



**ACT**<sup>®</sup>

# Starting Your High School Journey

**HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR FRESHMAN YEAR**

# Welcome to Your Freshman Year

Welcome to a whole new experience! The move from middle school to high school is exciting, but it can also be a little intimidating. There are new classes, new faces, and new courses that will help you set the path for your future. Now's the time to discover everything that high school has to offer.

Your ninth-grade year is a great time to develop strong study habits, familiarize yourself with your required courses, and try new things—elective courses, extracurriculars, clubs, and more. It's the perfect year to find what subjects you like most and the least, discover your interests, and build a solid foundation for your future.

Freshman year is all about exploration. Use this guide to help you get the most of your Freshman year by helping you carve a path for your Sophomore, Junior, and Senior years in high school and ultimately give you a clear goal for your college experience and career.



# What to Expect

Your Freshman year will give you a lot of new experiences. This marks the first step toward a more serious academic career by building teamwork skills and discovering your interests.

## NEW AND EXCITING CHALLENGES

Just because you'll have more work doesn't mean it won't be fun. While you'll still have classes in core subjects like English, math, science, and social studies, you'll find new aspects that will challenge and engage you. Some of these might include:

- **TEAM PROJECTS** that will prepare you for real-world experiences.
- **HOMEWORK** that will be more in-depth and thought provoking.
- **NEW IDEAS** with deeper dives into course subjects you're familiar with and new concepts and courses you've never taken before.

## BUILDING YOUR INTERESTS

One of the great benefits of high school is being surrounded by more opportunities. You'll have lots of options for after school activities and new, intriguing subjects you might not have had previously.

- **EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES** like clubs, sports, and other after school programs.
- **ELECTIVE COURSES** on specific subjects and themes.
- **COLLEGE AND CAREER** paths available to you based on your plans and interests.



# Prioritize Your Classes

Every high school has core requirements for graduation. These courses should be your main priority because they're the stepping stones for college and workforce preparation.

To help you succeed in both college and career, ACT recommends your high school coursework should include the following:

- **ENGLISH**  
4 years
- **MATH**  
3 years  
(including Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II)
- **SCIENCE**  
3 years  
(including Biology, Chemistry, and Physics)
- **SOCIAL STUDIES**  
3 years

## WHY ARE THESE COURSES IMPORTANT?

The most important reason is that the majority of colleges require them for admission. As of 2017, 82% of ACT-tested students aspired to continue on to a college or university. Applying yourself in these core classes is essential if you're among that group.

These courses will also help you prepare for the ACT® test. For the graduating class of 2017, 68% of students completed a core curriculum. Those students got an average ACT score of 22.1, while students who didn't had an average of 18.9. [Read more about how these core courses can help you with the ACT test.](#)

Although requirements may vary from college to college, check with your counselor or look online for the specific college requirements for any schools you're interested in attending. The added benefit is that the skills and knowledge from these courses will give you a well-rounded education that you'll use in any career.

# Tips for Selecting Classes

Here are some important things to keep in mind when selecting classes for your first year of high school.

- Review the **GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS** for your school. Talk to your school counselor to help you schedule the right classes.
- Four years of **ENGLISH** or **LANGUAGE ARTS** courses will give you key skills in reading, writing, and speaking that are necessary for college and your career.
- **MATHEMATICS** courses teach key problem-solving skills that are important for 21st century careers.
- Three years of **SOCIAL STUDIES** in high school is often a requirement for colleges and universities. These courses are key for learning about the world, nation, and society around you.
- Take at least three years of **SCIENCE**, including one laboratory course, to help build skills in critical thinking that will be helpful for future careers.
- Have at least one year of **VISUAL** or **PERFORMING ARTS** classes (choice, band, theater, drama, or dance) as part of your schedule. These classes help you become more engaged in your community and help you explore new and creative ideas.
- **ELECTIVE** courses are a great way to earn academic credit while helping you explore special interests.
- **FOREIGN LANGUAGE** courses are important for understanding the world and other cultures, but they're also required by many colleges to graduate. It's possible to fulfill these requirements by taking foreign language credits in high school.
- Ask your school about **APPLIED ACADEMICS** courses. These use hands-on approaches to learning and often meet core credit requirements.
- **COMPUTER** courses can build on skills you already have to develop more professional-level usage with applications and software.

# Discover Your Interests

You can start your path now by identifying interest in certain subjects and courses. You can discover what interests you most and what subjects, activities, or electives would benefit you by taking an Interest Inventory from ACT.

You can search careers, find majors, explore schools, track scores, and you can take quizzes that will help you discover your interests, abilities, and values to create a Career Map. This map will suggest possible career paths in social service, administration and sales, business operations, technical, science and technology, and the arts.

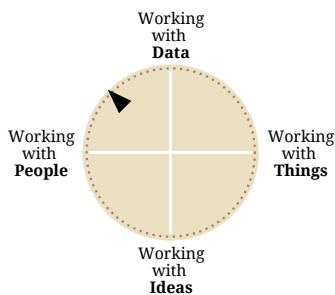
## College and Career Planning

Where are you going? Knowing your interests can help you find the kinds of majors and occupations that may be right for you. Occupations differ widely in how much they involve working with four basic work tasks: Data, Ideas, People, and Things. Before you took the ACT, you completed an interest inventory. Your results point to occupations that involve the kinds of basic work tasks you prefer. Visit [www.act.org/collegeplanning](http://www.act.org/collegeplanning) to learn more.

According to your results, you enjoy working with **People & Data**.

Here are a few examples of occupations involving this kind of work:

- Buyer
- FBI/CIA Agent
- Financial Manager
- Training/Education Manager
- Travel Guide



## Interest-Major Fit

Do your interests fit the college major you plan to enter? Based on information you provided, you plan to enter **Accounting**.



Your interests are fairly similar to the interests of college students in the major you plan to enter. Students in majors that fit their interests are often more satisfied with their major.



[Learn about you here.](#)

# Plan with Your School Counselor

Deciding on classes, after school activities, and electives can seem intimidating, but your school counselor can help you plan your high school path with useful information that will help you prepare for your academic career and beyond.

## MEETING WITH YOUR COUNSELOR

Prior to meeting with your counselor, you should be ready to discuss your:

- **INTERESTS**  
Take the Interest Inventory to prepare and bring an idea of what your interests are.
- **GOALS**  
Are you thinking about college or certain careers?
- **PAST GRADES/CLASSES**  
Talk about your current classes and what classes would help you.

Request a time with the counselor and let them know the reason you want to meet. If your counselor doesn't have time, ask for a recommendation for someone else you could speak with. Be honest! The more they know you the better they can help you.

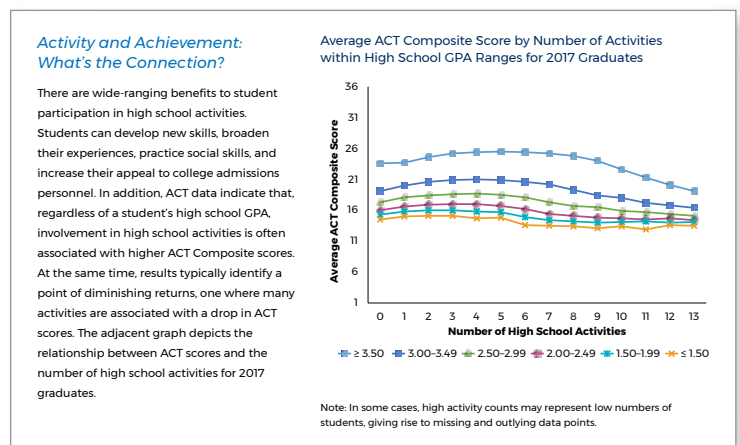
## SELECTING CLASSES

Talk to your counselor about planning your required **CORE CLASSES** and choosing **ELECTIVES** that line up with your interests. Finding new and exciting classes to take is part of the fun of high school and can help you discover what you might want to do for a career in the future.

## PARTICIPATING IN EXTRACURRICULARS

There's more to high school than just class. Joining different **SPORTS TEAMS, CLUBS,** or **AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS** looks great for post-high school education and offers the chance to make new friends, develop team building skills, and find new interests and activities you enjoy. Merit-based financial aid programs in many states award students for achievement both in the classroom and on college entrance exams in the arts, athletics, and other areas of accomplishment according to ACT Research.

[Read more about involvement in high school activities and success.](#)



## LOOKING FORWARD

Graduation is several years away but, if you have questions, you can ask your counselor to point you in the right direction based on your interests and ideas for what you're considering after high school. Although this will be more important in your sophomore and junior years of high school, it doesn't hurt to ask questions if you have them!

# Build Learning Habits

A new school means learning new skills that will help you succeed in the classroom. Developing good habits now will make a huge difference when you get into college and into your career. Following these tips can help you get more out of class, study time, and your entire high school experience.

- **JOIN IN ON CLASS DISCUSSIONS** Don't sit quietly in the back—participate in the conversation.
- **ASK QUESTIONS IF YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND SOMETHING.** If you didn't understand, there's a good chance the other students didn't either. Don't be afraid to ask questions!
- **EMAIL TEACHERS** for help on assignments after school hours. Discuss email policies with your teachers.
- **SHARPEN YOUR BASIC SKILLS** in every class. You can sharpen all of your skills in different classes—like practicing writing in social studies, using algebra in science courses, and more.
- **STAY ON TOP OF CLASS ASSIGNMENTS.** Use checklists, planners, or **PHONE APPS** to remind you about deadlines, assignments, and exams. There are lots of free productivity and scheduling apps that can help.
- **LEARN KEYBOARDING AND TYPING SKILLS.** If you haven't already, practice your typing to become faster and more efficient with your homework, saving you time for extra activities.
- **TAKE GOOD CLASS NOTES** by writing them by hand in lectures and then typing them later. That way you've taken in the material twice to aid the learning process, and saved another copy on your computer.
- Learn to **PROOFREAD, CORRECT,** and **REWRITE** your written work. Use online resources and reference books to practice.
- **DEVELOP GOOD TEST-TAKING SKILLS.** Read the whole question before answering and leave time to double-check your answers. You can also answer all of the easy questions first, then go back to the harder questions to keep a better pace.



# Expand Social Skills

High school is a new chapter in your life, but it's also an important step in your development as a well-rounded person. Building the right social skills and honing your character strengths are great for your academic career and will also help you throughout your professional career.

**MOTIVATION** - Did you know high school GPA is related consistently to motivation?

**SELF-REGULATION** - Did you know that as the measure of self-regulation increases, the number of disciplinary events per semester decreases?

**SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT** - Did you know students who participate in two or more extracurricular activities during high school have higher college retention rates?

The combination of **SELF-REGULATION** + **SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT** + **MOTIVATION** = **INCREASED LEARNING AND SUCCESS.**

These traits and habits are just as important in making sure you stay focused on tasks, interact positively with other students and teachers, and help you persevere when things get stressful.



# Planning for Your Future Starts Now

It's never too early to start planning for college and your career. Talk about your future with people you trust (parents, counselors, friends) and start to form a plan for after graduation.

There are many ways to get to your career. Some go to college, while some move straight from high school into a career. Just so you know, 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 higher pay, having a college degree or certification like the ACT® National Career Readiness Certificate® opens up more possibilities for your future. This includes more stable employment, greater benefits, and better career options.

[Learn more about NCRC here.](#)



# Take Advantage of Extracurriculars

High school is a great time to explore new and exciting activities that can help you develop your interests and social skills. Most high schools offer all kinds of extracurricular activities for students. Some activities, like music, band, or theater are curriculum-based and can be graded. Others are designed to give you life experiences and new skills, as well as the chance to make new friends. ACT data indicates that regardless of a student's high school Grade Point Average (GPA), involvement in high school activities is associated with higher ACT scores and post-high school success.

Discover what extracurriculars your high school offers. There are activities for athletes, “mathletes,” thespians, musicians, builders, gamers, artists, extroverts, and introverts. If there’s something you enjoy, there’s a team or group of like-minded individuals waiting for you.

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

**BONUS:** Colleges and employers like to see extracurricular activities on your transcripts and resumé. These activities build teamwork skills, hone your creativity, and prove that you have more than just “book smarts.” Plus, some of them can help you earn scholarships or grants to pay for college.



# Freshman Year Checklist

Get the most out of your Freshman year with this checklist of everything you should consider doing:

- Create new study habits by making a schedule for homework, reviewing notes, and study groups.
- Buy a planner or download apps to help keep up with reminders and dates for assignments.
- Develop your own system of taking notes in class that works best for you.
- Join extracurricular activities like sports, arts, service, and more. It will expand your life experiences and keep you active, giving you lots of material for college and your career applications.
- Learn your interests and skills. [Create an account](#) and take an Interest Inventory. This pinpoints your interests and skills, leads you to possible college majors and careers, and helps you use those interests to understand which major(s) to pursue.
- Meet with your counselor to help schedule your core classes. Remember, ACT recommends 4 years of English, 3 years of math (including Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II), 3 years of science (including Biology, Chemistry, and Physics), and 3 years of social studies.
- Consider researching and applying for part-time jobs that you can have during high school. Having a part-time job will help you start saving for college early and teaches valuable life skills like teamwork, problem solving, money management, and staying productive.
- Keep your mind sharp by reading books and magazines to develop your reading skills. Find ways to practice academics outside of the classroom, like writing a blog or tutoring others in math.
- Talk to your counselor, teachers, or other adults and professionals about colleges and post-high school career opportunities. Visiting college websites or researching scholarships, grants, and careers will give you a better picture for choosing a path in the years to come.

# Connect with Us

Stay connected with ACT to get updates, receive test-taking tips, and find other useful information for your high school career by following us on social media.



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