

6 Things High School Grads Need to Do Before Leaving for College



Getting ready for your last high school prom and counting down the days till graduation are all you can think about. Yes, freedom and plans for a fun-filled summer are just around the corner. Before you know it, you'll be loading up your belongings in the family minivan and headed off to college. You're so ready, right? Well, maybe not. Here are some tips for things to do this summer before you head off to college.

Downsize, Get Organized & Learn How to Do Your Own Laundry

You're not going to be able to take your whole closet and every cherished belonging with you to the dorm. Start downsizing now and make a list of all the things you'll need to take with you. A clean and tidy space will make things a lot more manageable. Most likely you'll go home a time or two on break and you can swap out things that you don't need for things that you do. But, in between those trips home, you'll need to learn how to do laundry. Those whites can turn into some interesting colors and transform into a smaller size if you don't know your way around a washer and dryer.

Understand Your Financial Situation

Each family's situation is different – make sure you understand what your family may or may not be able to contribute. You should've already applied for financial aid. If not, you need to complete the [Free Application For Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#) ASAP! Make sure you list on the application the school code of the college you plan to attend so your information is sent to that school. If you still haven't decided it's best to list any school you think you may attend. The financial aid office will then

notify you of any financial aid you might be eligible for. [Know what each of those types of aid is and in what order you should accept them](#). Visit [StudentAid.gov](#) for information on planning and paying for college. Do you have enough money to pay for school? Will you need to work part-time? [Make a budget](#) and know what you can spend on certain things.

Get a Good Calendar and Prepare for a Whole New World of Time Management

One of the biggest challenges for a lot of you will be time management. When you head off to college, you won't have somebody there to wake you up, make you breakfast and send you out the door in clean clothes with completed homework in hand. Set yourself up early with a class schedule (make a course syllabus your new best friend) and a system that works for you. You need to know deadlines for registration, papers, financial aid, coursework and everything in between. Your chance of succeeding academically will rapidly evaporate if you don't manage your time well. You're worth the investment – manage it well.

Craft a Good Resume and Learn How to Network

No, don't wait until you're approaching college graduation to write a cover letter and resume, you need one now. Having a compelling and professional resume and cover letter is vital to applying for part-time jobs, internships, etc. You might want to also consider changing your email address. Employers probably won't be impressed with an email address like [justheretoparty@XXmail.com](#). Work experience can be just as important as good grades when looking for jobs after college graduation. Internships not only provide you with knowledgeable experiences in your field, but they also provide great networking opportunities. Don't settle in and nest, put yourself out there and go to as many networking events as possible.

Embrace Coupons and Master the Art of a Good Deal

Another difficult thing to learn is skipping those unnecessary splurges. Yes, I know it's all about YOLO but you need to embrace BOGO. Coupons aren't just for stay at home moms anymore. Scoring deals whether in newspapers, magazines or with online sites like Groupon and Living Social it's easier than ever. But don't get so caught up in the deals that you buy vouchers for and you don't end up using. That can cost rather than save you money. Save those splurges for when you score a great "Buy One Get One" free or other greatly discounted offer. Ask about student discounts and if available a studentadvantage card. Start practicing this summer. It'll impress your friends and it'll be a little more money in your pocket when you get to campus. Another great way to save money is buying used textbooks rather than new. Search sites like bigwords.com, Amazon, and TextbooksRUs to name a few. If you buy new and then resell them back to the college

bookstore check online sites first for what they're worth. College bookstore buy back rates are sometimes as low as 10% of what you paid for it new. Lots of students are also now renting textbooks on sites like chegg.com.

Learn How to Keep You and Your Things Safe

Yes, you need to remember to lock your dorm room and place that lock on your laptop. Losing your laptop can wreak havoc on your studies and a theft due to an unlocked door can also ruin your relationship with your roommate. Start practicing being more aware of your surroundings and keeping yourself safe. Program your school's campus security number into your phone. You never know when you might need it. Safety also applies to protecting your social security number, PIN and passwords. Your social security number is one of the main identifiers when checking on things like financial aid, grades, and registering for classes. Make sure all your passwords and important numbers are not on a post-it-note on your desk. Store them in a secure place. Not protecting your identity and important information can have lasting long-term effects on your ability to get a job and apply for credit.

Congratulations on a job well done and making the decision to advance your education!

Susan Thares is the digital engagement lead for the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Federal Student Aid.