

Back to
School



New Year's Resolutions

When the lazy days of summer give way to the prospect of a new school year, a variety of feelings arise.

Parents may be relieved and anxious. A return to “normal” might be weighted with budget or safety concerns. Children, young and older, may experience similar feelings. Reuniting with friends might be tempered by achievement anxiety. Either way, the learning website Getting Smart offers tips on creating motivation and managing expectations for students of all ages.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

Learning can be fun and a challenge, enlightening and tedious, purposeful and abstract. Younger children will be drawn to how learning experiences can open up new vistas for them in reading (fantasy and exploration), math (how things work) and science (understanding the world around them). Older students can be stimulated by a desire to pursue certain careers or to advance their chances at attending a particular college or university. Creating positive, realistic concepts can go far in developing motivation.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Some children find themselves immediately attracted to school; others will struggle to overcome comprehension and performance obstacles. In both situations, positive reinforcement through encouragement, pride and even rewards for achievements can go a long way toward creating a winning environment. If a child is



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struggling, offer help in the form of your own knowledge or providing tutoring. If they find classes too easy, investigate advanced options to challenge them. A sense of involvement, understanding and reassurance can both dismantle fear and prompt engagement.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The prospect of learning something new and sharing that experience can be motivation enough for new students. Older students may lose track about their motivations despite their achievements. Creating and maintain-

ing clear and realistic objectives can help create a route to success. Younger students should be taught the value of building upon small goals — advancing from simple to more complex math problems, how finishing an easy book sparks interest in more difficult reading. Older students might be stressed by their parents' expectations — or even their own. Defining realistic achievement objectives that align with their sense of goals and dreams creates a path to accomplishment.

SOCIALIZING AND ACTIVITIES

Learning isn't all book knowledge.

School is also the beginning of a social education. Meeting new people, developing friendships with other students and relationships with teachers, and sharing interests and dreams can be a powerful catalyst as children work their way through their school years and lives. Both achievements and difficulties in and out of school can be made easier with peer support and encouragement. Likewise, extracurricular activities in sports or clubs serve to engage students with both a sense of mutual interest and a release from the pressures of academics.

Making the Most of your Budget

Sometimes it seems like summer has only begun when the first back-to-school ads begin showing up.

But schools are starting earlier than ever — and retailers at brick-and-mortar stores and online are ready to meet all your needs. Whether your child is just beginning school, a middle- or high-schooler, or headed to or back to college, shopping for the return of school days is both more complicated and easier than ever. The website Great Schools offers some tips to help you prepare for the experience.

MAKE A LIST TOGETHER

Before you begin shopping, make a list and involve your kids. The process will both motivate and provide a valuable learning experience. Begin with the basics. Check with schools for required and recommended supplies. Other parents with older kids are also a great resource. Students from elementary to college will obviously have different needs (and wants), so advance research will save you time and money.

MUST-HAVES AND NICE-TO-HAVES

Sorting out the aforementioned needs and wants is crucial in budgeting for the necessities and the desires of students. Once you've ensured



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you've addressed the former you can take into account requests for the latter. Students young and old are sensitive to trends, whether it's the character on your elementary-age child's notebook, the latest fashion or a next-level phone or computer, working with your children to establish the importance of a budget and priorities will help keep you both on track and spare them disappointment.

SALES AND TAX-FREE DAYS

Back-to-school sales will start early, so taking advantage of them will save money, time and frustration. Supplies from the most basic to the latest trend can and will vanish before you know it. Keep your eyes open for sales, promotions and tips from other parents. Both brick-and-mortar and online stores are competing for your dollar, so be vigilant for

price-matching and value-oriented sales on standard supplies. Many states also now offer tax-free days, creating extra values in supplies, clothing, computers and electronics.

DETERMINE WHEN QUALITY COUNTS

Bargains are attractive to any consumer at any level, but figuring out when quality counts will save you money in the long run. For many, seemingly basic

needs — pens, for example, on the low end, or computers on the high end — cheaper might seem better. That may be true in the moment, but leaky pens might mean ruined clothing and a bargain-basement computer likely won't last over the long term. Use common sense and make smart investments. Rock-bottom values aren't always the best deal. Both you and your children will benefit from your quality choices.

Keeping Time On Your Side

Whether it's work or play, time-management skills are necessary and invaluable to us all. When you add school to the mix, beating the clock takes on a whole new meaning.

Making sure your kids get to and from school on time, juggling extracurricular activities and appointments, and ensuring they devote appropriate time to homework and socializing makes time management that much trickier. The good news? It's been done before! The tutoring website Oxford Learning offers these tips for keeping time on your side.

SCHEDULING AND AGENDAS

From the youngest to the oldest, students quickly learn the value — and sense of accomplishment — from completing a task and crossing it off a list. Making a list. Creating an agenda and scheduling routines and activities will keep stress at bay and create valuable lifelong habits. Work with your children in creating these tools to avoid conflicts and keep the entire family on track.

REST AND RELAXATION

Any teacher will tell you that the best rested students



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are the best prepared and most engaged students. Making the switch from a relative lack of routine and lax bedtime schedules during the summer to the orderliness of school and activities can be jarring — and difficult at first. But setting and keeping a consistent sleep routine — even on the weekends — will ensure your children are ready for each day. After-school breaks and wind-down

time from homework and chores will also help kids stay focused and refreshed.

MEALS AND NUTRITION

The quality and nutrition of food is just one side of a healthy diet. Equally as important is maintaining a routine dining schedule. Establishing a schedule for breakfast and dinner will create several benefits: you'll ensure sufficient time to have

a proper, relaxed meal before the begins ends or ends; a routine will help keep kids nourished and less likely to snack; eating at least one meal together as a family will keep everyone in touch and the lines of communication open.

DRESSING FOR SUCCESS

Create time each evening to prepare for the next. That rule doesn't just apply to thoughts

of what is to come — but to be ready for it. Practicing wardrobe selection the night before also has several benefits: choosing what to wear will be less stressful and make the morning go smoother; digging through laundry for clothes will become a thing of the past; and your children will be ready for the next day's events — at school, for an outing or any post-school activities.

Learn Study Skill Basics

There are endless websites devoted to the latest dorm and fashion trends, list upon list of advice and suggestions designed to grab your attention — and your money. But the real college experience begins when you enter the classroom.

Whether you're a freshman or a returning student, back to school means developing or refreshing your study skills. Here's some study-smart tips from The Princeton Review to keep you unfazed by your assignments.

VARY YOUR STUDY SPACE

Whether you live at home or on campus, studying in solitary confinement in your room isn't always the best idea. A quiet study space is necessary, but switching up your environment can help you better retain information. Vary your study time by taking advantage of the library, a coffee shop or even another room in your home or dorm.

STICK TO A ROUTINE

Back to school is chock full of schedules to adhere to, and creating a routine time to study is paramount among these. Setting aside a regular time to study will keep you on track — with your homework and your social life.

Adapt your study schedule to your class day, pinpoint the time and place each day you'll hit the books and stick to it.



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CREATE A DISTRACTION-FREE ZONE

In today's hyper-connected life, disconnecting has become harder to achieve. But studying demands your full attention and focus, and that devotion will pay off. So find a location that has the least environmental distractions as possible. Then turn off the phone. Access your laptop only for necessary research. Going offline for your study hours will benefit not only your grades but also your mental health.

STUDY MORE, CRAM LESS

Embarking on an all-nighter cramming for a test might help you recall

key terms and answers to likely questions, but attempting to absorb a large amount of information in a short period of time will fail you in the long run. Cramming will tax your brain and exhaust you, making you less alert for exams and increasing the potential for mistakes. Instead, study a little each day well in advance and make sure you comprehend and extract value from the material.

DEVELOP HEALTHY STUDY HABITS

Use your classroom time wisely. Ask questions, take notes and create assignment- and test-tracking plan-

ners. Develop a simple system to organize materials for each class. Don't let a bad grade affect your attitude. One rough class doesn't have to define your GPA. Check your progress regularly and find a tutor if you discover you're falling behind.

MAKE FRIENDS IN EVERY CLASS

Besides the obvious social benefits, making friends in each class can act as a lifeline if you're late, miss a class or have a question you can't figure out yourself. Studying alone has its place, but making these contacts will have the effect of creating a ready-made study group come exam time.

It's Never Too Late

Returning to school as an adult can be many things to many people depending upon one's motivation or rationale: intimidating, invigorating, challenging, rewarding — or all these things.

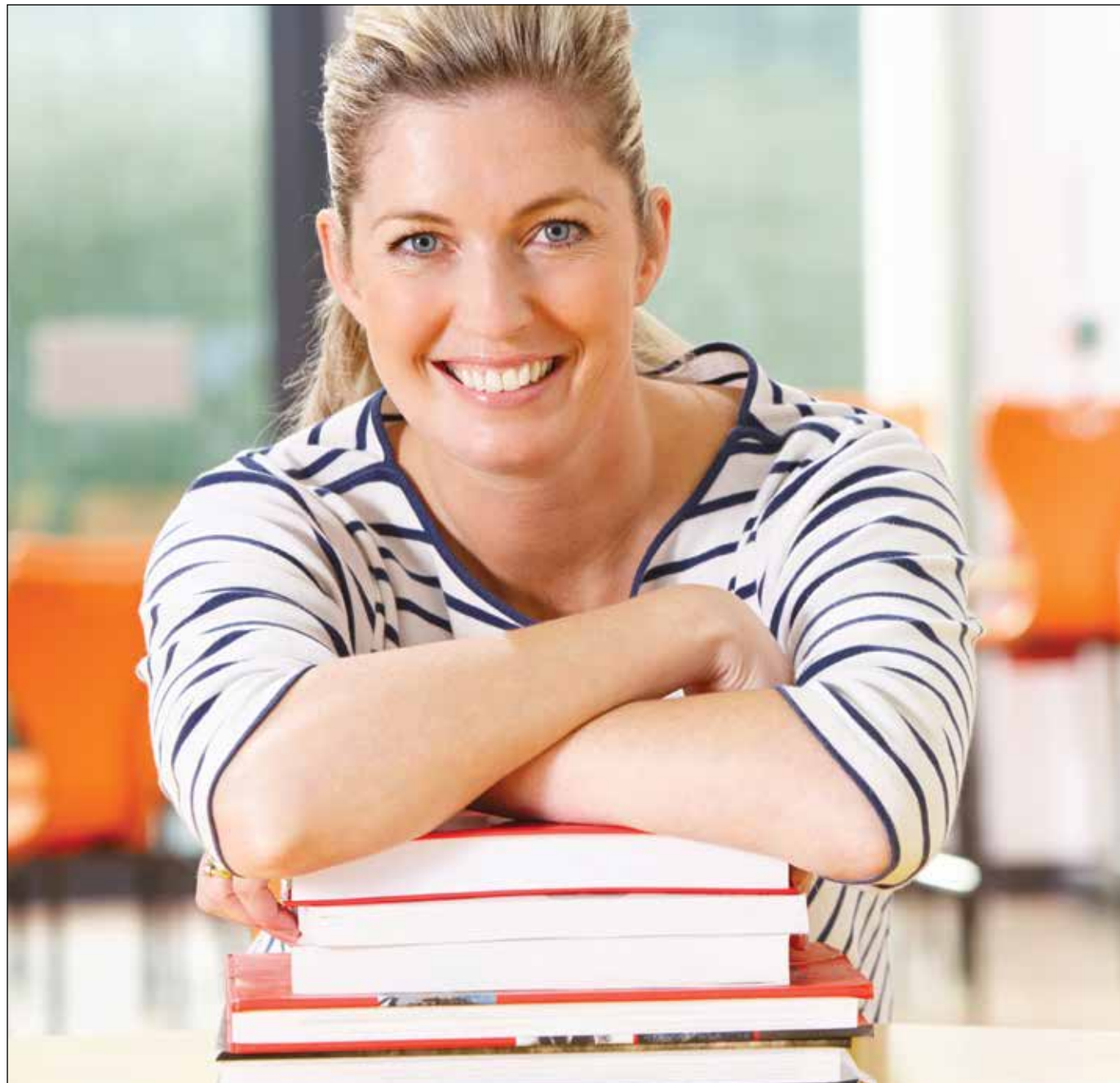
Whether you're returning to increase your knowledge, retrain for a new career or wish to finish a degree, NPR's interview with Rebecca Klein-Collins, author of "Never Too Late: The Adult Student's Guide to College," provided these insights.

ANXIETY ISSUES

Even if you're still in your 20s, going to college as an adult can bring age-related anxiety of being the oldest student in the class. But many soon come to realize that age brings maturity, wisdom, experience and discipline younger students may lack. Identifying your motivation for return to school as an adult can also help erase doubt and ease nerves, and the right school will support those goals.

IT'S NOT UNUSUAL

Either because of the economy, technological advancements, or both, encountering older adults in the college classroom is not an unusual sight. Other factors in the



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increase of adults returning to school: those who never finished; those who stand to benefit professionally from a degree; and military veterans seeking to capitalize on their experience. "These are all people who are really good candidates for going back to school. And these are the kinds of people you see in classrooms

these days," Klein-Collins told NPR. "It's not that unusual."

LOGISTICAL HURDLES

Many people cannot afford to quit their jobs to return to school, so finding a college that offers flexible schedules or blend of classroom and online learning helps students accommodate a busy life. Of

course, many for-profit universities today exist totally online, allowing students to catch classes at their convenience. More traditional colleges offer shorter terms or terms that begin at different points during the year.

SEEKING ADVICE

Because adults don't have

the benefit of high school guidance counselors, the process of figuring out all these issues is made more challenging. The truth is, there's no system in place to offer guidance to adults returning to school. But they can take advantage of advice from peers, seniors, mentors and seek the counsel of advisors at colleges they identify as meeting their needs.

THE RIGHT SCHOOL

Beginning college again or anew presents the opportunity to return to your old school or finding a new college that recognizes your stage in life and your goals. Either may be able to understand your obligations and aid you in tailoring an experience that fits into your lifestyle. The right school will also acknowledge your experience and its relevance to the courses and classes you take — as well as the valuable contributions you could make to younger students in a class.

GET LIFE CREDIT

Many colleges and universities offer "prior learning assessments." These are methods used to evaluate the knowledge a student has acquired from work, life or military experience. Some use standard tests; others create special exams based on a course or curriculum. If you possess a lot of experience or training, it can turn into valuable college credit allowing you to finish faster — and cheaper.

Getting Connected for College

Students entering college from high school this year can be assured of one thing: they are among the first of their generation to have had the benefit and experience of coming of age in a technologically immersive environment.

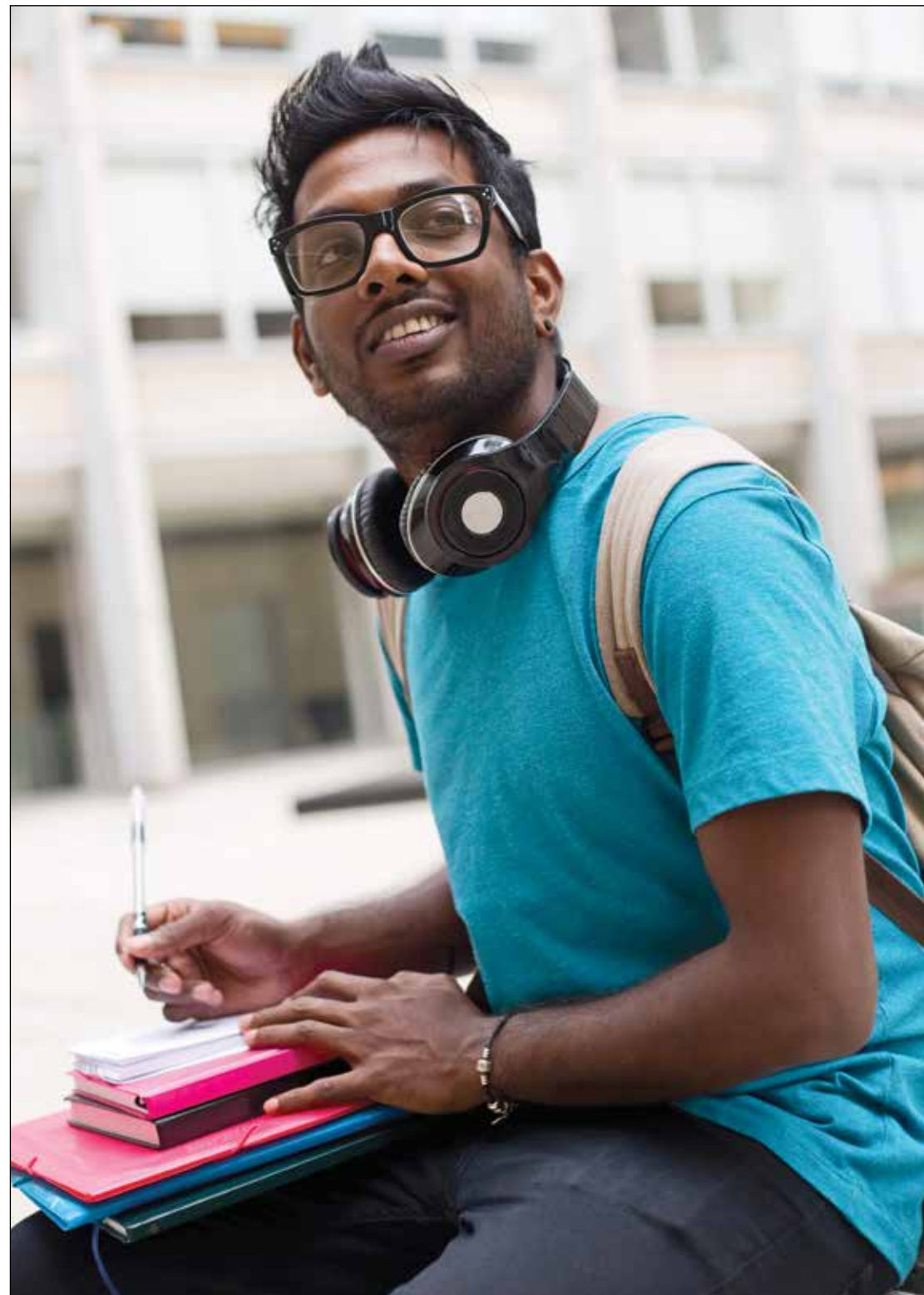
While first-time college students (or adults returning to school) might think they know what they need, here's some advice culled from The New York Times' "Smarter Living" guide to back-to-school tech you need — and don't. Smart choices will lighten the load both physically and financially, and better prepare you for classes.

INVEST IN A GOOD TABLET

New students soon discover the hefty price tag (and not inconsiderable weight) of college textbooks. An exorbitant amount of money can be spent purchasing new and used textbooks required for classes. But the burden can be lessened by investing in a good tablet. Renting textbooks as e-books is much cheaper and less cumbersome. The Times also suggests a good cover to keep your tablet from bumps or drops.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT LAPTOP

Students will appreciate the economy, power and space-saving properties of modern laptops. Tablets are helpful for the sole reason listed above, but a laptop is essential for any college student. Choosing the right computer depends upon your studies. Some colleges have specific recom-



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mendations; others have particular requirements for majors such as engineering and graphic design. Check with the school's IT department and counselors. Student may also be able to take advantage of discounted

machines offered by the likes of Apple.

MUSIC IS FUNDAMENTAL

Enduring a day of classes or a night of study is made infinitely more sur-

vivable if you can take a music break between classes or back in the dorm before or while you hit the books. Earbuds for your phone are a campus necessity, but when you're back in your room The Times finds these tiny speakers inadequate — especially when you want to share your tunes. They recommend investing in a Bluetooth speaker with good sound quality and battery life. They're easy to connect and fill a room with decent sound in a portable body.

A QUALITY BACKPACK

The right backpack is essential. Unlike the bulky backpacks of yesteryear, today's backpacks come with special compartments designed for gadgets and gear. Most separate your books and supplies from your tech for protection and quick access. Some even including charging stations. Best of all, modern backpacks are more versatile, comfortable and sleeker than ever before. Don't go cheap. You'll regret it.

WHAT YOU DON'T NEED

Television: Most dorms are too small for decent-size TVs. You can stream programs on your laptop or connect it to a larger monitor for a better viewing experience.

Printer: Another space hog, printers also drain your bank account by burning through paper and ink, and professors these days rarely require hard copies of term papers. It's cheaper to access the local office supply store's printer if you need one.

Cookware: Such items like microwaves and coffeemakers might seem like no-brainers to the uninitiated, but most of these items are banned by many schools for safety. Besides, common areas likely are already stocked with such items for community use.

Spend Your Free Time Smartly

Chances are by the time you've reached your senior year in high school, you've developed an extracurricular activity.

Whether that means a sport, a club, arts or hobbies, even a job or internship, finding a passion outside of the classroom is a healthy way to grow socially and provides a release from the stress of academics. One more valuable reason for engaging? Your extracurricular activities can help ease your way into college. According to the blog Prep Scholar, extracurricular activities are a vital guide for college admissions officers to gauge the total student. Fortunately, what they're looking for is predictable, experts at the site report.

THE ACTIVITY IS NOT IMPORTANT; YOUR PASSION FOR IT IS

According to Prep Scholar, college admissions officers are not as concerned with what your extracurricular activity is as they are with three specific things: passion, leadership and impact. Each of these elements are important because they paint a portrait of a well-rounded, engaged student who can contribute to the community while pursuing personal and sometimes professional development.



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FRESHMAN YEAR: EXTRACURRICULAR EXPLORATION

If you haven't yet tried out an extracurricular activity, the site recommends trying as many as possible without interfering with your studies. Exposure to many activities can lead to discovering interests you never knew you had. Your freshman

year can be a year of extracurricular exploration to guide you to your passion.

SOPHOMORE YEAR: NARROW YOUR FOCUS

If you've found one or more activities that interest and excite you, you're on your way in your sophomore year. You'll naturally develop passions for

at least one activity. In turn, you'll check-off the other boxes — impact and leadership, even if you simply take a standout role in a small project.

JUNIOR AND SENIOR YEAR: LEADERSHIP AND IMPACT

As you progress through your high school years and

become more involved in your extracurricular activity, your final years are the time to help grow and better your chosen activity. It's also a time to reflect on your own growth as a person and how your interests have impacted your life and education so far.

DO'S AND DON'TS

While the intent is to blend your extracurricular experience into one element of an attractive package for a college admission officer, it's worth noting that the site also advises balance and recommends some do's and don'ts in pursuit of your goals.

Do let your activities tell your story. They should naturally expose your passions and personality through your growing skills and dedication.

Don't take summer off. If you're not working during summer breaks, stay involved. The time away from classes can further your involvement and growth.

Don't let grades suffer. Immersion in an activity will never take the place of good grades. Cut back on your outside endeavors if you find this is the case.

Don't get burned out. Extracurricular activities should inspire, not stress you out. They should also be fun and mix easily with your academic life. If you find you are participating in too many activities, or ones that don't particularly suit you, focus on the ones you're most passionate about.