

Your Future, Your Fit

A Future Planning and Reflection
Guide for High School Students



Who Is This Guide For?

This guide is for you if you're a high school student...

- Thinking about what comes next
- Considering a two- or four-year college program or weighing other options
- Whose family has a lot of questions about your plans
- Feeling unsure or overwhelmed about what the future looks like

We can help you take time to think about who you are, what you care about, and what you want your life to look like. The rest gets clearer from there. (We promise!)

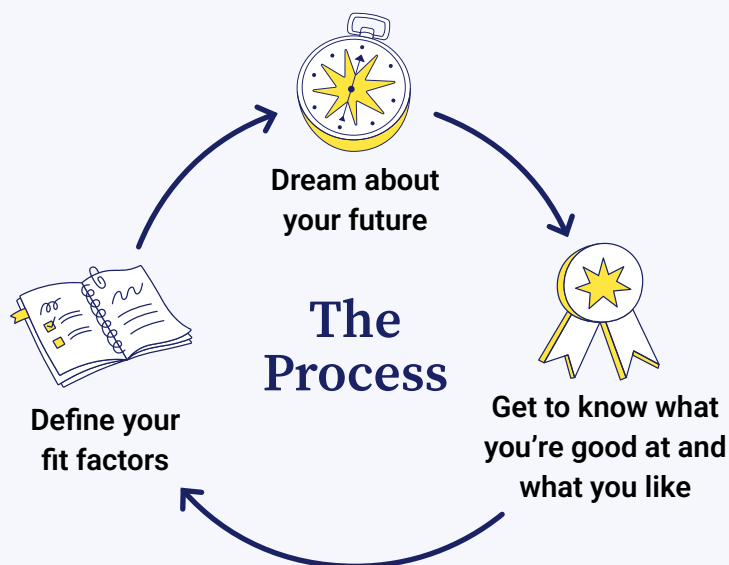


Where and what do you see yourself studying? What kind of jobs are you interested in doing? What makes you excited for the future?

Okay, these are big questions. You aren't expected to have all the answers yet. But thinking about them now can take some of the pressure off later. Dreaming about the future should be fun—so start there.

Even before you choose a college, it's important to consider questions about the life you hope to live one day. From there, you'll look for programs that fit you—your interests, your aspirations, your financial needs, your vibes.

Not sure where to start? Here are some things to think about.



Remember to get perspective from adults who know and care about you.

A yellow pocket watch with a white face and a large yellow star in the center. The watch has a yellow strap and a silver-colored rim. There are small black dots on the watch face representing hour markers. A small yellow star is also visible in the bottom left corner of the page.

You could also talk about these questions with a friend, make a voice memo, drop your notes in your favorite app, or whatever works for you.



1. When you think of yourself as an adult, what do you want your life to look like?



➤ Where do you see yourself living and working?

- ☐ In a city
- ☐ In a suburb
- ☐ In a rural area
- ☐ Near where I live now
- ☐ Far from where I live now
- ☐ Another country entirely!

➤ What are some things you want to be able to do as an adult?

- ☐ Travel and explore
- ☐ Be my own boss or start a business
- ☐ Express myself creatively
- ☐ Do hands-on work
- ☐ Help other people
- ☐ Make or design things
- ☐ Work outside an office setting (e.g., outdoors, in a lab, or somewhere else)
- ☐ Have a family of my own
- ☐ Live near my family
- ☐ Something else entirely

➤ What types of things matter most to you?

- ☐ My things: clothes, electronics, etc.
- ☐ My hobbies or activities
- ☐ The people around me
- ☐ How I spend my free time
- ☐ How I spend my work time
- ☐ Where I live

2. What do you value?



➤ How do you like to feel in your daily life?

- ☐ Helpful
- ☐ Appreciated
- ☐ Powerful
- ☐ Listened to
- ☐ Admired
- ☐ Supported
- ☐ Curious
- ☐ Something else

➤ When you have to make a difficult decision, what helps you figure it out?

- ☐ Talking with friends or family
- ☐ Writing down my thoughts
- ☐ Researching
- ☐ Trying different solutions
- ☐ Something else

➤ Is there a particular community where you find strength and fulfillment?

- ☐ A religious community
- ☐ On a sports team or through another activity
- ☐ My family
- ☐ My friends
- ☐ My neighbors

➤ Are there parts of how you were raised or things you grew up with you find important? Are there parts you hope to change or do differently?

- ☐ My family's values
- ☐ Religion
- ☐ Activism or community service
- ☐ How discipline is used
- ☐ Special traditions
- ☐ How we have fun
- ☐ How we communicate

3. What might you like to do in your future career?



- What topics are you thinking about when you lose track of time?

- Are there specific populations you'd like to work with one day?

- ☐ Children or families
- ☐ People with disabilities
- ☐ Senior citizens
- ☐ Something else

- Are there subjects you've studied in school that you would like to pursue as a career?

- ☐ Math
- ☐ Science or technology
- ☐ Reading or writing
- ☐ Health care
- ☐ Social science (e.g., psychology, sociology, etc.)
- ☐ Visual or performing arts
- ☐ Media, marketing, or communications
- ☐ Government or politics
- ☐ Something else

- Are there problems you'd like to solve in your community, or a business you'd like to build? (e.g., through science, business, engineering, health care, education, or other pathways)

- How important is salary when you think about your future career?

- ☐ Most important
- ☐ Important but not my #1 priority
- ☐ A bit important
- ☐ Not that important to me

4. How can you get ready for what comes next after high school?



- What do you feel ready for? What are you anxious about?

- What helps you feel comfortable when you're nervous? How do you cope with setbacks?

- What support resources do you have, and who can you ask for help?

- How will you know when it's time to seek out support?

2

Get to Know What You're Good At and What You Like



Take what you started to imagine in Part 1 and start connecting it to where you are right now: your strengths and experiences. High school is a great time to explore opportunities, build skills, get better at the stuff you care about, and “test-drive” future career paths. The more you understand what you’re good at and enjoy—where you shine—the easier it is to find a path after high school that fits you well.

1. What do you feel you're good at?



- What do the people who know you really well say you're good at? (Think best friends, closest family, favorite teachers, or coaches.)

- What skills pop as strengths on your PSAT-related assessment and SAT score reports? (You can see these in the [Career Insights Snapshot](#) in your score report.)

- ☐ Craft & structure
- ☐ Information & ideas
- ☐ Expression of ideas
- ☐ Standard English conventions
- ☐ Algebra
- ☐ Advanced math
- ☐ Problem-solving & data analysis
- ☐ Geometry and trigonometry

This [10-minute career quiz](#) about your interests can also be helpful to discover your strengths!

- Which AP courses have you tried and enjoyed? In what subjects have you built deep knowledge?

- What are your best durable skills? (These are essential non-technical skills that are highly valued by colleges and employers.) Examples of these skills include:

- ☐ **Communication:** Expressing your ideas clearly
- ☐ **Collaboration:** Working effectively with different kinds of people
- ☐ **Critical Thinking & Problem-Solving:** Working through challenging situations
- ☐ **Professionalism & Reliability:** Holding yourself accountable

- What do people ask you for help with?

- ☐ Academic support
- ☐ Social dilemmas
- ☐ Making or fixing things
- ☐ Caring for others
- ☐ Creative guidance or feedback
- ☐ Something else

2. What do you enjoy doing most?



- What are you doing when you lose track of time?

- Are there places where you feel most like yourself?

- When you imagine a great day, how would you spend it?

3. What can you try now to build on your current skills and interests and develop new ones?



- What AP or advanced courses could you take to build your skills or learn more on a topic you're curious about?

- What types of experiences could help you understand jobs that might interest you?

- ☐ An internship in a business
- ☐ A volunteer gig in the community or working with a population that interests me
- ☐ A part-time job where I could make money and gain experience
- ☐ A career-related course at my school
- ☐ Something else

- Who could you meet in your community that's doing something you're curious about? Could a teacher help introduce you?

- ☐ A business owner
- ☐ A doctor, dentist, or veterinarian
- ☐ A chef or restaurateur
- ☐ A scientist or researcher
- ☐ An architect or engineer
- ☐ A local elected official or government leader
- ☐ Someone else



Before you move on, highlight 3–5 responses above that feel most important. Those will be helpful in Part 3!

3 Define Your Fit Factors



Now, you'll take your notes from above and use them to build your personal criteria for "Fit Factors." These are the things you'll look for when you're researching colleges and careers.

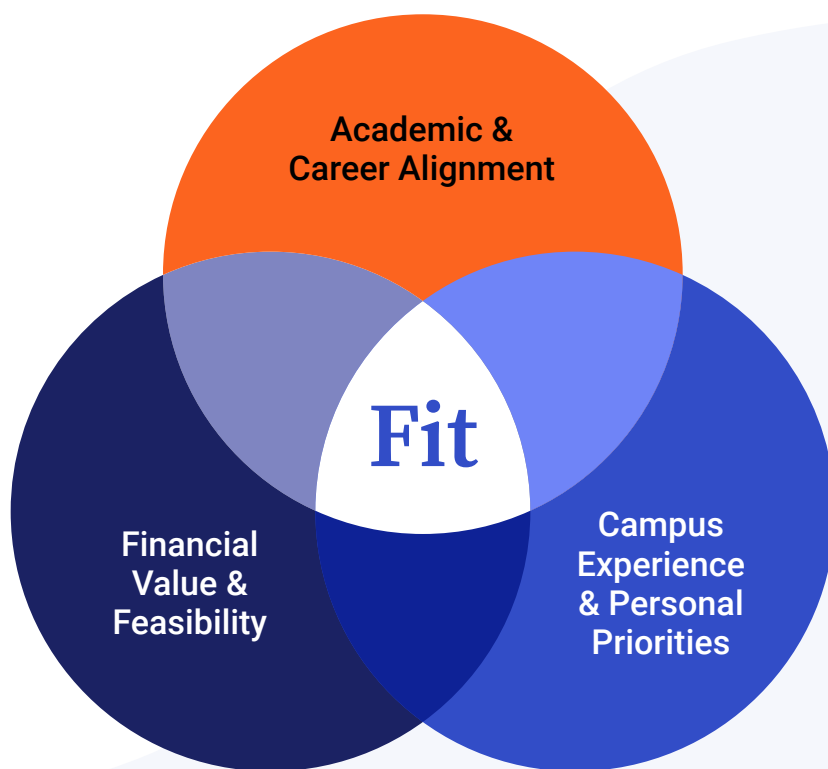
Fit Factors fall into three buckets: Academic and Career Alignment, Financial Value and Feasibility, and Campus Experience and Personal Priorities. Everyone's criteria for each of these looks different, so you'll list the characteristics that fall into each Fit Factor category for you. Indicate which ones are must-haves, nice-to-haves, and not that important to you. (These are just starting points. Add your own!)

Here are a few examples:

If you said **you want to work outside an office** and are **great at hands-on problem-solving**, you might prioritize experiential learning opportunities in your Academic and Career Alignment criteria.

If you said **how you spend your free time** is most important to you and **you love performing arts**, you might prioritize strong extracurricular theater or dance programs in your Campus Experience and Personal Priorities criteria.

If you said **it's important that you earn a high salary** and **you want to live far from home**, you might prioritize expected income for potential careers and your area of study and costs of travel when you consider your Financial Value and Feasibility criteria.



Academic & Career Alignment



- Strong programs in ____ (your areas of interest or future majors)

- Academic match (based on grades, test scores, and high school coursework)

- Career services (career center access, connections in your fields of interest, alumni network, etc.)

- Experiential learning opportunities (internships, study abroad programs, etc.)

- Research opportunities in your field of interest

- Access to professors and mentors

- Availability of advising

Financial Value & Feasibility



- Expected family contribution

- Estimated cost of travel to/from your home

- Estimated cost of books and materials

- Options for financial aid (federal and state aid; need-blind, need-based, or merit-based aid from college)

- Employment outcomes for ____ (your area of study)

- Expected income after college for ____ (your area of study) and potential for growth

Campus Experience & Personal Priorities



➤ Extracurriculars you care about

➤ Clubs based on shared background or interests

➤ Commuter student population

➤ Greek life

➤ Religious affiliation

➤ Region; urban, suburban, or rural setting

➤ Residential life

➤ Access to support for students with disabilities

➤ Access to mental health support



What's Next?



Take your Fit Factors to [**BigFuture.org's College Search**](https://bigfuture.org/college-search) and filter by the factors that matter most to you. If you need more guidance about finding your personal fit, you can always explore free articles and videos in the [**BigFuture Community Library**](#).

