



HIGH SCHOOL handbook

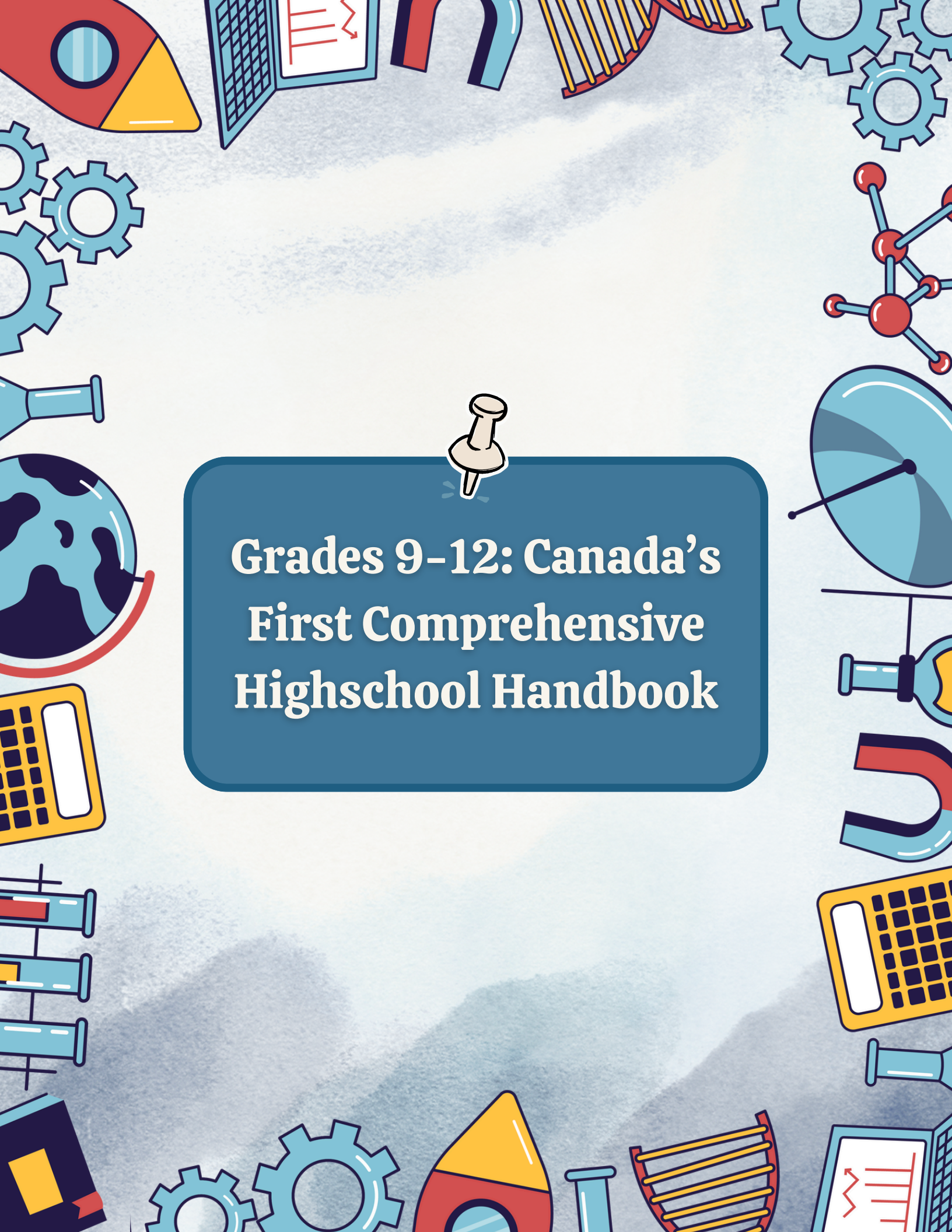




Canada's First Comprehensive Highschool Handbook

STEMBuddies

A STEMBUDDIES PRODUCTION



Grades 9–12: Canada's First Comprehensive Highschool Handbook

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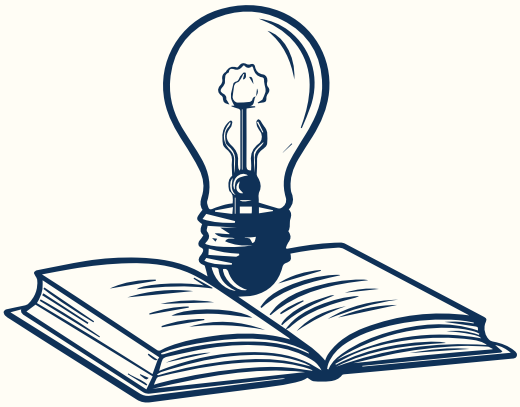
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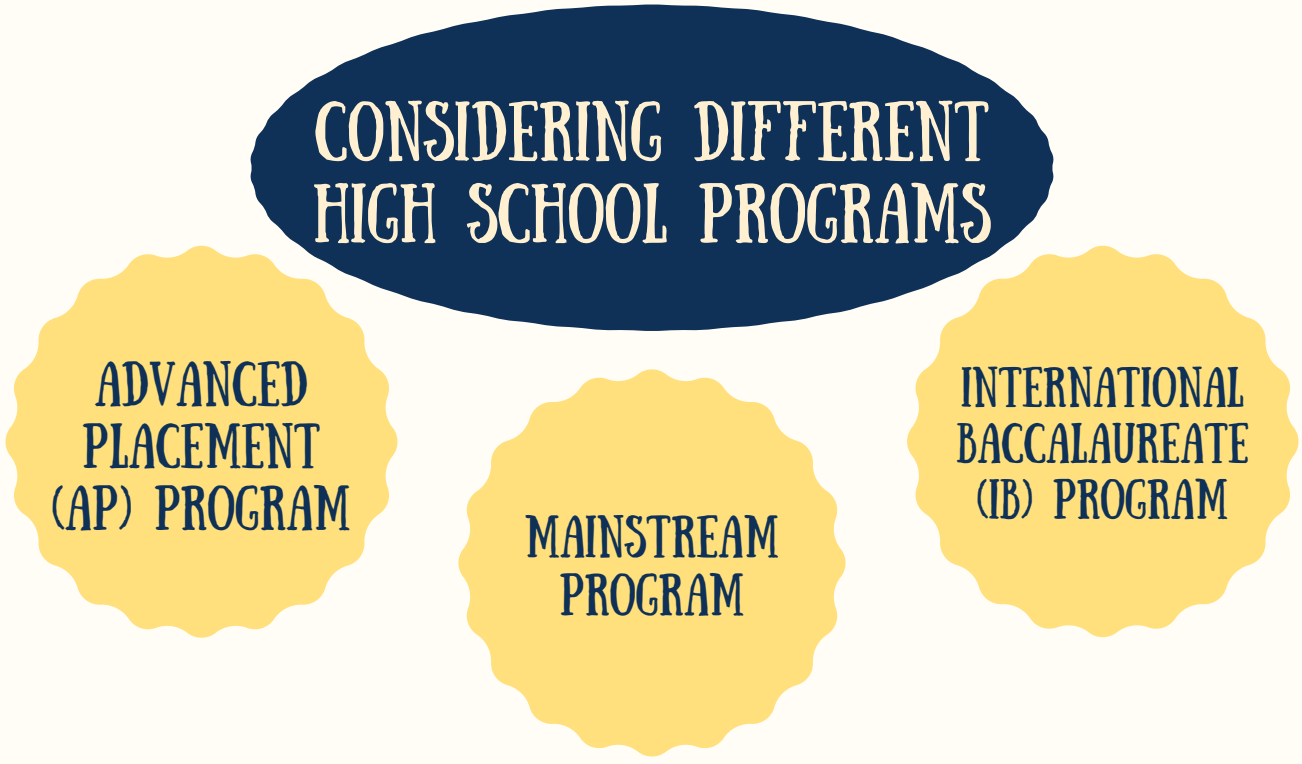




Before High School

Considering Different High School Programs

Selecting a high school program is an important decision that can influence a student's academic experience and future opportunities. Each program is designed with specific goals, offering distinct benefits as well as challenges. By carefully reviewing the structure, expectations, and outcomes of each option, students and families can make informed choices that support both academic success and personal growth.



Advanced Placement (AP) Program

The Advanced Placement (AP) program is a university readiness program in which students will fulfill the requirements of the Ontario curriculum, while experiencing additional enrichment to prepare them for standardized AP exams designed by the College Board, a U.S. education association. It is a Regional Choice Learning Program (RCLP) that you will have to apply to at the end of middle school.

AP exams: AP exams are standardized exams formulated by the College Board. They offer a way for students to test their knowledge on a variety of subjects ranging from Biology to English Literature and Composition. Exams are scored on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest score. Although Canadian universities DO NOT consider AP exams during admissions and they WILL NOT affect your average in school, they can still be used for transfer credits at certain universities and are useful for applications to universities programs abroad. For more information, please visit https://apstudents.collegeboard.org/.

Application Process: For the 2025–2026 school year, applications will likely open in semester 1 and consist of a written application plus a lottery. Visit your school board's RCLP webpage to see which schools offer AP, then contact the schools you wish to apply to.

Benefits: AP courses allow students to learn first-year university material in high school at low risk, since grading is still based on the Ontario curriculum. They prepare students for AP exams, which can support international university applications or provide early exposure to university-level learning.

Cons: The higher academic rigor may lower averages, and the heavier workload can cause stress or burnout. Because many AP students are high-achieving, the program may also feel highly competitive, leading to constant comparison or imposter syndrome.

International Baccalaureate (IB) Program

The IB Diploma Programme is an internationally recognized program completed between grades 11 and 12. It encourages personal growth through the development of interpersonal skills, world awareness, and academic rigour. For more information, please visit: https://www.ibo.org/

Application Process
In Ontario, students will apply to the program in the fall of Grade 8. All applicants must complete a graded assessment. This is usually an academic evaluation testing content from the Grade 7 curriculum, OR a collaborative activity + individual character paper (assessment varies by high school). Applicants are also required to submit a letter of recommendation and their Grade 7 Final Report Card.

Academic Requirements
Those accepted will start an enriched preparatory curriculum in Grades 9 and 10. All pre-IB courses will contain a "Z" or "7" at the end of the course code. Enrichment includes the mandatory completion of pre-IB Grade 11 Functions in the second semester of grade 10 (MCR3U7).

In grades 11 and 12, students will be formally enrolled in the IB Diploma Programme. They will work toward meeting both the OSSD requirements and IB Diploma requirements.

OSSD Requirements	IB Requirements
• Minimum 30 Credits • OSSLT (Grade 10 Literacy Test) • 2 Online Asynchronous courses • 40 hours of Community Involvement	**Six Groups:** ◦ 3 Standard Level (SL) courses ◦ 3 Higher Level (HL) courses **The Core:** ◦ Extended Essay (EE) ◦ Creativity, Activity and Service (CAS) ◦ Theory of Knowledge (TOK)

Six Groups

To ensure well-roundedness, the IBDP requires students to take six courses from 6 subject groups. Each student must choose one course per group, with 3-4 courses being higher level (HL) and 2-3 being standard level (SL). SL courses require 2 semesters of coursework, and are generally considered less challenging. HL courses require 3 semesters of coursework, encompassing more content at a greater difficulty. Each IB school offers different SL and HL courses. Please speak with your guidance counselor or IB Coordinator for further details on course offerings.

Ontario's IB subject requirements shown in table below. Please note that the additional letter behind the Ontario Course Code indicates standard (S) or higher (H) level.



GROUP 1: STUDIES IN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE LANGUAGE A: ENGLISH • ENG3US/H, ENG4US/H, ETS4UH	**GROUP 2: LANGUAGE ACQUISITION** LANGUAGE B: FRENCH • Semester 2 in Grade 11 (FSF3US) • Semester 1 in Grade 12(FSF4US)
GROUP 3: INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETIES May include one of the following (course offerings vary between schools): • ECONOMICS (CIE3MS/H, CIA4US/H, BBB4MH) • HISTORY (CHT3OS/H, CHY4US/H, CPW4UH) • PHILOSOPHY (HZB3MS, HZT4US)	**GROUP 4: SCIENCES** • BIOLOGY (SBI3US/H, SBI4US/H) • CHEMISTRY (SCH3US/H, SCH4US/H) • PHYSICS (SCH3US/H, SCH4US/H)
GROUP 5: MATHEMATICS • MATHEMATICS SL (MHF4US, MCV4US) • MATHEMATICS HL (MHF4UH, MCV4UH, MDM4UH)	**GROUP 6: THE ARTS** • MUSIC (AMI3MS/H, AMI4MS/H, AMC4MH) • VISUAL ARTS (AVI3MS/H, AVI4MS/H, AWN4MH) *Group 6 can be substituted with a science course.

Note: Students cannot take all 3 IB sciences (biology, chemistry and physics), as this contradicts the "well-roundedness" the program encourages. If a student is pursuing a degree in STEM, it is recommended to take IB chemistry, and one of IB physics or biology, depending on your programs of interest. If a student wishes to have all three sciences appear on their OSSD Transcript, they may take the outstanding subject in summer school.

The Core

In addition to the IB course load, the Diploma Programme also requires students to complete three core elements:

1) Extended Essay

The extended essay is an independent research project, requiring a 4000-word paper on one of the six subject groups.

2) Creativity, Activity and Service (CAS)

A project that requires students to demonstrate creativity, activity and service. Almost anything can count as a CAS project. It should last for at least a month, and must be completed within 18 months. Every school has slightly different CAS requirements, so please ask your guidance counsellors or IB Coordinator for specifics.

3) Theory of Knowledge (TOK)

A course on applied epistemology (the study of knowledge). Students learn about the development of knowledge, are encouraged to consider how beliefs are justified, and are challenged to be more creative in their thinking. Unlike other IB courses, TOK is marked in letter grades. In grade 12, students must also complete a major essay, which is sent to IB for grading.

IB Exams

Distributed between grades 11 and 12. Which exams a student takes per year will vary based on their school's SL and HL offerings. Please speak with your guidance counsellor or IB coordinator for more details.



IB Grading

IB courses are marked on a scale from 1 to 7. 1 indicates a grade in the fail range, whereas 7 represents the highest grade range possible (97-100%). A student's total IB score is out of 45, with a maximum of 42 points from 6 subject groups (7 being the highest grade per subject), and 3 points from the core elements (EE, CAS and TOK). To receive an IB diploma, a student must have a minimum total IB score of 24/45.

In Ontario, IB course marks are converted to their OSSD equivalents (percentage grades). If a student applies to Ontario post-secondary schools, these institutions will only use their converted OSSD marks for admission consideration.

IBSO Table of Equivalence in Ontario

IB 7-Point Scale	OSSD% Ranges
7	97-100%
6	93-96%
5	84-92%
4	72-83%
3	61-71%
2	50 to 60%
1	Below 50%

Benefits: Taking the IB Diploma Programme comes with multiple benefits. By introducing heavier work and curriculum in high school, graduates are often better prepared for the demands of post-secondary coursework. Additionally, the program is recognized by international universities, who often hold the program in high regard during admission consideration. Transfer credits are often awarded to students who have taken the IBDP.

Cons: The IB Diploma Programme often comes with high levels of stress. Strong time management skills are needed to balance the heavy subject workload and additional core element projects. The IB course selection is also quite limited, as students must take a set number of courses pertaining to each of the six subject groups, leaving little room for electives. In contrast, the AP program provides students with more flexibility, allowing students to individually select the advanced courses they wish to take. Also, the program does not require students to take a certain number of AP courses, allowing them to stay subject-specific.



Mainstream Program

The mainstream program follows the standard provincial curriculum and is the default academic pathway for students in high school. Unlike the AP program, students in the mainstream program are not required to apply in advance or participate in a lottery system. They take courses designed to meet provincial graduation requirements, with the option of selecting university (U), college (C), or mixed (M) level courses (in Ontario) depending on their post-secondary goals.

Mainstream courses cover the Ontario curriculum and are assessed entirely on said basis. These courses do not include additional enrichment or content beyond graduation requirements. As a result, the material is more manageable, and course loads tend to be lighter compared to AP classes. This allows students to maintain a strong average, which is important for admission to competitive Canadian schools (many admission decisions are based solely on grades. The mainstream program is suited for students who want to focus on maintaining a high average, reducing academic stress, and preserving time for extracurriculars, part-time work, or personal interests. Since university admissions in Ontario are primarily based on your top six Grade 12 U/M courses, being in the mainstream program does not put you at a disadvantage in the admissions process. It offers a flexible and balanced approach to high school education.

While the mainstream program is less intense, it may not provide the same level of academic challenge or enrichment as the AP or IB programs. Students interested in experiencing university-level content early, or those applying to international universities that consider AP exam scores, may find fewer opportunities here. Additionally, students in the mainstream program won't be directly prepared for AP exams unless they self-study. Students who take AP classes may also have the opportunity to "transfer" their AP credits to their post-secondary institutions, whereas students in mainstream programs cannot.

ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL DIPLOMA
A FULLY REGULATED PUBLIC QUALIFICATION

Grade 9 to 10

Transitioning to Middle School

Welcome to high school! Grade 9 is very different from middle school, as you will have more independence, freedom, and responsibility. One of those responsibilities is staying organized, as your teachers will no longer enforce homework completion or constantly remind you of upcoming assessments. Moreover, you will be juggling additional responsibilities, such as clubs, work, and post-secondary applications. It's important to develop strong time management and self-regulation skills, as your performance in school is up to you now! Below, you'll find some organizational tips we have; feel free to implement what you think is most effective for yourself.

ORGANIZATION TIPS

- MAKE A STUDY PLAN FOR QUIZZES, EXAMS AND TESTS
- KEEP A CALENDAR OF IMPORTANT DATES AND DEADLINES
- KEEP YOUR NOTES AND WORKSHEETS ORGANIZED
- PLAN YOUR DAY OR WEEK IN ADVANCE



Keep a calendar of deadlines and important dates:

- Whether you keep a physical calendar or use an online application, it is good practice to keep track of your deadlines, tests, and important dates on a calendar.
- Some recommendations we have for online calendars include Notion Calendar and Google Calendar, which allow you to schedule events and their timings. You can even enable desktop or phone notifications on these calendar applications to receive reminders.

Plan your day or week in advance:

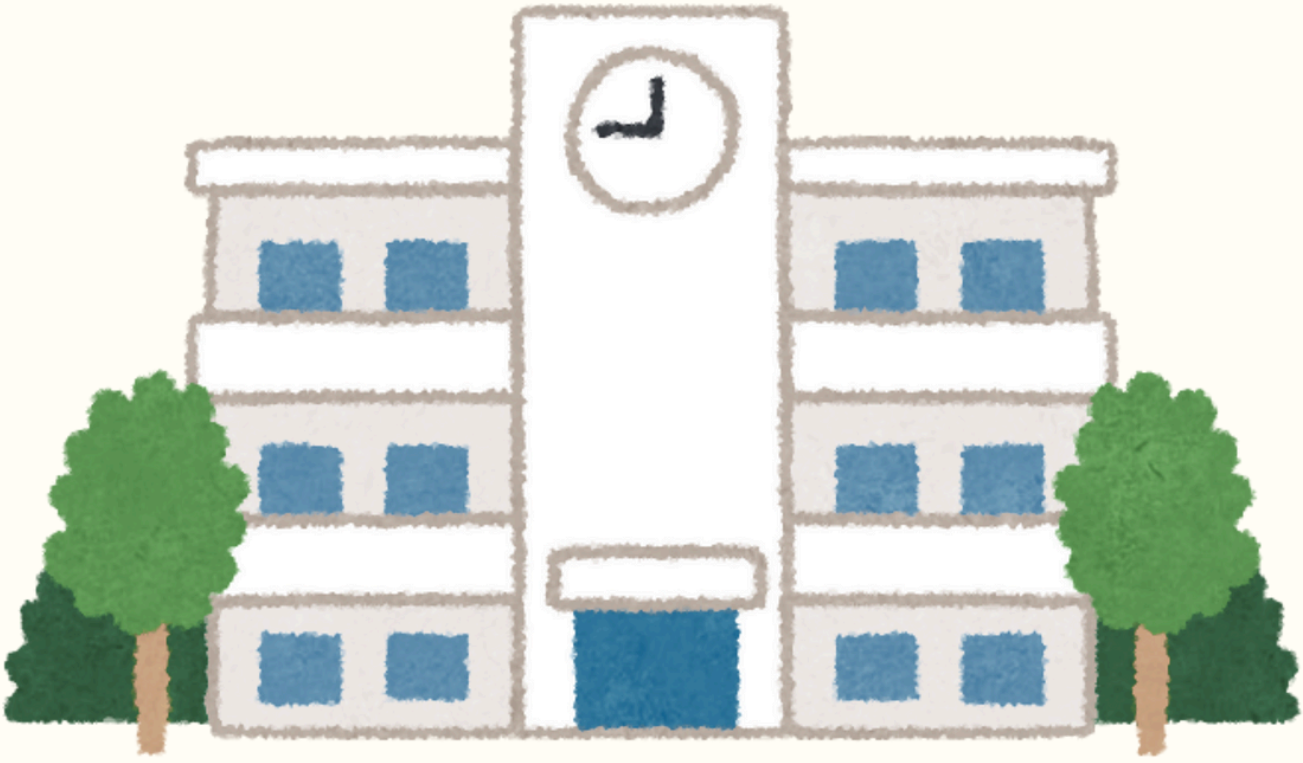
- Block out specific times within your day when you will work on certain assignments, attend extracurriculars, and study for assessments.
- Again, we recommend keeping some sort of schedule, whether physical or digital, where you can "time block" and plan out your tasks for the day.
- It is a good idea to do this the weekend before, as well as plan according to the priority of the task. If something is due in the next few days, then it should be prioritized over something that is due in a month.

Make a study plan for quizzes, tests, and exams:

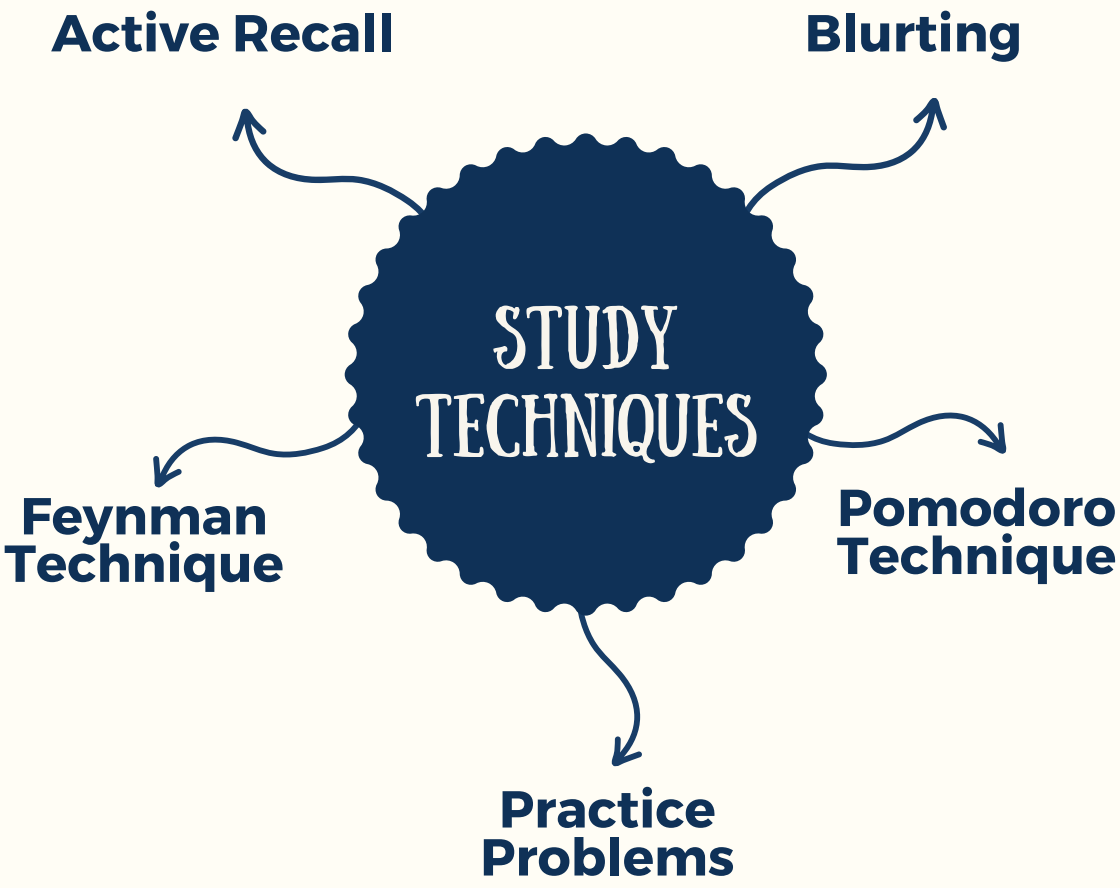
- While planning out your tasks, you can also make accompanying study schedules.
- For example, if you have an upcoming test in a week, you can block out 1-2 hours for the first 3 days to review content, and then block out 2-3 hours in the last 3 days to do practice problems.
- It is good practice to not only block out time to study every day, but also plan out which topics and practice problems you're doing each day.

Keep your notes and worksheets organized:

- You will have more paperwork in high school compared to middle school; this includes worksheets, notes, and tests.
- To stay organized with all your material, we recommend buying a large binder, hole punching all your papers, and storing all of them in your binder.
- You can also buy binder separators for each specific subject to stay more organized.
- If you decide to take digital notes on Goodnotes, OneNote, or Notability, you can also organize them by date, topic, and subject and download them onto your device.



Study Techniques



In high school, you can expect an increase in the amount of time and content you have to study compared to middle school. More content is covered at a faster pace, and there is greater weight on assessments such as assignments, quizzes, tests, and final exams. Many people struggle in Grades 11 and 12 because they haven't established good studying techniques in Grades 9 and 10, so it's important to explore different techniques to find the ones that work best for you. Below, we have detailed a few study techniques that you can try, along with the subjects for which they are best suited.

Things to keep in mind:

- While studying, make sure to limit distractions by putting your phone out of reach in another room, finding a quiet space where you can focus, and getting comfortable (but not too comfortable).
- Whether you're working at home, in a library, or in a cafe, make sure you find somewhere easy for you to focus and be productive!
- Additionally, before a test, it is a good idea to simulate a "test environment": time yourself while doing practice problems, move somewhere quiet, and eliminate distractions.



Active recall and spaced repetition:

- Active recall involves memorizing information and retrieving it without looking back at your notes, and spaced repetition involves retrieving the information at fixed time intervals, with the intervals increasing over time and as you become more familiar with the content.
- A method of active recall and spaced repetition is using flashcards; the application Anki is one of the most popular applications used for making flashcards.



Blurting:

- Blurting is a form of active recall where you write down everything you know about a topic without looking at your notes, and then comparing what you've written down with your notes afterwards.
- Once you have identified content that you have missed, you can review that information and repeat the process of blurting once again.
- This helps reinforce knowledge gaps and highlight areas that require further review.



Feynman technique:

- The Feynman technique is a method for understanding and internalizing information.
  - It involves first choosing a topic first and studying it, and trying to internalize the information while doing so.
  - Then, you will have to teach the topic to someone; this could be either a friend, parent, sibling, or imaginary audience.
  - Next, they can ask you questions about your content, or you can keep track of the topics that you're having trouble explaining.
  - Finally, go back and review the content, filling in any gaps in knowledge that you've identified and repeat the process until you can clearly and succinctly explain the content.



Pomodoro technique:

- The Pomodoro technique is a method where you study in time increments, separated by short breaks.
- The most common time increments are 25 minutes of studying followed by 5 minutes of break, which make up one “Pomodoro”.
- Usually, four Pomodoros are completed at a time, followed by a longer break that is 15-30 minutes.
- This method improves focus, time management, & it minimizes distractions.



Practice problems:

- Although not a study technique, doing practice problems is arguably the best way to improve your critical thinking skills and familiarize yourself with exam-level content.
- Whether it’s doing textbook problems, going through past exams, or redoing in-class worksheets, the more problems you are exposed to, the more you will understand which approaches to use for certain types of problems.

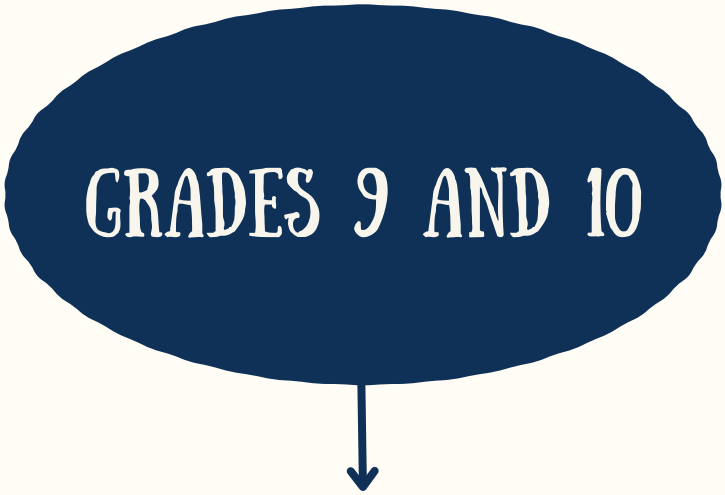


Post-Secondary Pathways

Schooling	Description	Length
College	Equips students with the knowledge and abilities needed for particular professions or industries. Learning often involves practical, hands-on experiences, and academic programs emphasize both theoretical foundations and technical skills relevant to the field. • www.ontariocolleges.ca	Depending on the credentials that are being earned, college programs can be 1-3 years.
University	University programs emphasize theoretical learning, encouraging independent study and the development of critical thinking skills. Students have the flexibility to choose a major, minor, or area of specialization across a wide range of academic disciplines. • www.ouac.on.ca/ • https://www.ouinfo.ca/	Most programs are 3-5 years; however, course load can vary.
Apprenticeship	Apprenticeship programs combine paid on-the-job training with classroom instruction, allowing individuals to gain practical experience while learning a skilled trade. Participants work under the guidance of experienced professionals, developing hands-on expertise and industry-specific knowledge over time • https://www.canada.ca/en/services/jobs/training/support-skilled-trades-apprentices/provinces-territories.html • https://www.skilledtradesontario.ca/apprenticeship/	3-4 years
Workplace	Some students choose to join the workforce immediately after high school, with no plans to pursue further education. Others take on jobs to save money and help cover the cost of post-secondary studies in the future. • https://www.hdsb.ca/students/Pages/Secondary%20School/Guide%20to%20Post-Secondary/Work-Pathway.aspx	N/A

Course Selection

Course selection is an overlooked yet crucial aspect of your high school journey. In grades 9 and 10, most courses are already pre-determined for you (compulsory courses).



- Typically, in grade 9, you will take 8 mandatory courses, with space for 2 elective courses.
- Elective courses are a range of courses that are not obligatory for you to take throughout your high school journey, but are available in case you want to fill up your elective course space.
- In each year of high school, you will have the opportunity to incorporate elective courses into your schedule.
- In grades 9 and 10, we recommend that you focus on taking elective courses to further explore your subject interests.
- Common examples of elective courses include business courses, computer science/studies-based courses, the arts, second language courses (e.g., french), amongst many more.
- Utilize these courses to explore where your courses lie and which courses you may take at a higher level in grade 11 and 12.

GRADES 11 AND 12

- Grades 11 and 12 are a lot more critical in terms of course selection.
- In these grades, it is important to take courses that meet the pre-requisite requirements of the post-secondary programs you will be applying to.
- Pre-requisites refer to courses designated by post-secondary institutions that you must take in order to be eligible to apply to a specific post-secondary program.
- It is crucial that you research the admission requirements for the programs you're interested in ahead of time, as early as possible.
- This will give you ample opportunity to plan your grade 11 and 12 schedules effectively.
- For instance, if you're interested in pursuing engineering, you'll likely need Advanced Functions, Calculus and Vectors, and some of the sciences.
- Amidst this process, make sure you are taking your grade 11 and 12 courses at the right level to make you eligible for the programs you will be applying to.
- The distinguishing feature is taking college (3C or 4C courses) vs. university courses (3U or 4U courses).

UNIVERSITY

- University programs will require you to only take university-level courses (these are courses that have 3U or 4U codes) OR mixed-level courses (denoted by 3M or 4M courses).
- Thus, if you will be applying to a post-secondary program at a university, make sure you take courses at these levels. If your desired program requires grade 12 high school biology, make sure to take SBI4U0 and not SBI4C0, for example.

COLLEGE

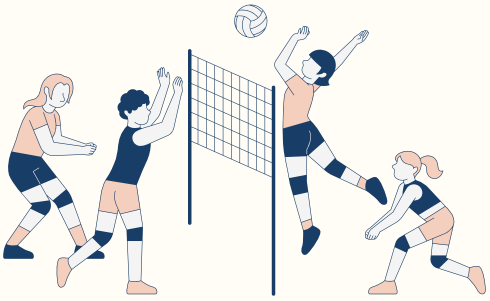
- Similarly, if applying to some college programs, they may not require you to take courses at the university level, but rather you are able to take college level courses (at the 3C or 4C level).
- These courses usually have a lighter workload, which may appeal to you if you don't plan to pursue further studies in that subject.

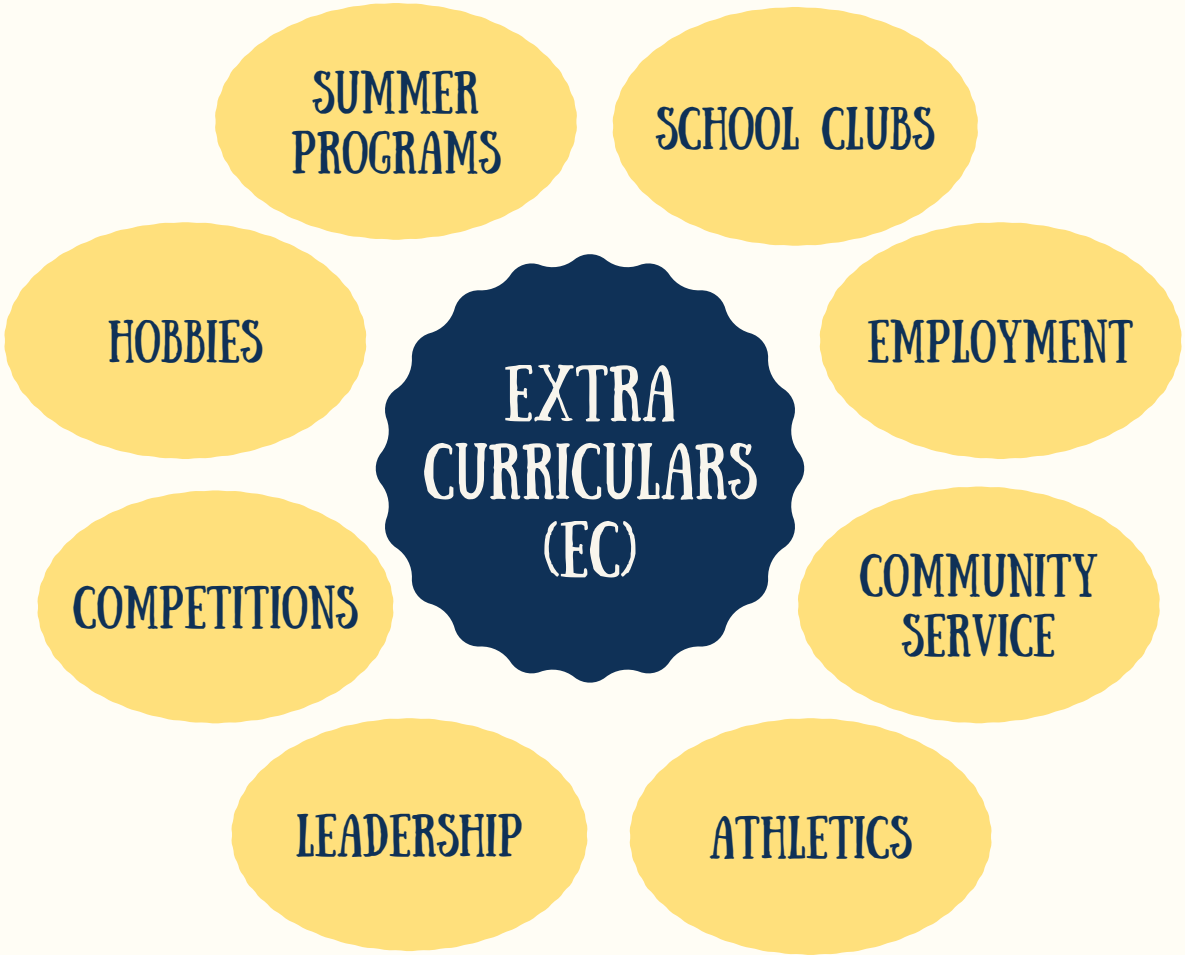
Ultimately, don't be afraid to seek guidance. Your school's guidance counselors are there to help you navigate course selection, understand graduation requirements, and align your choices with your future goals. Talk to older students, teachers, or mentors to gain insight into what certain courses are like and how they might fit into your long-term plan.

Extracurriculars

An extracurricular is essentially any non-academic activity. They are important because post-secondary institutions or future employers want to know who you are outside of the classroom, and participating in extracurricular helps you demonstrate these non-academic capabilities. Not only do extracurriculars help develop your interpersonal skills, but they will also aid in your university application process. Below, you can find examples of extracurriculars and the categories they fall into.





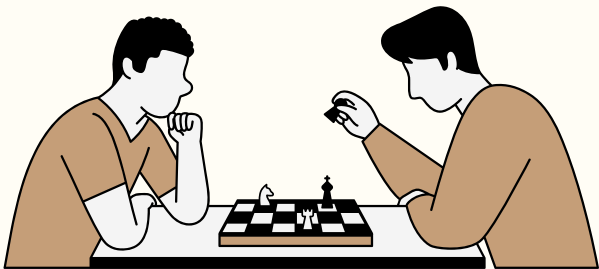


EC Category	Examples
School Clubs	**Competition-based:** • DECA - club that hosts business competitions. Allows you to practice your oral skills and apply business knowledge. • HOSA - club that hosts healthcare-related competitions. Allows you to learn about and apply medicine-based information. • Model UN - an educational simulation of the United Nations (UN). Helps students understand how the UN is run, while fostering debate and public speaking skills. **Leadership-based:** • Student council or government - demonstrates leadership, advocacy, teamwork, and communication • Peer mentoring - club centered around mentoring younger students and helping them transition into high school • Tutoring - some schools run drop-in tutoring sessions for different topics during exam season; volunteering as a tutor can be a great experience! **Interest-based:** • Anything - think of an interest and there will probably be a club for it...if not, consider creating your own!
Community Service	• Hospital wayfinding, front-desk, or gift shop • Environmental conservation (ex. Credit Valley Conservation) • Animal shelters • Food banks • Sports coaching • Joining local non-profit organizations (ex. Mississauga Youth Action Committee) • Community events (ex. Ribfest, Japan Festival Canada) • Political canvassing) • Long-term care homes or senior homes
Employment	• Education (ex. Tutoring at Kumon) • Food and beverage (ex. Fast food worker, waitress, • barista, etc.) • Retail (ex. Cashiers, sales associates, etc.) • Recreation and entertainment (ex. Cinema attendants, amusement park attendants, camp counsellor, etc.) • Internships (ex. SickKids STAR Program, Emile Stowe Scholars Program, RBC Summer Tech Labs)

Athletics	• School sports teams (ex. Cross country, Track and Field, Volleyball, Basketball, etc.) • Competitive sports (ex. Dance, badminton, baseball, swimming, etc.)
Leadership	• Community service organizations (ex. Local food banks, animal shelters, immigration centres, STEMBuddies, etc.) • Social justice/humanitarian organizations (ex. UNICEF, Red Cross, United Nations, etc.) • Religious organizations (ex. church)
Competitions	• UWaterloo CEMC competitions • U of T National Biology Competition • Olympiad competitions • Ivey High School Case Competitions • Sir Isaac Newton Exam • STEM Fairs – Youth Science Canada • HOSA, DECA, FBLA, MUN
Hobbies	• Could be anything! • Common hobbies include rock climbing, painting, reading, competitive dancing, etc.
Summer Programs	• SHAD Canada • UofT Summer Mentorship Program (SMP) • SickKids Summer Mentorship Program • Catalyst @ UWaterloo

School clubs:

- School clubs are usually organized by students and are often based around a certain activity or hobby.
- Usually, most schools have existing clubs but also allow students to create their own club through a ratification process.
- Joining clubs as a general member is a great way to explore your interests and learn more about certain topics, such as science, politics, or literature, and gaining an executive position or starting your own club helps you gain leadership experience within your school community.



- School clubs often fall into 3 different categories: competition-based, leadership-based, and interest-based.
- Competition-based clubs often culminate in some sort of national- or international-level competition, such as HOSA or DECA. These clubs are very common and standardized, and can be found in most schools across Ontario.
- Leadership-based clubs such as student council or government advocate for student rights, or provide a service, like one-on-one mentorship for younger students or free tutoring during lunchtime. Most of these clubs are run by school admin or the guidance team.
- Lastly, interest-based clubs are very diverse; you can find clubs ranging from Chemistry Club to Visual Arts Society. These clubs are a great way to explore your interests and potentially demonstrate your passion for a certain topic.

Community service:

- Community service, or volunteering, is any unpaid experience done to support a cause.
- Volunteering can be extremely diverse, as anything done to help another entity can be considered a volunteer experience.
- In Ontario, high school students are required to complete 40 hours of mandatory community service; most students choose to work with local organizations and complete tasks such as collecting donations for food banks, helping at an animal shelter, volunteering at a retirement home, or participating in community events.
- Activities that are ineligible include requirements for a class (eg. co-op placements), paid work, activities that take place during school hours, or duties performed around your house.
- To find nearby volunteer opportunities, you simply have to search “volunteering opportunities [insert city name]”, and you should find an official webpage from your city or region with a list of available opportunities.



- Your school board and school should also have active volunteer postings.
- We also recommend exploring your interests, for example, if you are passionate about helping seniors, you can search “senior home volunteering near me” on Google and apply to postings you are interested in.



Employment:

- Employment refers to any paid work experience where you contribute your time, skills, and effort in exchange for monetary compensation.
- This could include part-time, full-time, seasonal, or casual jobs.
- For high school students, common forms of employment include working at retail stores, restaurants, summer camps, tutoring, or assisting in family-owned businesses.
- Employment can be a great way to develop essential life skills such as time management, responsibility, communication, and teamwork, while also earning income.
- To legally work in Ontario, students under 18 must follow certain regulations regarding hours of work, types of jobs, and their age.
- For example, 14- and 15-year-olds can only work in specific sectors (like retail or food service), while 16- and 17-year-olds can work more broadly but still face restrictions, especially during school hours.
- You do not need a work permit, but you will need a Social Insurance Number (SIN) to get paid legally.
- To find employment, you can search online job boards like Indeed or the Government of Canada Job Bank, check local businesses for “Now Hiring” signs, or ask friends, family, and teachers for leads.
- School guidance departments may also offer job boards or connections to youth employment programs.
- When applying, you typically need a résumé and sometimes a short cover letter.

- For help in structuring your CV and cover letter, join the STEMBuddies Discord through our Instagram @stembuddies_canada for assistance!

Athletics:

- Athletics refers to participation in physical sports, games, or fitness activities, whether recreational or competitive.
- Being involved in athletics can include playing on a school sports team (such as basketball, soccer, or track and field), joining a local community league, participating in martial arts, swimming lessons, or even regularly attending a gym.
- Athletics can help build physical fitness, discipline, teamwork, leadership, and resilience, qualities that are valuable both in and out of school.
- In high school, athletic opportunities may include tryouts for varsity or junior teams, intramural sports leagues, or joining athletic councils.
- Many students also participate in sports outside of school, such as through city leagues or private clubs.
- These activities can count as extracurriculars when applying to post-secondary programs and scholarships, especially if you've demonstrated commitment, sportsmanship, or earned leadership roles like team captain.
- To get involved, look out for announcements from your school's athletics department at the start of the school year, or visit your school's website for sign-up dates and eligibility requirements.
- You can also search online for "[your city] youth sports leagues" or visit local recreation centers to explore non-school athletic options that match your interests and fitness goals
- Despite not being "traditional" activities included on post-secondary applications, involvement in athletics reflects a personality and commitment that is quite unique to post-secondary institutions, helping you stand out from the thousands of students applying.



Leadership:

- Leadership involves taking initiative, guiding others, and making decisions that help a group, team, or community achieve a shared goal.
- You don't need a formal title to be a leader, leadership can be shown in classrooms, clubs, teams, or volunteer groups by stepping up, helping others, and being a positive role model.
- That said, many high school students demonstrate leadership through roles like student council representative, club executive, team captain, camp counsellor, or peer mentor.
- Leadership experiences are highly valued by post-secondary programs, scholarships, and employers.
- Even helping organize a fundraiser, leading a group project, or mentoring younger students can count as leadership experience if you took charge and made a meaningful contribution.
- To get involved, start by looking for opportunities within your school, such as running in student elections, joining leadership-focused clubs, or volunteering to lead school events or initiatives.
- You can also develop leadership outside of school by taking on roles in community organizations, youth councils, or faith-based groups.
- If there aren't existing opportunities, you can create your own, such as starting a club, organizing a community clean-up, or launching a social media campaign for a cause you care about.



Competitions:

- Competitions are organized events where individuals or teams compete to showcase their knowledge, skills, or talents in a specific area.
- These can range from academic contests like math or science Olympiads, DECA, and Model UN, to creative or technical challenges such as writing contests, art shows, coding hackathons, business case competitions, and sports tournaments.
- Some are school-based, while others are regional, national, or even international.
- Participating in competitions pushes you to challenge yourself and learn beyond the classroom.
- Strong performance in competitions—especially at the regional or national level—can make your post-secondary applications stand out, and may even lead to awards, scholarships, or networking opportunities.
- To get involved, listen for school announcements, visit your school's guidance office or club bulletin boards, and talk to teachers who may coach or sponsor teams.
- You can also search online for competitions that match your interests (e.g., "high school science competitions Canada" or "youth poetry contests 2025").
- Many competitions now also offer virtual options, making them more accessible. Whether you win or not, the experience of preparing and participating is often just as valuable as the outcome.



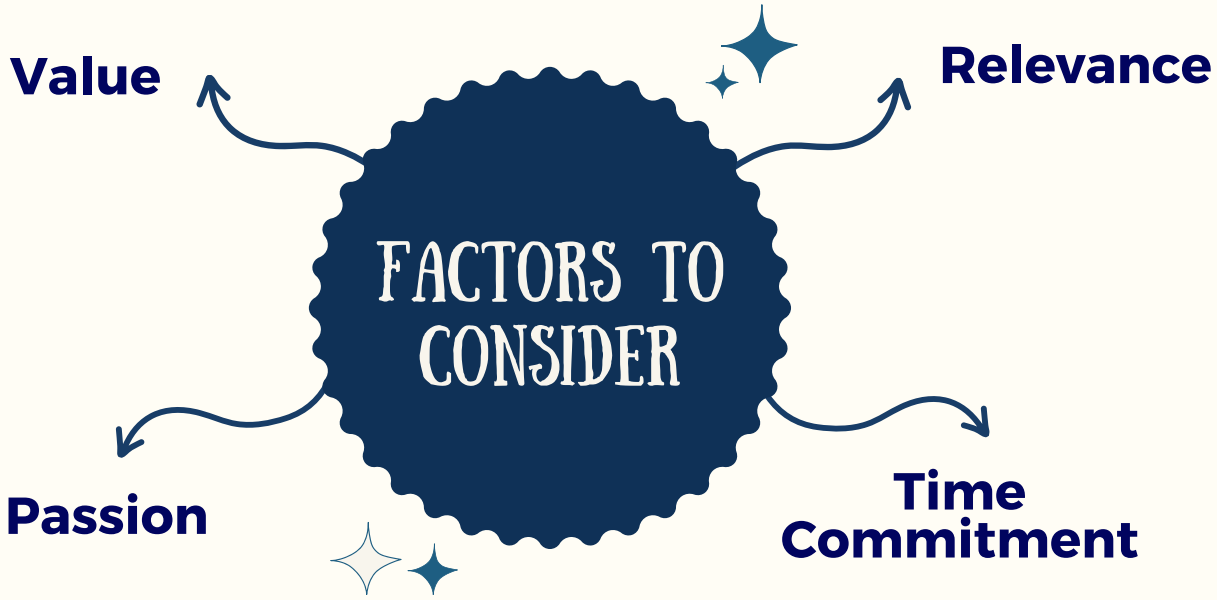
Hobbies:

- Hobbies are activities you enjoy doing in your free time for personal interest or relaxation.
- They are not typically tied to school, work, or volunteer responsibilities, but they play an important role in personal development.
- Common hobbies among high school students include reading, writing, drawing, coding, playing music, baking, photography, gaming, or learning new languages. Hobbies can also be physical activities like hiking, dancing, yoga, or skateboarding.
- While they may seem informal, hobbies provide a healthy outlet for stress and are a great way to explore your passions.
- Many post-secondary programs and scholarship applications ask about your interests outside of school, so sharing hobbies can help showcase your personality and individuality.
- If you're unsure what your hobbies are, think about what activities make you lose track of time in a good way. You can also try out new ones by joining school clubs, attending community workshops, exploring online tutorials (e.g., YouTube), or visiting your local library or recreation centre.
- Remember, hobbies don't need to be competitive or "productive," if you enjoy doing it, and it helps you grow or recharge, it counts.



How to Pick the Right Extracurriculars

When choosing between the many extracurriculars offered in high school, you may feel overwhelmed or confused. To narrow down your options, we recommend that you consider the following factors.



Value:

- When considering an EC, you should ensure the activity provides you the opportunity to gain value experiences, as it may be referred to in the future.
- For example, if you struggle with public speaking, you could consider joining your school's Model UN club to practice talking in front of larger crowds.
- In future interviews or applications, you may encounter questions about overcoming challenges. You could use this experience as an example in your response.

Relevance:

- Ensure your ECs align with your pathway and career considerations.
- Oftentimes, many career pathways require students to partake in certain events to build competence in their fields of interest.

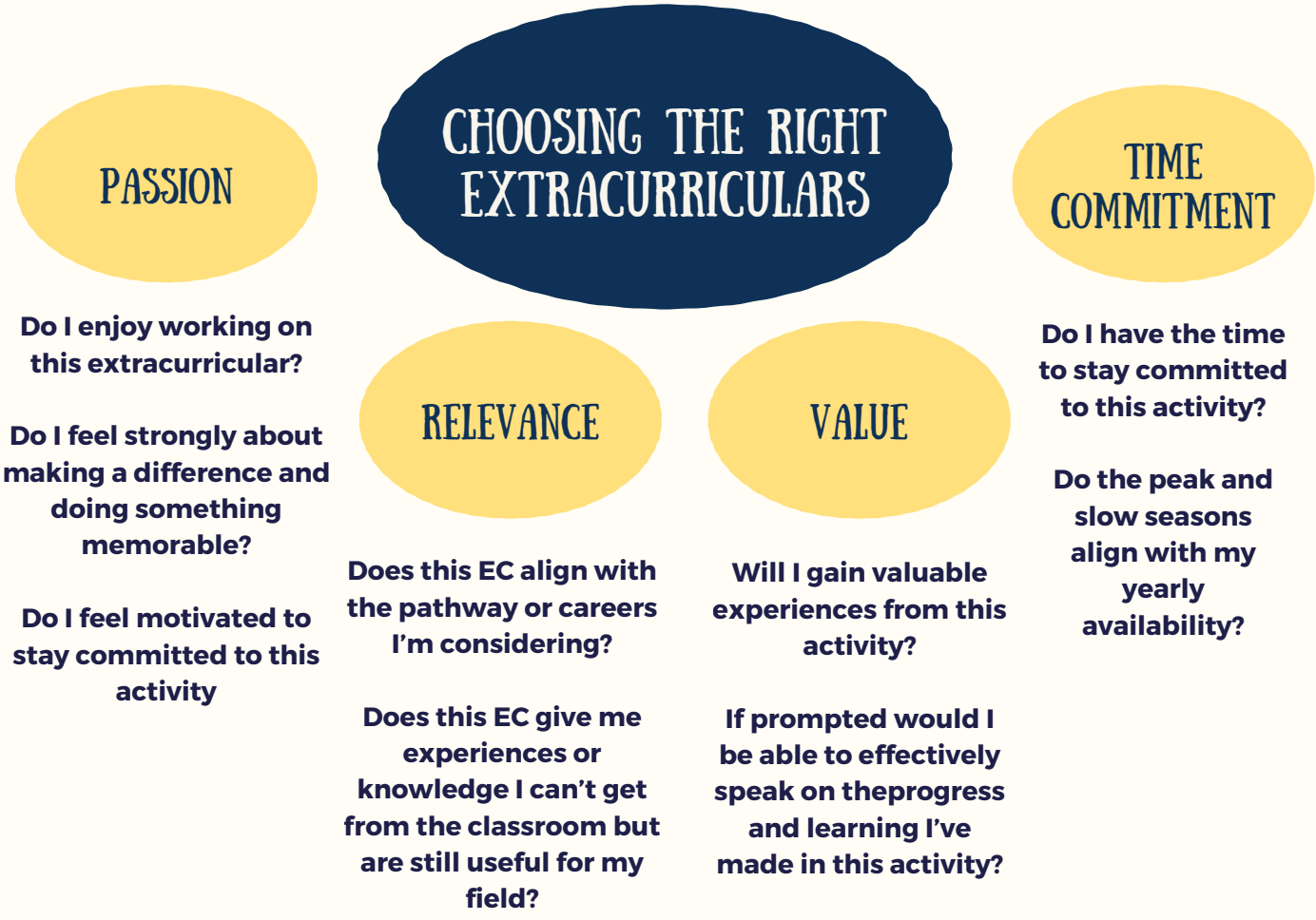
- For instance, for students considering medical school, it is often recommended to pursue ECs pertaining to healthcare, such as clinical volunteering or research.
- This allows applicants to familiarize themselves with patient care and the methods behind clinical advancements, both of which are strong focal points of medicine.

Passion:
We suggest that you choose ECs that you are passionate about. This will ensure that you show up and stay consistent, allowing you to make a significant difference.
Additionally, having a passion for your ECs will make it easier when referring to them during interviews or applications.
For example, if you chose to join a robotics club, but don't actually enjoy machine design and coding, you will likely not show up to the activity anymore.
If you are asked about your role in the club, or why you decided to partake in the activity, it will be very difficult to provide a succinct response.

Time Commitment:
- ECs may require a lot of commitment, so it is important that you have enough time for them.
- To ensure you can commit to a specific activity, consider how much time you need to study and attend school. If you have enough time for an additional activity, you should join.
- If not, consider applying when you have a lighter workload, or opt for a different EC that aligns with your availability.



- It is important to remember academics should take precedence over ECs, as you do not want to fall behind in school.
- Additionally, you should also consider if an EC has peak or slow seasons that suit your schedule.
- For example, if you are considering becoming a full-time camp counselor, you should expect to commit a large amount of time in the summer, with few to no hours during the school year. In contrast, a school club needs consistent effort throughout the regular academic year, but requires you to put in a lower number of weekly hours compared to a full-time summer job.



Awards

- Throughout your high school years, you'll have many opportunities to be recognized for your achievements, growth, and contributions.
- Awards are not just about getting the highest grades; they also acknowledge effort, leadership, creativity, and the positive impact you make in your school community.
- You might receive recognition for academic excellence, significant improvement, or outstanding character and citizenship. If you take on leadership roles, get involved in school clubs, or help organize events, your initiative may also be celebrated. Likewise, your dedication to athletics, music, art, or drama can lead to awards that highlight your talents and commitment.
- These recognitions not only feel rewarding but can also support future opportunities, such as scholarships, college applications, and job prospects.
- No matter the area, every achievement counts. If you see an award application, fill it out, even if you are unsure if you will be awarded it. Practicing award applications will be useful in your early years in high school, as you gear towards submitting more awards applications in your later years.



Grade 11 & 12

University Program Requirements

Congratulations, you've made it to Grades 11 and 12! By now, you should have a rough idea of what you would like to pursue in your post-secondary endeavors. After exploring some of the introductory STEM courses in Grades 9 and 10, you're ready to take on more challenging and specialized courses in Grades 11 and 12!

Although it's very important to keep in mind which courses you have an interest in, you will also need to do some research on pre-requisite courses for the specific post-secondary programs you're applying to. As mentioned previously, a prerequisite course is any course you must complete in high school before applying to your desired post-secondary programs. As long as you complete the required prerequisite courses for the post-secondary programs you are applying to before you graduate Grade 12, then you will be eligible to submit an application to said programs.

Many prerequisites are Grade 12 courses, some of which can only be taken if their Grade 11 pre-requisites are completed (yes, Grade 12 courses also have prerequisites!) For example, if you are required to take Grade 12 Biology for a Life Sciences program, then you must also take Grade 11 biology. For more information about course selection, please reach out to the guidance office at your school to ensure you are completing all of a post-secondary program's prerequisites, as well as complete your own research on your programs of choice BEFORE Grade 11.



Most university programs will require specific 12U or 4U level courses, so ensure you are not only taking the right courses, but also University (U) level courses. Additionally, many post-secondary programs will require a minimum mark in certain courses, so also make sure you meet the required mark cutoffs.

In addition to pre-requisite courses, some post-secondary programs will also require applicants to fulfill additional requirements. For example, McMaster Health Sciences is known to require applicants to write a supplementary application consisting of short essay questions, and all Waterloo University applicants are required to fill out an Admission Information Form (AIF) that details an applicant's extracurricular involvement.

***The tables below include common prerequisites and additional requirements for different pathways.**

****Note that this is not an exhaustive list. Please complete your own research for more details about specific programs.**

University Pathway	Program Examples *This is a short register of programs for each pathway. It is not an exhaustive list	Competitive Average (based off of subjective knowledge)	Typical Academic Prerequisites *Programs do not have the same prereqs	Potential Additional Requirements *Programs do not have the same additional requirements
Nursing	McMaster University, BScN Queen's University, BNSc Western University, BScN	Minimum 85% for consideration High 80s to low 90s High 80s to low 90s	12U Biology 12U Chemistry 12U Math (varies between programs) 12U English *Two additional U or M courses	Supplementary application CASPER test

Engineering ***General indicates a type of engineering (ex. mechanical, chemical, mechatronics, civil, etc.)**	**U of T, Engineering Science** **U of T, General* engineering** **UWaterloo, engineering specializations in (electrical, computer, mechanical, biomedical, etc.)** **McMaster University, General* engineering** **Queen's University, General* engineering** **Western University, General* engineering**	**High 90s** **Low 90s to high 90s** ***Average depends on speciality** **Low 90s to high 90s** ***Average depends on speciality** **High 80s to low 90s** **Low 90s** **High 80s to low 90s**	**12U Physics** **12U Chemistry** **12U Advanced Functions** **12U Calculus and Vectors** **12U English** ***One additional U or M course**	**Supplementary application** **CASPER test** **Interview**
Computer Science	**UWaterloo, CS** **U of T (St.George Campus), CS** **U of T (Mississauga Campus), CS** **U of T (Scarborough), CS** **McMaster, CS**	**High 90s** **High 90s** **High 80s, low 90s** **High 90s (no supp-app)** **High 90s**	**12U Calculus and Vectors** **12U Advanced Functions** **12U English** ***Three additional U or M courses** ****12U Computer Science and 12U Mathematics of Data Management are often recommended, but not required**	**Supplementary application** **Interview**

General, Medical and Life Sciences	**Western University, Medical Sciences** **McMaster University, Life Sciences** **Queen's University, Life Sciences** **U of T, Life Sciences (all campuses)**	**Low 90s** **Low 90s** **Low 90s** **High 80s to low 90s**	**12U Biology** **12U Chemistry** **12U Math (varies between programs)** **12U English** ***Two additional U or M courses** ***12U Physics often recommended, but not required**	**N/A**
Health Sciences	**McMaster University, BHSc** **Queen's University, BHSc** **UOttawa, BHSc** **Western University, BHSc**	**90+ for consideration** **Mid 90s to high 90s** **Mid 80s** **High 80s to low 90s**	**12U Biology** **12U Chemistry** **12U Math (varies between programs)** **12U English** ***Two additional U or M courses**	**Supplementary application**

College Pathway	Program Examples *This is a short register of programs for each pathway. It is not an exhaustive list	Competitive Average (based off of subjective knowledge)	Typical Academic Prerequisites *Programs do not have the same prereqs	Potential Additional Requirements *Programs do not have the same additional requirements
Nursing	Seneca Polytechnic, BSN Humber Polytechnic, BScN Centennial College	Minimum 75% in required courses Completion of all required courses 70-75%	12U/C Biology 12U/C Chemistry 12U/C Math (varies between programs) 12U/C English *Two additional U or M courses	Mature student status, or at least 19 years of age OSSD
Engineering Technician Programs *There are many types of engineering technician programs, but most of them follow the same prerequisites	Centennial College Durham College George Brown College	Completion of all required courses	12U/C Math 12U/C English	Mature student status, or at least 19 years of age OSSD
Computer Programming	Sheridan College} George Brown College Durham College	Completion of all required courses	12U/C Math 12U/C English	Mature student status, or at least 19 years of age OSSD

College Pathway	Program Examples *This is a short register of programs for each pathway. It is not an exhaustive list	Competitive Average (based off of subjective knowledge)	Typical Academic Prerequisites *Programs do not have the same prereqs	Potential Additional Requirements *Programs do not have the same additional requirements
General Arts and Sciences Program	Sheridan College George Brown College Durham College	Completion of all required courses	12U/C English	Mature student status, or at least 19 years of age OSSD
Pre-Health Sciences Pathway to Advanced Diplomas and Degrees (PHS) *The PHS certificate grants students ability to apply to various healthcare programs in other post-secondary institutions	Seneca College George Brown College Sheridan College	Completion of all required courses	12U/C Math 12U/C English	Mature student status, or at least 19 years of age OSSD

How to Navigate OUAC

PURPOSE

If you're planning to apply to universities in Ontario, you'll use the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC) to manage your applications. OUAC is an online platform where you can research programs, apply to multiple universities, and track the status of your applications all in one place.

GETTING STARTED

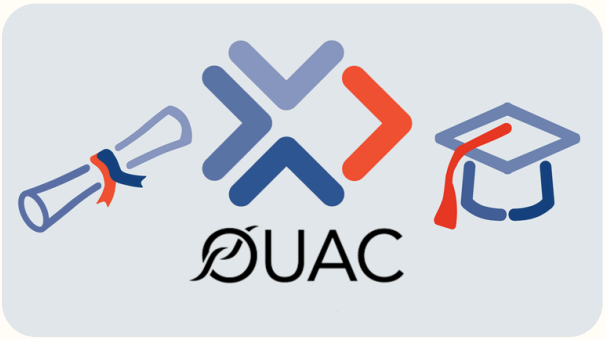
To get started, visit www.ouac.on.ca and select the appropriate application type (usually the "101" application for current Ontario high school students). You'll receive access details from your school, including your personal PIN, which you'll need to log in.

USING OUAC

Once inside, you can search for programs, add your choices, and rank them in any order. Make sure to review each university's requirements and deadlines carefully, as they can vary. After submitting your application and paying the fee, you'll receive confirmation and can log in anytime to make updates or check your status.

AFTER SUBMISSION

Remember to keep track of your OUAC login and monitor your email regularly for updates from both OUAC and the universities you've applied to. Staying organized and informed will help make the application process smoother and less stressful. Typically, when you receive your admission offer decisions, you will be accepting your offer on OUAC.



Thus, it is important to keep your sign-in information stored in an easy-to-remember and safe location to ensure that you still log back in without issues when it comes time to accepting your university offer!

Admissions Into University Programs

"Top 6 Average"

Admissions into different university programs depend entirely on the program itself! However, almost all university programs will consider your "top 6 average": this will be the average of the grades you received in your pre-requisite courses along with whichever other courses you have the highest marks, adding up to six courses in total. So, six courses should be considered for your "top 6 average", including your pre-requisite courses. Most programs will have a cutoff for your "top 6 average", which will be specified in the admission requirements, although meeting the cutoff average will not guarantee acceptance.

Many students have inquiries about their admissions average, so we will answer some commonly asked questions below.

Q: How is my average calculated for early admissions into certain programs?
A: Certain programs, like Western Medical Sciences for example, will send out offers in November. To calculate your admissions average, they will take into account all of the REQUIRED 4U courses that have been fast-tracked previously such as Biology or Chemistry, then use your midterm grades in your required 4U courses and your Grade 11 marks to predict your admissions average. The exact algorithm each university program uses to calculate your admissions average is unclear, but most programs will use a combination of your Grade 12 midterm and Grade 11 final grades.





Q: Is there an "ideal" or "competitive" average for admissions?
A: No there is not! As long as you meet the cutoff admissions average specific on the program's website, you will have a fair chance at admissions. However, meeting the cutoff average will not guarantee your acceptance, while having a high average above the cutoff will not guarantee your acceptance either. We recommend trying your hardest in all your courses and giving everything your best shot!

Q: What if I haven't completed all the required courses within my "top 6" by the time OUAC applications are due?
A: Many university programs will consider your Semester 1 FINAL marks along with your Semester 2 MIDTERM marks in your admissions average. After you receive your conditional offer in around April-May, you will be required to meet certain cutoff marks in your Semester 2 FINALS for your required courses for the program. These requirements will be specified once you receive your conditional offer.

Supplementary Applications

Many university programs, as mentioned before, will require a supplementary application along with your "top 6 average" when considering your application for admissions. We have little information about how supplementary applications are scored, but the process usually involves a panel of admissions officers assigning a score to your application, which can factor in your extracurricular involvement, awards, personal experiences, and creativity.

Below, you can find the supplementary application marking schemes used by some of the most popular university programs in Ontario:

University of Toronto: Rotman Commerce

Requires the completion of a timed application that contains a mixture of 5 written and video-response questions.



1

20 minutes are allotted for the first question. It will likely ask you to list a few major extracurricular activities you have completed within the last four years. You should focus on writing about each activity's key takeaways, including:

- A brief description of what you did in each activity
- How long you were involved
- Achievements/awards/notable roles you earned through this activity

2

45 seconds are allotted for the second question. This is a video-based response, where you will be asked to:

- Provide a short introduction about yourself
- Describe something you are passionate about
- Share some of your personal experiences and qualities that will positively contribute to Rotman's community.

3-5

The next three questions will comprise of two written responses and one video-based response. These questions will be randomly selected from a question bank.

- 20 minutes are allocated to answer each of the 2 written questions.
- 60 seconds are designated to prepare for the video response, and 60 seconds are allocated for the response

University of Toronto: Engineering (Core 8 and Engineering Science)



- Requires Completion of the U of T Online Student Profile
- This application requires frequent updates, so please START EARLY.
- Contains 6 Sections

1

Selection of Engineering Program - Applicants can choose up to 4 engineering programs and rank them in order of choice. Each applicant will be given ONE offer of admission.

2

Academic Profile - requires applicants to provide high school course information. Students are required to self-report midterm and final grades as they become available throughout the admission consideration period.

3

Applicant Timeline - requires students to share their academic activity from grade 9 to the time of application.

4

Test Scores and Optional Applicant Statement - Report standardized test scores, such as ACT/SAT/AP exams. An Optional Applicant Statement can also be filled out to delineate any extenuating circumstances that may impact a student's application.

5

Extracurricular Involvement - allows students to detail their extracurricular activities. References are required to verify activity descriptions.

6

Personal Profile - a series of 3 questions, with 1 being written and 2 being video-recorded.

- Q1: 10 minutes write a 300-word response.
- Q2: 2 minutes to prepare, 2 minutes to complete a video response.
- Q3: 3 minutes to prepare, 3 minutes to complete a video response.

University of Waterloo: Computer Science



- Requires Completion of **Admission Information Form (AIF)**. This application is long, so please START EARLY.

- **2 Parts:** Autobiographical Section and Math/Computer Science Section (CS applicant-specific)

1

Autobiographical Section
This section asks applicants why they are interested in Waterloo and the Computer Science program.

Also allows students to share more about their passions, extracurricular activities and personal characteristics. Specific questions can be found here.

2

Math/Computer Science Section
Additional considerations are made for Computer Science applicants. Specific questions can be found here.

University of Waterloo: Engineering *General



- Requires Completion of **Admission Information Form (AIF).** This application is long, so please START EARLY.

- **2 Parts:** Autobiographical Section and Engineering Section (Engineering applicant-specific)

1

Autobiographical Section
This section asks applicants why they are interested in Waterloo and their Engineering program(s) of choice. This also allows students to share more about their passions, extracurricular activities and personal characteristics. Specific questions can be found here.

2

Engineering Section
Additional considerations are made for Engineering applicants.
Specific questions can be found here.

Western University - Ivey HBA Advanced Entry Opportunity (AEO) & Undergraduate Degree

- The Ivey AEO supp-app is comprised of 2 parts
  - Written portion
  - Video response
- The application is very long, so it is fundamental to START EARLY.



1

Written Response

Awards:

- Applicants can list any non-academic awards they received over the last four years.

Activities

- Centered around 2 major essays that are no longer than 500 words each. Applicants must provide a comprehensive description of their valuable leadership experiences and qualities.
- Applicants can also list up to 5 additional extracurriculars.

Additional Written Work

- Students may choose to complete an optional identity supplemental. This written piece allows applicants to share how their experiences and identity will help them belong in the Ivey Community (500 words max).
- A student may also list the contact information of an Ivey HBA candidate/graduate who can speak on their character to further strengthen their application.

Note: Each essay and activity must be verified by a reference. Applicants will be asked to provide their references' full name, email and phone number in the application process.

2

Video Interview

- After the written portion, students will be asked to provide answers to five randomly-generated questions, answered live through the Kira Talent Platform.
- Each question will be provided one at a time, and students will be given 60 seconds to prepare their answer.
- Once prep time is up, they must provide their spoken response in under 90 seconds.
- This is repeated until all questions are answered. You are only given one chance to record your answer to a question.

Queen's University Smith Commerce, Nursing & Health Sciences

Two parts: Written response and video response

1

Written Response

- Applicants will be begin the written response first. This will be a randomly-generated question or prompt, usually pertaining to overcoming significant challenges or obstacles.
- Students will have 10 minutes to write a written response, with a maximum of 335 words.
- The written response is graded based on this rubric.
- It is highly recommended that applicants read the rubric before beginning the supplementary application.

2

Video Response

- After the written, response, applicants will be directed to the Kira Talent Platform.
- Students will be asked to answer randomly-generated questions, often pertaining to diversity, a major focus at Queen's.
- There will be 2 minutes to prepare for the questions, and 2 minutes to record the subsequent video response.

McMaster University : Health sciences

Two written essays



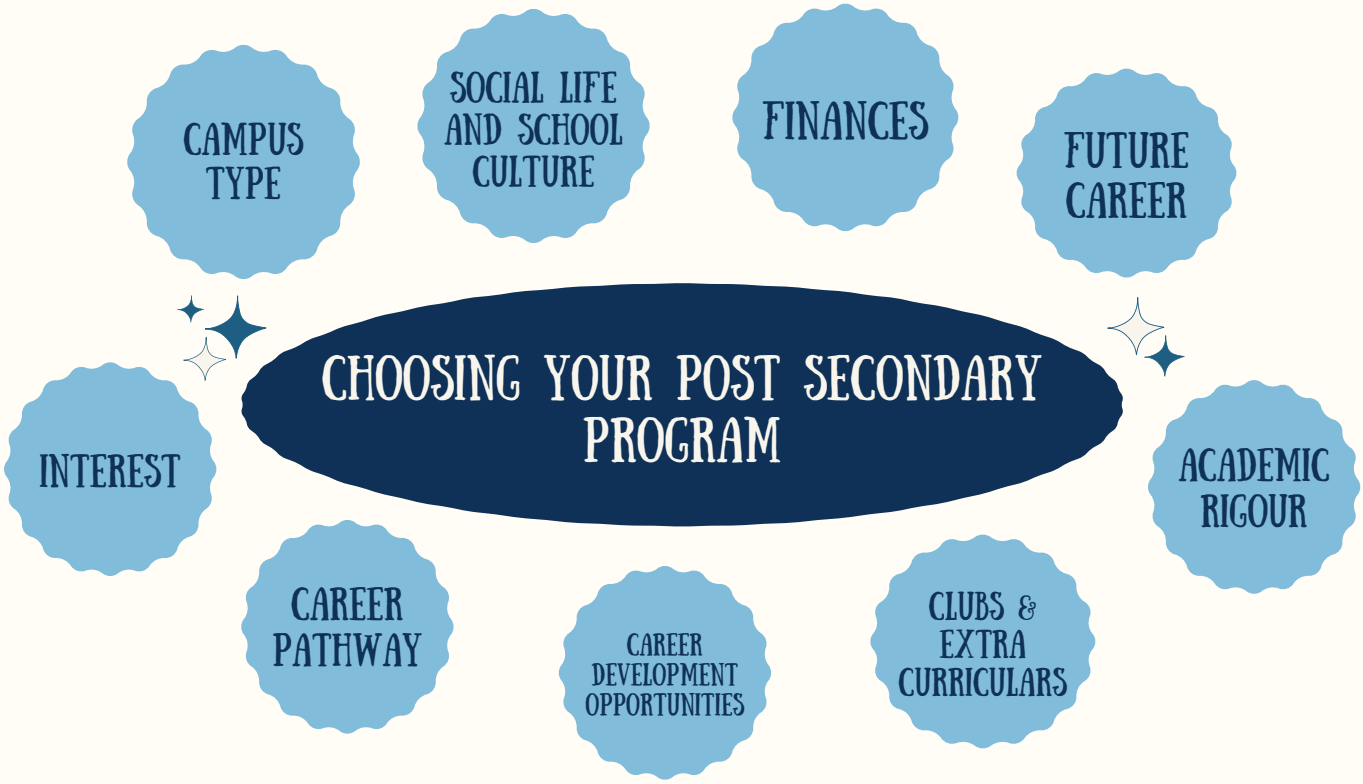
- Three essay prompts will be released at the beginning of the school year. These questions tend to be rather vague, and encompass themes relating to self-actualization, philosophy and critical thinking.

- Applicants will choose two prompts and have several months to prepare both essays. Essays have a limit of 1500 characters each.

- Past Supplementary Application Questions:
  - 2025 Admission
  - 2024 Admission

Choosing Your Post-Secondary Program

When you are choosing which programs to apply or commit to, there are many different factors to consider. However, the most important factor you must keep in mind is interest: do you see yourself enjoying the program you have applied to, or are you simply applying for other reasons such as “prestige” or parental pressure? Many students apply to extremely competitive programs simply for the sake of attending a program with a low acceptance rate, but you will likely fall behind due to a lack of motivation and passion once you begin attending the program. So, before deciding on which programs you will apply to and ultimately commit to, it is a good idea to speak with people who attend those programs, whether they are alumni from your high school or connections you make on LinkedIn. Additionally, you should also research the courses you will have to take in the program and determine whether or not you are interested in those subjects. We have also listed some other factors you should keep in mind when deciding which university programs are right for you.



Career pathway:

- Although we do not expect high school students to have their entire career trajectory planned out (don't worry, neither do we), we still recommend students to have a general idea of their future occupation.
    - For example, if you are interested in the field of healthcare but you do not want to go into medicine, then you could consider nursing, kinesiology, or health science programs in university.
    - Furthermore, if you are interested in engineering but do not know which type of engineering you want to specialize in, you can apply to a general engineering program like Engineering Science at the University of Toronto of Engineer at Western University and specialize in your upper years of university once you have more experience.

Career development opportunities:

- Depending on your program, some universities offer more internship, co-op, experiential learning, and postgraduate opportunities.
    - For example, the University of Waterloo offers WaterlooWorks, which is a co-op and job database where students can have exclusive access to job postings from large tech companies. Western University also has the Science Co-op Program, which gives students the opportunity to participate in a full-time placement in a science-related workplace between 4-16 months.
- The programs listed above are simply examples; for your career path or program, a co-op or job placement might not be what you are looking for and you may find volunteer opportunities more useful. So, you should research the career development opportunities available at the school you are planning on attending, as well as any exclusive opportunities for your program specifically.





Academic rigour:

- When choosing the right program for you, it is important to keep in mind the academic rigour of certain schools and programs.
    - For example, schools like the University of Toronto and Waterloo University are known for having difficult courses and tightly-packed schedules. However, other schools may have more space for elective courses, leaving you with a more manageable course load.
- Although certain programs like Engineering are rigorous by nature, choosing a program that allows for more flexibility could be a good idea if you require a high GPA for graduate school (Master's/PhD programs, medical school, etc.) or competitive job positions.
- It may be objectively easier to obtain a higher GPA in some programs as compared to others. You should also be able to achieve work-life balance in the program you choose; a program with high academic rigour can quickly lead to burnout if you are devoting your entire day to studying with little to no time for extracurriculars or socializing.
- Again, it is a good idea to look into the required courses you will be taking for your program and read over their syllabi. Doing so will give you a good idea of the content you will be learning and how you will be evaluated, giving you a good idea of the difficulty of the course. Consulting online forums and asking alumni can also give you a rough idea, although these opinions may be less reliable.
- Ultimately, this will depend on your personal situation and preference. Keep in mind your program's academic rigour and difficulty of courses before committing to it.



Clubs and extracurriculars:

- Certain schools and programs can provide special opportunities such as clubs, volunteering, research, and alumni networks.
- Although most universities are fairly similar in terms of the extracurriculars offered on campus, some opportunities may be exclusive to your program.
    - For example, the Smith School of Business at Queen's University offers a program called SmithConnect which allows students in the Commerce program to reach out to and coffee chat with its extensive alumni network.
    - Furthermore, the Scholar's Electives program at Western University provides its students with the opportunity to conduct their own research as a part of a thesis course starting from second year.
- These extracurricular opportunities may be limited to the program you are in, so make sure you conduct thorough research on the perks of your program.

Social life and school culture:

- It is definitely possible to find a good group of friends and maintain a work-life balance despite the school you go to,
    - However, certain schools may be known more for being "social schools." Schools such as Queen's and Western University are known to be more social than the University of Toronto or University of Waterloo, but these are mostly based on stereotypes and not entirely true.
    - Although a more social atmosphere can be a tradition for some schools, you are bound to make social friends at UofT or meet introverts at Western.



- For those who want to engage in the “typical” university experience, attending a “social” school may be a good option if you would like more opportunities to socialize, make new friends, and go out often.
- However, it is important to note that not everyone attending a social school will fit into a specific stereotype, and you will definitely be able to meet like-minded people who enjoy the same activities as you. If you are more of an introvert, you can simply avoid attending large-scale group events or find a friend group with similar interests as you.
- At the end of the day, the people who you surround yourself with ultimately have the biggest influence on your university career, so the alleged “school culture” will have minimal impact on your social life if you choose your friends wisely and remember that there will always be opportunities to make new friends!

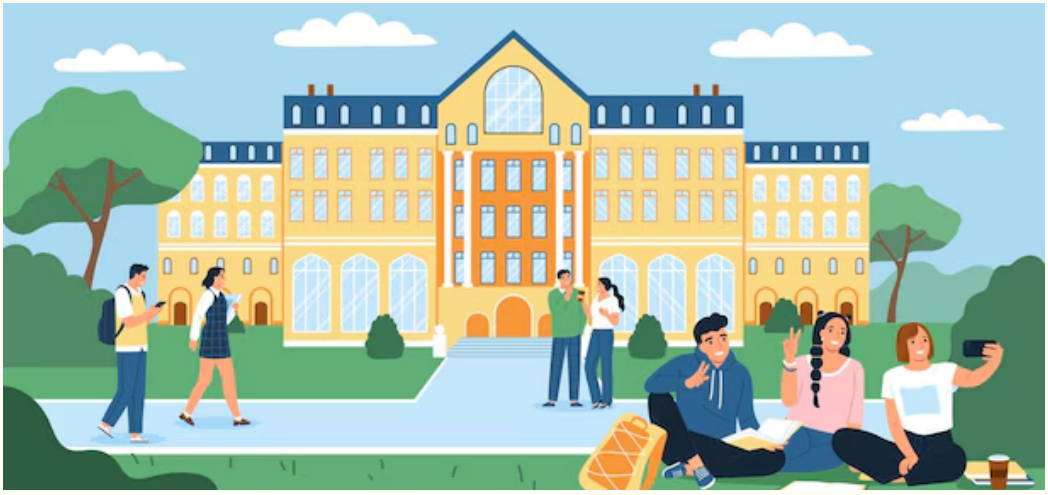


Campus:

- Universities will usually be categorized as “commuter” or “non-commuter” schools.
  - Commuters such as the University of Toronto or the Toronto Metropolitan University are schools where a majority of students live at home or off-campus and commute to school every day,
  - Whereas non-commuters like Western and Waterloo University are schools where most students live on-campus or within close proximity to the campus.
- Commuters are often located in large cities like the GTA, where non-commuters are often located in smaller towns, some of which can be populated mostly by students.



- Commuter schools can be very convenient because you could potentially live at home, if the school is near your house.
    - On the other hand, if your school is located in a major city, then renting a house or apartment could be quite costly. It is also harder to maintain a social life when you are commuting to and from school every day, leaving little time and opportunity to make new friends.
- Non-commuter schools often have more compact, tight-knit campuses that are centralized within one area.
- This can also be convenient as you will either live in residence in first year or rent nearby the campus later on, allowing you to either walk or take the bus to class every day. Since you and your classmates will all be on campus, it can be easier to maintain friendships and meet new people.
- The best way to determine if you like a campus or not is to organize a campus visit with the schools you are applying to. That way, you can receive a personalized tour and get a feel for where you will be taking class, residences, and other facilities on campus.



Finances:

- Post-secondary can be expensive, and it is often overwhelming to look at the cost of your first year, which not only includes your tuition but residence, meal plan, textbooks, transportation, and other personal expenses as well.
- These costs can add up quickly, especially for students moving away from home or attending school in a major city where the cost of living is higher.
- Many students rely on a combination of financial aid, student loans, part-time jobs, and scholarships to make ends meet. It's important to start exploring your options early by looking into entrance scholarships, bursaries based on financial need, and awards specific to your program, background, or extracurricular involvement.
- Some schools offer automatic consideration for scholarships, while others require detailed applications, so staying organized and aware of deadlines is key.
- Budgeting also becomes an essential skill. Learning how to track your spending, prioritize needs over wants, and plan for both fixed and unexpected costs (like a laptop repair or course-specific equipment) can help reduce stress and build long-term financial habits.
- You are also not alone. Universities often have financial aid offices, budgeting workshops, and advisors who can help you understand your options and build a plan. It’s okay to ask for help. Many students are navigating this for the first time, too.



Future career:

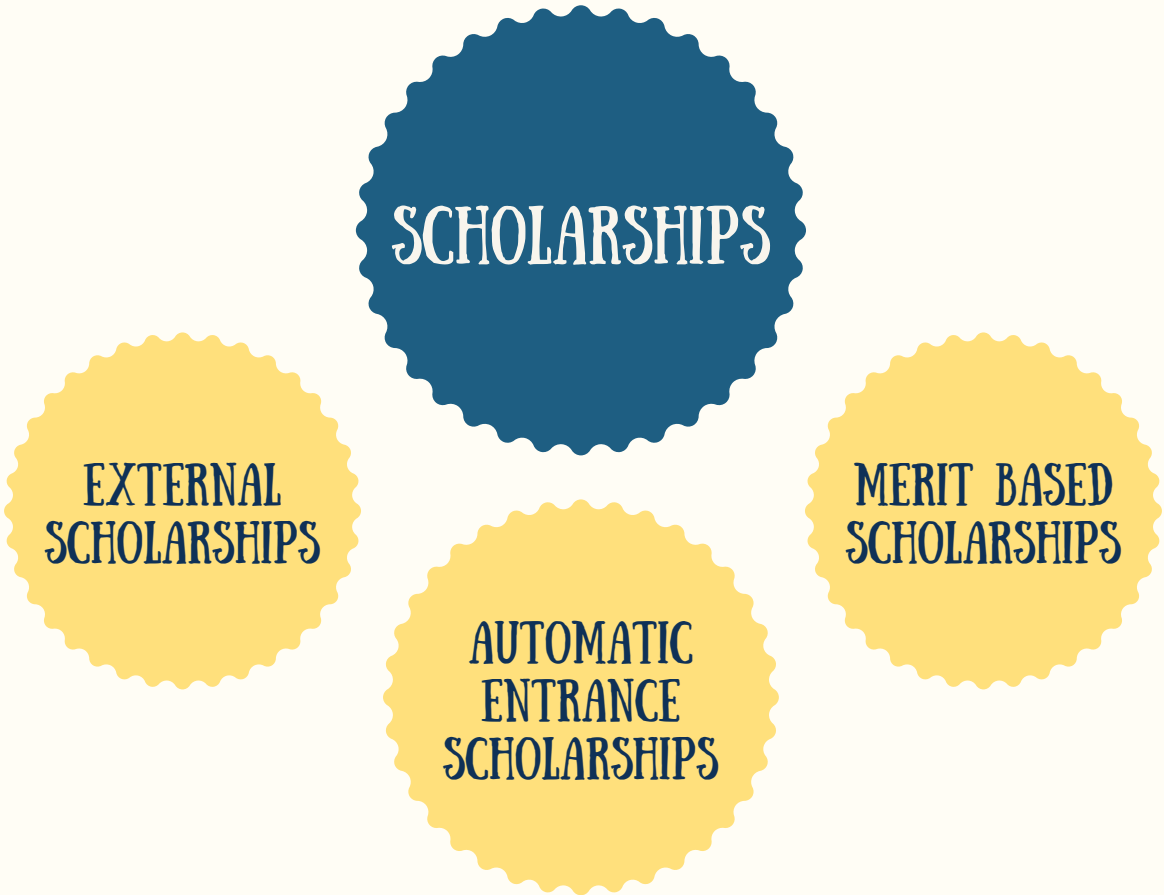
- When choosing a post-secondary program, it's important to think about how it connects to your future goals—even if those goals aren't fully clear yet.
- Ask yourself what subjects interest you, what kinds of work you enjoy, and what kind of lifestyle you hope to have.
- Some programs lead directly into specific careers (like nursing, engineering, or teaching), while others offer broader pathways that allow you to explore different options along the way (like psychology, sociology, or general sciences).
- If you already have a career in mind, research the qualifications required—some professions need specific degrees, certifications, or further studies. If you're undecided, that's okay too.
- Many students start in general programs and specialize later as they gain more clarity.
- Look for programs that offer flexibility, electives, or co-op placements so you can explore different areas while earning your degree.
- Also consider what else a program offers: are there internship or research opportunities? Are the class sizes a good fit for your learning style? Is there support for career planning? Choosing a program isn't just about the subject, it's about setting yourself up for growth, discovery, and future possibilities.



Applying to Scholarships

Applying to scholarships is an important step in making higher education more affordable and accessible. Scholarships not only help reduce the financial burden of tuition and related expenses but also recognize a student's achievements, talents, and potential.The process typically involves preparing strong applications that highlight academic performance, extracurricular involvement, leadership, and personal stories. Starting early and staying organized can make a significant difference in securing opportunities that align with your goals and interests.





Automatic Entrance Scholarships	• Based on grades only • Guaranteed if you meet grade requirements • Often given out in tiers ◦ Ex. 85% - 89.9% for $2000, 90% to 94.9% for $3000 and 95%+ for $4000 ◦ Do not assume that you will receive an automatic admission scholarship, even if you have a high average. Admission scholarship requirements can vary greatly between schools. ◦ Ex. A 95% average automatically gives you a renewable scholarship of $12 000 ($3000 per year) at the University of Toronto (Scarborough and Mississauga Campus). However, a 95% average may not be enough to earn an automatic entrance scholarship at Queen's University. Instead, your average must be within the top 5% of all program matriculants to earn a non-renewable scholarship of $7000.
Merit-Based Scholarships	• Must apply for Merit-based scholarships • Are not guaranteed and often very competitive. • Have greater monetary value than automatic entrance scholarships • Based on many factors, including extracurricular involvement, community service, academic performance, special awards, etc. • Often requires a nomination by your high school ◦ Ex. Chancellor's Scholarship at Queen's University ◦ Ex. Schulich Leader Scholarship at Western University ◦ Ex. National Scholarship Program at University of Toronto
External Scholarships	• Granted by non-academic institutions • Can include banks, organizations, companies, foundations, etc. • Examples include: ◦ CIBC Full Ride Scholarship ◦ TD Scholarship for Community Leadership ◦ Unilever Voices for Change Scholarship • Requirements differ between scholarship • May be lottery-based or granted based on the quality of a candidate's application

Co-op

What is Co-op?
Cooperative Education (Co-op) is a program that combines in-class learning with workplace experience. Schools and local businesses or community organizations partner, allowing grade 11 or 12 students to complete coursework and work 3–6 hours per day, five days a week, over one semester (about five months). Although the placement is not paid, students will earn high school credits and valuable experience for the workforce.

Student Benefits:

- Learn about career paths and skills in different industries
- Develop and further soft skills, including communication, teamwork, and problem-solving.
- Professional networking, which may provide references for future opportunities
- The Ministry of Education and Training offers full coverage for Workplace Safety Insurance Board (WSIB) benefits for all students enrolled in co-op.

Interested Students:
Students who would like to enroll in the Co-op program must finish an application and complete an interview with their high school's designated co-op teacher.



Busting Myths About Co-op

"Coop is unpaid, so it is not worth my time."

- While coop is not paid, it may help you find a compensated job later on.
- Applying for a job outside of coop often requires references, extensive work experience or a post-secondary degree. Many high school students cannot meet these requirements yet. In contrast, the SHSM and Coop programs do not require such formal qualifications. Thus, a co-op placement allows you to gain experience that is difficult to access outside of school.
- Your coop workplace may even end up hiring you!
- Ex. Some students work as co-op pharmacy assistants at Shoppers Drug Mart, and secure a paid position outside of school after the co-op is complete.

"I don't have enough course space for co-op."

- Co-op can be done in the summer! This allows you to reserve space for prerequisite courses during the regular school year.
- "I shouldn't do co-op because it doesn't count toward my admission average."
- Many post-secondary programs do not admit students solely based on their marks. Supplementary applications may also be required, and the experience co-op provides you may be helpful when writing them.
- Many supplementary applications want applicants to describe their leadership experiences, or how they handled difficult situations.
- Co-op may provide you with new leadership opportunities and introduce you to workplace problems you may not encounter in formal education. These unique experiences can help your suppapp stand out!



Do's and Dont's

Do's

Maintain a good study-life balance

- High school can get demanding and challenging at times, but don't forget to take time for yourself to protect your inner peace
- Optimize your habit and routine to make time for work, but to make time for de-stressing

Get involved

- Whether it is extracurriculars, athletics, personal projects, get your feet wet with as many life experiences as possible. High school is the time for you to learn and make the most of your youth
- However, be cautious of overcommitting

Do your research

- Research the courses that are needed for the post-secondary pathway/program of interest
- Determine where your subject interests lie and what you see yourself doing in 1, 3, 5, 10, 20+ years

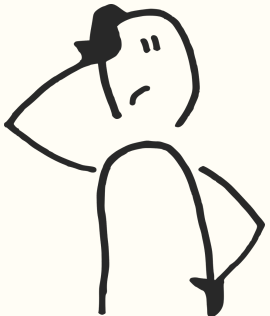
Dont's

Don't procrastinate or cram

- Cramming usually doesn't work. If it does, the knowledge will not stay in the long run.
- Bad habits stick, not good for higher education or the workplace

Don't compare yourself to others

- Don't stress if you're not at the top of a class, not the most involved in ECs, don't have a large friend group, aren't in a relationship, etc.
- Everybody's path is different, and we all move at our own pace
- Not any less of a student or person if somebody appears to be better at something.



Communicate with school admin

- School admin is your best source to seek clarification about prerequisites and grad requirements
- Have any questions? Your admin office likely has the answer

Work hard and study consistently

- Especially in grade 11 and 12 to maximize your academic excellence

If you can, fast-track courses to lighten your workload for upper years

- Ex. 12U English, 12U Advanced Functions, etc.

If in grade 12, start your applications EARLY!

- 4 months seems like a long time but it goes by VERY FAST! Don't get a late start!

Maintain positive relationships with your teachers

- Letters of recommendations are very commonly asked for in scholarship applications and some applications abroad

Remember to spend time with friends!

- There will be times where studying should and will take priority, but part of high school is making those everlasting friendships and memories, so don't forget that!

Don't let FOMO get to you!

- You don't need to be a part of everything to have a fulfilling high school experience

Don't put things off because you are "too young"

- Sometimes, when we come up with an amazing idea or we become extremely passionate about a particular subject of interest, we internally dismiss it because we're "too young" and don't have the ability to take action
- However, don't self-limit yourself – some of the world's most successful innovators realized their potential at a very young age, and you can too!





A STEMBuddies Production

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