

The Tutor Times

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

The Importance of Reading 2

The Junior Year Grind 4

Choosing the Right College After You're Accepted

By: Leah Nelson



If you're a senior in high school, you're probably looking forward to graduation and what happens afterwards. But for students going off to college in the fall, right now is the waiting time. You are probably a little nervous and your mind is full of questions: Were my SAT scores good enough? Will they like my essay? How did I stack up against other applicants?

Soon enough, the waiting and worrying will be over and the letters will be in the mail. Maybe you applied Early Decision and you already know your fate at your top school. If you've applied wisely, in all likelihood, you will be in the position to choose among several schools who have offered you a spot in their next class. While this is certainly a good problem to have, the decision is a big one. You want to make sure you're choosing the environment where you can meet the goals you have set out for yourself and make your next four years everything you are hoping for.

Degrees and Majors

First consider what you want to study. If you are considering a major such as engineering or architecture that may not be found at all colleges, this may be the most important consideration. You don't want to end up needing to transfer in order to pursue the academic options you are interested in. For some students who are weighing more common options such as Biology, English, or Business,

(continued on page 3)



(703) 241-5416 (o)
(703) 268-1032 (c)

The Importance of Reading and Starting Early

By: Laura Smith

It's no secret that reading is one of the most important indicators of a child's future success. The National Research Council states that a child's reading level in the third grade can be an indicator of whether he or she will graduate from high school.¹ Since you are involved with a tutoring company, you are invested in your child's education, and most likely, your child is not at risk for an incomplete high school education. Yet the National Research Council's message has startling implications for all elementary aged children: students must hone their reading skills early, and if they don't, they face a labyrinth of unnecessary obstacles.

The reading capacity that your child is building now will shape all future academic endeavors: success on a sixth grade book report, a ninth grade World History test, entrance into an AP class, and finally the much dreaded SAT

1: Alliance for Excellent Education Policy Brief, Page 3, June 2006.

or ACT. It is essential that you invest your own time or a tutor's time now, when your child's abilities are malleable. Improvement comes through the three P's: Practice, Practice, and Practice. Whether it's bedtime stories, trips to the library, or time spent alone reading, it is a habit that must be enforced early. That is not to say that if your tenth grader is struggling with reading comprehension that you should throw in the towel. Instead, tackle these issues head on and don't be alarmed if this takes more rigorous work on your part and on the part of your tenth grader. Remember you always have a support system: your child's school, family, and Commonwealth Education.

Here are the most important things to look for in an elementary-aged child's learning process: reading comprehension, advancement of vocabulary, spelling, and sentence structure. It is not enough just to make sure that your child
(please see Reading, page 5)

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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/High School Application Assistance
- Basic Study Skills

Choosing the Right School (cont'd)

this may not be a particularly important factor; however, these students should still look closely at academic options, as some schools may have stronger programs than others in certain areas.

Location, Location, Location

Next, consider location. How important is it for you to be close to home? If you go out of state, you may not get as many opportunities to visit home. Are you excited about discovering new places and new ways of life, or are you looking more for the comforts of home? Do you want the excitement of the big city or prefer a small, college town? Also, think about the campus. Is it easy to get off campus and explore or do students describe their campus as a "bubble"? Think about what type of environment in which you would like to spend the next four years.

Student Life

What types of activities do students get involved in? If you are an athlete, you might look for a school with a strong club sports program. Are you excited about cheering on a big-time football team or joining a fraternity or sorority? Are students studious or social? Also, consider the size of the school. Are you used to closer relationships with your teachers and advisors that you're more likely to find at a smaller school? Perhaps you're more excited about the large number of opportunities and research

possibilities at a larger school. Think about the types of things you want to get involved in and check at the college's website to see if those opportunities will be available to you.

Campus Visits

The best way to answer these questions or any other questions you may have on colleges where you have been accepted is to visit the campus. Many colleges have formal accepted students' weekends or may offer the opportunity to stay with a host student. Contact the Admissions Office to see if there are opportunities available. Talk to current students at the college- the way they describe their experience can tell you a lot about what it is like to go to that school.

In the end, your decision will come down to where you feel most comfortable. There are many great schools out there, so as long as your choice covers the aspects that are most important to you, you will be off to a great start in your college career.

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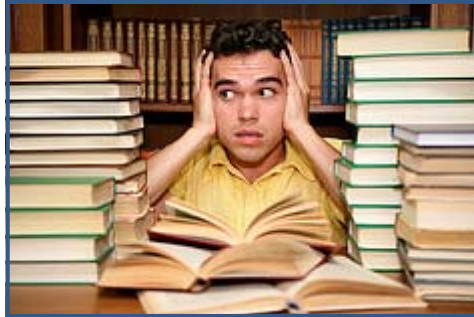


Leah helps Commonwealth Education students with the college and high school application process. She graduated from William and Mary with a B.A. in Sociology and also earned a M.Ed. in Counselor Education from the University of Virginia.

The Junior Year Grind

By: Laura Smith

Junior year, especially the second semester that just began, can be an overwhelming time for students. In addition to the usual workload, they must find ways to keep tabs on college applications, as well as prepare for various standardized tests. Never before have students been asked to tackle such a vast array of projects, all with extremely significant implications for their future. It is essential that juniors develop an organizational strategy both for their time and for the masses of paper they will be dealing with.



ing the student to see that his or her workload is manageable. Encourage your student to rank each task with a number indicating the assignment's importance and time sensitivity. Encourage them to do those assignments first. For example, a college essay for a pending application would be ranked with a 1 (for most important), while a daily, ungraded reading response would be given a 5 (for least important).

The most organized students are the ones with the best tools, and you can lighten the load for your child by ensuring that they have them. Consider stockpiling items like folders, sticky notes, pens, and binders. Encourage them to use a calendar system, either an online one, such as Google calendar, or a paper one. Aside from reminding them of important upcoming dates, it also acts as an emotional tool, allow-

If your child is not prone to intensive organization, consider hiring a tutor who specializes in organization. Everyone has different strengths, and for many, staying organized is not among them. On the other hand, it's possible that this could be one of your child's strengths, they just require some gentle prodding to tackle what feels like a large obstacle. Organization can be a lifelong habit, and the junior year crunch is an important time to begin.

Image Courtesy of <http://www.eduinreview.com>



Organization Checklist

- 1) Get a Calendar (online, paper)
- 2) Prioritize Tasks
- 3) Tackle them one at a time



Reading (cont'd)

is reading, but that he or she is also processing the nuances of the story. This way, by the time the student reaches high school, his or her brain is hard-wired for complex, analytical thinking.

Any parent knows that children don't do things habitually that they don't enjoy. So as parents, we are given the vital task of making sure we engender a love of reading in our children. If you have a reluctant reader, take the time to discover which genres appeal to your child in particular. In every genre, there are books that are thematically exciting but that also work to boost your child's vocabulary, knowledge of sentence structure, and tackle age-appropriate analytic thinking.

Below are a few of our suggested and award-winning favorites for each elementary age group. This is not an exhaustive list, but our aim here is to vary genre and writing style. Of course, you should encourage your child to



Image Courtesy of www.kidsbabydesign.com/

read outside of their grade level:

1st grade: *Why Mosquitos Buzz in People's Ears* by Verna Aardena and *The Henry and Mudge* by Cynthia Rylant

2nd: *Amelia Bedelia* by Peggy Parish and *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein

3rd: *The View from Saturday* by E.L. Konigsburg, Judy Blume's *Fudge* box set

4th: *The Indian in the Cupboard* by Lynne Reid Banks, *My Side of the Mountain* by Jean Craighead George, and *The Girl Who Dreamed of Only Geese* by Howard Norman.

5th grade: *Matilda* and *BFG* by Roald Dahl, *Holes* by Louis Sachar, *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry

6th grade: *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, *Walk Two Moons* by Sharon Creech, *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeline L'Engle.



Laura is an English and Humanities, French, SAT, ACT, and study skills tutor for Commonwealth Education. She earned her B.A. in English Literature from the University of Virginia.



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.

Ryan is responsible for the day-to-day operations of Commonwealth Education, including the coordination of tutors and students. He has tutored students of all ages, from middle-school to adult literacy students. He currently also volunteers as a literacy tutor and tutor trainer for the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia.

Ryan received his B.A. from the University of Virginia, and his Masters from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Email Ryan at Ryan@CommonwealthEdu.com.

Maria provides advisory and oversight functions for Commonwealth Education and provides Spanish assistance for our students. She has worked with Spanish-speaking students learning English in both classroom and individual settings. She has also tutored fellow students in English and in the Sciences.

Maria received her B.S. from the University of Virginia and her J.D. from Columbia Law School. Maria currently practices law in Washington, D.C.



CommonwealthEdu.com

Office: 703.241.5416

Mobile: 703.268.1032

Fax: 703.241.1148

107 Falls Avenue
Falls Church, VA 22046