

Preparing for College

College is a very important part of your life, one that provides you with a firm foundation on which you can build a successful and fulfilling future. Some colleges are better than others in that they're more sought after by students because they've established a reputation that's hard to beat. So if you're looking to gain admission to one of the top-most colleges in the country, you need to start preparing for it as early as you can, as early as high school. Not many students think of college when they're in high school, but it's the ones who do who go on to study in the best institutions. If you're looking for tips on how to prepare for college while still in high school, read on:

1. Strive for academic excellence so that your grades are high – the best colleges come to those who have the best grades.
2. Cut back on the frivolity in your junior and senior years and work on taking AP and college prep classes in your free time. You not only gain college credits and get to graduate early, you also bring down the total cost of college.
3. Volunteer for some community service and take part in extra-curricular activities to boost your extra-curricular profile; it not only reads well on your college application but also goes down well with employers once you graduate.
4. Create a portfolio of all your accomplishments in high school; from academic performances to community service experience, they all count when you're looking for a scholarship.
5. If you're not yet decided about your major and what degree you want to pursue, talk to your high school guidance counselor so you're able to gain an idea before you go off to college.
6. If you know what you want (which college you want to attend and which degree you want to study), then do your research and ensure that you meet the qualifications for admission. If you require a high GPA or a certain score on standardized tests like the SAT, work on achieving them.
7. Don't pin all your hopes on one particular institution – create a list of desirable schools and prioritize it in order of your preference. Applying to many schools gives you more options and reduces your chances of failure.
8. Decide on how you're going to pay for college – if your parents have saved up for you, it's not much of an issue, otherwise, you must try hard to find a scholarship or grant. Start early, scour the web for resources, and talk to your guidance counselor and the colleges you're applying to so you can check if you qualify for any of their programs. The least attractive option is a student loan because you graduate with debt clinging to your back. However, if you can work at a part-time job and pay off your debt quickly (don't borrow loans with prepayment penalty clauses), students loans are a good way to put yourself through college.
9. Work on your communication skills, both written and oral. Your college essay is your USP when it comes to gaining admission because it is the one thing that sets you apart from every other student who has the same academic qualifications as you. You're also likely to be interviewed at some point of time before or after you graduate, so learn how to speak confidently and without showing any signs of nervousness.
10. And finally, prepare for a life that's very different from high school and where your future and success depend on your ability to take the initiative and assume responsibility for yourself.