



THE Ultimate Teen Guide

TO

Getting into the Ivy League

THE 10-STEP SYSTEM



INSIDER
INFO
from an
IVY LEAGUE
GRADUATE

Learn How To...

- Achieve an impressive transcript and GPA
- Win national awards
- Score high on the SAT and ACT
- Demonstrate your passionate commitment
- Write a winning essay
- Gain valuable recommendations
- Decide between EA, ED, or Regular Decision



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STEP 1

EXCEL IN SCHOOL

LET'S GET THE obvious one out of the way: Make it your goal to excel in school. Maintaining a high GPA in high school shows that you are a diligent student, are dedicated to success, and will be able to handle the rigor of courses in college.

REMEMBER: Your transcript should exhibit your passions, assets, skills, and advantages. Devote extra studying time to perfect your strengths—the subjects you want to pursue—and you should shoot to be around the top 10 percent of your graduating class.

So, how can you be a successful high school student? Let's get started.

Show a trend of advancement. Each year, increasingly challenge yourself, and take as many honors, AP, IB, and college-level courses as possible. Admissions officers want to see that you've been striving to excel and haven't just been coasting along. This is also your opportunity to showcase your strengths by taking advanced courses in subjects that spur your interest and curiosity. Doing so demonstrates your motivation and desire to be as knowledgeable, proficient, and adept as possible in your field. Furthermore, although receiving outstanding grades in advanced courses will always remain the best advantage, colleges are more impressed by an A in an advanced course than by an A+ in an easy course.

Take advantage of your academic opportunities. Another reason taking AP courses is important is that schools have access to your high school profile. This profile provides academic context: information about the curriculum your school offers, grading scale, average standardized test scores, the amount of students who graduate and where they attend college, in addition to other numbers. Therefore, if your school offers twenty-five AP courses, but you have only taken one, that is a red flag. However, if the school offers zero AP courses, admissions officers gain a better understanding of your situation and the opportunities available.

Just do it. But don't overdo it. Even if you are not particularly interested in the subject per se, you should take the most challenging classes available because the teacher of the class is likely to be passionate about the subject, and your interest may grow. However, this issue is a fine line. Don't waste time in something you absolutely know you will never pursue. Each AP class takes time away from you chasing your true passion, so don't take on the extra workload if you don't think it will pay off. Depending on what your high school offers, taking four to seven AP classes over the course of your high school career is sufficient. Anything more than eight might be overkill and jeopardize your ability to shine in your true strengths.

There are other admission-related benefits to challenging yourself. Because of the rigorous material and high-level critical thinking required, students who take more challenging courses in high school are typically more likely to score better on the SAT and ACT. The English skills, reading and writing skills, math skills, and science skills tested by these standardized tests can be developed in high school classrooms: AP English Language, AP English Literature, AP Calculus BC, AP Physics C, AP Biology, as well as English honors, Algebra II honors, Physics honors, and Biology honors. Classroom activities include learning how to analyze passages, books, or poems; learning how to write effectively with proper organization; learning how to break down math problems and how to substitute formulas; and learning how to interpret graphs and data. Essentially, the more advanced courses can delve more deeply into problems, cover more material, and as a result, better prepare the students.

NOTE TO PARENTS: Encourage your child to get out of his or her comfort zone. That is the only way they can grow and see their true

potential.

Develop strong time-management skills. Maintaining a long-term commitment to a sport or the arts while trying to stay on top of schoolwork is difficult, so make sure you know how to prioritize your time. Develop a balance between taking rigorous classes and having a meaningful involvement in extracurricular activities.

NOTE TO PARENTS: Remind your children of their commitments. You don't want to be a "nag," but you are still their support team. Be there for them as much as you can.

Watch how much time you spend on social media. Today, there are countless phone apps, social media sites, and streams of communication teenagers can waste their time and energy on. For instance, many high school students are on Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat throughout the day to talk with their friends, post pictures, and scroll through their newsfeeds to see what their friends have posted. Then, once they arrive home from school, their sports practice, or their extracurricular, they log onto Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat again, and are glued to their screens for hours until they go to sleep. There are also countless video games to play, YouTube videos to watch, pictures to re-post on Tumblr and Pinterest, and celebrity tweets to read on Twitter. Be aware of how much time you are spending on these mindless activities.

Of course having friends and being social is important, but ask yourself how these sites will help you advance as a student, as an athlete, and as a person. Most of the time, the answer is probably not much. If you spend a total of four hours every day on these sites, by the end of the year, you have spent almost *1,500 hours* on social media. You probably could have created your own successful app in that amount of time! Try to be aware of how much time you spend on what are essentially distractions, and focus your time on what matters most to you.

Find your "Study Sweet Spot." Whenever you have a crucial test coming up or a large project or essay to finish, you should have a go-to location and set-up to do so. This sweet spot can be your room, a classroom, library, bookstore, coffee shop, community center, or even the park. Make sure it's

thoroughly comfortable, quiet, and inspiring so you can focus and be creative without interruption.

NOTE TO PARENTS: Keep a quiet setting in the household as much as possible, and don't allow teens to have television sets in the bedrooms.

Listen to baroque music. To reach your full potential, bring your headphones and listen to baroque music while you study. Research has shown that baroque music “stabilizes mental, physical, and emotional rhythms . . . to attain a state of deep concentration and focus in which large amounts of content information can be processed and learned.”⁸ This music pulses between fifty to eighty beats per minute, which helps brain waves to focus, relax, and stimulate your mind. Try listening to Bach, Vivaldi, and Handel while you study, and you may see a difference!

Get enough sleep. To stay healthy and energized, you should aim for approximately seven to eight hours of sleep per night. However, taking four or five AP classes, participating in clubs, and practicing and competing in sports every day can take up more than twelve hours of your day, leaving you with no time to have your necessary “downtime.” That’s why it’s important to finish your obligations first, and then relax. Don’t procrastinate or give other tasks more importance than your health, schoolwork, and sports/extracurricular activities.

NOTE TO PARENTS: Have dinner around 7:00 or 8:00 p.m. so your teens don't have a full stomach and can peacefully go to sleep. Also, if you tend to watch television at night, remind them to finish their homework before 10:00 p.m. so they can go to bed at a decent hour. Try to set a good example and create a healthy environment by going to bed early too. That way, the lights will be off and no one will be talking or making loud noises in the house.

Stay organized. Make sure you buy all the supplies you need for each class. For instance, three-ring binders are typically useful because you can effectively insert the assignments and important papers your teacher distributes, take class notes on the inserted loose-leaf paper, and organize

everything with dividers. Additionally, make sure to keep your papers in chronological order to make studying for midterms and finals effortless.

NOTE TO PARENTS: Take your teens to buy the majority of school supplies after the first day of classes. Of course, if you have the list in advance, go right ahead and shop early. However, most students buy supplies before the first day of school and then have to go back to the store anyway because the teachers handed out a specific list of what they needed.

Have a calendar for important deadlines and test dates. With many pursuits comes many important dates, and remembering each of them can be difficult. To make it easier, buy a large calendar you can hang on your bedroom wall so you will be able to see it every day and make changes when necessary. Try to write down everything, from tournament dates and college application deadlines to review session times, teachers' office hours, and doctor's appointments. Regarding college applications, definitely write down deadlines for the following:

- Essays
- Forms for teachers and guidance counselors
- SAT or ACT test dates (and prep courses if applicable)
- Financial aid form deadlines (Note: these aren't the same as admissions deadlines)
- Meeting times with your teachers and guidance counselors
- Final due dates for all other documents and supplemental material

NOTE TO PARENTS: If possible, check your teens' calendar and suggest writing down anything you think is missing. Although teenagers at this age should be learning how to be more independent, everyone makes mistakes, and you don't want them to make crucial mistakes that could affect their long-term goals.

Don't skip meals. Eating a nutritious breakfast and a healthy lunch (try to stay away from the vending machines and student stores!) will keep you

focused in your classes throughout the day. Some examples of a healthy breakfast are:

- Oatmeal with low-fat milk and berries
- Eggs with whole wheat toast
- Fruit smoothie with spinach or kale and protein powder
- Greek yogurt with almonds and berries
- Something nutritious to sprinkle on foods such as oatmeal, toast, smoothies, or yogurt are organic chia seeds and flax seeds. These whole raw foods contain omega-3 fatty acids, which are essential for good health, as well as fiber, protein, antioxidants, and massive amounts of nutrients, all of which can keep you full and focused.

NOTE TO PARENTS: Be a health nut as much as possible. Buy healthy food at the grocery store, cook healthy meals at home, and give your kids extra money for the healthier lunches if necessary. It will definitely pay off for them—and you too!

Be friendly with everyone. High school is hectic enough, so try not to concern yourself with gossip, cliques, or who's friends with whom. Simply be yourself, and get into the habit of saying hello to people and talking with new classmates. If you get comfortable interacting with a diverse group of people now, you will be more likely to develop traits such as adaptability and flexibility for college and beyond.

“Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people.”
ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

NOTE TO PARENTS: Encourage positive talk around the house. Consistently speak well of others, and talk about creative ideas and goals as opposed to people. Make an effort to meet together consistently as a family. If work gets in the way of dinnertime, sit down for breakfast, lunch, dessert, or even a time at night when you can all come together. You always have the power to influence your children in some way. Build relationships with them, ask them about

their day, and see how you can assist and support them. Create a loving and encouraging atmosphere that will stabilize their overall well-being.

“All great change in America begins at the dinner table.”

RONALD REAGAN

Remember the “clichés.” In general, it is important to remember no one is perfect, and everyone makes mistakes. If you get a C on a test, lose a football game, or embarrass yourself in front of your friends, don’t be too hard on yourself. Be able to laugh at yourself. Remember what you did wrong and learn from it so you can improve for the future.

NOTE TO PARENTS: Encourage and reward accomplishments with love, attention, support, congratulations . . . and maybe a dinner out.

Be your own advocate. Calculate grades for each class on your own. Although it’s rare, teachers do make mistakes when it comes to grading, whether it’s a calculation error or simply a misunderstanding. Additionally, never be afraid to ask why you received a certain grade for an essay, project, or test. It shows you care.

NOTE TO PARENTS: Despite what many believe, talking to your child’s teachers can be a positive thing. It shows you are involved, the teacher can put a face to your name, and you can gain a better understanding of the class environment and requirements.

Be a problem-solver. If you aren’t performing as well as you had hoped, don’t immediately feel disheartened. Simply ask other students and friends how they study effectively for tests and suggest studying together. Another solution could be attending extra-help sessions before or after school if offered, or, if necessary, you can find a tutor.

NOTE TO PARENTS: Be as flexible as possible when it comes to driving your children to school early or picking them up at a later time when they suggest attending an extra help session. It will be crucial to their success in the class.

Have fun with it. One of the best ways to memorize content is through songs, chants, poems, or even raps. Music remains a powerful mnemonic device because the added melody encourages repetition and, ultimately, memorization. Sometimes teachers have their own entertaining songs, but try to write some on your own.

NOTE TO PARENTS: Talk to your kids about their day at school and ask them to share what they learned. It will build your relationship with them and help them learn at a quicker pace.

Keep your goal in front of you. One of the best ways to achieve a goal is to remind yourself of it every day so you keep working hard. For instance, you can put a picture of your “first choice” school on your desk at home, on the inside of your binder, or on the door of your locker. You could even tape a picture of yourself on a picture of the campus. It sounds silly, but the mind is very powerful. Your subconscious mind won’t know if that was the past, present, or future, and you might be surprised at the results.

NOTE TO PARENTS: Make a goal page or “vision board” with your son or daughter. Buy a piece of poster paper, lay magazines, photos, and pictures of yourselves on the table, and cut and paste them onto the page. Make it fun with words, stickers, colors, and designs.

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