



**INTERNATIONAL LITERACY
AND DEVELOPMENT®**

**INTERNATIONAL LITERACY AND DEVELOPMENT
YOUTH GUIDE FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS**



YOUTH GUIDE FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

This guide was created to help you learn about how to prepare for college. There is also a section on how to prepare for and take the GED if you need to take it. Finally, we also have sections on creating a resume and cover letters (which are required for job applications). We hope that you and your guardians will find this resource helpful when you are in high school and looking to the future.

Sections:

1. College Readiness and Timeline

Describes what you should be doing each year in high school and how to prepare for college applications.

2. Preparing for and Taking the GED

For those who need to get the GED before applying for college.

3. How to Write Essays

This is also very useful for writing your college application essays and essays in college.

4. Preparing for the SAT, ACT, and AP Tests

The SAT and ACT are tests whose scores are used in your college application and AP tests provide credit for college courses.

5. Financial Aid Applications

These are financial aid applications required as part of the college application.

6. Loans and How They Work

7. How to Use Common App and ApplyTexas

These are the two application platforms that you will use for college applications.

8. How to Write College Application Essays

More details on the college essay process, the one most important part of your college application.

9. How to Write a Resume and Cover Letter

10. How to Find Trade Schools

For those who want to learn a trade directly and work.



COLLEGE READINESS AND TIMELINE

Applying for and getting into college is a long-term process even though you will not apply for colleges until the fall of your senior year (unless you are graduating early). This guide explains the most important tasks for each year of your high school program. There are multiple programs and ways to get a full ride (usually free tuition and sometimes money towards housing and other fees).

[College for All Texans](#) includes a lot of detailed information too.

8TH GRADE

If you are in a DISD middle school, you will pick a graduation plan which lets you pick an area of focus for studying. This helps with deciding where to go to college and get jobs after graduation.

If you do well in your classes and graduate high school with a [Distinguished Level of Achievement](#), you are automatically eligible to go to any Texas four-year college if you rank within the top 10% of your senior class (8% at University of Texas at Austin).

9TH GRADE

You should talk to your guidance counselor at least twice a year about how you are doing in your classes: what is working? What isn't working? Is there anything you need more support in? Your guidance counselor will be a major support during college or trade school applications. They can also help with financial questions and other problems if they happen.

Make a Google Drive or other folder to keep track of all your high school classes, requirements, volunteer hours, and other activities. Colleges care about more than just grades. For this reason, it is important to share about volunteer activities or community involvement.

In Texas attendance is a required part of your education. It will also be important for college grades. You cannot skip classes just because you want to or because you have a family obligation. While days like Eid or being sick will be excused absences, you have to attend school the majority of the time or risk getting in trouble. You can get excused absences for religious holidays, and can ask your guidance counselor how this works.



Depending on how you are doing in school, talk to your counselor about taking advanced classes, like honors, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), or college dual enrollment courses. If you take a test in an AP or IB class at the end of the year and get a good score, you can use that score for class credit in college and have one less class to worry about! This saves both time and money.

AP tests score out of 5 and IB tests score out of 7. If you take AP Government and get a 3-5 you can get one to two classes of credit at Texas colleges. If you take IB Chemistry and score a 6-7 you can get one or two classes of credit at Texas colleges.

Subject	Examination	Score of 3	Score of 4	Score of 5
Art	History of Art	3 SCH free electives	AHST 2331	AHST 2331
	Studio Art: 2-D Design	3 SCH free electives	ARTS 2380	ARTS 2380
	Studio Art: Drawing	3 SCH free electives	ARTS 1316	ARTS 1316
Biology	General Biology	3 SCH free electives	BIOL 2312 + 2112, BIOL 2311 + 2111	BIOL 2311 + 2111, BIOL 2312 + 2112, BIOL 2281
Chemistry	General Chemistry	3 SCH free electives	CHEM 1311 + Lab	CHEM 1311 & 1312 + Labs
Chinese	Language & Culture	CHIN 1311	CHIN 1311 & 1312	CHIN 1311, 1312, & 2311
Computer Science	Computer Science A	3 SCH free electives	CS 1336 + 1337	CS 1336 + 1337
Economics	Macroeconomics	3 SCH free electives	ECON 2301	ECON 2301
	Microeconomics	3 SCH free electives	ECON 2302	ECON 2302
English	English Language and Composition	3 SCH free electives	RHET 1302	RHET 1302
English	English Literature and Composition	3 SCH free electives	LIT 2331	LIT 2331

This screenshot is from UTD's [page](#) on what credits they will offer for AP tests.

Credits are a recognition of the academic work you've done—the classes you've taken and passed. You'll usually need 120 credits to get a bachelor's degree.

Many colleges offer credit for AP scores. Suppose you earn a 4 on your AP Biology Exam, and your college grants you 6 credits for that score. That means you walk into your college with 6 credits under your belt—before you even take your first class there.

Khan Academy and the College Board both offer free resources to prepare for AP classes and tests. Khan Academy includes free video content on a number of subjects so if you need extra help understanding a topic, the site is a great resource.



Your grades in classes are one of the most important parts of your college application so getting good grades early on is really important. At the end of each academic year, your grades are calculated to create a grade point average (GPA) and the higher your GPA is, the higher your class rank is. Your guidance counselor can explain how this works at your school, but generally speaking the weighted GPA is an average of all courses taken in grades nine through 12 with appropriate course weights. The closer to a 4.0 or a 5.0 (if your school uses 5.0) the better so try to get high Bs and As in all your classes.

Another important part of your college application is your extracurricular activities (what you did outside of classes) so exploring after school activities and programs your first year is important. This might be the math club, robotics, HOSA (health professionals), volunteering with an organization, etc.

10TH GRADE

Start looking at colleges in the area. Dallas County Promise will pay for tuition at a number of local schools if you graduate with good grades and agree to attend a Dallas County Promise partner school.

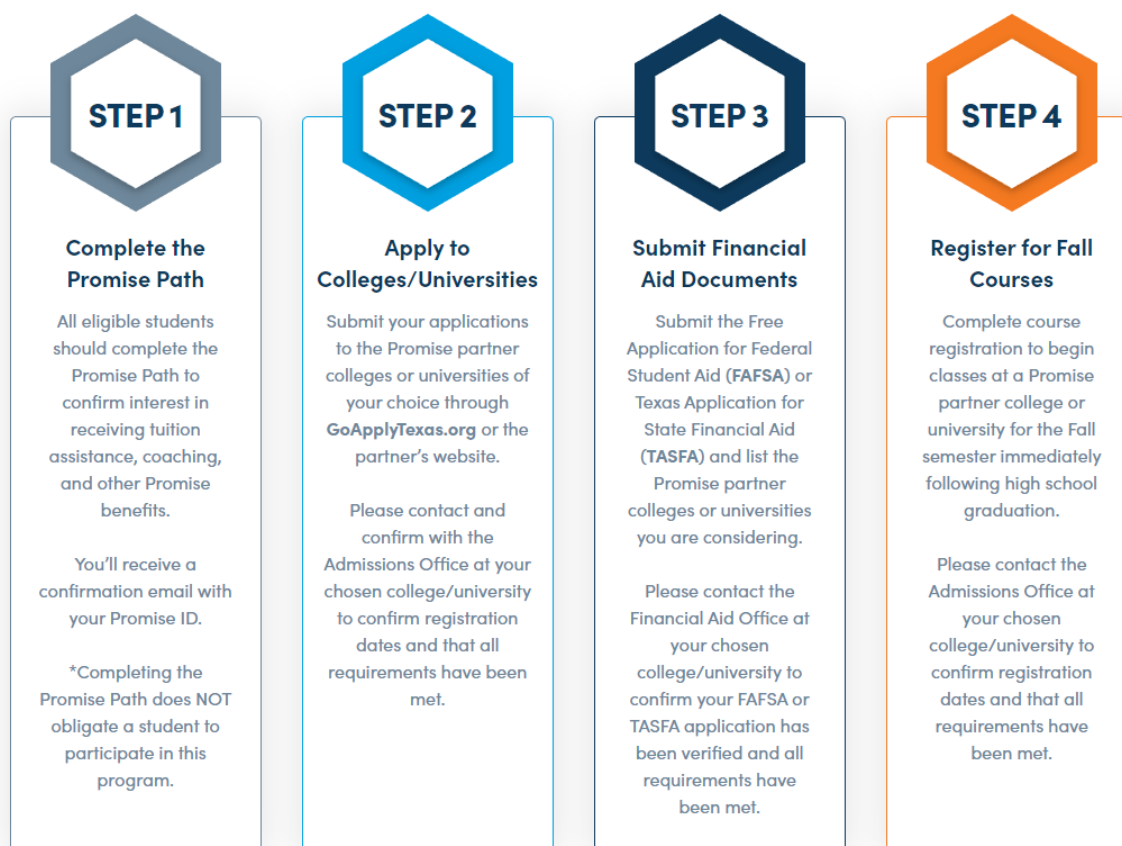
Promise partner schools might change but generally the following are part of the program:

- Dallas College
- Texas Woman's University
- MSU Texas
- Texas A&M Commerce
- University of Texas Arlington
- *SMU sometimes has special scholarships, too.*

Additionally, if your parents or guardians do not make more than \$50-\$60K a year combined, these schools will likely cover tuition fully. There are also a number of scholarships offered by each college so looking at what is available early is important. This way you can prepare for writing strong applications.

You should also take a practice PSAT. The PSAT is similar to the SAT which you will take during your senior year. Doing really well on the PSAT *and* the SAT can get you full rides for tuition (*and* housing) at a number of universities through the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (NMQST). There are study books, websites, and sometimes classes to help with PSAT preparation.





From the Dallas County Promise [website](#).

11TH GRADE

You will take the PSAT this year. If you do really well you can qualify for the [National Merit Scholarship](#) program (if you then your senior year do really well on the SAT, you can get a full ride at different universities).

Start looking more at colleges to see where you will apply in the **fall of your senior year**. *Some students begin their applications the summer before their senior year while they have more time.* The College Board has a great resource called [Big Future](#) where you can narrow schools by location, majors, type, and campus life.

Make a [spreadsheet](#) to track all your college research and in your senior year, your application details.

If you can, visit the local and surrounding universities to learn more about the scholarships and programs available so you can talk to your parents about going to one of those schools. These four year universities offer a lot of opportunities for refugees and a degree from them will be very helpful for getting a higher paying job. Each school has a website and their admissions section will provide a lot of information on how to apply, what to expect, and where to get more information. Many schools host webinars and information sessions, too.

- SMU
- UNT
- UTD
- UTA
- Dallas Baptist University
- Dallas College (the community college)
- Texas Woman's University
- Texas Christian University
- Texas Wesleyan University
- Paul Quinn College

If you have any AP or IB classes this semester, take the relevant tests at the end of the year for college credit. You will qualify for a fee waiver to pay for taking your AP, IB, SAT, and ACT tests and just need to talk to your counselor at school to help apply for them. **These tests will be free if you use the fee waiver, so definitely take advantage of this! If you get college credit this will save you thousands of dollars in classes.**

Also take the SAT subject tests for classes that are not AP or IB, which will get you even *more* course credits!

12TH GRADE

Look at the Dallas County Promise program to find out the eligibility requirements for the year you are applying for colleges. Frequently asked questions about the program are answered on **the site**.

Most importantly, you MUST be enrolled in a participating high school as of November 1st of your senior year and graduate from that same high school.

You apply for colleges in the fall of your senior year. Most college applications are due December 1st, December 15th, January 1st, and January 15th.

Some schools also offer early admission (you are saying that if you get in then you will go to



that university) and those applications are usually due November 1st or November 15th. If you want to do early admission, make sure to do Early Action. If you choose Early Decision, you will have to commit to that school whether or not they give you any financial aid.

Of course, check each school's due dates and add it to the spreadsheet that you made in 11th grade. Many students begin their college application processes the summer before their senior year so that they are organized.

The Common App and Apply Texas are the two places that you will be most likely applying to the colleges.

▶ What is the Common App?

You need to write **college essays** for the applications so you should start working on them early in August when the Common App and Apply Texas applications for each year start. The College Essay Guy is a great resource and has a lot of workshops that allow you to “pay what you can.”

You also need letters of recommendation for each application, usually **3** letters per application. Make sure to ask your writers (teachers, your guidance counselor, someone you work for) at the start of the semester because they will be asked by all the other seniors applying for college, too! Then follow up with them a month, two weeks, and a week out from the deadline. Delayed recommendation letters may mean you don't get accepted into that university.

Create a Google Drive folder for recommendation letter materials. Here you should include your resume (which you will need for applying to colleges), a document that has details about you (what you're interested in, what you're good at, any activities you've been doing, etc.) and what the recommendation letter writers should focus on in their letters (to highlight aspects about you). This way you can get letters telling the schools how awesome you are! You can also include a spreadsheet with deadlines.

You also need test scores, transcripts, and other materials for each university so add these items to the spreadsheet so that you can keep track of what you need.

You also need to fill out the FAFSA which is how the universities decide how much money they will give you towards your education each year. It can be submitted after October 1st and needs to be submitted as soon as possible. Make it a goal to complete your FAFSA and have your college applications in by November 6. Texas A & M, UT-Austin, and some others, give out



all of their discretionary financial aid by then so you don't want to miss out on that free money. They determine if you need additional money by looking at your FAFSA.

You will need your parent's tax information so it's good to talk to your counselor about how the application works so you aren't stuck waiting on information.

Make sure you are filling out the proper FAFSA which is available at <https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa>. Any other website is not the right one!

If you are not yet a U.S. citizen, you may qualify for the TASFA instead of the FAFSA.

The CSS Profile is another aid form that many colleges require so check the colleges that you apply to and find out if it is needed on the school's financial aid website.

It is very likely that you will qualify for financial aid both from the university and the government, including work-study which means you are paid for working on specific jobs on campus. **Avoid loans.** Loans have high interest and take a long time to pay off.


If you are doing well in school and do Dallas Promise or get a full ride from a local university, you will likely only have to pay for housing (and if you apply to be a Resident Assistant and live on campus, that job will pay for your housing).

You will find out if you got into the schools that you applied to in the spring, and then choose a school usually by April 1 or May 1. The summer is when you will attend orientation at that university.



PREPARING FOR AND TAKING THE GED

The approved provider of the high school equivalency assessment in Texas is the GED Testing Service (GEDTS). The [Texas High School Equivalency Testing At a Glance](#) document will provide you with detailed information about the test. Upon the successful completion of the GED tests, the test-taker will be issued a State of Texas Certificate of High School Equivalency.

 What is the GED?

Who can take the GED?

- A resident of Texas 18 or older who has not graduated from an accredited high school is eligible to take the high school equivalency test.
- 17 year olds can qualify for an exception but must not have a diploma or not be enrolled in school.

What is needed to take the test?

- A valid government (national or foreign) issued photo ID, such as one of the following:
 - state driver license,
 - Department of Public Safety identification card,
 - military ID,
 - passport,
 - U.S. passport card,
 - permanent resident card, or
 - matrícula consular;

(NOTE: School IDs and Library cards are not accepted)
- Provide proof of residency in Texas, which could be a:
 - Texas driver license or Texas ID,
 - utility bill showing a Texas address, or
 - bank statement showing a Texas address;
- You must:
 - be 18 years of age;
 - not be enrolled in an accredited high school; and
 - not be a high school graduate from an accredited high school.

What is on the GED?

- The GED® exam is made up of 4 subjects, broken into separate exams: Mathematical Reasoning, Reasoning Through Language Arts, Social Studies, and Science. You don't have to take all 4 exams at once -- you can space them out and go at your own pace.
- Study Guides
- Math (\$80)
 - Learn math concepts, measurements, equations, and applying math concepts to solve real-life problems. You don't have to memorize formulas and will be provided a formula sheet to use on the exam.
 - Basic Math
 - Geometry
 - Basic Algebra
 - Graphs and Functions
 - The exam is two parts
 - You will have access to math formula sheet and on-screen calculator
 - Multiple choice and other question types (drag and drop, fill-in-the-blank, select an area, and drop-down)
 - 115 minutes, 2 minutes of instructions and final review, 3 minute break between parts
- Reasoning Through Language Arts (\$80)
 - Learn reading and writing concepts, including grammar. You'll need to read excerpts from a variety of informational and literary sources and show your understanding, draw conclusions, and write clearly. Your writing will demonstrate your ability to analyze two passages, decide which argument has more convincing evidence and explain why the evidence supports your choice.
 - Topics
 - Reading for Meaning
 - Identifying and Creating Arguments
 - Grammar and Language
 - Format
 - 3 sections
 - 1 written essay (extended essay response)
 - Multiple choice and other question types (drag and drop, select an area, and drop down)
 - 150 minutes, Includes 3 minutes of instructions and final review, Includes 10 minute break between parts 2 and 3, Includes 45 minutes for the written essay

- Social Studies (\$80)
 - Learn to apply American social studies concepts, know how to read graphs and charts displaying social studies data, and use reasoning to interpret information. The social studies exam is not about memorization. You won't need to memorize the capitals of countries or dates that events occurred, but given some information about an event you might need to use that in drawing conclusions.
 - Topics
 - Reading for Meaning in Social Studies
 - Analyzing Historical Events and Arguments in Social Studies
 - Using Numbers and Graphs in Social Studie
 - Format
 - 1 part
 - Access to on-screen calculator
 - Multiple choice and other question types (drag and drop, select an area, and drop down)
 - 70 minutes
 - Includes 2 minutes of instructions and final review
 - No break
- Science (\$80)
 - Learn to understand science concepts, know how to read graphs and charts displaying scientific data, and use reasoning to interpret science information. The science exam is not about memorization. You won't need to memorize the periodic table of elements, but you will need to recognize names and symbols of key elements in answering some questions.
 - Topics
 - Reading for Meaning in Science
 - Designing and Interpreting Science Experiments
 - Using Numbers and Graphics in Science
 - Format
 - 1 part
 - Access to on-screen calculator
 - Multiple choice and other question types (fill in the blank, drag and drop, hot spot, and drop down)
 - 90 minutes includes 2 minutes of instructions and final review
 - No break

How to prepare for the GED?

- The GED has multiple studying options. The GED website has sample tests so you can see how much information you already know or need to learn.
- [Prep Centers](#) which range in cost offer classes and programming
- [GED Complete](#) Official International GED Tutoring program for \$80 a month
- [GED Live Online Classes](#) ranging in cost
- [Practice tests](#) (each subject \$6.99 or altogether \$22.99)
- GED Flash practice [questions](#) ranging in cost

FREE RESOURCES

- The [Dallas Public Library system](#) offers free classes for Dallas residents with a library card
- You can check out GED practice books from the library
- The library also offers scholarships for the practice and official test
- You can study online and in-person for free through the library

GED Academy Online (through the Dallas Public Library system)

- GED Academy creates a personalized learning plan just for you. You'll take an assessment that will pinpoint exactly where you need the most help. Then your suggested lessons will focus on improving these skills. When you're ready to take the official test, the GED Academy will let you know, so you can feel sure that you're prepared.
- GED Academy Online also allows you to submit a writing practice test. Professional graders will score it and give you feedback on what you're doing right and where you can improve your writing.
- With over 200 hours of instruction available, you can prepare for your GED tests at your own pace from your own computer. Every Dallas Public Library has computers that can be used to study for the GED using GED Academy Online.
- Contact the library and they will help you make an account.

USA Hello

- USAHello offers free online classes to help you learn and succeed in the USA. You do not have to pay because USAHello is a non-profit organization. They offer a [GED course](#) that covers all four topics and offer [practice tests](#) for free.

Dallas College WorkReadyU

- This program offers a no-cost adult education program including free [GED classes](#) and [Free Job Training](#).
- You must be 16 and older.



HOW TO WRITE ESSAYS

In college almost all students will have to write at least one or more essays and if you are studying a humanities or social science subject, you will write multiple essays each semester until you graduate. There are thousands of books and websites about how to write a good essay. I link to some of the more detailed online resources below, and provide a basic outline with tips and tricks for writing. Please read through each link as they all provide different examples!

[Oxford Scholastica: How to Write the Perfect Essay](#)

[Grammarly: The Only Guide to Essay Writing You'll Ever Need](#)

[International Student: General Essay Writing Tips](#)

[Scribbr: The Beginner's Guide to Writing an Essay | Steps and Examples](#)

[!\[\]\(10f8862fc183b400327470ea85afe9ae_img.jpg\) How to Write an Essay: 4 Minute Step-by-step Guide | Scribbr !\[\]\(4ba8d838a2aa5445d51c9dee78fcb0cc_img.jpg\)](#)

What is an essay and what are you trying to do in one?


Essays are a form of writing where you are educating the reader about a certain topic. There are types of essays: argumentative (defend a position), persuasive (convince the reader), compare-contrast (devoting attention to two or more topics), personal (about yourself and your experiences), expository (explanatory), and admissions or application essays for colleges and awards

Steps for Writing an Essay

1. Analyze the question or prompt
 - a. What does the question want you to do? Essay questions usually include a topic or topics to be addressed, the scope of the topic, and what you have to do in the essay (discuss, analyze, define, compare, evaluate, etc.)
 - b. Example: Discuss the importance of bike lanes in cities.
 - i. This is a short prompt but gives you very specific directions. Your essay would need to discuss why bike lanes in cities are important. You would *not* write about rural or country areas and why bike lanes are *not* important.
 - c. Example: Should students be allowed to have phones at school?
 - i. This is another short prompt asking you to discuss your opinion on whether students should be allowed to have phones at school. You would pick a side (yes they should/no they shouldn't) and then persuade your reader.
 - d. Example: To what extent can the American Revolution be understood as a revolution 'from below'? Why did working people become involved and with what aims in mind? (This example is from [The University of Melbourne](#))

- i. This prompt asks you to focus on the aims and motivations of the working people in the revolution (from below). If your answer focuses on the rich people then you would not be answering the question.
2. Once you have read the prompt and understood what you are being asked to do, **brainstorm!**
 - a. This is where you take a piece of paper or your document and list all the things that come to mind about the topic. What do you know about bike lanes? Do you have an opinion about using phones in schools? What do you remember from history class about the American Revolution? Brainstorming allows you to think about everything you know about a topic and what else you might need to research. To write about the importance of bike lanes, you will also need to do some research. What are the rates of accidents in cities without bike lanes? How do bike lanes impact bikers and drivers? What happens without bike lanes?

Opinion Essay

Brainstorming ideas 

Topic question: Discuss the importance of bike lanes in cities.

What do I already know?	What do I want to argue?	What do I need to find out?
Supporting ideas	Supporting ideas	Supporting ideas

3. Prepare and Outline
 - a. Once you have brainstormed and decided what you want to say in your essay, you must prepare an outline of your essay. Here you collect resources for evidence which includes newspaper articles, websites, speeches, journal articles, books, and other scholarly sources.
 - b. Create an outline of your essay using the sources that you have collected
 - i. This can be bullet point or short sentences, you'll need an introduction, body paragraph, and conclusion so in the outline you will decide what pieces of evidence will go where in the overall essay.

4. Draft

- a. This is the main part of essay writing where you take all the information you have gathered so far and start writing full sentences. This is your first attempt at putting everything together!
- b. All essays need an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. The number of paragraphs is up to you but usually three or more is required for a detailed essay.
 - i. **Introduction:** This is where you start your essay by introducing the topic you will write about. Your reader should know by the end of the introduction paragraph exactly what the essay is about. Introductions should have a hook to grab your reader's attention, background for context on the topic, and a clearly defined thesis statement.
 1. Example thesis statement: Bike lanes are important in cities because they reduce the number of car and biker involved accidents and create a specific place for bikers to ride their bikes.
 - ii. **Body paragraphs:** Body paragraphs are where you go into further details about your topic and explain why your thesis statement says what it does.
 1. A good body paragraph contains four elements:
 - a. Transitions (furthermore, besides, whereas, equally important, lastly, yet, still, however, immediately, first, for example) are the bridges between your essay paragraphs. They provide cues to help your reader understand your ideas.
 - b. Topic sentence: This sentence is at the start of the paragraph and introduces what the entire paragraph is about.
 - c. Supporting sentences: These sentences make up the bulk of your body paragraph to develop and support the topic sentence's assertion with evidence, resources, and your opinions.
 - d. Conclusion: This is your paragraph's last sentence summing up or reasserting what you just said and leading into your next paragraph.
 - iii. **Conclusion:** The final essay in your paragraph is where you restate your thesis (without repeating it exactly), reiterate your main points from your body paragraphs, and then write a conclusion sentence that pulls it all together. Ask yourself so what? Why did this essay matter? What were you trying to say? You

want the reader to leave the essay feeling like they have learned something new and understand your topic more.

1. Don't say in conclusion, in summary, or to sum up. The readers know it's the last paragraph.
2. Don't simply summarize what you already wrote.
3. Avoid introducing new ideas or evidence, that will confuse writers. You *can* say something like "further research in X topic will let us understand the topic more"

5. Revise

- a. You've written a first draft! Now what? Once you have your first draft finished, you need to go back and reread what you wrote. Pay attention to word choice and clarity. Does what you wrote make sense? Does it actually say what you wanted to say? Is there a section that needs more information? Do you need stronger sources to back up what you're trying to say? Revising is about cleaning up what you wrote and making it stronger.

6. Proofreading

- a. You have a final draft. Or so you think. Proofreading is where you go through for a final polish to make sure nothing is spelled wrong, formatting is correct, there are no grammar problems, and that you have properly cited your sources.
- b. Not citing sources properly is plagiarism which can lead to your essay getting a zero and in major academic trouble (zero in the class, academic probation, expulsion from the school). Anything that did not come out of your own head has to be cited.**
 - i. If something is common knowledge you don't have to cite it. "The sky is blue" is a sentence that does not have to be cited.
 - ii. HOWEVER, *why* the sky is blue is a matter of physics and would need to be cited.
 - iii. If concerned, cite!
- c. You can learn more about citations at [Purdue Owl](#) which includes guides on the major citation styles. Your professor will probably assign a style or let you pick, but you must be consistent for each paper!

7. Create works cited


- a. You will need to create a works cited or bibliography page that goes at the end of the essay that lists all your sources based on the citation method you pick. Usually this is in alphabetical order by last name. You can use the Purdue Owl link to see what the process is for your citation type, but again, be consistent.

If you follow these seven steps every time that you write an essay you will have successful essays each time.

For many of you English is a second (or third or fourth) language and that can make writing difficult. However there are some free sources online that will help you with spelling, grammar, and making sure that your writing is clear and makes sense.

Grammarly is a free site that includes an app that you can install on your computer that will look at your writing and tell you how to fix your grammar, checks plagiarism, can generate citations, check your tone, and check your essay overall for any issues.

They also have a writing guide (linked at the very top of this article) and many resources on how to develop your writing.

 What Is Grammarly?

Most colleges have a writing center where you can ask for advice and get help with looking over your writing. The writing center will usually read your essay and help you with different parts of the process of writing and review what you have written. They are a great asset so you should use them.

PREPARING FOR AND TAKING THE SAT, ACT, TSI, AND AP TESTS

The SAT (from College Board) and the ACT are tests required by many universities as part of the college application process. Many schools will state that they are test optional so students can choose to submit a score or leave it off their application. Finally some schools don't require the test at all. Regardless of where you are applying, you will probably take the SAT or the ACT at least once in high school as a junior, and then again as a senior and submit the better score. The SAT is scored out of 1600 and the ACT out of 36.

AP (Advanced Placement) tests are taken by students who are in AP classes in high school. Doing really well on these tests will get you college credit when you apply to colleges. The AP



test is scored out of 5 and a 3 is considered passing. You usually get credit for scoring a 3, 4, or 5 depending on the university and the subject of the test.

This section of the guide briefly outlines some resources for preparing for the three different tests. You should also speak with your high school counselor to apply for fee waivers so that you do not have to pay to take the tests or send the scores to the schools.

SAT

What exactly is the SAT?

The SAT tests skills that you are learning in high school. In 2023 the test is moving to a digital format so the test has changed in length and format from what students have taken before 2022. As of spring 2024 both the PSAT and SAT will be offered in the digital format. The links will take you to pages explaining the topics within each section of the test and what type of questions you will answer on each part of the test.

The test has a two-stage adaptive test design for Reading and Writing. Both modules are 25 operational questions and 2 pretest questions and both will take 32 minutes each. The questions are all four-option multiple choice (ABCD).

The Math section works similarly. It is a two-stage adaptive test design. Both modules are 20 questions and 2 pretest questions each and both will take 35 minutes each. The question types are four-option multiple choice (ABCD) and student produced responses where you type in the answer. The digital format of the test will allow you to use a calculator for the entire test.

Adaptive test-design means that the test will score how you do on the first module and then give you either easier or harder questions for the second module.

[What to expect with the digital SAT Youtube Video](#)

There are hundreds of test prep websites and books available for study. The most popular website is Khan Academy (which has courses on every topic you might take in high school). The course explains the SAT, general strategies, how the Reading, Writing, and Math sections will work, as well as tips and strategies. The course currently still includes a section on the SAT essay, but that is no longer part of the test.

College Board provides free full length practice tests on their website including the digital format so that you can familiarize yourself with how the test will look and study guides.



Kaplan Test Prep (one of the many test prep companies) also provides free resources on their website and questions of the day.

When do I take the SAT test?

You will likely take the PSAT as a junior, and then take the SAT in your senior year. You should aim to take it at least once in the fall of your senior year so that if you don't like your score, you can prepare to take it again later in the year with enough time to send the results to the schools that you will apply to. Deadlines for each test offering are on the website and you will need to register at least a month in advance of the date that you want to take the test on.

ACT

What exactly is the ACT?

The ACT, a three-hour, multiple-choice college entrance exam, covers four skill areas: English, math, reading, and science. It also includes an optional essay. It is 2 hours and 55 minutes without the essay. English is 75 questions and you have 45 minutes. Math is 60 questions, and you have 60 minutes. Reading is 40 questions and you have 35 minutes. The optional writing essay is one question and you have 40 minutes to write the essay.

The ACT website offers a free test guide that breaks down the types of questions more, how fee waivers work, when the test dates are, and test prep. The same link includes practice questions for each section of the test and free full-length test. Kaplan Test Prep also includes a guide on how to study for the test.

Like the SAT you can take the ACT multiple times and will need to take it in your senior year.

TSI

The Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA) is the result of the Texas Success Initiative mandated by the Texas State Legislature. The assessment is designed to guide Texas public institutions of higher education in helping them determine whether students are ready for entry-level college coursework in the areas of English Language Arts Reading (ELAR) and mathematics. Students are exempt from this assessment if they meet college readiness benchmarks on the SAT, ACT, STAAR English III or Algebra II EOCs, or successfully complete the high school College Preparatory Course.

Students scoring at or above the benchmarks are considered “college ready” and eligible to enroll in any entry level college course (for example, English composition, history,



government, or college algebra) without remediation. Some college level courses require passing scores in more than one area.

The TEA website explains the minimum scores required on the TSI and what scores will exempt you from having to take it.

There is also an informational brochure for students, and resources on preparing for the test if you think you will need to take it. You should speak with your high school counselor to find out if you think this will be necessary.

If you are not exempt, your college will ask you to take one test in math, one in reading, and one in writing. Based on your scores on these tests you might be placed in required courses.

AP

AP Tests are the tests that students take in the spring (usually in May) on the subject(s) that their AP classes are about and these tests provide college credit. Common tests are the AP Government, AP Economics, AP US History, and AP English tests. Some students will take AP science courses in high school and test in those. You can see the full list of AP tests on the College Board website.

If you are in an AP class, then you are being taught the subject to match the test itself so it is a good opportunity to get college credit whether you will go to a community college or private/public university. Khan Academy has a free number of courses for AP subjects to help you to study for the test.

FINANCIAL AID APPLICATIONS

When you apply for college and every year in college, you will fill out a number of financial aid applications. This document outlines the key information for the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) who are citizens, TASFA (Texas Application for State Financial Aid) for those who aren't citizens, and the CSS Profile which is mainly for private colleges and through the College Board. You will complete *either* the FAFSA *or* the TASFA.

FAFSA

Make sure you are filling out the form at studentaid.gov. Any other link is incorrect. You will make an account and click that you are a student and want to access the FAFSA form.

The FAFSA collects financial information about your parents from their tax documents to calculate the amount that your family is expected to contribute. Colleges use this information to give scholarships and aid, and the Federal Government uses this information to provide Pell Grants (do not have to be paid back), and loans (that do have to be paid back). Some people also receive Work Study (where you are paid to work on campus).

▶ **FAFSA® Overview** This video provides a brief overview of the FAFSA

▶ **How to fill out the 2023-24 FAFSA** This is an hour long step by step on how to fill out the FAFSA

This link has frequently asked questions. The deadlines are different for each state but you should always aim to finish it as early as possible.

Eligibility:

- demonstrate financial need for need-based federal student aid programs;
- be a U.S. citizen or an eligible noncitizen (as a refugee you are eligible);
- have a valid Social Security number (with the exception of students from the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, or the Republic of Palau);
- be enrolled or accepted for enrollment as a regular student in an eligible degree or certificate program;
- be enrolled at least half-time to be eligible for Direct Loan Program funds;
- maintain satisfactory academic progress in college or career school;
- sign the certification statement on the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA®) form stating that you're not in default on a federal student loan, you do not owe money on a federal student grant, and you'll only use federal student aid for educational purposes; and
- show you're qualified to obtain a college or career school education.

Who is considered a parent?

The US government considers “A legal parent includes a biological parent, an adoptive parent, or a person that the state has determined to be your parent (for example, when a state allows another person’s name to be listed as a parent on a birth certificate)” as your parent. Grandparents, foster parents, legal guardians, older brothers or sisters, widowed stepparents, and aunts and uncles aren’t considered parents unless they’ve legally adopted you.

What do I need to fill out the FAFSA form?

- Your Social Security number
- Your Alien Registration number (if you're not a U.S. citizen)
- Your parent’s federal income tax returns, W-2s, and other records of money earned (Note: You may be able to transfer their federal tax return information into your FAFSA form using the IRS Data Retrieval Tool)
- Bank statements and records of investments (if applicable)
- Records of untaxed income (if applicable)
- An FSA ID to sign electronically.

You can also get help filling out the FAFSA by calling the financial aid office of the college(s) that you are applying for, and the videos linked above show the steps on the application. The application is available to view before making an account in the [paper format](#).

The Federal Pell Grant Funds can be received for no more than 12 terms (6 years) and is called the Federal Pell Grant Lifetime Eligibility Used (LEU).

TASFA

The Texas Application for State Financial Aid ([TASFA](#)) is used to collect information to help determine eligibility for state financial aid programs that are administered by institutions of higher education in the state of Texas. Students that are classified as a Texas Resident who cannot apply for federal financial aid using the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) are encouraged to complete the TASFA.

The priority deadline for Texas schools is usually January 15th of each year and is a [paper form](#) that must be sent to the financial aid office of each college that you apply to.

▶ Introduction to the TASFA explains the TAFSA in more detail and you can call TAFSA for more help.



CSS Profile

The CSS Profile is required for a limited number of colleges in Texas which can change, so you should check if the college you are applying for is listed.

If you do have to apply for this, you can learn how to complete the profile in [this free guide](#) from CollegeBoard with videos.

You'll need your most recently completed tax returns, W-2 forms and other records of current year income, records of untaxed income and benefits, assets, and bank statements.

Use your College Board account to sign in which helps save time.

Remember: You do not need to complete the entire application at one time. You may save and return to complete the application.

The deadline is school specific so check the financial aid site of the school that you are applying to.



LOANS AND HOW THEY WORK

Sometimes students have to take out some form of loans which are funds that have to be paid back to the loan granting organization.

There are three types of Federal Loans.

Subsidized Loans are for undergraduate students with financial need determined by the cost of attendance minus expected family contribution and other financial aid (grants or scholarships). These loans do **not** accrue interest while you are in school at least half-time or during deferment periods.

Unsubsidized Loans are loans for both undergraduate and graduate students that are not based on financial need. Eligibility is determined by your cost of attendance minus other financial aid (such as grants or scholarships). Interest is charged during in-school, deferment, and grace periods.

Unlike a subsidized loan, these loans **do** accrue interest from the time the unsubsidized loan is disbursed until it's paid in full. You can choose to pay the interest or allow it to accrue (accumulate) and be capitalized (that is, added to the principal amount of your loan). Capitalizing the interest will increase the amount you have to repay.

There is also the Parent Plus Loan which is a loan to your parents *not you* and can be taken if the amount of Subsidized and Unsubsidized Loans are both maxed out. These loans have a very high interest rate and should be taken out as a last resort.

This link explains the limits based on your year in school and whether you are a dependent or independent student.

You can learn more about each type of loan at StudentAid.Gov and by talking to your college's financial aid office.



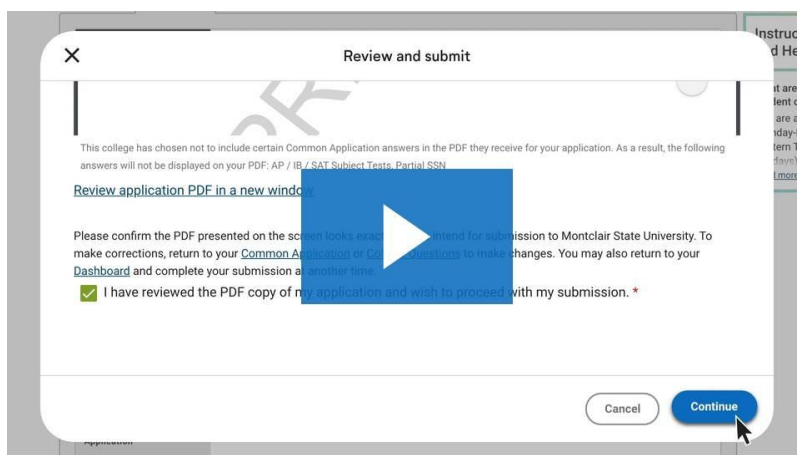
USING COMMONAPP AND APPLYTEXAS

While some colleges and universities might have their own application portals, the majority of universities use [Common App](#) or [ApplyTexas](#) for their applications. Apply Texas works just like Common App except only for schools in Texas so the directions below apply to both websites. You can also check the [frequently asked questions page](#) for Apply Texas.

Spreadsheet.com provides a [free template](#) to help keep track of all the pieces of information needed to apply to college.

Common App

To use Common App you will create a profile where you fill out information about yourself, your high school experiences, and answer essay prompts that are particular to each university. Below is a summary of the details from the [First Year Student Guide from Common App](#). The link includes a video that takes you step by step through the system.



First-Year Submission

Create your account and choose your student type and complete your registration information which requires your name, home address, phone number, date of birth, and other details.

- Filling out your application takes time. You will eventually need before submitting: A copy of your high school transcript (you will enter your high school grades and current courses in the system)



- A list of your activities, work, and family responsibilities
Test scores and dates from your college entrance exams (SATs, ACTs, AP/IB tests)
- Your parent's information and your own demographic information
Academic honors and achievements
- Add colleges that you want to apply to (you can apply to a max of 20).

* While some colleges may charge an application fee, others have no fee to apply. And, many will offer fee waivers under certain circumstances, including financial need, veteran status, and more.

Each of your applications will need official school forms including letters of recommendations so make sure you keep track of who you are asking to submit recommendations and create a spreadsheet or document that lists who you are asking and when you have spoken with your recommenders.

These are usually your counselor, teachers, employers, or other non-related adults who can talk about you positively.

It's important to stay organized as you work on your applications.

Each college needs you to complete common questions and add counselor. Beyond that their applications vary. Each college can determine their unique requirements for:

- Deadlines
- Application Fees
- Personal Essay
- Courses & Grades
- Test Policy
- Portfolio
- Writing Supplements
- Recommendations

Plan your essays. These take the longest time to do because you need to write multiple drafts before you have a good final draft to submit. Colleges can make the personal essay optional or required but if they require it, that personal essay will get used for all the colleges.

Colleges also have short-answer prompts ranging in 150-500 words where they want you to answer specific questions about why you are applying to that college specifically.



Some colleges use a separate writing supplement. Not all colleges have a writing supplement. Some colleges only request this supplement based on how you answer other questions.

Essays are what distinguish you from every other applicant and can be the difference between getting accepted to a college, waitlisted, or rejected.

Submit your applications!

Submission is a three-step process:

- 1) Reviewing your application.
- 2) Paying the application fee (if applicable).
- 3) Submitting your application.

Always submit things early because thousands of students will be applying to college at the same time as you and the online system can have issues if you wait until the last minute. If the deadline is 11:59PM on January 1st, submit that application in December. Colleges are sometimes flexible if recommendations are delayed but they will not accept your application if it is late.



WRITING COLLEGE APPLICATION ESSAYS

Writing a college application essay is similar to writing any essay. Both CommonApp and ApplyTexas provide prompts that applicants must choose one of to write.

This year's essay prompts are available [online](#) so you can see what the prompts look like.

“Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.”

You would not want to write about multiple things in this essay. If you chose this prompt you could talk about being a refugee and your experiences and how those experiences have impacted you as a person. However you would not want to talk about your experiences as a refugee, your interest, and talents because that is too much information.

Keep your reader in mind! College application readers do not spend a lot of time on each application so you have to have a good “hook” to get their attention. They care about what makes you unique and why you are a well-rounded person who they should admit.

Always use descriptive language and details that let the reader get to know you! “I am a refugee” is a true statement, but it doesn't say anything else. “I was born in Burma but had to flee with my family to Thailand when I was six years old” is much more impactful.

Grammarly (the same website included in the writing essays section) has a [post](#) all about writing college essays which goes into more detail.

You should proofread it for errors and clarity. You can also ask your counselor or a trusted teacher to review it (with enough time for revision)! The college essay (and supplemental essays) are what help to distinguish you from thousands of applicants so it is a important!

You should also make sure you say the right name of the university if you are adapting one essay for multiple applications. Saying that you really like the psychology department at UTD in an application for SMU will not look good.

Most importantly, be authentic! Write what is true to you and your experiences. Don't write what you think the admissions committee wants to hear.



RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS

Resumes are one to two page documents that summarize your work, volunteer, and education experience in one place for hiring. It's essentially a marketing document!

A cover letter on the other hand, is a literal letter that you are writing to the hiring manager to explain why they should consider hiring you. In this letter you are emphasizing how awesome you are and why they should hire you for the position. Even before you start college or a job, you will need to have a resume for applying to college or the job. You will need a cover letter later as you progress through your career.

This section of the guide goes over common things to remember in each document with an example of a resume and links to successful cover letters.

[Ask a Manager](#) is one of the best resources for job related questions. This is a blog run by Alison Green who has been a manager for over 15 years. A lot of the information below is from her site and you can find all her posts about [resumes](#) and [cover letters](#) on her site. You can get her free guide for preparing for job interviews by signing up on [her site](#), and she does not send spam.

How to Write a Resume

As a refugee you have unique experiences that other people in the United States don't have. You have probably helped out around the home or a family business whether in the United States or the country(s) that you lived in before resettling here. All of those experiences count for your resume.

1. The first part of your resume will include your legal name, your location (city, state), your email (this should be professional), and your phone number centered at the top of the document
 - a. First Name Last Name
Dallas, TX | firstname.lastname@gmail.com | 972-123-4567
2. Your first real section until you have graduated from college is your education section
 - a. Emmett J. Conrad High School, GPA and the year you will graduate from high school
 - b. If you are in college you keep your high school information, but then your college information will be first as you will list in reverse chronological order



3. The next section is your Work Experience section. Start by listing all your jobs and experiences
 - a. You will need the name of the employer/job, your title, and the dates that you worked in that job. This list will be your Work Experience section.
4. Create a bullet-point list under each job of what you did and the achievements
 - a. Here you need to list your accomplishments and try to include numbers where you can, ex) if you worked at a restaurant you would state “served X customers daily” or “handled \$X in cash daily”
 - b. Not all jobs (especially starting out) will include numbers but you can try to provide context, so if you helped a neighborhood auntie watch children you could say “Provided childcare for X children weekly”
 - c. If the job is in the past, use past tense for your verbs
 - d. If the job is currently happening, use present tense
5. Add a volunteer and leadership experience section
 - a. If you were involved in groups in your highschool, this is where you would list that information
 - b. National Honor Society, Art Club, Student Council, Key Club, Soccer Team
 - c. You will also list that period of time that you were involved and your involvement. Were you a member? Did you have any leadership positions in the organization? You want to show all your involvement in high school.
 - d. If you haven’t worked a lot you can combine work and volunteer together at first.
6. You might include a skills section.
 - a. If you have any special certificates you can list them here. If you know how to edit videos, or use Canva, Photoshop, etc., you’d want to list them in this section too.
7. You might also include an awards section (especially as you progress through college)
 - a. This includes being on the honor roll/doing really well in school

Again as a high schooler, or early college student you probably don’t have a lot of things to list, but you will still need a resume when applying to college and for jobs so it is important to have one ready. The next page has a resume template that you can copy and use.

Your resume format should be clean and easy to read. Many jobs have an automated program that reviews the resume so you do not want it to be clunky or confusing. Do not use fancy fonts or special colors. Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri, are good fonts for a resume (and cover letter).



First Name Last NameDallas, TX | firstname.lastname@gmail.com | 972-123-4567**EDUCATION**

Emmett J. Conrad High School, 3.5 GPA

Expected May 2023

WORK EXPERIENCE

Kumon Learning Center

Dallas, TX

Instructor

Jan 2022 - May 2023

- Supported students in learning math and coached them to improve their studying
- Monitored and wrote notes on student productivity and progress
- Instructed 20 early learners ages 3-7 weekly

Emmett J. Conrad High School Student Council

Dallas, TX

Member

Jan 2022 - May 2023

- Help organize school events
- Set up decorations, design path, and clean up for haunted house

Chemistry Class

Dallas, TX

Aide for Chemistry Teacher

Jan 2021 - May 2021

- Help grade class assignments

KFC Berjaya Times Square

Kuala Lumpur, MA

Cashier

Jan 2020 - May 2020

- Take orders from customers daily and handle daily till

SKILLS

Microsoft Office

Photoshop | Video Editing

AWARDS

Honor Roll each academic year

Aug 2018 - May 2023

HOSA - Future Health Professionals Award



How to Write a Cover Letter

Again, the cover letter is another way to market yourself and convince the hiring manager to pick you to interview. In this letter you can talk about things that wouldn't make sense on the resume or can expand on something in the resume. **Don't** just summarize your resume!

The cover letter is a one page document explaining what makes you the perfect fit for the job. As a high schooler or early college student, you probably don't have a lot of experience but you can still talk about what you have done in a detailed way. As a refugee you can also explain that because you arrived in the country at the age that you did, you are still learning English/starting to look for jobs and experiences/want to get the first job.

"I'm writing to apply for X position", "I'd love to be considered for Y position", "I'm excited to apply for Z position" are all perfectly good opening lines. You also do not need to be super formal, but you also shouldn't be super informal. Think about how you would write a letter to your school's principal or other important person.

A cover letter is generally four or five paragraphs:

- Paragraph 1 (I am excited to apply because XYZ)
 - "I am excited to apply for this Environmental Safety Policy Internship because I am very passionate about environmental safety in our local communities..."
- Paragraph 2 (Here are some things I did in the past and why they show I am a good fit)
 - "I am the Student Council Vice President in my high school and worked to create a recycling program and community garden..."
- Paragraph 3: (I also do ABC or am involved in XYZ which shows I am interesting and have good experience)
 - "I also volunteer to help clean up White Rock Lake..."
- Paragraph 4: (This can be another example paragraph or the conclusion where you summarize why the job is the right fit for you)
 - "I believe this internship will be a great experience and I will learn more about environmental safety and that I can bring my own experiences to creating environmental policy in Dallas, Texas."

[This link](#) provides 9 examples of successful cover letters that were edited by the authors after they wrote boring letters. They are by people with years of experience, but you can see how each one has a different personality but still gets across that the person is really good at their work and should be hired!



TRADE SCHOOLS IN THE DFW AREA

Sometimes college might not be the right choice for you and your family. Below is a list of common trade schools. Be careful when attending for-profit trade schools. Many of the certificates or degrees they offer can be obtained from Community Colleges for a significantly cheaper cost. If attending a for-profit trade school, most credits obtained will not transfer to a community college or university, should you decide you want to further your degree.

You may attend a for-profit college for two years and then decide to transfer to a four-year university and you would have to start from the beginning with your degree and all of your credits. Your best bet is to attend a community college if you are looking for an alternate route to college and want to do a short-term trade certificate instead of a degree.

Dallas Career Institutes

For current high school students, you can study programs not available at your high school focused on job readiness in the following pathways:

- Architecture
- Automotive
- Aviation
- Construction and Carpentry
- Cybersecurity
- Dental Assistant
- Electrical and Solar
- EMT
- Gamer Design and e-Sports
- HVAC and Refrigeration
- Interior Design
- Mechatronics
- Patient Care
- Pharmacy Technician
- Phlebotomy and EKG
- Plumbing
- Software Development
- Welding



Dallas College WorkReadyU

Dallas College provides career training programs to people who do not have a bachelor's or advanced degree in the following pathways (which can change so check the website). You can contact the program at 214-860-5902 or by email at workreadyu@dcccd.edu.

- Bakers Assistant
- Bankwork\$
- CertifiedNurse Aide
- Computer Aided Design and Drafting
- Computer User Support
- Construction Trade
- Culinary Foundations
- EKG
- Electrical Certification
- Facilities Maintenance Certification
- Hospitality Management
- Hospitality Management
- Machining
- Medical Assistant
- Medical Billing
- Patient Care Technician
- Phlebotomy
- Plumbing/Pipefitting
- Teacher's Assistant
- Welding

The Art Institute of Dallas

The Art Institute of Dallas is a design media arts fashion and culinary post-secondary school that offers a range of bachelor's and associate's degree programs in Advertising Design Culinary Arts Digital Media Production Interactive Media Design Fashion Design Graphic Design Interactive Media Design Interior Design Media Arts & Animation Restaurant & Catering Management and Video Production among other creative fields. The Art Institute also offers certificates in Animation Art of Cooking Video Technology and Web Design.

Aviation Institute of Maintenance - Dallas



A national aviation maintenance training program the Aviation Institute of Maintenance – Dallas location offers an Airframe & Powerplant Certificate program; an Aviation Maintenance Technician program; and an Aviation Maintenance Technical Engineer (AMTE) program with avionics.

Champions School of Real Estate

Founded in 1983, Champions School of Real Estate has served Texas real estate agents for more than 25 years and offers career training licensing and professional and continuing education in real estate appraisal home inspection and loan origination/mortgage brokerage in multiple formats (live classes online or correspondence).

Kaplan Professional Schools

Kaplan Professional Schools owns and operates the largest group of real estate schools and is the largest provider of financial services training in the U.S. With more than 50 locations including several in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex Kaplan Professional Schools offers both classroom and distance education – including online and textbook courses in real estate appraisal home inspection mortgage insurance and securities.

