

# Grade 9

## Start Down the Right Path

### Is College for Me?

You're just starting high school. Maybe you're already thinking about what you'll do when you graduate, or maybe graduation seems too far away. Maybe you're certain you want to attend college, or maybe you're not. Maybe you know what kind of job you would like to have in the future but don't know what you need to study to prepare for it.

There are some very good reasons to consider college. Try this True/False quiz below. Then, look at the answers that follow. You may learn some good reasons why college really is for you.

True or False:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ If no one in your family has gone to college, you can't go either.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Only rich people can afford to go to college.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Anything that is taught in college, you can learn on the job.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ If you don't know what you want to study, you shouldn't go to college.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ If your grades aren't very good, you can't get into college.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ You don't need to go to college to get a good job.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ If you don't know how to apply to college, you can't go.

### Answers:

1. **"If no one in your family has gone to college, you can't go either."** False. Many students attend college even though no one in their family has ever gone before. In fact, in 2003 more than half of all the high school graduates whose parents didn't attend college started college that fall.
2. **"Only rich people can afford to go to college."** False. College can be expensive (see the box at right), but that doesn't mean you can't afford to go.

There are many ways to pay for a college education. You might qualify for financial aid, which is money given to students to cover college costs based on students' financial need. Types of financial aid include grants and scholarships, loans, and college work-study. The state and federal governments, private organizations, and colleges are all sources of financial aid. Sometimes, more expensive colleges have more financial aid available to give to students.



Many students find additional ways to afford college, including:

- Participating in co-operative education programs where work is included as part of the curriculum
- Taking part in community service programs such as AmeriCorps that provide educational awards upon completion of service
- Joining ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps) or the U.S. Armed Services, which provides college scholarships and educational opportunities
- Starting their studies at a less expensive community college, then transferring to another institution for the final two years
- Attending school part-time while working

#### Average college costs per academic year

2-year public colleges: \$2,272

4-year public colleges: \$5,836

4-year private colleges: \$22,218

Source: The College Board®, 2007

Note: Costs are subject to change each year.

#### 3. **“Anything that is taught in college, you can learn on the job.”** False.

Most jobs require some on-the-job training. However, for many jobs, you will need a certain level of technical or analytical skill before you are hired, and that may require you to obtain some education after high school.

In addition, many employers won't consider you for employment without a college degree. That's because employers expect people to have transferable skills. Transferable skills are skills that can be used at (or transferred to) any job. Employers know that college is one of the best opportunities for young people to develop transferable skills. For example, in college, students learn:

**Organizational skills**—College students have to independently learn how to manage their time, finances, and academic workload.

**Communication skills**—Homework, essay writing, and class discussions help college students develop strong written and oral communication skills.

**Interpersonal skills**—Interpersonal skills enable individuals to get along and work together with many different types of people. College students have many opportunities to participate in study groups, student clubs, internships, study-abroad programs, and more—all of which develop their interpersonal skills.

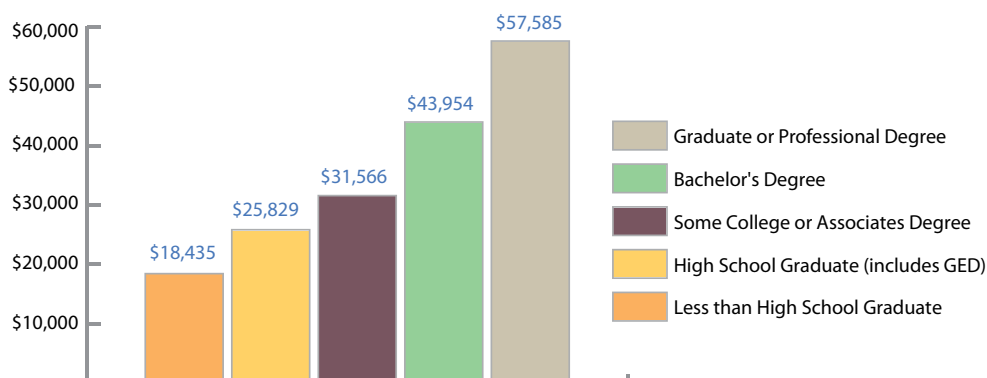
**How would you rate yourself? Which skills are you strong in and which do you need to improve? Which transferable skills might be important for the jobs you are interested in? What steps could you take to improve these skills?**

Source: University of Cambridge (England) website, <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/education/skills/>

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4. **“If you don’t know what you want to study, you shouldn’t go to college.”** False. College is a good place to explore the academic areas that interest you and think about the career you want to have after you graduate. At many colleges, you can spend your first year (and sometimes the second year) taking a variety of different courses before you decide what your major will be. Most colleges have academic advisors and career counselors to help you make these decisions.
5. **“If your grades aren’t very good, you can’t get into college.”** False. Different colleges have different requirements for admission. They also look at other qualities besides your grades, such as activities, involvement in the community, hardships you’ve had to overcome, etc. If you want to strengthen your skills and improve your grades, you may want to consider attending a community college for your first year or two and then transferring to a four-year college to finish up your last couple of years. In many cases, a high school diploma or GED will qualify you for acceptance to a community college.
6. **“You don’t need to go to college to get a good job.”**

True and False. If a “good job” means a job you really like, you don’t necessarily have to go to college—but you will have more career options available with a college degree. If a “good job” means a job that pays well, statistics show that on average, the more education you have, the more money you earn (see chart to the right).



Source: US Census Bureau 2005

7. **“If you don’t know how to apply to college, you can’t go.”**

False. If you don’t know how to apply to college, there are many places to turn for help—your guidance counselor, college access centers such as TERI’s College Planning Centers, and booklets like this one!

**ACTIVITY:** List three careers you might be interested in. Research them in the Occupational Handbook (available at your local college access center, library, or online at [www.bls.gov/oco/home.htm](http://www.bls.gov/oco/home.htm)). Answer these four questions:

1. What level of education is required?
2. What do people actually do on the job?
3. What are the average salaries?
4. Will there be more or less need for these jobs in the future?





## How Should I Prepare for College?

It's not enough just to want to attend college. You've got to start preparing for it. If you wait until senior year, it may be too late to attend your first choice school. There are four ways you can start preparing for college right now:

- **Do your best in school.**
- **Take college preparatory courses (courses that help you prepare for college).**
- **Participate in extracurricular activities to develop your talents and interests.**
- **Start learning as much as you can about college and how to finance your education.**

1. **Do your best in school.** Your grades really do matter! All of your grades from freshman through senior years will appear on your high school transcript. Most colleges require a copy of your transcript when you apply to them, so they can determine whether or not you have the skills to do college-level work. But don't just do well to get into college—do it for yourself. You owe it to yourself to learn as much as you can and become the best person you can be. Think about your grades. Do they indicate your best effort? How can you improve?

2. **Take college preparatory courses**, not just the classes required for high school graduation. Research shows that taking rigorous college prep courses in high school is the most important predictor of college success. Also, colleges look favorably upon students who take the more difficult courses. If you do not take these, you may not only limit the colleges to which you are accepted but also your ability to succeed in college.

See chart on page 8.

Meet with your guidance counselor to plan your schedule, and make sure you are taking the courses listed on the next page. Keep in mind that the courses listed on the next page are the minimum requirements for most colleges and universities other than community colleges.

Also, check with your counselor to see if your high school has an agreement with a local college to let high school students enroll in college-level courses. These agreements are known as Flexible Campus or Dual Enrollment Programs. Students often receive both high school and college credit for these courses.

3. **Participate in extracurricular activities.**

Extracurricular activities and enrichment programs are a great way to develop your talents and interests, and colleges like to see that you have interests in addition to school. See chart below for some types of activities in which you can participate.

4. **Learn as much as you can about college.** This booklet is a great way to start! As you read through it, you will find many ways to learn more about preparing for college.

### In school

Student government, drama, yearbook, newspaper, band or orchestra, sports, pep clubs, etc.

### In your community

Youth organizations, religious groups, community service, summer enrichment programs, summer camps, part-time jobs, etc.

### For college preparation

Upward Bound, Educational Talent Search, GEAR UP, pre-college programs for high school students at local colleges, etc.



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Subject	Number of Years You Should Take It	Description
English	4 years	College preparatory English
Mathematics	3 to 4 years	Including Algebra I & II and Geometry
Science	2 to 3 years	Usually Earth Sciences, Biology, and Physics or Chemistry—2 laboratory courses are required
Social Studies	2 years	For example: History, Government, Economics
Foreign Language	2 years	Of the same language (many colleges require 3 years)
Electives	3 years	Courses of your choice to enhance your skills and knowledge. Some options that will help in college include computer science, fine arts, and especially honors and advanced placement courses if they are offered.

## 9th Grade Check List

Check each item as you go.

- ☐ Start by telling your parent(s), counselor, teachers, family, friends, and other adults you respect that you want to go to college. The more people you tell the more support you will have to help you reach your goal.
- ☐ Explore careers: What kind of higher education is required? Will you need two years of college, four years of college, or college plus a graduate degree?
- ☐ Talk to people who have attended college. Ask members of your family, people in your neighborhood, and people at community gatherings to share their experiences with you.
- ☐ Talk to your guidance counselor, parent(s), other family members, and teachers to make sure you are signed up for college preparatory courses.
- ☐ Do your best in school. Grades count, but don't drop a college preparatory course if you are having trouble. If a course is difficult, get help from a teacher or ask for a tutor. Remember, colleges look at the level of your courses as well as at your grades.
- ☐ Create a college file and put in items such as the following:
  - *Copies of your report card*
  - *A list of awards and honors you receive*
  - *A list of community organizations and clubs you join, including dates of participation and any offices you held*
  - *A list of paid and volunteer jobs you have had*
  - *Letters of recommendation from adults who know you well (not family members)*
- ☐ If you need to work, try to find a part-time job related to your career interests. Start saving money for college. Even if you're only able to put a little aside, colleges want to see that you are willing to save for your education. Be careful, however, that your job doesn't take away from the time that you need to do well in school.
- ☐ Participate in after-school programs college-ready programs at your school.
- ☐ Become involved in extracurricular activities. Colleges look for well-rounded students, so it's important to show you're involved in activities beyond your regular classes.

## 9th Grade Glossary

**Financial aid**—Money to help you pay for the costs of college, based on your financial need, that may be provided by colleges; federal, state, and local governments; and private sources. This includes grants and scholarships, work-study, and loans.

**Grants/scholarships**—Money to help pay for college costs, awarded to you by colleges; federal, state, and local governments; and private sources; that you do not have to pay back. In general, grants are awarded based on financial need, and scholarships are awarded based on merit (such as outstanding academic achievement, demonstrated talent, or athletic ability) or involvement (such as membership in an organization or ethnic group, or employment in a company).

**Internships**—An experience in a working environment that leads to either academic credit or experiential learning. Internships are a good way to learn more about a particular career in which you are interested. Internships are usually unpaid job experiences, although some paid internships exist.

**Loans**—A type of financial assistance that involves you or your parent(s) borrowing money to cover college costs. You and/or your parent(s) will have to repay the amount of the loan—with interest—to the lender. Many student loan programs have low interest rates and do not require repayment until you graduate or are no longer attending college. Explore federal loans first, since federal loans usually provide you with a better interest rate, reducing the amount you pay over the life of the loan.

**Federal Work-Study**—A federally or state-subsidized financial aid program. You must earn the amount of money you are awarded to cover part of your college expenses, usually by working 10 – 15 hours per week on campus or for an off-campus nonprofit agency.

**Cooperative education (or “co-op”)**—A college program that combines academic coursework with relevant work experience. Students often alternate a semester of coursework with a semester of working in a related field, gaining both income and experience that will help them pursue their careers after graduation.

**Grade point average (GPA)**—A cumulative, numerical equivalent of your letter grades. In the most common system, A=4, B=3, C=3, D=1, and F=0. Learn how your school calculates GPA.

**Major**—Called a concentration at some colleges, a major is the primary subject you choose to study in college. Many (but not all) of your college courses will be related to your major.

**Transferable skills**—Skills that are important in order to succeed in any workplace but that are not specific to any particular job. Instead, these skills can be transferred from one job to another.

**College preparatory**—High school courses in primary subjects (language arts, math, science, social studies) that are required for college admission or are designed to help students prepare for college. In some high schools, the only college preparatory courses are those that are also considered honors or advanced placement. Check with your guidance counselor.

**Transcript**—A written record of your achievement in high school, including the courses you have taken, the grades you have earned, certain standardized test scores, awards or special achievements, and your attendance record.

**Extracurricular activities**—Voluntary activities in which students participate, normally after school or during weekend hours. These include athletics, performing arts, community service, student clubs, etc.

**Enrichment programs**—Extracurricular programs that develop students’ academic and thinking skills, either directly through tutoring, or indirectly through projects and activities.



NOTE: *Making College Affordable* is another TERI publication that offers detailed information on how to finance a college education. You may receive copies by contacting TERI at [www.tericollegeplanning.org](http://www.tericollegeplanning.org) or 1 877 ED AID 4U (1-877-332-4348).