

Preparing for Higher Education

Advanced Level



After you have an idea of the education and training you need to achieve your future career goal, it's time to begin making plans to reach that goal! Preparing for education and training after school doesn't happen overnight—as a matter of fact, there are things you need to do throughout your time in high school to make sure you are prepared.

There are four things you need to do to prepare for higher education:

1. Prepare yourself academically
2. Get into the right habits
3. Explore potential interests
4. Select and apply to post-secondary institutions right for your career goals

1. Prepare Yourself Academically

DID YOU KNOW?

- The percentage of first-time high school graduates placed into at least one remedial course in 2011 was 31.8%, up from 28.6% in 2009-10. The largest number of students needed remediation in math.
- Nearly four out of five remedial students had a high school grade point average of 3.0 or higher.¹

Remediation refers to sequences of increasingly advanced courses designed to bring academically underprepared students to the academic skill level expected when entering higher education. Students are often taken by surprise when they learn they are “not college ready.” Didn't they pass their high school academic classes? They graduated from high school, on time, right? And hey, they even did well on the high-stakes assessments—doesn't that mean they are college ready?

Not necessarily. Higher education and training expectations are very different from high school! Even if the class you are taking has the same name as the one you took in high school, higher education instructors move through course material at a much faster pace, cover more material, emphasize different concepts, and may have very different goals than high school instructors.²

So even if a student passed the required math classes in high school, it doesn't necessarily mean that student is ready for math in a higher education setting.

What many students don't realize is that the remediation courses they take are often required, add to their degree or certificate program course load, cost the same as any other course, **but do not count towards their program certificate or degree**. Therefore, if you had a degree program that required 120 credits, credit earned in post-secondary remediation courses would not count toward the 120 credits required for that degree. This may mean that it takes longer to finish your degree program, and in the meantime, your post-secondary funding may run out. The last thing you want is higher education debt but no credential to show for it!

If you take a placement test while still in high school, you still have time to get your academic skills up to speed before you go to higher education. This could save you time *and* money!

¹ *Diploma to Nowhere*, Strong American Schools, Delta Cost Project, 2008, p. 4 (<http://www.deltacostproject.org/resources/pdf/DiplomaToNowhere.pdf>)

² Conley, David T. *Redefining College Readiness*, EPIC Institute, 2011, p.2. Web. <<https://epiconline.org/files/pdf/RedefiningCollegeReadiness.pdf>>

1. Prepare Yourself Academically Continued...

You can do something about it—find out early on if your academic skills are “college ready.” Although admissions tests, like the SAT or ACT can provide an indication of your academic readiness, many post-secondary institutions, use placement tests, such as the Accuplacer exams, to determine if you are academically ready for post-secondary courses. Testing results from a placement exam aren’t used to determine if you should continue your education but to place you in the most appropriate academic post-secondary courses, even if it means remedial courses.

You can also prepare by challenging yourself in high school, especially in your core academic courses

What steps can you take to make sure you are ready for higher education?

2. Get Into the Right Habits

You need to know more than facts to do well when continuing your education and training after high school. You need to have the right behaviors that will lead to post-secondary success. These include good note-taking skills, study skills, time management skills, and self-monitoring skills.

Note taking skills

The problem: Professors and training instructors will not slow down or tell you what is important information—you have to be able to figure that out on your own.

The solution: Practice better note taking skills in high school. Education blogger Dennis Jerz³ offers tips for good note taking skills that include:

- ❑ Go to class prepared
- ❑ Improve your listening skills
- ❑ Develop a note taking method that works for you
- ❑ Pay close attention to content
- ❑ Review and edit your notes

You can try out different note taking methods by downloading “Five Note Taking Methods” from the Rhode Island Adult Education Professional Development Center, www.riaepdc.org/Documents/ALALBA1Five_Methods_of_Notetaking.docx UPDATED 7-09.pdf

Study skills

Once you get to higher education, it's up to you to read and understand the assigned materials. Lectures and assignments proceed from the assumption that you've already done so *and* that you understood all of the assigned material. To study well, you will need to practice effective reading comprehension techniques, to create your ideal learning environment and to demonstrate discipline.

To better understand what you are reading, it may help to try some of the following techniques:

- ❑ Try pre-reading techniques: write down what you already know about the topic, or questions you may have
- ❑ Read out loud
- ❑ Look up unfamiliar words
- ❑ Summarize each page, section or paragraph as a “tweet” (write a summary of 140 characters or less)
- ❑ Outline what you have read to capture main points and supporting details
- ❑ If you own the text, or are using an e-reader, underline or highlight key facts or passages
- ❑ Read the passage twice—once to appreciate the information as a whole and then to understand the details

³“Taking Notes: 5 College Success Tips,” Dennis G. Jerz, posted August 29, 2012, <http://jerz.setonhill.edu/writing/academic1/taking-notes-5-college-success-tips/>

Study Skills continued...

Now is the perfect time to determine what your ideal learning environment. Different people learn best in different situations. Think about the following conditions and figure out which settings work best for your learning needs:

- ❑ **Sound.** *Some people need it absolutely quiet in order to concentrate. Others work or study more effectively only if there is music or noise around them.*
- ❑ **Light.** *Too little or too much light can inhibit learning.*
- ❑ **Design.** *This refers to the formal or informal settings and furniture in the room where you study. For instance, do you sit at a desk or do you prefer to lounge on the floor or bed?*
- ❑ **Time of Day.** *Some people are night people and others work best in the morning.*
- ❑ **Food.** *you need to eat, drink, or chew gum while studying or working?*
- ❑ **Social Aspects.** *This is your preference to work or study alone, with a partner, or in a group.*

Finally, it is a great time to start working on self-discipline when it comes to studying. It can be difficult to avoid activities with friends, texting, favorite TV shows, or talking on the phone, but these devour your study time. Once you find the right place and time, get rid of all possible distractions so you focus on your main purpose—earning good grades, and eventually, earning a post-secondary credential.

Time management skills

It doesn't take long for students who continue education beyond high school to realize that managing their time is one of the most challenging aspects of being in school. With so much to do and keep track of, and no teachers or parents pushing you, strong time management skills can make all the difference.

- ❑ Get a calendar and use it. It can be a paper calendar or a cell phone. Schedule reminders, study times, and project benchmarks.
- ❑ Write down everything. Write down everything you need to do in one place: when to eat, sleep, study, do laundry... You get the idea. The busier your schedule gets, the more important this becomes.
- ❑ Schedule time to relax and reward. Don't forget to schedule a chance to relax and chill, even if it is only for fifteen minutes. Give your brain a break and keep your stress levels in check. Also, schedule some rewards to celebrate accomplishments. It might make it easier for you to get through a challenging concept or assignment if you know you have something to look forward to afterwards.
- ❑ Keep trying new time management methods until you find one that works for you. Maybe a new and better app just came out. Maybe a friend told you about a technique that works for him. Maybe a technique you are trying just isn't working out.
- ❑ Plan backwards from major deadlines. Start with deadlines for large projects, exams and papers. Then, figure out how much time you need to prepare for each deadline and schedule your time accordingly. Be sure to put in a little extra time, just in case you hit a bump in the road.
- ❑ Don't procrastinate. Even if you're able to pull off writing two papers and planning a presentation during midterms week, you'll be stuck if you get the flu when you've planned to pull an all-nighter. Work on your assignments as soon as they are assigned, and not when they are due, to eliminate any unwanted surprises or delays.

Self Monitoring

When you continue on to higher education, the only one responsible for you is you. You need to be able to demonstrate you have what it takes to take care of yourself and get your work completed on time. You need to figure out when you can handle your work by challenging yourself and when you need assistance. And it is critical that you know where to go to access the assistance you might need, whether it be tutoring or medical help.

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3. Explore Potential Interests

By exploring your interests and hobbies throughout high school, you can accomplish many things that schools and employers look for:

- Showcase diverse interests and capabilities, to demonstrate that you are “well-rounded”
- Prove you are able to manage your time successfully
- Showcase your talent and leadership skills
- Exhibit transferable skills that lead to success in the classroom and the workplace
- Contribute back to your community or to others
- Demonstrate excellence through acquiring awards and honors

However, you may be accomplishing more than that—you may be finding your future career! It’s important during high school to start to get a sense of what you might like, or might not like, to do once you enter the workforce full time. You can do that through your extra-curricular activities, your hobbies and even through a summer or part-time job.

For years, many advisers would tell students they had to demonstrate they were “well-rounded,” meaning capable in a variety of skills. Admissions advisers are now mixed: some still believe it is still a must to get into a good post-secondary school, some believe it is too common to make you stand out, and still others want to see a singular focus.

There are also work-and-learning activities that might be available during high school. These can include career fairs, community service projects or project learning, internships, community service, job shadowing, informational interviewing and cooperative education opportunities. The more information you can gather now, the better equipped you will be to select, and pay for, the post-secondary education or training you will need to prepare you for a chosen occupation.

What skills can make you successful in the classroom and the workplace?

Financial Implications of Switching Programs and Schools

Not many people know what career they want without test-driving it first in a post-secondary setting or in the workplace. However, every time you change your post-secondary degree or certificate program of study, you risk “losing” credits for classes you’ve already taken. On top of that, the new program of study you have selected will require you to pay to take new classes, costing you even more money, and more time, to finish your post-secondary education or training.

Sometimes it is recommended to have a ‘fallback’ or ‘starter’ career goal, something that could get you a job while you work towards a career that is your true passion. What would be a good fallback program of study for you?

The problem of loss of class credit and money can be even more extreme if you switch schools. Many times, one higher education institution will not accept credit for courses from another institution, even if it is for the same class. In addition, the new school may not accept course credit from the old school if you received a low grade for that class, such as a “D.” Either way, you end up paying twice for the same classes. On top of that, you risk losing some or all of your financial aid by transferring to another school.

Before you consider switching majors or schools, weigh the potential costs of this decision. You might end up paying a lot more to cover additional classes or training requirements. You also might end up losing scholarships or grants you were awarded. Depending on your situation, you may be better off completing a degree or training program if you know it is at least related to something you want to do. Do your research and check with an academic advisor. Long-term thinking and planning will save you time and money. Better yet, minimize the risk of needing to switch schools by researching the school first, including its costs, programs and aid package. Also consider interviewing current students and visiting the campus to ensure it is a good fit.

4. Select and apply to post-secondary institutions right for your career goals

Here are some simple steps to help you navigate the process to apply to a post-secondary education and/or training institution:

Step 1: Select the school, or schools, where you'd like to go after high school. *Factors to consider include: admission rate, programs of study, cost, size, location, setting, accreditation, extracurricular activities, etc.*

Step 2: Define the application process for that school. *Perform an Internet search for the post-secondary institution plus words like "application" or "admissions" to get a link to that institution's website; it should walk you through what that school or program requires. Pay close attention to different application processes, their requirements, and deadlines.*

Step 3: Identify potential mentors who can help you in the application process. *Who could help you through this process? A parent? Teacher? Guidance counselor? Academic advisor? Mentor? Find one or two people who can help you during the process and motivate you to complete the application.*

Step 4: Identify data sources—what documents and resources do you need to complete the application? *Typically, these include high school transcript, standardized test scores, letters of recommendation; personal essay or statement; extra-curricular transcript; work experience; any honors, certificates, awards or other achievements.*

Step 5: Collect documentation. *Once you know what you need, collect the required documents.*

Step 6: Have your mentors check your application. *It is better if a trusted friend or adult finds a mistake than an admissions officer! Have your application mentors check for any errors, make sure all answers are complete, and that all required documents are accounted for.*

Step 7: Apply. *Be sure you make a copy of the completed application before putting it in the mail, including a copy of the application fee you send along with it (for your records). If needed, schedule an in-person interview and practice with one of your application mentors to ease your nervousness.*

Step 8: Follow up. *You should receive a confirmation email once the school has received your application. Check that email to make sure all of the information is correct, and contact someone from admissions if it is not. There are great websites with tips on how to play the application waiting game without becoming an application "status stalker," such as Jackie Mantey's article, "What to Do While Waiting for Admission Letters."*

Step 9: Compare offers. *Now is the time to get picky to make sure you make the right choice for you! Consider the aid package, and then other factors such as program completion rates, work-and-learning opportunities, job placement rate, study abroad opportunities, student-faculty ratio, safety, campus life, alumni network, and transportation options.*

Step 10: Select your school. *This is when the real work begins! Forget everything you know about the school and try to see it with fresh eyes. If you have not visited the institution, now is the time to do it. Talk to students in your program of study area and get a first-hand account of the curriculum, faculty, facilities and options for those who complete. Sit in on some classes. This is one of the most expensive decisions you will ever make—you wouldn't buy a car without seeing it or test driving it first! The more research you do now to make sure this is the right place for you, the less likely it is that you will regret your decision or need to transfer down the road.*

Start a "College/Training Application" folder that has copies of documents typically needed for employment or post-secondary applications. Include copies of awards and achievements, a resume that includes community service and any repeated volunteer work, a listing of all extracurricular activities noting any leadership roles, proof of any special status you might use for financial aid—first generation college student, veteran status, etc., test scores and more.

⁴Jackie Mantey, "What to Do While Waiting for Admission Letters," US News Education, October 31, 2007, <http://www.usnews.com/education/articles/2007/10/31/what-to-do-while-waiting-for-admission-letters>