



**ACT**<sup>®</sup>

# Keep Your Eyes on the Prize

**HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE**  
DURING YOUR SOPHOMORE YEAR

# Welcome to Your Sophomore Year

This year might include moving from the junior high to senior high building, or it might just mean the stress of being a freshman is over. Whether it's a change of scenery or not, hopefully your comfort levels are up and stress levels are down, now that you know what to expect from high school.

Your tenth-grade year is a great time to stretch yourself and try new things—new activities, new kinds of classes, new challenges. It's also a “directional” year—a time for you to start figuring out your college and career goals. In other words, it's time to start thinking about what comes next. The key to planning your future is determining your goals, and then planning your path to achieve those goals. Keeping your “eyes on the prize”—your college and career goals—throughout high school will motivate you to do your best.

You don't have to know exactly what path you'll take after high school just yet, or even how to find it, but this book can help you set a course based on the things you enjoy doing and what kinds of college and/or career paths might be the best fit for you.





# Prioritize Your Classes

You've likely gotten a chance to take at least some core courses during your first year of high school. Core courses should be a big priority because they are the building blocks for getting ready for college and work.

Your schedule should include the following courses, according to ACT:

- **ENGLISH**  
4 years
- **MATH**  
3 years (including Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II)
- **SCIENCE**  
(including Biology, Chemistry, and Physics)
- **SOCIAL STUDIES**  
3 years
- **OTHER COURSES**  
Foreign language, visual and performing arts, computer science, and many more.

## WHY ARE THESE COURSES IMPORTANT?

First off, most colleges require them for admission—although requirements vary from college to college. Be sure to talk with your counselor or look online for specific colleges' requirements. Secondly, what you learn in these classes will give you the well-rounded knowledge you'll need later in life.



# Tips for Scheduling Classes

Here are some more things to keep in mind when scheduling classes for your sophomore year of high school:

- Familiarize yourself with the **GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS** of your school. Talk to your school counselor. What are you missing?
- Four years of **ENGLISH or LANGUAGE ARTS** courses will strengthen your reading, writing, and speaking skills necessary for college and career.
- **MATHEMATICS** courses are important as you prepare for 21st-century careers.
- Many colleges and universities require three years of **SOCIAL STUDIES** in high school.
- Like math, science skills are highly important to future jobs. Take at least three years of **SCIENCE**, including one laboratory course.
- Schedule at least a year of **VISUAL or PERFORMING ARTS** classes, such as choir, band, theater, drama, or dance classes.
- Don't forget **ELECTIVE** courses! They're a great way to earn academic credit and help you explore special interests.
- **FOREIGN LANGUAGE** courses are not only important for helping you understand the world and its cultures, but many colleges require foreign language credits to graduate, as well. You might even earn enough foreign language credits in high school to fulfill the requirement in college.
- You could be eligible to take classes at a community college or online for **DUAL CREDIT or CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT** credits. This is a great opportunity to earn college credit early (possibly for free—check with your high school) and get some real college experience before making the leap. Ask your counselor for opportunities.
- You can also ask your school about **APPLIED ACADEMICS** courses, which use hands-on approaches to learning and often meet core course credit.
- You probably know how to use **COMPUTERS**, but your school may offer electives on that topic if you need extra help.

# Learn How to Learn

Developing good habits in the classroom will make a huge difference when you get into college. Now is the time to improve those habits and skills. If you follow these tips, you'll get more out of class, and you'll probably enjoy being there!

- **JOIN IN ON CLASS DISCUSSIONS.** Don't sit quietly in the back—get engaged in the classroom.
- **ASK QUESTIONS IF YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND SOMETHING.** As the old adage goes: if you didn't understand it, there's a good chance others didn't either.
- **KEEP UP WITH CLASS ASSIGNMENTS.** Keep a checklist of when they're due—or finish them before the due date.
- **CHECK FOR PHONE APPS** to remind you about deadlines, assignments, and exams.
- **ASK FOR HELP** when you're falling behind.
- **LOOK FOR WAYS TO SHARPEN YOUR BASIC SKILLS** in every class. Practice writing in social studies. Practice algebra during science projects. Use science skills during vocational education classes.
- If you haven't already, **LEARN KEYBOARDING or TYPING SKILLS.**
- Learn how to take **GOOD CLASS NOTES.**
- Learn to **PROOFREAD, CORRECT, and REWRITE** your written work.
- **DEVELOP GOOD TEST-TAKING SKILLS,** like reading the whole question before answering and leaving time to double-check your answers.





# Make Extracurriculars Count

Most high schools offer all kinds of extracurricular activities for students. Some—like music, band, and theater—are attached to classes and can be graded. Others are designed to give you life experiences and skills, an opportunity to make friends, and ways to have fun and stay productive outside of class.

**OUR ADVICE:** Take advantage of as many of these opportunities as you can.

Colleges and employers love extracurricular activities. They build teamwork skills. They make you more creative. They show there's more to you than just book smarts. Some can even help you earn scholarships or grants to pay for college.

Most schools have extracurricular activities that fit just about every student: athletes, “mathletes,” thespians, musicians, builders, gamers, artists, extroverts, introverts—all kinds of personalities. There's a team or group waiting for you.

In a few years, you can use your extracurricular experience in your college, internship, or job applications. It not only enhances your skill set, it shows who you are as a person. That can help with developing relationships with employers, coworkers, and fellow students in the future.



# “Think Out Loud” About Your Future

Your sophomore year is an excellent time for career exploration. It’s early enough in your education that you don’t have to worry about college applications, but instead, you can spend time taking note of your interests and use that information to figure out which paths you should take to your future goals.

It’s never too early to think about your direction in life. But to do that, try thinking about what you do well, what you enjoy doing, and how your interests and goals compare those needed in a career. Become an “expert on you.”

And don’t do it alone. It’s time to get out there and talk with older students and adults about what career options are available for you.

- **DO SOME VOLUNTEER WORK** for a local nonprofit group or volunteer organization, especially one that looks interesting to you.
- **TALK TO THE ADULTS IN YOUR LIFE** about their careers and what they like best about them.
- **“JOB SHADOW”** at a business that sounds interesting to you.
- **SET UP REGULAR MEETINGS** with your school counselor about career options.

- **FIND A MENTOR**—a person with knowledge and experience who can help you figure out your career goals.
- **TALK WITH CLASSMATES** who have similar goals about how they plan to get there.

Keep in mind, too, that your career goals today don’t have to be your goals tomorrow. They’re the first steps in a long journey with plenty of room to adjust and evolve as you examine careers and get more experience trying them out.

# Start Making a College & Career Plan

Once you've talked about your future with people you trust, you can start to figure out if your future includes a path to college or directly into a career after graduation.

Some people move straight from high school into a career. But studies show that:

- People with college degrees or certifications **EARN ABOUT 56% MORE** than those who only have a high school diploma
- By the year 2020, **65% OF ALL JOBS** will require education and training beyond high school
- Few jobs requiring only a high school diploma have **PROMOTION** potential

Sources: US Department of Labor, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Economic Policy Institute, Center on Education and the Workforce

In addition to money, having a college degree or certification opens up more possibilities for your future, including more stable employment, greater benefits, and better career opportunities. In the long term, any type of education after high school can make your career a little smoother.





# Start Thinking About College

Believe it or not, your sophomore year isn't too early to start thinking about selecting a college, or even going on a college visit or two. Visiting a college or university campus can help you visualize yourself there, and that can help motivate you to make college a goal and a priority the next few years.

Here are some things to consider when thinking about attending a college or university.

## COLLEGE CONSIDERATIONS

**TWO-YEAR VS. FOUR-YEAR:** Some students choose to start out at a two-year community or technical college. They're often closer to home and more affordable, and they award two-year associate's degrees, which is all that's required in some careers. However, many careers require the four-year degrees offered by colleges and universities. Research some careers to find out which is the best path for you.

**PRIVATE VS. PUBLIC:** If you choose the four-year college route, you'll need to decide between a publicly or privately funded college or university. Private colleges and universities are often smaller, with fewer students, more access to faculty, and better chances of getting into programs and classes. They're also typically more expensive, although scholarships and other financial aid can often offset those tuition costs. Public colleges and universities often have a wider range of degree options, and are often more populated with more competition to get into major programs. However, both kinds of colleges strive to work with students to help them achieve their goals.

## WHICH TYPE OF COLLEGE YOU CHOOSE WILL DEPEND ON MANY FACTORS:

- **YOUR COMFORT LEVEL** (class size, distance from home, etc.)
- **WHAT YOU CAN AFFORD** (but remember not to get hung up on sticker price—there are many options for financial aid)
- **WHICH COLLEGE IS THE BEST FIT FOR YOUR PROGRAM OF STUDY**

By starting now, you'll have plenty of time to figure out which one is the best fit for you. Talk to your counselor about these considerations so you can start planning your path.

# Build Your College Knowledge

There are all kinds of ways to learn more about colleges. First, make contact with colleges you're interested in.

**VISIT COLLEGE CAMPUSES.** Talk to your counselor and parents about visiting colleges you're interested in, and create a list of questions to ask during those visits, including:

- How successful are your graduates at finding jobs? Ask specifically for a percentage of student placement in jobs after graduation.
- How easy is it to get into classes?
- How many students are in each class?
- What's campus life like (clubs, activities, recreation, etc.)?
- Where do first-year students live?
- What activities and services will help me when I first get to campus?
- How easy is it to meet with faculty?
- What other services are available on campus—health care, transportation, etc.?
- What's the total cost for attending?
- What financial aid is available, and how do I apply?

**CHECK OUT THIS GUIDE on visiting college campuses**

**PAY ATTENTION** when colleges come to you, either through college fairs or when representatives from colleges visit your school. It's never too early to meet with college reps about your goals and interests—and it's never too early to ask questions.

**READ ABOUT COLLEGE AND FINANCIAL AID.** The more you read, the better you'll understand how things work. Get some brochures and catalogs from your counseling office, as well as a list of college websites.

**START BOOKMARKING WEBSITES OF COLLEGES YOU'RE INTERESTED IN.** Check back with them throughout your junior year so you get a feel for the kinds of deadlines you'll need to keep track of next year.

**START COMPILING A LIST OF SCHOLARSHIPS** you might be able to access during senior year. Talk to seniors for advice on scholarships they're earning.

# Don't Let College Costs Scare You Off

For most students, college costs are a big factor in the planning process. Attending college can seem expensive, but it's an excellent investment in your future. Never let expense stand in the way of a college education.

Fortunately, there are lots of ways to pay for college—and your performance in high school (good grades and involvement) can make a huge difference in getting free or low-cost financial aid.

Your parents/family may have started a college fund for you, or maybe you've been saving money from part-time or summer jobs, family gifts, and other resources. But nearly all students find financial help to afford college. Talk with your family about their ability to help pay some college costs, and remember that there are many forms of funding available. Never assume that you're ineligible for financial aid; explore all of your options.

## FUNDING SOURCES INCLUDE:

- **SCHOLARSHIPS** —Awards based on merit or need that you don't repay
- **GRANTS** —Awards based on need that you don't repay
- **LOANS** —Funds available through private lending institutions, colleges, and state or federal government that must be repaid
- **WORK STUDY PROGRAMS** —Jobs funded by the school and often related to a student's program of study

Finding sources of funding means researching (either online or in person) the aid available at colleges you want to attend, and asking your counselor for tips on scholarships and grants.

**REMEMBER:** Continuing your education after high school is an investment in yourself and your future. And there's always a way to pay for it.



# Will I Be Ready for College?

The best way to figure out if you're ready for college courses is to take a college readiness assessment.

Most students take an assessment like the ACT® test or SAT® starting their junior year. As a sophomore, it's probably too early to take one of those tests to measure your college readiness, but there's another option designed specifically for your sophomore year.

PreACT® is a simulation of the ACT test, designed to get you comfortable with testing, predict your score, and find ways to improve it. Many schools offer PreACT to sophomores to help make students more comfortable with the experience of college testing while giving them an early prediction of their college entrance exam scores—and plenty of time to learn and improve before taking the higher-stakes ACT test.

PreACT also gives you access to the ACT Interest Inventory, which helps you consider your career paths based on your interests and what you like to do. You can also sign up for the ACT Educational Opportunity Service, which helps colleges and universities find and recruit students like you.

Ask a teacher or your school counselor about taking PreACT during your sophomore year.

**[CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFORMATION.](#)**



# Sophomore Year Checklist

- ☐ Meet with your counselor and make sure you're on a path to get all of your core courses covered during high school. Remember, ACT recommends four years of English, three years of math (including Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II), three years of science (including Biology, Chemistry, and Physics), and three years of social studies. Completing core courses before graduation is the best way to be prepared for college.
- ☐ Start collecting college and university information.
- ☐ Start comparing colleges based on your needs (location, majors offered, comfort level, cost).
- ☐ Set up a college visit. Be sure to bring a list of questions you have about getting to and attending college, including how to prepare and how to pay for it. Visiting a college or university during sophomore year will give you plenty of time to visualize yourself in college, helping to keep your "eyes on the prize."
- ☐ Set up an [MyACT](#) account. This will help you pinpoint your interests and skills, give you an interactive college major and career map to help with planning, and help you understand how your interests can help you choose which major(s) to pursue.
- ☐ Take [PreACT](#), which will give you a simulated experience in taking the higher-stakes ACT test and a predicted ACT test score (and ways to improve it). It can even put you in contact with colleges you might be interested in attending.
- ☐ Start researching and applying for jobs you can have during high school. Having a job will help you start saving for college early and teach valuable life skills, like teamwork, problem solving, money management, and staying productive. Also, it opens the door for potential references for college and scholarship opportunities.
- ☐ Look at volunteer opportunities, too. They can help you build work skills and make connections that could help with job recommendations and mentorship down the road.
- ☐ Keep your mind sharp. Read books and magazines to develop reading skills. Find ways to practice academics outside of the classroom, like writing a blog or tutoring others in math.
- ☐ Join an extracurricular team. Get involved in activities you enjoy—sports, arts, service, etc. Not only will it expand your life experiences and keep you active, it'll give you lots of material for your career and college applications.

# Connect with Us

Find out more about what you can do to prepare for college and career at the ACT website.

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