

# High School Do's and Don'ts

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High School Do's and Don'ts

## DO THESE THINGS

*Take these steps in high school and you'll be **REALLY** ready for the  
The Future.*

Even freshmen can prepare for the college application and admission process. Trust us, staying ahead of the game makes a difference when deadlines close in.



- **Be yourself.** Enjoy others who enjoy you. The confidence gained from this simple tip will help keep you grounded when you're stressing out about college.
- **Care about grades from Day 1.** By creating a good work ethic now, you will have an easier time maintaining a good GPA. Ninth grade courses count toward your GPA.
- **Go to Florida Shines.** At [www.FloridaShines.org](http://www.FloridaShines.org) complete a College & Career Readiness Evaluation.
- **Schedule a meeting with your guidance counselor.** Investigate college prep programs, including honors, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), dual enrolment, early college and Advanced International Certificate of Education classes.
- **Sophomores, register for college pre-tests (PSAT and PLAN, the ACT pre-test).** The results will point out areas you may need to focus on before the real deal. While you're on the websites, sign up to receive "question of the day" emails and other free prep tools.

- › **Sophomores, more prep.** Consider taking some AP exams and/or SAT subject tests in May.
- › **Summer job/volunteering.** Find a paying job or volunteer with an organization or project that will enhance your resume.



## FALL

- › **Breathe.** This will likely be your most busy year of high school. Avoid the tangle of stress by taking care of your body and mind as well as your workload. Exercise, sleep and eat well.
- › **Check your status.** You'll find Bright Futures and state university admission requirements at Florida Shines ([www.floridashines.org](http://www.floridashines.org)). Make sure you know what you still need to do.
- › **Meet with your guidance counselor.** Discuss your academic standing and what schools might be the best fit.
- › **Register for the ACT and/or SAT.** Choose the earliest dates available, so you will have chances for retakes if necessary. Look at test prep strategies and resources.
- › **A calendar is your friend.** If you aren't already, keep all important dates for testing, application deadlines, your favorite colleges' open houses and college fairs on a calendar and refer to it frequently.
- › **Volunteer.** Don't wait to pick an area of interest to earn community service hours needed for graduation and some scholarships, including Bright Futures. If you know what you plan to study, look for a volunteer job in that field.
- › **Narrow your list.** Contact potential schools for information/application packets. Keep the materials organized by school in folders. The Get Smart Guide starting

on page 60 and websites such as <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/> and [www.bigfuture.org](http://www.bigfuture.org) are good places to start your research.

- › **Look for the money.** Have an in-depth conversation with your parents about funding college and your future. Whether you're depending on scholarships or financial aid, the time to search is now. Set up or update your profiles on search websites such as [www.FastWeb.com](http://www.FastWeb.com) and on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid site, <https://FAFSA.ed.gov>. Check out the scholarship list on pages 32-39 for more.
- › **Attend at least one college fair.** Dress up a bit (no jeans or shorts) and collect brochures and other info about tons of schools.



## SPRING

- › **Test time.** Take ACT and/or SAT, and SAT subject tests and AP exams as appropriate.
- › **Keep looking for the money.** Continue researching and start applying. Don't overlook local organizations.
- › **Update your resume.** Add all the activities you've been doing this year. If required for college or scholarship applications, start portfolios, audition videos and essays.
- › **Plan campus visits.** Make appointments, especially if you plan to visit in the summer. To save on travel expenses, you can wait until you are accepted, and visit only those campuses.
- › **Stay focused!** Keep up with your grades. Study should be your favorite verb; *organize* should be your second favorite verb. Being organized will help you keep the mountains of college information and materials accessible and in order. Use a binder or file box to create a system that works for you.



## FALL

- › **Keep your eyes on your grades.** Your GPA is still important, as are good grades in honors, AP, IB and/or dual enrollment classes.
- › **Take or retake the ACT/SAT.** If necessary.
- › **Give recommendation writers time.** It is good policy to allow teachers, employers and other adults at least a month to complete recommendation forms and letters. Be sure to give them specific instructions about how to address letters and any particulars you want to highlight.
- › **Organize your application materials.** Narrow your list of schools, including your fallback choices in case your first picks say no. Check their deadlines and make sure you have the required materials.
- › **Apply to schools on your final list.** Most schools have online application options; Florida's state universities and colleges may be found at [www.FloridaShines.org](http://www.FloridaShines.org); the state's new online planning tool, MyCareerShines; or through the schools' websites. Keep copies of everything you send (essays, recommendations, school transcripts, etc.) and keep track of all communications (emails, letters, phone calls) with college admissions and financial aid officials.
- › **Track your status.** If available, use each school's online application tracking system to make sure all your materials have been received.
- › **Check on the money.** Gather information to complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form. Continue the search for scholarships, and check out [www.studentaid.ed.gov](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov) and [www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org) for other financial aid resources.
- › **Start researching housing options.** Complete required forms if you plan to live on campus.

- › **Make sure you're on track.** Before your last semester of high school, check your school's requirements for graduation. You don't want to discover in January that you're missing a required class that is full.



## SPRING

- › **File FAFSA.** After Jan. 1 or as soon thereafter as possible, submit the form with a parent's help. You'll need their most recent tax return.
- › **Make your future bright.** Complete the Florida Financial Aid Application to be considered for Bright Futures Scholarships and other state aid.
- › **Request transcripts.** Some schools ask for midyear grades, so submit the request to your guidance counselor.
- › **Wait. Wait. Wait.** Schools and scholarship organizations have different schedules for acceptance decisions and financial aid, so try not to stress out. Use the information to determine which school best meets your academic goals and financial needs.
- › **Visit 2.0.** Consider another campus visit (overnight if offered) to schools that have accepted you. Ask plenty of questions to help you decide.
- › **Yes!** Once you make your choice, immediately notify all colleges that accepted you. Send in housing and other deposits and sign up for orientation at your school.
- › **There are options.** If your top schools said no, work with your guidance counselor to find others with openings.
- › **More transcripts.** Send final transcripts to your chosen school. If you are taking dual enrollment courses, request that an official transcript from that school be sent to your future college.
- › **More tests.** Take SAT subject tests or AP exams as you complete specific advanced coursework. Take College Level Examination Program (CLEP) tests to earn college credit.
- › **Be thankful.** This is really important! Send thank-you notes to teachers, counselors and anyone else who may have

assisted you in the application process. Parents, maybe?

- › **Soak it all in.** Not just Florida's sunshine on spring break, but every good moment and memory of this year. Don't forget to congratulate yourself for all that you've accomplished. Positive thoughts will energize you when you get to college, especially when new situations challenge you.



## SOME DON'TS FOR COLLEGE

*A high school guidance counselor has seen some bad moves. Let her save you from them.*

By AMY H. SHAPIRO

- › **DON'T be afraid to connect with admissions representatives.**  
Most colleges have regional reps that are in charge of applications from specific states or cities. Most college counselors in high school have this information at their fingertips. If not, this information is readily available on the college's website. Or call the general office of undergraduate admissions.
- › **DON'T recite your GPA and standardized test scores in your essay.**  
Your essay is a chance to let admissions officers get to know you apart from the other portions of your application. Write about your experiences and how they have shaped you into who you are. Don't get caught up in WHAT you do, but explain HOW you do it and how it has shaped you into your unique self.
- › **DON'T be afraid to call a school's financial aid office and ask questions.**  
Many times students become nervous when talking about finances and worry that a school will rescind their admission if they ask for more money. Remember, admissions officers and financial aid advisors are people too. They want to help you. (Just be polite!)
- › **DON'T let mom and dad call admissions officers and ask questions for you.**  
Every phone call and email is a chance to make an impression. If a college believes you are not independent enough to speak for yourself, you are sending a message

that you may not be ready for college!

► **DON'T badmouth your high school, teachers, students or other colleges to an admissions rep.**

Just don't do it.



*Amy H. Shapiro is a guidance counselor at Coral Reef High, Miami's mega-magnet school.*

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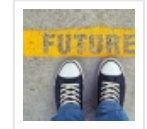
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