

## COLLEGE DAY TOOLKIT

The College Day Toolkit is a resource guide for middle and high school students, grades 8th - 12th. This toolkit will explore important pre-college themes such as time management, career pathways, college essay writing and the college selection process. The College Day Toolkit is designed to inform, engage and inspire young minds, while demystifying the college going process.

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## Part 1: Career Pathways

Thinking about what you want to do with your future? Here's a tip, start exploring the six career pathways that may lead you to your dream job. The possibilities are endless!

### Career Pathways Quiz

**Directions:** Test your knowledge about careers. Use the Career Pathways Roadmap to explore the possibilities. Click the Kahoot Quiz link to begin your journey. If you are unable to access the link, use the questions below to navigate your journey. Reflect on your answers and share what you find! [Kahoot Quiz](#)

**01. Which of these is NOT one of the six career pathways?**

- a. Arts & Communication
- b. Human Services
- c. Doctor
- d. Health Sciences

**02. Which pathway is best for people who love nature?**

- a. Health Sciences
- b. Arts & Communication
- c. Natural Resources and Agriscience
- d. Business Management, Marketing & Technology

**03. Someone who likes working with numbers and ideas may enjoy this pathway?**

- a. Health Sciences
- b. Business, Management, Marketing & Technology
- c. Arts and Communication
- d. Health Services

**04. Which of these do not fit into the Arts & Communication pathway?**

- a. Radio and TV Producer
- b. Journalist
- c. Librarian
- d. Fashion Designer

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**05. Nursing is included in the Health Sciences career pathway along with which of the following careers?**

- a. Dentistry/ Hygiene/ Medicine
- b. Nutrition and Fitness
- c. Therapy and Rehabilitation
- d. All The Above

**06. Engineering/Manufacturing and Industrial Technology career pathways include Electricians and Plumbers?**

- a. True
- b. False

**07. Your teacher went through this Career Pathway...**

- a. Business, Management, Marketing, and Technology
- b. College
- c. Engineering/Manufacturing and Industrial Technology
- d. Human Services

**Discussion & Reflection Questions:**

1. What information, if any, surprised you?
2. Which of your interests and/or personality traits match a career pathway?  
*\*Refer to column 2 on the Career Pathways Roadmap\**
3. Think about your favorite class. What career pathway does it fit into?
4. Which career pathway would you want to know more about? Why?

**To learn more about your dream job, visit one of the sites below.**

- Vault.com: [www.vault.com](http://www.vault.com)
- Bureau of Labor Statistics: <https://www.bls.gov/k12/students.htm>
- Careers Out There: <https://careersoutthere.com/>

**Source/Created by: Nayef Taleb, Matthew Bozzo, Da Jaunteye' Hawkins and Dyrel Johnson**

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## Career Pathways Roadmap

Your guide to career planning!

Start exploring a possible career that you'll love by matching the information about you with different careers.

What Are the Six Career Pathways?	Is This The Career Path For You?	Career Categories	Sample Careers with Post-High School Education
<p><b>Arts and Communication</b> Careers in this path are related to the humanities and performing, visual, literary, and media arts. These include architecture; graphic, interior, and fashion design; writing; film; fine arts; journalism; languages; media; advertising; and public relations.</p>	<p>Are you a creative thinker? Are you imaginative, innovative and original? Do you like to communicate ideas? Do you like making crafts, drawing, playing a musical instrument, taking photos, or writing stories? This may be the career path for you!</p>	<p><b>Arts and Communication</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Advertising and Public Relations</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Creative Writing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Film Production</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Foreign Languages</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Journalism</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Radio and TV Broadcasting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Public Relations Executive</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Dancer</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Film Producer</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Fashion Designer</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Journalist</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Radio and TV Broadcaster</li> </ul>
<p><b>Business, Management, Marketing, and Technology</b> Careers in this path are related to the business environment. These include entrepreneur, sales, marketing, computer/information systems, finance, accounting, personnel, economics, and management.</p>	<p>Do you enjoy being a leader, organizing people, planning activities, and talking? Do you like to work with numbers or ideas? Do you enjoy carrying through with an idea and seeing the end product? Do you like things neat and orderly? Do you enjoy balancing budgets, following the stock market, holding an office in a club, or surfing the Internet? This may be your career path!</p>	<p><b>Business, Management, Marketing, and Technology</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Accounting</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Hospitality/Tourism Management</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Computer/Information Systems</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Marketing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Office Administration</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Business Ownership</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Economics</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Personnel</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sales</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Loan Officer</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Economist</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Legal Secretary</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Hotel Manager</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Office Manager</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Computer Programmer</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Travel Agent</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Salesperson</li> </ul>
<p><b>Engineering/Manufacturing and Industrial Technology</b> Careers in this path are related to technologies necessary to design, develop, install, and maintain physical systems. These include engineering, manufacturing, construction, service, and related technologies.</p>	<p>Are you mechanically inclined and practical? Do you like reading diagrams and blueprints, and drawing building structures? Are you curious about how things work? Would you enjoy painting a house, repairing cars, writing electrical circuits, or woodworking? This may be the career path for you!</p>	<p><b>Engineering/Manufacturing and Industrial Technology</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Architecture</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Construction</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Mechanics and Repair</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Manufacturing Technology</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Engineering and Related Technologies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Architect</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Technician</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Plumber</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Chemical Engineer</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Air traffic Controller</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Auto Mechanic</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Drafting</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Electrician</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Surveyor</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Health Sciences</b> Careers in this path are related to the promotion of health and treatment of disease. These include research, prevention, treatment, and related health technologies.</p>	<p>Do you like to care for people or animals who are sick or help them stay well? Are you interested in diseases and in how the body works? Do you enjoy reading about science and medicine? Would it be fun to learn first aid or volunteer at a hospital or veterinary clinic? This may be your career path!</p>	<p><b>Health Sciences</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Dentistry</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Hygiene</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Medicine</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Nursing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Nutrition and Fitness</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Therapy and Rehabilitation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Dental Hygienist</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Veterinary Technician</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Respiratory Therapist</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Physical Therapist</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Forensic Scientist</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Doctor</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Dentist</li> </ul>
<p><b>Human Services</b> Careers in this path are related to economic, political, and social systems. These include education, government, law and law enforcement, leisure and recreation, military, religion, child care, social services, and personal services.</p>	<p>Are you friendly, open, understanding, and cooperative? Do you like to work with people to solve problems? Is it important to you to do something that makes things better for other people? Do you like reading, storytelling, traveling, or tutoring your children? This could be your career path!</p>	<p><b>Human Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Education</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Child and Family Services</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Food and Beverage Service</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Law and Legal Studies</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Law Enforcement</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Cosmetologist</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Social Services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Chef</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Teacher</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Lawyer</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Police Detective</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Cosmetologist</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Librarian</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Firefighter</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Social Worker</li> </ul>
<p><b>Natural Resources and Agriscience</b> Careers in this path are related to agriculture, the environment, and natural resources. These include agricultural sciences, earth sciences, environmental sciences, fisheries, forestry, horticulture, and wildlife.</p>	<p>Are you a nature lover? Are you practical, curious about the physical world, and interested in plants and animals? Do you enjoy hunting or fishing? Do you like to garden or mow the lawn? Are you interested in protecting the environment? This could be your career path!</p>	<p><b>Natural Resources and Agriscience</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture Horticulture</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Animal Health Care Forestry</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Wildlife Management Life Sciences</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Science Earth Sciences</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Fisheries Management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Farmer</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Oceanographer</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Physicist</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Landscaper</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Marine Biologist</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Conservation Agent</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Chemist</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Forester</li> </ul>

Source: GRAB College Prep

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## Part 2: How to Build Your College List

Not sure how to find the perfect college? We've got you covered. Building an effective college checklist will allow you to select an institution that meets all of your needs and is the right one for YOU! Let us show you how.

### College Checklist

**Directions:** As you begin to find colleges/universities that are of interest to you, you can use this checklist to compare what each school has to offer. Fill in as much of the boxes for each school you list as you conduct your research. Once you have listed the colleges and weighed the pros/cons of each school, go back and review your notes and rank each school with **your own ranking** to see what are your top choices. This will help you condense your college list.

**Reminder:** Colleges are not a one-size-fit-all, it's what size fits YOU. In other words, the college that your friend picks may not be the same college you pick and that is okay! You have lots of college options to choose from around the world.

	College/ University Name:	College/ University Name:	College/ University Name:	College/ University Name:
	Choice/Rank #___	Choice/Rank #___	Choice/Rank #___	Choice/Rank #___
<b>Type of Colleges</b> - What type of school do I want to attend? Is the institution public or private? Is the institution a 2-year, 4-year, or Trade School?				
<b>Location</b> - What type of environment is the school located in? Is it located in an urban, suburban/ residential, or rural setting? Do I want to relocate to another city? Another state? Internationally?				
<b>Size</b> - Do I want to know everyone at my school, do I want to know some people at my school, or a small percentage of people at my school? Do I feel I learn best with small classes or when there are more classes I can choose from but potentially larger class-sizes?				

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<p><b>Diversity</b> - Who is on the campus? Does the college have a diverse group of students and professors? How are these diverse students being supported and are they graduating? Does the school have support programs for students of diverse identities?</p>				
<p><b>Majors</b> - Does the school offer the major(s) you are interested in? If you are unsure of what you want to major in, does the school offer flexibility for you to explore most majors or take classes in different fields?</p>				
<p><b>Degrees</b> - What type of degree do I want to attain? Certificate/License, Associate's degree, Bachelor's degree?</p>				
<p><b>Class Format</b> - What format are classes taught in at this school: in-person, online, or hybrid?</p>				
<p><b>Grade Point Average and Test Scores</b> - What is the average GPA of students accepted into the college? What does the college consider in calculating your GPA? Note: The average GPA/test score is not a minimum you have to reach, it is just an average. Use this as a guide along with the other factors.</p>				
<p><b>Cost of Attendance</b> - Does the school meet all of your financial need? If not, how much is the school willing to cover on average? Does the school offer its own scholarships?</p>				
<p><b>Campus Housing</b> - Would you like to live on-campus and does the school offer on-campus housing (such as dorms)? Would you like to live at home and commute to school? Does the school offer ample student commuter parking lots? Is there off-campus housing around the school?</p>				
<p><b>Campus Life and Activities</b> - What type of activities do you want to engage in outside of class? Specific cultural clubs, intramural sports, greek life, community service?</p>				

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## How To Build Your College List

### Why is a college list important?

Creating a college list is one of the most important steps in the college application process. It will help you thoughtfully select a school that is the right one for YOU! An effective college list will make it easy for you to find the school that will meet your academic, personal and social needs, allowing you to be successful!

Pay close attention to the “Pro-tips” throughout the document! These are college ready tips you may want to consider as you begin to research colleges and participate in campus visits (virtual or in-person).

### Pro-Tip

- You can begin building relationships RIGHT NOW! Don't be afraid to reach out, attend events or ask questions of admissions representatives
- There are more than 3,000 Colleges & Universities in the US and each one differs in location, size, majors, etc. Just because a school accepts you does not mean that it is the best fit for you. Finding a school that will allow you to learn, be happy and supported is what is most important

### How we define college/school/institution:

Please note every time the word "college" is used it refers to community colleges, vocational/trade schools, four year colleges, universities and other postsecondary institutions



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## Things to Consider

### Types of Colleges

#### What You Need to Know

- 2-year colleges can include community colleges and vocational/trade schools where you can obtain an Associate degree or certificate
  - Examples: Washtenaw Community College, Douglas J Aveda Institute
- 4-year colleges offer a wide range of majors and degrees. Many offer Bachelor, Master and PhD programs

#### Questions to Ask Yourself

- What type of school do I want to attend? Is the institution public or private? Is the institution a 2-year, 4-year, or Trade School?

#### Pro-Tips

- Institutions can be public or private. Speak with your counselor and/or admissions representative to find which option is best for you
  - Examples of public institutions:
    - University of Michigan
    - Michigan State University
    - Eastern Michigan University
    - Washtenaw Community College
  - Examples of private institutions:
    - The University of Chicago
    - Columbia University
    - Loyola University Chicago
- Institutions can also vary by mission and/or demographics of students that attend. Some examples include:
  - **Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCU):** A college or university with a mission to educate Black/African American students
  - **Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI):** Colleges or Universities that serve a significant number of Hispanic students
  - **Tribal Colleges (TCU):** A college or university located on or near American Indian Reservations to serve American Indian and Alaska Native students

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## Location

### What You Need to Know

- Schools can be located in various settings across the country, allowing you to choose the best setting/environment for you
  - **Urban:** Located within a major city
  - **Suburban/Residential:** Located on the outskirts of a major town or city
  - **Rural:** Located in small town/countryside, away from a major city

### Questions to Ask Yourself

- What type of environment is the school located in? Is it located in an urban, suburban/residential, or rural setting? Do I want to relocate to another city? Another state? Internationally?

### Pro-Tips

- Change isn't always bad. Sometimes living in a different location/setting than where you grew up may be a good experience, giving you a new perspective. Whatever you choose, make a choice that works for you!

## Size

### What You Need to Know

- Size varies from school to school. For example, some large schools may offer large classes, small classes and/or a combination of both, but small schools can as well

### Questions to Ask Yourself

- Do I want to know everyone at my school, do I want to know some people at my school, or a small percentage of people at my school?
- Do I feel I learn best with small classes or when there are more classes I can choose from but potentially larger class-sizes?

### Pro-Tips

- "What is the average class size?" This is a great question to ask a college admissions representative

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## Diversity

### What You Need to Know

- Diversity is the representation of different types of identities (such as people of different race and ethnicity, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, (dis)ability status, language, culture, national origin, religious commitments, age and more) on campus

### Questions to Ask Yourself

- Who is on the campus? Does the college have a diverse group of students and professors?
- How are these diverse students being supported and are they graduating? Does the school have support programs for students of diverse identities?

### Pro-Tips

- This is why it is important to look at the student body demographics of a given college
- When looking at support programs at a college, one way to research is by checking if the school has a multicultural center or multiple cultural centers/clubs available
- Consider asking your admissions representative about the graduation rate of diverse students (the number of students that graduate each year from diverse student groups)

## Majors

### What You Need to Know

- When you go to college, you will choose a specific subject that you want to study. This process is called selecting a major. This will ultimately help you map out what classes you take
- Examples of majors:
  - Communications & Media Arts
  - Child Development
  - Engineering
  - Business Administration
  - Paralegal
  - Dental Hygiene

### Questions to Ask Yourself

- Does the school offer the major(s) I am interested in?
- If I am unsure of what I want to major in, does the school offer flexibility for me to explore most majors or take classes in different fields?

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## Pro-Tip

- If you are interested in a major that the school does not offer, then the school may not be the right fit for you

## Degrees

### What You Need to Know

- A degree is what you will earn after you complete all of the requirements (classes) for your major
- Types of Degrees
  - **Certificate/License:** Typically attained at trade schools and community colleges  
Examples: Auto Mechanic or Cosmetology license/certification
  - **Associate's degree:** Attained at community colleges
  - **Bachelor's degree:** Pursued at a 4-year institution

### Questions to Ask Yourself

- What type of degree do I want to attain?

## Pro-Tips

- Everyone's educational journey is different. It may take some people longer or shorter to complete a college degree and that's okay, so go at your own pace!
- You can go beyond getting a certificate, Associate's, and Bachelor's degree by pursuing a graduate degree! For example:
  - Master's degree (M.A., M.Ed., M.S.)
  - Doctorate degree (Ph.D, Ed.D)
  - Law degree (JD)
  - Medical degree (M.D.)
  - And the list goes on!
- Even though you pick a specific degree, you can seek a concentration such as Pre-Med, Pre-Law, etc. Example degrees:
  - Biology with a Pre-Med concentration
  - Public Health with a Pre-Med concentration

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## Class Format

### What You Need to Know

- **In-person Learning:** Meeting face to face with your instructor and classmates
- **Online Learning:** Attending class virtually using technology to communicate with your instructor and classmates
- **Hybrid:** A combination of in-person and online learning (Ex. most classes may be online, with some of the classes meeting in person)

### Questions to Ask Yourself

- What style of learning works best for me: in-person, online, or hybrid?

### Pro-Tips

- Think about how you learn best and determine which format will allow you to perform at your best
- Given the Covid-19 pandemic, some schools may have switched or made additional class formats. Make sure to check with an admissions representative for the most updated class formats available

## Grade Point Average and Test Scores

### What You Need to Know

- The grade point average (GPA) on the admissions website is the average GPA of admitted students, meaning students can be admitted with a GPA lower than what you see advertised
- It is important to speak with your counselor to find out your GPA
- Schools may require students to take standardized tests such as the SAT or ACT

### Questions to Ask Yourself

- What is the average GPA of students accepted into the college?
- What does the college consider in calculating my GPA?

### Pro-Tips

- The average GPA/test score is not a minimum you have to reach, it is just an average. Use this as a guide along with the other factors
- Admissions considers your academic situation (ex. GPA and test scores) based on your specific school. Your GPA is not being compared with students' GPAs at other schools
- You can ask the various college admissions representatives how their specific college calculates GPA

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## Cost of Attendance

### What You Need to Know

- Cost of attendance is the total amount it costs to attend a college, including tuition, fees, housing, books, and additional expenses  
**Note:** Cost of attendance is not how much you have to pay out of pocket to attend college
- Financial aid is money that you can get for free or borrow to pay for college
  - **Scholarships/grants:** Free money that you do not have to pay back
  - **Loans:** Money you borrow that you must pay back
- Financial aid can come from a combination of different sources such as the college you're applying to, the government, and/or outside organizations
- To qualify for financial aid, you must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

### Questions to Ask Yourself

- Does the school meet all of my financial need? If not, how much is the school willing to cover, on average?
- Does the school offer its own scholarships and/or grants?

### Pro-Tips

- Every college has an Office of Financial Aid that you can contact with any financial-related questions
- If you're unsure how to contact the Office of Financial Aid, connect with your admissions representative

## Campus Housing

### What You Need to Know

- Some schools offer housing options for students to live on campus. However, some students may choose to live off campus, depending on their situation. Housing is typically called "room and board" and it is a separate cost from tuition

### Questions to Ask Yourself

- Would I like to live on-campus and does the school offer on-campus housing (such as dorms)?
- Would I like to live at home and commute to school? Does the school offer ample student commuter parking lots?
- Is there off-campus housing around the school?

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## Pro-Tips

- Many colleges and universities offer different housing options but make sure you choose what is in your price range
- Transportation: Some schools may or may not allow first year students to have a car on campus
- Ask your admissions representative about this. If you cannot have a car during your first year, there is often reliable public transportation available to students

## Campus Life and Activities

### What You Need to Know

- Getting involved is an important part of the college experience, a great way to meet new people, and learn new things outside of the classroom
- Each college offers various opportunities for students to get involved

### Questions to Ask Yourself

- What type of activities do I want to engage in outside of class? Specific cultural clubs, intramural sports, greek life, community service?

### Pro-Tips

- Check if the colleges you're interested in provides opportunities for you to get involved  
**Note:** If there is not an opportunity you see for yourself, know you can create and establish new opportunities on campus that fit your needs

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## Part 3: Time Management

Homework, sports, clubs, chores, life...there is always something to do and never enough time! Learning how to effectively manage your time is the best way to stay on track and achieve all of your personal and academic goals. Ask yourself "Am I using my time wisely"?

### How Do I Spend My Time?

**Instructions:** Think about the activities you engage in throughout the week and consider how much time you spend on each activity. Record your answers in the chart below.

Time	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
6:00 AM							
7:00 AM							
8:00 AM							
9:00 AM							
10:00 AM							
11:00 AM							
12:00 PM							
1:00 PM							
2:00 PM							
3:00 PM							
4:00 PM							
5:00 PM							
6:00 PM							
7:00 PM							



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8:00 PM							
9:00 PM							
10:00 PM							

## Weekly Summary Chart

Add up the time for each activity and place the information in the summary chart below.

- \_\_\_\_\_ hours on sleeping
- \_\_\_\_\_ hours with my family
- \_\_\_\_\_ hours eating
- \_\_\_\_\_ hours on TV or video games
- \_\_\_\_\_ hours talking to my friends
- \_\_\_\_\_ hours texting
- \_\_\_\_\_ studying/homework
- \_\_\_\_\_ minutes on \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ minutes on \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ minutes on \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ minutes on \_\_\_\_\_

## Reflection Questions

1. How do you feel after seeing the amount of time you spend on each activity during the week?  
What surprised you?
2. What activities do you spend most of your time engaging in? Why?
3. What activities do you spend the least amount of time engaging in? Why?
4. Is it possible to change your routine/ activities? Why or Why not?
5. What activities could you take away from your weekly routine?
6. What activities could you add to your weekly routine?

Source/Created by: Sydney Morgan-Green, Salvador Vargas and Dyrel Johnson

## Part 4: Essay Writing

Essay writing is an important part of the college application process. Writing a strong personal essay is a great way for college admissions representatives to get to know you and understand why you would be a great student at their school. You are awesome. Learn how to tell your story and creatively share your “why” with others!

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## From Admissions Essay Guide

**Important note:** This text is taken from the University of Michigan Admissions Essay Guide

Helpful advice for writing your personal statement

## University of Michigan Supplemental Essay Questions

### Short Answer

- Required for all applicants
- Approximately 100 words (maximum 150)

**If you could only do one of the activities you have listed in the Activities section of your application, which one would you keep doing? Why?**

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### Essay #1

- Required for all applicants
- Approximately 250 words (maximum 300)

**Everyone belongs to many different communities and/or groups defined by (among other things) shared geography, religion, ethnicity, income, cuisine, interest, race, ideology, or intellectual heritage. Choose one of the communities to which you belong, and describe that community and your place within it.**

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## Essay #2

- Required for all **freshman** applicants
- 500 words maximum

**Describe the unique qualities that attract you to the specific undergraduate College or School (including preferred admission and dual degree programs) to which you are applying at the University of Michigan. How would that curriculum support your interests?**

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## Writing Personal Statements

### Context Considerations

- What is a personal statement? A personal statement, or essay, offers an opportunity to show aspects of yourself that will not be obvious in other areas of your application. It is important that personal statements are not simply material contained elsewhere in the application
- Think of the statement as the single opportunity in your package to let the admissions committee hear your voice. You want your essay to engage the reader, and to clearly demonstrate what makes you a unique candidate - different from the rest of the students who are applying

### Overview of the Essay

- Some applications ask more specific questions than others. There is no set formula to follow in shaping your essay, only choices for you to make, such as whether you should write an essay that is more autobiographical or one that is more professionally focused
- Personal statements are most important when you are applying to an extremely competitive program, where all the applicants have high test scores and GPAs, and when you are a marginal candidate and need the essay to compensate for low test scores or a low GPA

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## The Importance of the Personal Statement

- The personal statement is an important part of your application package. Depending on the topic you choose, the essay you write provides additional evidence of your intellectual and creative achievement
- The essay is also the only opportunity for the readers of your application to get a feel for you as a person as well as for you as a student. It is also the place where you can put your academic record into the context of your opportunities and obstacles

## Process for Writing the Essay

1. Analyze the question(s) asked on a specific application. Research the school and/or program to which you are applying
2. Take a personal inventory. Write out a two-to-three sentence response to each question
3. Write your first draft
4. Revise your essay for form and content. Ask yourself the following questions as you edit for content:
  - a. Are my goals well articulated?
  - b. Do I include interesting details that prove my claims?
5. Make sure your essay is error-free with no spelling, grammar, or mechanical mistakes
6. Ask someone to read your essay and make suggestions for further revision
7. Revise again

## Personal Inventory Questions

- What's special or impressive about your life story?
- What details of your life (personal or family situations, history, people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals) might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?
- What are your career goals?
  - Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain?
  - Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships (for example, economic, familial, or physical) in your life?
- What skills (for example, leadership, communication, organization) do you possess?
- What personal characteristics (for example, integrity, compassion, persistence) do you possess that would improve your prospects for success in the field or profession? Is there a way to demonstrate or document that you have these characteristics?
- What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admissions committee to be interested in you?

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- What or who are your intellectual influences? What writers, books, teachers or concepts have shaped you?
- What's the most important thing the admissions committee should know about you?

## Going Beyond The Basics: The important Role of Modifiers

### What are modifiers?

- **Adjectives** (describing words):
  - Interesting
  - Amazing
  - Fascinating
  - Cool
- **Adverbs** (the “-ly” words that describe verbs) - Examples:
  - I ran quickly
  - Unfortunately I can't do that
  - I obviously understood that
- A solid revision uses strong adjectives and description to make the writing more precise and interesting.
- **Weak adjectives:**
  - Interesting
  - Different
- **Strong adjectives:**
  - Absorbing
  - Arresting
  - Engaging
  - Engrossing
  - Enthralling
  - Fascinating
  - Gripping
  - Immersing
  - Intriguing
  - Involving
  - Riveting
  - Unique
  - Varied
  - Individual
  - Particular

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## Example Revision With Increased Attention to Description

When Mr. McCarthy wadded up a ball of construction paper and threw it full force across the room in World History class my sophomore year, something changed in the way I thought about learning. Mr. McCarthy was trying to explain how difficult it was for the papacy in France to control the Byzantine officials in Constantinople. As he wadded up the ball of paper in his thick, knotty hands, he said, “Imagine that this piece of paper is an edict from the Pope in France, and think of Chris’ desk as Constantinople.” He threw the paper ball across the room and it floated gently to a landing on the carpet next to Chris. “That,” Mr. McCarthy said, “is about how difficult it was to communicate between France and Constantinople. By the time the message got to Turkey, nobody took it seriously because it had taken so long to arrive.”

Even today, two years later, I remember that empires that decentralized their power during the Middle Ages were more likely to collapse. Thanks to Mr. McCarthy’s creative, non-traditional teaching tactic, I doubt that I will ever forget this fact. I believe that the University of Michigan will offer me equally creative and unique opportunities to learn and grow.

## Essay Overview Checklist

### DO

- Answer all the questions asked
- Be honest and confident in your statements
- In some cases, a student needs to explain a weak component of their application, but in other cases it may be best not to mention it at all. Rather, write an essay that focuses on your strengths
- Write a coherent and interesting essay
- Make your first paragraph the best paragraph in your essay. The lead or opening paragraph is generally the most important. It is here that you grab your reader’s attention or lose it. The paragraph becomes the framework for the rest of the statement
- Develop a thesis about yourself early in the essay and expand on it throughout.
- Think of the essay as not only an answer to a specific question but as an opportunity to introduce yourself
- Think in terms of showing or demonstrating through concrete experiences. If your statement is fresh, lively, and different, you’ll be putting yourself ahead of the pack. If you distinguish yourself enough through the story, you will make yourself memorable
- Be specific
- Tell what you know

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- Be meticulous. Type and proofread your essay very carefully. Express yourself clearly and concisely. Adhere to stated word limits
- Avoid clichés

## DON'T

- Summarize your entire life. Don't include needless details that take space away from a discussion of your maturity and ability to be successful in college
- Write what you think the admissions committee wants to hear. Such a response is likely to make you blend into the crowd rather than stand out from it
- Repeat information directly from the application form itself unless you use it to illustrate a point or want to develop it further
- Allow any superficial errors in spelling, mechanics, grammar, punctuation, format, or printing.
- Try to hide, make excuses for, or lie about your challenges

## U-M Essay Tips

- Read and answer the question asked. You'd be amazed how many essays we receive that don't relate at all to the question we were asking!
- Be authentic
- We want to hear about you in your response – the experiences, opinions, and values that have shaped you. Feel free to write on something you are passionate about so we can get to know you better
- Be proactive!
- Each year, we talk to students who have everything ready but their essays. Get started on your essays soon!
- Avoid re-writing your accomplishments
- You should have already given us all of that information in your application
- Don't forget - a research paper is different from an essay
- If you are reusing something you've previously written, make sure it directly answers our question and not one that a teacher posed to you for an assignment
- Don't overload on advice
- When other people edit your essay too much, your unique voice will disappear. And we want to hear from you - not them
- Remember there is no "right" answer. Don't think you know what we want to hear. Whatever you have to say about the topic is of interest to us
- Use recent examples
- It's always best to focus on issues that occurred while you were in high school, since we're only reviewing your high school performance when determining if you'll be admitted. If something

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happened when you were younger that has significantly affected you, talk about it, but then put the focus on how this event has influenced you in recent years

## Don't Make Excuses.

- If you've had a poor or inconsistent grade performance due to unusual or stressful circumstances, feel free to share that information with us. It can be useful. But don't strain credibility by making up false excuses. Be honest – we'll respect that
- Watch your tone
- There's a big difference in focusing your essay on "U-M needs me as a student because..." versus "please please please admit me!"
- Be truthful, but make sure you're comfortable with your potential audience
- Students often feel compelled to share extremely personal and even traumatic experiences in their responses – health issues, death of a family member, abuse, etc.
  - We will absolutely keep your information confidential, but be aware that a number of people will be reading your essay
- Tell us why Michigan is the school for you
- Talk about campus programs you've attended. Tell us why you're a great fit for Michigan.
  - Remember that athletics can be a reason, but should not be the only reason you want to come to Ann Arbor! Your essay is your opportunity to tell us why you would be a valuable contributor to the U-M community

## Sources Include:

- Jen Michaels, Sweetland Center for Writing, University of Michigan
- [www.cws.illinois.edu/workshop/writers/tips/personalstatement](http://www.cws.illinois.edu/workshop/writers/tips/personalstatement)
- [owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/pw/p\\_perstate.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/pw/p_perstate.html)
- [students.berkeley.edu/apa/personalstatement](http://students.berkeley.edu/apa/personalstatement)



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## Tell Your Story: Change A Life: Writing with Purpose

### How to begin to Discover your WHY?

#### Questions to consider:

- Why does your family celebrate certain holidays?
- Why do you spend 3 hours a day playing soccer after school?
- Why do you think you are sitting in this room right now?
- Why do you want to go to college?

How do you get there though? Really it is a journey of reflection and self-discovery. These are some questions that might help you start to explore what your WHY is. You might have a question that is not up here. Whatever that WHY question is, think about it and write down 3 words or phrases on a sticky note or in your notebook that helps to explain your WHY. You do not have to write what your WHY. What we are asking is what words or phrases are associated with your WHY. You will not have to share this.

### Common/Coalition Application Prompts

#### MIGHT Pull out these WHYS

- Identity
- Obstacle/Challenge
- Culture
- Resilience
- Leadership
- Morality/Ethics
- Interests/Passions
- Responsibility
- Growth
- New Perspective

### Video Watch: [Pixar in a Box](#)

#### Discussion Questions:

What did you think?

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Did anything stand out?

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The speaker talked a lot about writing what you know, but he also mentioned this idea of the story under the story. Monsters Inc is not about a monster that scares kids for a living, but about a man becoming a father. It was something he knew about. It was authentic and vulnerable and the message is concise. The thing you likely know best is yourself. So really the story you tell in your college essay is a vehicle, a tool, to talk about yourself. What is the story, under your story?

## Your WHY tends to inform Your Story

- Be Authentic
- Be Vulnerable
- Be Concise
- **Challenges:** Pick a challenge in your life. Something specific. (ex. Mom lost her job)
- **Effects:** What effect did that challenge have on you? (we had less money in the house)
- **Feelings:** How do you remember that moment? (ashamed, concerned)
- **Needs:** What did you need in that moment, both tangible and abstract. (I needed to feel like a kid again, I also needed to be there for my mom who has having a difficult time, more time in the day)
- **What I did in response:** What did you actually do in response? (I got a part-time job)
- **Values:** As a result of this situation, what did you learn? About yourself, about the world, etc? How have you changed? What is new/different? (I understand the value of money better now, I know that time is precious because you can get more money but not more time, I value family, support, sacrifice, etc). Also known as the “So What?”
- **1-line story:** Think back to Monsters Inc. If you had to tell the real story, the story under the story, in 1 sentence, what would it be? (How I started to become an adult)

## Takeaways

- Telling your story is important
- Be self-aware. People detect others’ genuineness, truth and integrity (especially admissions officers)
- Learn to navigate your journey—it gives you credibility and helps others connect with you

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**Directions:** The StoryBoard below is designed to allow you to not tell the story, but use the story to talk about you.

**Follow the steps below in order to help you complete the StoryBoard.**

- **Step 1 (Challenges):** Pick a specific challenge in your life
- **Step 2 (Effects/Feelings):** Talk about the effect of that challenge. What feelings did you have?
- **Step 3 (Needs/What I Did In Response):** Discuss what you needed at that moment as well as how you responded to the challenge
- **Step 4 (Values):** Write the “so what” - The “so what” explains the lesson learned and the values you gained from the challenge
- **Step 5 (1-Line Story):** Tell your story in 1 sentence

*The first two rows are used as examples to help guide your work. Remember: you do not need to use full sentences until the last column.*

CHALLENGES	EFFECTS	FEELINGS	NEEDS	WHAT I DID IN RESPONSE	VALUES	1-LINE STORY
<i>Mom lost her job.</i>	<i>We had less money coming into the house</i>	<i>Ashamed, concerned, guilty.</i>	<i>I needed to feel like a kid again, I needed to be there for my mom.</i>	<i>I got a part-time job.</i>	<i>I learned the value of money. Time is valuable because you can't get more.</i>	<i>This is the story of how I started to become an adult.</i>

Source/ Created by: Keiran Miller, U-M Graduate Intern

## Structure of an Essay

### MLA Format

- Type your paper on a computer and print it out on standard, white 8.5 x 11-inch paper. Double-space the text of your paper and use a legible font (e.g. Times New Roman)
- Whatever font you choose, MLA recommends that the regular and italic type styles contrast enough that they are each distinct from one another

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## Key things to be aware of while writing

- Be comfortable in the language you use in your writing
- You are writing a prompt. You are not taking a writing test
- Be concise with your words
  - Allows you to use more words
- Utilize your 5 senses when telling your story
  - It is always better to be concrete rather to be abstract

## Ways to begin an essay

- Begin in the middle of an action/event
  - This would be similar to a flash back, but remember to explain after how you got there and how you have grown
- Ask Question/ Make a Statement
  - Do your best to address and answer that question through a story
- Picking one particular person, place, or thing and describe your connection to the person, place, or thing
  - Be sure to not focus too much on the item, but instead what you have gained or learned from that person, place, or thing

## Ways to end an essay

- Conclude with a question/ statement that is connected to the theme of your story
  - Allows the reader to understand that you do not have it all figured out and still interested in learning more
- How the story you told is connected to your plans or goals for the future
  - How will the lesson or experience you discussed affect what you will do once on campus

## Source: Sweetland Center for Writing

- <https://lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/undergraduates/writing-guides.html>
- <https://lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/undergraduates/writing-guides/how-do-i-write-an-intro--conclusion---body-paragraph.html>
- <https://lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/undergraduates/writing-guides/how-can-i-write-more-descriptively.html>

## Model MLA Paper: A Visual Formatting Guide

EasyBib  
a Chegg service

### Model MLA Paper: A Visual Formatting Guide

This is a **heading**. In MLA, you don't need a title page, but it is recommended to have a 4-line header with your name, teacher, class, and date.

Jane Doe  
Dr. S.  
English 4900  
16 October 2016

Create an original **title** for your project and place it in the center of the page.

Doe 1

The Unity of Story in Tolkien's Works

Story in the form of myth, legend, and song serves to unify all elements of Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings*. Even though each story hinges on a previous one, connecting each situation with all situations, the use of myth, legend, and song within the stories to connect them and hint at a continuation of the written pages.

**Double space** the whole paper. This is standard for all style manuals, unless you are instructed otherwise.

These titles are in *italics* because they are books. **Long works** like books, magazines, and newspapers are always in *italics*. **Shorter works** like short stories, songs, and poems are denoted by quotation marks ("Title"), without italics.

*The Hobbit* is the first story having to do with the Ring, thus bringing its adventurous tale into the unifying mix of Tolkien's works. Many key characters are introduced, such as Bilbo Baggins, Gollum, and Gandalf. In this work, song is used to connect Bilbo to Gollum when they play a game of riddles and discover that they know many of the same ones (*The Hobbit* 76-77). In this way, Tolkien introduces the saga of the Ring, unifying this book with *The Lord of the Rings*. Song is also used to introduce the spiders in Mirkwood related to Ungoliat, from *The Silmarillion*, and later to Shelob, from *The Lord of the Rings*, when Bilbo sings to escape them (158-59). The myths of the ancient past are ushered in with the dwarves, who sing a dirge to explain the history of their feud with the *Silmarillion*. Thus song a works.

*The Lord of the Rings* star

**In-text citations** usually include the author (last name) and location of the quote or information that's being used.  
Example: (Tolkien 76-77).

In this case, the author's name, Tolkien, was mentioned earlier in the paragraph, so it does not need to be included in the first in-text citation. Since more than one Tolkien work was mentioned, we included the title (*The Hobbit* 76-77).

When citing the same work again (158-159), only the page numbers are needed. The only reason to include *The Hobbit* again is if a different work is referenced between the citations.

Find more guides and tools on citing and writing at [www.easybib.com](http://www.easybib.com)

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Set a 1 inch margin around the entire paper.

Include your last name followed by the page number in the upper right hand corner. It should be a  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch from the top.

**Pro Tip:** Use your software’s “insert page number” feature rather than typing it into the body of the essay.

**Pro Tip:** If you tend to write short sentences (and paragraphs) and struggle to make them longer, try combining clauses. This paragraph is long is because there are complex sentences, or sentences with more than one clause.

For example, the topic sentence here contains a semicolon, which is a great way to combine two clauses with similar thoughts into one sentence.

You should aim for 6-10 sentences per paragraph. This paragraph is ideal at 7 sentences.

Indent each new paragraph by a  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch from the left margin.

This comma appears at the end of an introductory phrase. This type of comma is commonly missed. To make sure you include it, look for sentences that begin with prepositions (like “in” here) or gerunds (like “being” or “having”). The comma will go right before the main subject of the sentence, in this case Tolkien.

Find more guides and tools on citing and writing at [www.easybib.com](http://www.easybib.com)

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Title your bibliography in MLA as  
"Works Cited."

Doe 3

## Works Cited

Drouot, Michael D.C., and Hilary Wynne. "Tom Shippey's J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century and a Look Back at Tolkien Criticism since 1982." *Envoi*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2001, pp. 101-167. *ResearchGate*, [www.researchgate.net/profile/Hilary\\_Wynne2/publication/282942606\\_Tom\\_Shippey's\\_'JRR\\_Tolkien\\_Author\\_of\\_the\\_Century'\\_and\\_aLook\\_Back\\_at\\_Tolkien\\_Criticism\\_since\\_1982/links/56234dac08aea35f2682f284.pdf](http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Hilary_Wynne2/publication/282942606_Tom_Shippey's_'JRR_Tolkien_Author_of_the_Century'_and_aLook_Back_at_Tolkien_Criticism_since_1982/links/56234dac08aea35f2682f284.pdf).

Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Hobbit*. Houghton Mifflin, 1996.

--. *The Two Towers*. Houghton Mifflin, 1994.

Hanging  
indent  
0.5"

This is a Works Cited entry. It is set to have a **hanging indent** in case the citation goes longer than one line.

### MLA Formatting: 7th or 8<sup>th</sup> edition?

If you use a web citation tool like EasyBib, you may see an option to choose MLA 7 or MLA 8.

MLA 8 is the latest edition, and MLA 7, the previous edition, is still used by many teachers. MLA 7 has slightly different rules, so make sure to ask your teacher which edition to use.

Find more guides and tools on citing and writing at  
[www.easybib.com](http://www.easybib.com)

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## Part 5: Brag! Tell Your Story Through Your Activity Involvement

Colleges are excited to see when you are able to balance school and extracurricular activities. This is the time to brag about yourself and show others just how awesome you are! Do you babysit after school? Are you a captain or a part of a sports team? Do you have an after school job? If so, you should list these activities on your college application. Listing your extracurricular activities allows institutions to see what you can bring to their college and highlights your involvement, leadership, and personal commitment.

### Junior Brag Sheet

Please fill out this form as accurately and completely as possible. Don't be afraid to "brag" about yourself. Your counselor and teachers will use this information in recommending you for scholarships, college admission, and other honors/awards.

**Full Legal Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Preferred Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of parents you live with** (please indicate relationship – mother; father; step-mother etc.):

\_\_\_\_\_

**Number of Siblings:** \_\_\_\_\_

List ALL activities and leadership roles beginning with 9th grade

**Clubs and organizations:**

**Name of club**

**Years involved**

**Offices held**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



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## Awards and Honors:

Name of award	Reason for award	Year received
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## Athletics:

Sport	Years involved	Position played Awards/recognition?
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**Church and youth group activities:** (Include where, type of activity, length of time)

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# College Day

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**Plans after leaving high school:** \_\_\_\_\_

**College** (Proposed major?) \_\_\_\_\_

**List top three schools you plan to apply to:**

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**Technical School** (Proposed major?) \_\_\_\_\_

**List top three schools you plan to apply to:**

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**Military** (Which branch) \_\_\_\_\_

**Work** (Where, doing what) \_\_\_\_\_

**What three adjectives best describe you?**

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# College Day

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If your best friend were asked to describe you, what would they say?

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Discuss an event in your life that has had a significant impact on you, your life, your academics?

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After three years of high school, what are you most proud of?

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Source: Laura Saavedra, Program Manager at The Center for Educational Outreach

## Part 7: College Day Reflection

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Going to college is important to me because:

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# College Day

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What College is the best fit for me?

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Career Interests

Personal & Academic Goals

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I fully commit to my academic success in the following ways:

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Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_