

What to Expect Your Freshman Year of High School

There will be growing pains.

The start of high school may be exciting, but it will be a big adjustment. There will be new classes, new teachers, new students, and often an entirely new campus to navigate. Your first day may leave you feeling lost and uncomfortable, but give it some time – every big change requires an adjustment period. Rely on friends, teachers, or even older siblings to help you find your classrooms, learn the lunchroom dynamics, find new clubs to explore, and get used to the new academic rigors. Before you know it, you'll be navigating the new high school scene like a pro.

There will be opportunities to explore new interests.

High school holds a wealth of opportunities for freshman students. From new clubs and organizations, to sports teams and other activities, there's no shortage of extracurriculars for you to explore. Now is the time to get involved, and there will be plenty of opportunities to do so. If your school offers a club fair, go and learn about the organizations that pique your interest. A bigger student body often means a more diverse extracurriculars, so explore what interests you. You never know what you might learn about yourself and your high school.

You will make new friends.

And maybe grow out of old ones. The dynamics of high school are much different than in primary and middle school. While it's common to stay friends with those you have grown up with, new classes and involvement in new activities can lead you to new friendships you may not have considered before. If you're attending a new school where you know few people, don't worry – you will get to know your new classmates faster than you think.

You will need to learn the importance of time management.

As we said before, your freshman year of high school is the beginning of a four-year journey to college, and it's something that needs to be taken seriously. Classes in high school rely heavily on every minute of classroom instruction, so there will be a lot of homework. Add extracurricular activities and new friendships to the mix and suddenly you have an overwhelmingly busy schedule. You'll need to quickly learn how to prioritize your time in and outside of the classroom. Balancing schoolwork with extracurriculars and a social life can be difficult at first, but you'll soon get the hang of it. Create a homework schedule or keep a detailed calendar to help you keep track of all commitments. Staying organized is key to successfully managing your time.

College may seem far off, but you will need to prepare.

Colleges look at all four years of academics, not just junior and senior year, so start your freshman year off on the right foot by performing well in your courses. If you're having difficulty understanding some of the material, don't be the shy freshman who silently struggles – ask your teachers for help. Not only will this improve your grade, it will also help you foster strong relationships with your instructors – something that is important when it comes time to ask for recommendations during the college application process.

You're going to enjoy it.

The start of the high school experience is an exciting time. There's no doubt that some challenges will lie ahead as you adjust to new academic and social dynamics, but it will be a fun journey. Remember that high school is meant to be educational, enlightening, and the stepping-stone to a college education. You'll learn a lot about yourself your freshman year – which subjects you like, which subjects you don't, which interests you wish to pursue, and how you want to contribute to your high school community. This is a time of great change, so embrace it!

Entering high school can be an exciting, but also intimidating time. The following list is advice that every freshman should know.

Procrastination

By the time you reach high school, you've probably earned extra responsibilities at home and at school. With that responsibility comes more freedom. Be proactive with school work and commitments at your job or at home. Procrastination can lead to stress or result in bad grades or breaking trust.

Stress

Stress, when not handled properly, can cause real problems. When you feel overwhelmed take a break and reassess your situation. It's also helpful to ask for help from an adult or someone you trust.

Beware of Bullies

There are different kinds of bullies in high school. Some may be large guys who steal your lunch money but others, mean girls/cliques or people online can do just as much damage. Be cautious when sharing personal information or photos with others. Observe people and let their actions speak for them.

Be the Real You

Sometimes it is easier to try to fit in with the crowd than be who you really are. You will be happier if you are true to yourself. Whether you are an athlete, computer guru or a brilliant mathematician—be yourself.

Pay Attention

Everyone wonders if they will ever use chemistry or calculus when they are an adult. You would be surprised, so learn what you can. Just as important, you should learn skills like being a good listener and being respectful.

Make Wise Choices

It may be easy and tempting to find friends who steer you in the wrong direction or encourage you to do things you should not do. You always have the choice to say "no" or find new friends.

Be Careful Online

Colleges and employers are looking at applicants online presence so be careful about what you share. Scammers and predators are watching too. Stay safe and keep your personal information private.

Think About the Future

You may not be ready to grow up, but it's a good idea to keep your future in mind. If you want to go to college make sure you take the right classes. Learning a second language may give you a leg up when it comes to applying for jobs. Don't forget about volunteer work, it shows people that you care about others and are willing to work hard.

Have Fun

The high school years will fly by. Be intentional about making memories and having fun. Be the person who cheers for their team, asks someone to the dance, and has fun with their friends.

Preparing to Study

Find a good place to study. This means a desk or work area with nothing on it except what you need for the task you are going to work on. Move everything out of the way. You want to concentrate on one thing: studying. Have a regular time and place for studying. Make sure you have the following:

I. Your Assignment Notebook

- A. write down all assignments right away
- B. Listen carefully to what the teacher says
- C. Know exactly what you are supposed to do
- D. Start immediately when you sit down to study
- E. Have everything that you need with you
- F. Plan what you want to accomplish
 1. Plan when you will study
 2. A consistent time and place is best
 3. Break down large tasks in to smaller ones
 4. Make a list of what you want to accomplish
 5. Keep a record of what you do accomplish

II. Solid flat surface for writing - Clear everything off your desk except what you are working on

III. Good lighting

IV. Chair - a regular chair that is comfortable; avoid strain and fatigue

V. Books - have all necessary text books and reference books

VI. Supplies - pencils, pens, markers, erasers, white-out, ruler, stapler and staples, paperclips, pencil sharpener, post it notes, index cards, paper, scissors, calculator, etc.

VII. Clock or watch - this will help you to manage your time

VIII. Eliminate all distractions - this would include TV, loud radio music, etc.

IX. Computer (optional) - if you have one it can be helpful; if you don't, you can get along just fine without it; or you can use one at school or the public library

X. Wear your glasses (if you are supposed to) - if you are supposed to wear glasses, please do so, this will help in getting the most out of your studying

XI. Good health - Get enough sleep; set a reasonable bedtime; eat breakfast; eat three good meals a day; your body needs energy to study well; get some exercise; take frequent breaks from studying for a few minutes

Extracurricular Tips

Selective colleges want to know what you do both inside and outside the classroom. Yes, your academics come first, but what you do with your free time reveals a lot, such as:

- Whether you are mature enough to stick to something over the long haul
- What your nonacademic interests are—what makes you tick
- How you've contributed to something beyond yourself
- Whether you can manage your time and priorities

So here are some tips for choosing extracurriculars.

Consider your interests and abilities first

It's easier to commit to something that fits the real you. If you like to write but don't enjoy running, it makes more sense to join the school newspaper than the track team. And while it's natural to want to be where your friends are, don't join something for that reason alone—it truly should be a shared interest.

Go for depth, not breadth

Colleges are more impressed by a real commitment to one activity over time, rather than a superficial involvement in multiple activities. So don't join a bunch of activities just to bulk up your application.

Keep your balance

Remember: Colleges are not interested in seeing you “do it all.” Don't overextend and risk burnout or bad grades. Colleges don't have a checklist of requirements when it comes to extracurriculars.

You don't have to be a star

Don't worry about being president of the club, or captain of the team. The key is whether you've contributed something significant—center stage or behind the scenes.

Working or volunteering counts too

A job—paid or unpaid, year-round or summer—shows that you can handle responsibilities and have “real-world” experience. If jobs are hard to find, ask your counselor how to arrange for an internship or a job-shadowing opportunity. The local chamber of commerce or organizations like Rotary or Kiwanis might also be able to help you. Volunteer work, such as tutoring elementary school kids or spending time at a local hospital, is another great way to gain the skills and experience colleges like to see.

Source: Get It Together for College, 2nd ed. (College Board, 2011)

Handout 2E