

Getting Ready Academically

Source: [College Board](#)

In college, your child will study subjects in greater depth than in high school and may discover new academic and career interests. To take full advantage of everything college has to offer, they need to lay a solid foundation in high school.

Take Five

Colleges look for students who work hard in challenging courses. That's why your child's high school [transcript](#) is one of the most important parts of their application—it lets colleges know your child's ready to take on college coursework.

Your child should take at least **five solid academic classes every semester**. Here's what colleges want to see on your child's transcript:

- Four years of English
- Three or four years of math
- Three or four years of lab science
- At least two and a half years of social studies
- Foreign languages and the arts are often required or recommended

Keep in mind: The courses required for high school graduation might not be enough to satisfy the colleges your child applies to.

Electives

Electives include any course that isn't a graduation requirement at your child's high school. Your child elects, or chooses, to take them.

Encourage your child to take full advantage of elective courses. They offer students the opportunity to pursue their interests, strengthen their transcript, and show colleges who they are.

Avoiding Basic Skills Courses in College

It's not just about getting in. Students with a solid foundation don't have to take [remedial courses](#) in college to strengthen their basic academic skills.

- They can start right away with classes that interest them and count toward their degree.
- They're more likely to graduate on time.
- They'll save money on [tuition](#).

Taking Challenging Courses

Students who take honors and [AP](#) courses in high school explore new ideas, build new skills, and try entirely new subjects. And their college applications stand out: 85% of [selective colleges](#) report that a student's AP experience has a positive impact on admission decisions.

AP courses are college-level courses students can take in high school. If your child receives a high enough score on an AP Exam, they may be eligible for [college credit](#), [advanced placement](#), or both at most U.S. colleges.

Developing College Skills

To succeed in college courses, your child needs to build skills in these areas:

- **Time management:** In high school, you may have helped your child keep track of deadlines and get motivated to work. In college, they'll have to plan and finish assignments on their own.
- **Collaboration:** The ability to work with others on an academic project is an important college skill.
- **Communication:** Speaking and writing skills, including making presentations and writing papers, are essential to almost any college course.
- **Research:** Whatever your child's major, they'll need to know how to find and analyze information and evaluate the sources.

Taking challenging courses in different subject areas can help students develop these skills. If your child's school participates in the [AP Capstone](#) program, look into AP Seminar and AP Research, which help students build those specific skills.

Standardized Tests

Your child may take [standardized tests](#) such as the PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 in high school and the PSAT 8/9 in grade 8 or 9. Schools and districts use these tests to track student progress. They're **not** [college entrance exams](#), and your child's scores are **not** sent to colleges.

The PSAT/NMSQT, PSAT 10, and PSAT 8/9 are all aligned with the SAT (also a standardized test) and with each other: they use the same score scale and test the same knowledge and skills in ways that are appropriate for each grade level. This makes it easy to see how students are progressing over time.

Here are some good reasons your child should take the PSAT-related assessments:

- They provide a baseline for measuring how ready your child is for college.
- They pinpoint the areas your child needs to focus on to stay on track for college.
- They help your child get familiar with the SAT's format and content.
- They connect your child to free, personalized SAT practice.
- They can open the door to scholarships to help pay for college.

What You Can Do

Encourage Your Child to Meet with Their Counselor

[School counselors](#) can help your child stay on track. Here are some questions your child can ask:

- How should I plan my schedule so I'll complete the courses I need for college?
- Which AP courses should I consider taking?
- When do you recommend I take the SAT?

Use the Academic Tracker

You and your child can use the Academic Tracker to look up specific colleges and see what courses they require students to take to gain admission. To access this free tool, students just need to log in to BigFuture using the username and password associated with their College Board account.

Visit [BigFuture](#)

Once they're logged in, students can:

1. Go to any college's profile page by entering its name in the "find colleges" search bar.
2. Click **See if you're on track** at the top of profile.
3. Compare the courses they're taking to the college's requirements.