bachelor's. It is important that you make sure the four-year school will accept your two-year credits, but you'll find that many schools do. Following this plan will save you tens of thousands of dollars and ensure you get the best education you can for your money.



Part 8

Apply to College

When choosing a college, you'll want to look for a program that meets your scholastic goals and offers the kind of education you want and the activities you want to try. The simple rule of applying to colleges, however, is to find more than one that fits these criteria. Applying to only one school is never a safe choice and is not highly recommended; similarly, applying to too many schools indicates that you don't care which school you get into, as long as you get into one. College recruiters typically love the schools they work in, so they are looking to accept those they feel love their school as well. A good rule of thumb is to apply to three to five schools to show you care where you go while leaving yourself options. Sometimes, these "options" are referred to as safety schools.

Many factors are considered by college admissions departments.

Remember, they don't just look at your grades. They want to see a variety of factors including:

1. A Challenging High School Curriculum

- a. Schools want to know you did more than just attend classes: they want to know if any of those classes were accelerated or advanced. Be sure to mention in your application if you were involved in AP, Honors, or other accelerated programs.

2. Good Grades

- a. Not only do they want to know if the courses you took were advanced, admissions officers want to know how well you did in school. More important than good grades is the fact that you maintained *consistently* good grades or that your grades show an upward trend from freshman to senior year. You don't have to have the best GPA to be considered—you just need to show that you are always improving. Colleges like to see improvement.

3. Good Standardized Test Scores

- a. Great grades are one thing, SAT's and PSAT's are another. Nearly all four-year schools require that an SAT be taken, prior to being considered for admission. If you didn't take the tests or performed poorly on them, you might consider attending a two-year college first and transferring to a four-year college later. Most two-year colleges don't require SAT scores and the majority of four-year schools don't require an SAT score, if you already have an associate degree.

4. Extracurricular Activities

- a. Schools like knowing you did more than just go to school and do what was expected of you. They like knowing you joined a group, started a club, or played on a sports team. These activities show that you are outgoing, sociable, and willing to involve yourself in group activities.

5. Community Service

- a. Doing your part to serve your community is a shining star on your application. Schools love admitting students who have helped others, locally and beyond.

6. Internships and Work Experience

- a. Colleges are also big fans of internships, especially when they come with letters of recommendation. Getting an internship shows you tried to test out a potential major/career path before applying to their program and lets admissions officers know you have thought your education through.

7. Essays

- a. Some schools require multiple essays on different subjects as well as general essays on why you want to go to their college and what you hope to achieve there. Essays are a major part of the application process and can help you gain acceptance to schools if your GPA isn't where you'd hoped it would be. In the end, it's important that you take the time to compose a very well-written set of essays that highlight your goals in life and your writing capabilities.

8. Standard Recommendations

- a. You will also need to reach out to teachers, guidance counselors, and former or current employers to find someone willing to write a letter of recommendation. Colleges love to hear why *you* think you should attend their school, but it's also important that those who know or have worked with you think you'd be a good fit, as well.

9. Additional Recommendations

- a. Sometimes, schools ask to see how you have engaged with adults, beyond teachers and counselors, who think highly of you. Whether this letter comes from a friend's parent, a friend of your parents', or another trusted figure, colleges like to see other adults supporting your decision to attend their school.

10. Awards or Honors

- a. Schools want to know if you won any awards for merit, scholastic achievement, sports, or the like. Items like this do wonders to boost your chances of being accepted.

An important factor for *you* to consider is your degree of personal happiness and comfort at a school. Once you're a resident, you will spend the majority of your four years on or around campus and it will become, as colleges like to

say, your “home away from home.” If you don’t feel at home at a school before you become a student, enrolling may bring more emotional/psychological harm than it is worth. If you have questions when you visit, talk to someone who does not have a stake in your attendance—someone not connected to (or who doesn’t get their paycheck from) the university. If a friend, relative, or former classmate recently graduated from the school, tell them what’s bothering you; hopefully, they can satisfy your curiosity and quell any doubts. However, if you still have doubts after talking to an alum, don’t attend the school: it’ll be a huge waste of personal energy and investment money if you back out or don’t finish. If, after a few years, you decide you would like to attend that school, the option will still be there—without a large debt attached.

For this reason, it’s a good idea to visit each campus you apply to. Sometimes, this isn’t possible, due to cost or distance. In these cases, it’s recommended that you go over the school’s website from top to bottom and seek out external reviews from current and former students. When it’s all said and done, you’re hoping that the school meets your criteria and you meet theirs. At the end of this process, you’re looking to have one thing happen (illustrated below):



For a more advanced look at applying for college—how to write your essays, get teacher recommendations, and prepare for face-to-face interviews— keep an eye out for our upcoming eBook, “The Procrastinators Guide to Getting into College”

Part 9

Find the Right Place to Live

Unless you plan to live at home—a much cheaper option that has become quite popular, in recent years—you’re going to need a place to live. A good rule of thumb is that, if you need to spend more than 30-45 minutes travelling to school, you should move, since that’s a minimum of 60-90 minutes that could be spent studying, working, or enjoying time with your classmates. This guide will advocate for getting out of your parents’ house, possibly slowly, but deliberately.

You’re in a transition from living with your family to independence and self-reliance and are going to need to make the break; the questions are how quickly and whether finances demand that you keep expenses to a minimum. You will want a place where you feel comfortable and at home, where the atmosphere is supportive and friendly, whether that be with your parents or with like-minded friends or roommates. It helps if the people you’re living with have the same attitude toward collegiate academics as you.

Some colleges, however, do not give you a choice. Many state and private schools, especially in large cities, require that you live in their provided dormitories for at least your first year, ensuring that you become immersed in the college environment. Typically, after your freshman year, they will start giving you more freedom of choice, where living is concerned. At that time, many people choose to live with new or old friends although, when choosing roommates, it is important to look for compatible sleeping and studying habits and similar hobbies.

If you want or have to find an apartment and roommate(s), college towns often recommend a few specific neighborhoods with multiple student housing options available. Visit the campus beforehand to pick an apartment you like that doesn’t break the bank and put in an early bid so you can be assured of getting what you want. Fill out more than one rental application so as not to put all your eggs in one housing basket. Remember: student housing goes fast. Apartments are available a minimum of three months prior to the start of the semester and, after that, pickings get slim, right up until a month before the semester starts, when pickings are hard to come by at all. Student housing is usually cheap and close to campus, though both factors can vary. Make sure you know what you’re getting and that you can afford the rent with whatever bills—food, utilities, etc—you’re going to have. Affordability and comfort, together with basic apartment functionality, are the main factors in being happy with any arrangement.

This philosophy extends to your dining. Most college food is institutional, made by an outside vendor, and sold at a significant markup, either a la carte or through a meal plan. Dining halls cook for a significant number of students

and, as such, don't always offer choice ingredients; what you'll get if you're on a school-sponsored meal plan is probably enough to fill you up, but may not be nutritious or varied. If you have food restrictions, preferences, or allergies, you will want to investigate your school's offerings to ensure you have the options you require.

If you live near campus, it might be best to try to buy your own meals. You might want to bring food from home or buy the cooking equipment you'll need and shop at local grocery stores. This will give you ample practice at cooking for yourself, if this is a skill you have not already acquired. Living in dorms, however, often means living without a kitchen. Shopping at the grocery store for wholesome food may be difficult if all you have is a mini-fridge and a microwave.

During your freshmen year, the college may require you to eat on campus—the idea being that you'll mingle with classmates, teaching assistants, and even professors, depending on the school. Luckily, many grocery stores and local business (especially in big college towns like Buffalo, NY) *also* allow you to use campus dollars at their off-campus stores.

Of course, living away from home can be extremely stressful. Most reputable colleges offer mental health crisis centers or other built-in plans that can help you cope with the transition or send you home, if that is your best option. It may be that the school you chose is a poor match and transferring to a different place, possibly with an adjustment period, will be better. It may also be that, with the right counselor and/or a break, you'll be ready to face the pressures of college life again.

If you're having mental/psychological issues from the strain of school or from being away from your family, don't be embarrassed—get help. It's much better to get counseling at an early stage than suffer later on and it's well-established that younger people tend to rebound faster than older ones. Statistics show that, beyond this, you are far from alone: 1 in 3 people experience depression at some point in their lives. In addition to whatever counseling your school or family provides, it is important that you surround yourself with like-minded, supportive friends and peers who can help you through the recovery process.

Student or off-campus organizations can be a great way to find this community. It is best to join a group based on a strong reputation of scholastic achievement and seriousness, not on partying. Some organizations can foster great connections within an industry, push you to greater academic heights, and provide crucial leadership positions. Others may just waste your time, so choose wisely.

It is most important to find a housing arrangement that you can both live with and afford, preferably in student housing that is easily accessible to campus, school activities, and friends. Another factor is easy access to cheap, preferably decent, food. Always look for bargains and make sure you know where all the good grocery stores are. These are things you may have to experiment with, but they are not hard to figure out and you can learn a lot just by word-of-mouth.



Check Out this [Interesting Infographic](#) detailing how to find off-campus living or [this other one](#) made by colleges for students.

Part 10

Taking an Alternate Route



If you are not planning to attend college after high school, it's important to find a job in a trade you are interested in. Since the United States is recovering slowly from a tail-spin, the gap is widening between the haves and the have-nots and the explosion of college graduates all over the country is making it difficult to find a job, even for those who have a degree. The key is to find a position with growth opportunities and to accumulate knowledge and experience in that business, earning yourself a reputation, connections, and success.

It is also a good idea, if you know you're going to start working right after high school, to get an apprenticeship or internship in a business you think you want to pursue, getting yourself hands-on experience before you graduate high school and come on the market. This will give you an edge on somebody who's coming out cold, with no work experience or know-how in a business. It also looks fantastic on your resume that you took the initiative to pursue something early.

Many people consider going into trades like plumbing, carpentry, or electric utilities. These jobs can pay well enough to support you and a family, but it's important to note that some have unions that are difficult to get into. If you plan on going into one of these the trades, make sure you have an "in" to get your foot into the door for a bright future.

You don't need to go to college to be successful. If you're an inventor or entrepreneur, you can pursue a self-made career. Beyond this, you can still look into certificate programs that help you find easier employment like medical billing and similar certifications. The main methods of achieving success are continually educating yourself, even if it's on your own, and finding an outlet in the job market where you can show your skills, even if you don't have a degree.



Keep Yourself Educated. Never stop learning!

Part 11

Life on Your Own – Be Safe and Responsible

Free, at last! Living on your own is likely new for a high school graduate; instead of living with your parents, you're suddenly living with peers or, possibly, by yourself. Your first taste of independence is very different and it takes getting used to.

Some college-bound students make plans to live near their parents, so they can be in proximity and go home when they choose. A lot of students choose state-funded universities partly because of this and partly because of their parents' influence on the decision. As mentioned earlier, it's also the most economical way of getting a degree. Many students, however, want to get some distance from home. It all depends on you and the home you're leaving: if you are close to your family and view them as a support system, it may be best to stay close to them; if you're ready to take the leap on your own, you may decide differently. Note, also, that the quality of a program at a far-away school may be high enough to warrant moving farther from the nest. Many state universities provide enough quality programs in diverse areas that state residents don't have to move far to get what they want, but not all do.

It goes without saying that many students on their own for the first time get a little excited. Being on your own is a chance to show your maturity, your resolve, and your general skills at life, but it may also seem, to some, like a time to throw inhibitions to the wind, throw back a 12-pack of beer, and stay out every night until the sun comes up, looking for the shoe you lost on your way home from a late-night trip to Burger King.

Students should be extremely careful when it comes to alcohol and other substances. A criminal conviction, for underage drinking or general irresponsible behavior, makes it hard to get hired, later on. Such discretions could also get you ejected from a college housing system or even result in expulsion. Drinking responsibly is okay, once you are of legal age, and a lot of people with respectable positions enjoy it. Drinking excessively, though, is not only self-destructive, but can lead to very unpleasant outcomes.

Whether you're of age or not, it's best to avoid drinking games or any kind of competitions, centered on alcohol or drug consumption. Make sure you make friends who enjoy activities other than drinking. Remember that having fun is great, but long-term relationships should also involve activities in a sober environment.

As a general rule of thumb, whether male or female, it is best to never go out alone—especially, at night. You should always make sure that your friends/roommates know where you are going and when you will be back. It is also a good idea to attend events with friends who will keep an eye on you as not everyone is looking out for your well-being. Remember—school first, then have fun while being smart and safe.



Use Your Brain!



Whether it's a quick, easy adjustment or takes a while, the important thing is that you're learning self-reliance and becoming an independent adult. With hard work, you will be a mature, educated, and—hopefully—employed adult by the end of your four years. It's exhausting work, but it trains you for the rest of your life. Be excited to take the journey!

Part 12

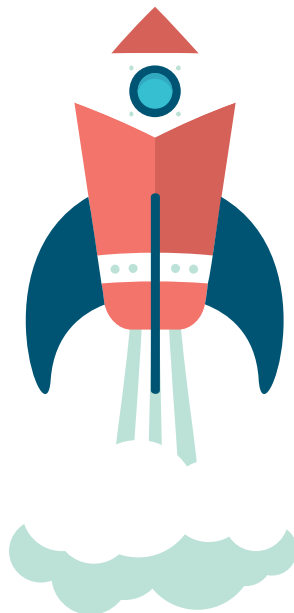
Take a Mind-Clearing Trip

You're in a transition phase and want to make sure you hit new challenges with a clear head and optimistic mindset. College requires a new, more demanding set of expectations, rarely giving passing grades to students who haven't earned them. In high school, a teacher might curve your test to make sure you don't have to take summer school or repeat senior year, but these events are far less frequent in college.

If you're worried about starting school—or if you need the chance to recuperate from your senior year—it's a good idea to take a break the summer before you start college/work. A standard vacation to the family cabin in the woods might be enough, but something like a driving, biking, or hiking trip “away from it all” can also be beneficial when clearing one's mind. Sometimes, there's nothing like a road trip along a steadily winding road, if you like to drive. If you're in the North to Midwest, we advise a nice drive on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Likewise a planned multi-day bike ride or hike into a wooded area or national park is a good idea, especially if you go for a few days. You might try visiting a beach, whether local or more than a way's away, or challenging yourself to a new activity you've always wanted to try. Do it and feel proud of yourself: a confidence booster right before college is a great idea. A few of us at GraduationSource went skydiving; it isn't necessarily relaxing, but it does clear your mind of *literally* everything else.

Whatever you choose to do, get out there and do something!



Part 13

Final Thoughts

Graduating high school is an important, transitional period that will influence the rest of your life. It's important that you make the best, most-informed decision you can, based on where you think you want your life to go. The information and resources available to you now are far better than what was available to a typical college-bound student even 15 years ago. Know that you can make adjustments later, but many important actions depend on what you do now.


Live your life fully, starting today; take advantage of every opportunity, work hard, get where you can, and enjoy yourself. Stay calm and focused and remember that your mind is your best resource, the tool that no one can take away from you. You will be developing through each of the steps described in this eBook; that's what this is all about.

If you give your best every day, no matter what you do, you can think about yourself at the end of the day—for the rest of your life—and say, “Yes, I worked and did the best I could with what I was given. “

You are learning to harness your entire self, mind and body, to lead the best, fullest life you can. Our hope is that it will be a happy one, filled with satisfaction and accomplishment.



It's Your Time!



High SCHOOL AND *the Road Ahead*

Hi there high school graduate! High School is drawing to an end. As in all things, the end of one thing is the beginning of another. Ahead of you lies a long road, a road that will lead you to a successful and happy life. The adventure that is life after High School is about to start. Are you ready?

It's time to steer yourself in the right direction. It's time to make important life altering decisions. The first of many decisions you'll be needing to make in the months to come, is which colleges to apply to. The stakes are high because so many of your peers are doing the same thing, and the competition for the most selective colleges is intensive. Our goal in writing this e-book is to guide you in what to expect. Within these pages insights from people who have had to make the decisions you're making now. All of whom were happy to contribute their advice to help you make some great decisions.

Let's get started. The rest of your life is waiting.

WRITTEN AND EDITED BY:

GraduationSource
Making Memories That Last a Lifetime