

The Tutor Times

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Moving On: Looking Ahead to College

Summer is coming to a close, and in a month or so the crisp evenings of fall will be upon us. For juniors and seniors, this means it is time to begin (or continue) the college application process. While the process can be fraught with anxiety, stress can be minimized by starting early, making a plan, and sticking to it. We suggest treating the application process as another subject, and having a separate notebook that holds all notes regarding your applications.

After deciding what schools you will apply to, you must begin organizing application forms. Make sure to make note of the deadlines. Many colleges use the Common Application (www.commonapp.org), which



includes standard admissions information. Be sure to check each school's required supplemental documents for any additional requirements.

Standardized tests are next. Research the schools' requirements, and become familiar with the SAT, ACT, and TOEFL (if applicable). These tests are typically offered roughly every month in the fall and spring. While test scores are not all that colleges look at, they are important. Start studying for them early, and get help if you need it.

When it comes to the essays, try to complete them at least two weeks early. Put them away and don't look at them for a week. After the week, re-read them and you will have a much better sense of what minor changes are needed (if any). Many schools offer applicants the chance to complete an optional essay. If there is something you think your future school should know about you that may help bolster your application, or if you want to explain an extenuating circumstance that occurred during high school and affects your profile, this is your chance. Also, have someone review your applications, as a pair of fresh eyes can spot mistakes you may have missed or offer new insight on how your essay could be improved.

(Please see Moving On, page 5)



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Stepping Up: Preparing for the Jump to High School

You are finally in eighth grade, at the top of your school; you know how everything works, you are comfortable with your classes, teachers, and friends... And then comes high school and everything changes.

Your teachers are all new, you likely are in class with a lot of people you have never met before, and there seem to be a lot of kids in the halls that look a lot older than three years older than you.

At first daunting, the transition to high school from middle school can be exciting and relatively stress-free. On the academic front, be prepared to use all the tools you developed in middle school to stay organized (or see the List article on page 3 to get started now). Your classes are going to get more difficult in high school, but by keeping organized you will be miles ahead of the game. Be prepared to work hard, and don't be afraid to ask questions.



Beyond academics, the opportunities begin to open up substantially in high school. There are more sports teams, clubs, volunteer groups, student government opportunities, and countless other activities in which you can become involved. Don't put it off! The four years in high school will fly by, and you will soon be wondering where they went. Colleges also look favorably upon students that are very involved in their schools and communities outside of academics. But don't feel like you have to join every club at school. Follow your interests. Admissions officers like to see students who demonstrate a passion for a certain activity or cause, as much as they like to see students with varied interests.

High school is a time for you to try things out and see what you do and don't like. Take the time to explore new subjects and activities.

(Please see The Step, Page 5)



The Tutor Times is a publication of Commonwealth Education, a leading provider of private one-on-one tutoring in the following areas:

- SAT/ACT Preparation
- All School Subjects
- College Application Assistance
- Basic Study Skills

The List: Organization Made Easy

You know how it feels. You have a math test tomorrow, a game tonight, and a college application due in three weeks. Forget about the English paper, the Spanish presentation, and the part-time job you are starting tomorrow. How are you going to keep it all straight?

We've all felt that way, but by taking a few simple steps, you can get organized and give your mind a break. How? We call it the List. It may sound obvious, but it works.

Keep it simple.
Specific dates only.
No detailed descriptions.
Just the tasks.

First take a notebook, notepad, iPhone, or whatever you like to use, and write (or type) out everything that you have to do. Make sure you do not use this notebook for anything else. It is only for the List. Have a separate notebook for class notes, returned tests, SAT studying, volunteer groups, and whatever else you need to keep track of. The List is **only** for tasks that you have to complete.

Next, start writing down tasks. Keep it simple with the name of the task and specific dates only. No detailed descriptions. Some things on my list include: "1) Write 5 math problems 2) Work out tomorrow morning 3) Prepare next newsletter." By simply writing down tasks, you can free your mind from clutter and focus on the activity at hand.

Let the List worry about all the things you have to do. All you have to do is check it during the day and cross off any items you have completed. At the end of every day, when you start to relax and can think more clearly, do a last check of the list. Again, cross off completed items and write down anything new. Review it in the morning and repeat! With only a few minutes of your time every day, you've created your own personal assistant to keep your to-do list for you.

This method may sound too simple, but how likely are you to use something complicated? We are looking to simplify your life, not make it more difficult. By keeping organization as simple as possible, students are more likely to follow through on their to-do lists.

Try it for two weeks and see for yourself. We think you'll like it, and will find that your mind is less cluttered and you have more time to do what you want to do.



Exercise and the Brain

Exercise has long been known to be good for the body, especially the heart, but can it help you think? The answer seems to be a resounding yes. There are many recent studies indicating that exercise helps reduce stress and anxiety, and also improves our ability to stay focused and involved in our activities.⁽¹⁾ In fact, researchers indicate that those who engage in aerobic exercise at least 2 days a week have better concentration levels than those who do not exercise.

Why is this important? As you face the crunch of your first semester, whether you are a student applying to college, preparing for the SAT, or shoring up your grades in your last year of middle school, it is pretty clear that you should make a little bit of time for yourself and get moving!

You don't need to run a marathon, or lift weights for 3 hours. You can get great benefits from just going for a walk around the block. Exercise floods the brain with oxygen and raises our dopamine levels, which are crucial to concentration, thus jumpstarting the brain.⁽²⁾ Even the simple act of standing up and walking around tells your brain it's time to wake up, says Kathleen Nadeau, Ph.D.⁽³⁾ If you like sports, call up a couple of friends and get into a pickup game. Don't like sports? Go for a walk. Take a bike ride. It doesn't matter what you do, but if you get out for 20 minutes or so, you will likely feel the stresses of your busy life melt away.

That 20 minutes is a time for you, and you only. No worries about the test tomorrow, or the ACT next month. You will be surprised how a little bit of exercise can really recharge you, and when you get back to what you were doing, you will feel more alert and will work more efficiently.

There are other positive effects as well to exercise: you will probably sleep better, and if you are able to stick to doing some exercise a few times a week, you very well may feel your happiness levels increase and your self-confidence improving. As our 3rd President Thomas Jefferson once wrote, "A strong body makes the mind strong." Just get outside and breathe a little fresh air! It will help you when you go back in to finish cramming for that exam or complete that essay.

"A strong body makes a strong mind."

-Thomas Jefferson, letter to Peter Carr, August 19, 1785.



(1) http://badgerherald.com/news/2003/11/13/study_shows_exercise.php

(2) <http://www.cnn.com/2008/HEALTH/11/14/rs.increase.your.attention.span/index.html>

(3) *Ibid.*

Moving On *(cont'd from page 1)*

Teacher and other recommendations are an important part of the applications, and should be requested early. It cannot hurt for your application to be one of a few forms sitting on a teacher's desk in September, as opposed to one of many in December.

Give yourself plenty of time, stay organized, and you will get through the process!

The Step *(cont'd from page 2)*

You may be surprised. Curious about the theater? Like art? Take a class or join a club. Play ball? Try out and see what happens.

The bottom line: take advantage of the additional choices in high school, and you will probably find something interesting along the way.

Questions? Comments? Content requests for upcoming issues?

Visit us on the web at www.CommonwealthEdu.com or
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We welcome all feedback and look forward to helping in any way we can.



"Teaching Tomorrow's Generation... Today"



Commonwealth Education was founded by Ryan and Maria Garton to meet the tutoring needs of students in the greater Washington, D.C. area. Both have more than ten years of experience tutoring students in a wide variety of subjects.



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