

## Have Questions? Ask for Help

This should give you a good idea of what you need to do to get into college. Along the way, you'll have lots of questions. Ask for help when you need it. Talk to your school counselor. They can help point you in the right direction.



# NEXT STOP College

PLANNING AND PREPARING FOR  
NINTH AND TENTH GRADERS



## In Collegeland All Things Are Possible—Start Now!

College may seem like a long way off, but if you start planning now, you'll be one step ahead. Being prepared is easy—and it opens up a world of possibilities in college. Inside you'll find tips on what you need to know to help you through the process of planning and preparing for college.

## WHERE ARE YOU HEADED?

### THINK ABOUT A CAREER

You can go anywhere in Collegeland, but if you find the college that is the best match for what you think you want to be, you'll be better off in the long run. Start by exploring your career options and thinking about your interests.

#### What is your favorite subject?

Consider your likes and dislikes so you can identify your interests and focus on your goals.

#### How do you spend your time outside of school?

Think about what you like to do when you're not in school. What kind of career might be a good match for these activities?

#### What do you imagine yourself doing when you're finished with school?

Is there a job you always imagined yourself doing? When you were little, what did you want to be when you were grown up?

## TAKE A CAREER ASSESSMENT

Career assessment tests help you determine your skills and interests. To find the right career match for you, check out these resources.

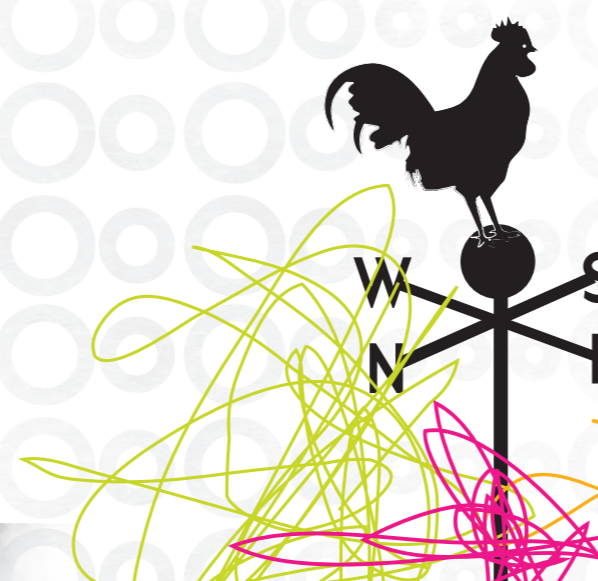
The **Occupational Outlook Handbook** ([bls.gov/ooh](http://bls.gov/ooh)) from the Bureau of Labor Statistics helps you find the training and education you need for a job, figure out what workers do on a job, and determine what you might earn.

## EXPECT A LOT OF YOURSELF

You're the only one who can achieve your dream of going to college—and the only way you can achieve your dreams is to work hard and have high expectations of yourself. You need to get good grades, participate in activities outside of class, and do volunteer work. All of these will help you succeed at college and in life.

## Visit

[studentaid.gov](http://studentaid.gov) to explore career options, plan for college, and locate financial aid sources.





## STOP DREAMING! START DOING!

Once you know what career path you're on, it's time to start preparing. Think about what you need to do to get to where you want to go in Collegeland.

### PUT TOGETHER AN ACADEMIC PORTFOLIO

An academic portfolio is a good way to keep track of everything you will need when you start applying for college. It's also your chance to show off your accomplishments! Pull together samples of class projects that let your talents and achievements shine. You'll have the information at your fingertips when you're ready to fill out your applications. If you think your college might require admission interviews, create your portfolio in neatly labeled folders that are easy for an admissions officer to look through and see why they want you to attend their college.

#### Include:

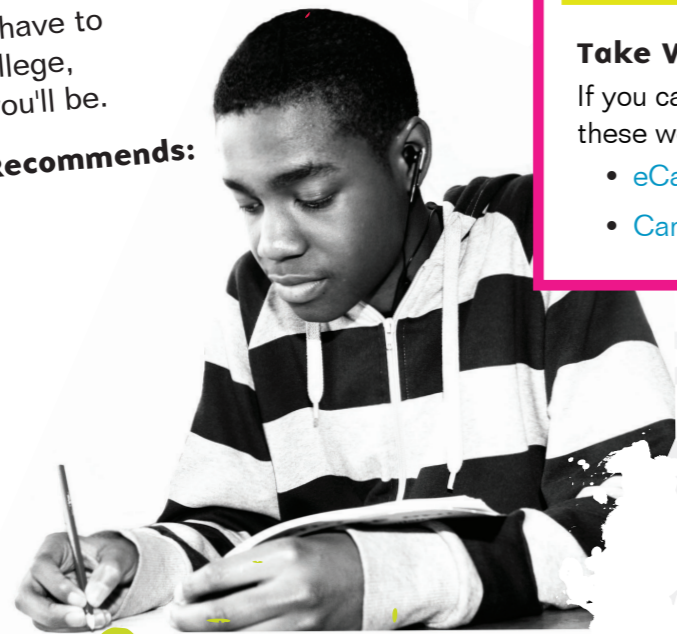
- School records
- Immunization records
- Standardized test records
- Honors, certificates, and awards
- Records of part-time and summer jobs, internships, and community service work
- Records of extracurricular activities
- Writing samples and class projects

### TAKE THE RIGHT CLASSES

Start taking the right classes now! You don't have to take all of these classes to get in to every college, but the more you take, the better prepared you'll be.

#### The U.S. Department of Education Recommends:

- 4 years of English
- 3–4 years of math
- 2–3 years of science
- 2–3 years of social studies
- 2–4 years of a foreign language
- 1 year of visual or performing arts
- 2–4 years of other electives
- At least one AP or honors class



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### PLAN FOR STANDARDIZED TESTS

Part of getting into college is taking standardized tests. Standardized tests show colleges how you compare academically to other students applying for college. Most colleges require one of the tests for admission and the higher you score, the better chance you have of getting accepted at the college of your choice.

The two most common tests are the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) and the ACT. Most colleges accept both tests. You can prepare for the tests by taking pretests your junior year—the PSAT for the SAT or the PLAN for the ACT.

If you're taking Advanced Placement classes, think about taking an AP exam. AP tests help you earn college credit for your AP classes or allow you to skip entry-level college courses.

#### Check out:

SAT and AP: [collegeboard.org](http://collegeboard.org)  
ACT: [actstudent.org](http://actstudent.org)

#### Take Virtual Tours!

If you can't visit colleges in person, these websites offer virtual tours:

- [eCampusTours.com](http://eCampusTours.com)
- [CampusTours.com](http://CampusTours.com)

### LOOK INTO COLLEGES

There's a lot to explore in Collegeland, but if you start researching early, you'll have plenty of time to make a decision.

**Research colleges** to determine what fits your needs. If you're looking for a certificate program or an associate degree, then a two-year community or technical college may be the answer. If you're looking for a bachelor's degree, then a four-year liberal arts college may be what you're looking for. Use the College Navigator ([nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator](http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator)) to help you research the right college for you.

**Attend college fairs** to find more information and pick up applications and financial aid forms from colleges that interest you.

**Visit colleges** you think you'd like to apply to—check their websites for campus visit days or open houses.

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### NEXT STOP? COLLEGE!

Here's a sneak peek of what you can expect when it's time to apply.

#### APPLY FOR ADMISSION

At the beginning of your senior year, start gathering college admission applications from college websites—many of the applications can be completed online. Get a head start by filling out the applications and beginning your admissions essays. Make sure you submit your application by the deadline.

#### APPLY FOR FINANCIAL AID

In order to receive financial aid, you need to fill out the FAFSA. The FAFSA is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid—a federal form that the U.S. Department of Education uses to determine how much financial aid you qualify for. File the FAFSA as soon as possible after January 1 of your senior year.

Keep applying for scholarships—free money you don't have to pay back!—and keep an eye on deadlines for other sources of financial aid. Make sure you submit any additional college financial aid forms before they're due to get the most help paying for college.

#### UNDERSTAND THE TYPES OF FINANCIAL AID

**Scholarships and Grants**—gift aid that does not need to be repaid.

**Work-Study**—a job with your college that helps you pay for college.

**Loans**—money that you borrow that must be paid back.

Once you've applied for admission and financial aid, wait for your acceptance letters and financial aid packages. Compare colleges and make your college decision. Choose the college that is the best fit for you academically, socially, and financially. Then get ready—you're college-bound!

### Scholarships

Search for scholarships at:

- [zinch.com](http://zinch.com)
- [cappex.com](http://cappex.com)
- [bigfuture.org](http://bigfuture.org)

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### WHAT CAN YOU DO NOW?

**Stay on track.** Meet with your high school counselor often. Use "Twenty Questions to Ask Your School Counselor" at [collegeboard.com/student/plan/starting-points/114.html](http://collegeboard.com/student/plan/starting-points/114.html).

**Keep talking.** Talk to anyone you know who's been to college. Ask them about their experience and if they have any advice. Talk to your parents about college and make sure they know you want to go.

**Get involved.** If you're in activities outside of school, stay in them. If you're not, join some. Take on a leadership role with the activity you enjoy the most or get involved in community service or other volunteer activities.

**Start searching.** Get a head start with your scholarship search. Scholarships are awarded for lots of reasons and thousands of them are available each year. The earlier you start, the easier it will be to apply for them later.

**Work hard.** Take the most difficult classes you can handle and do well in. This will help you prepare for college, but it will also show the college that you're willing to challenge yourself.

**Keep saving.** If you're already saving money for college, keep saving. If you aren't, start saving. The more money you can save now, the less you'll have to borrow later. Find savings tips at [finaid.org/savings/tips.phtml](http://finaid.org/savings/tips.phtml).

**Forecast your future.** Get an early estimate of your financial aid eligibility using the FAFSA4caster at [fafsa4caster.ed.gov](http://fafsa4caster.ed.gov). It will help you plan how much money you might need to save between now and college.

**Make summer count.** Summer is a time for fun, but you can also use it to your advantage. Build up your college savings account with a part-time job or your admission application with an enrichment program or volunteer work in an area that interests you. See [volunteermatch.org](http://volunteermatch.org) for ideas on finding the right volunteer opportunity for you.



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