



COLLEGE
MATCHPOINT

GUIDE TO SUMMER PLANNING



Summer: The Perfect Opportunity for Students to Grow

For many of today's college-bound high school students, summer is no longer nine weeks of total relaxation, but rather an opportunity to spend time actively working, learning new skills, or diving deeper into an area (or areas) of interest. Summer is the perfect time to take calculated risks that push students into unfamiliar situations, which will help them build skills and enrich life experiences.

THE KEY INGREDIENT IN FINDING THE MOST REWARDING EXPERIENCES: PLANNING.

We encourage students to consider what they enjoy, what areas they could improve in, and what their goals for the future are in order to decide what to do over the summer. During their research, students will want to consider their current **interests**, how to increase their **involvement**, and opportunities that allow them to take **initiative** and create meaningful **impact**. Ultimately, the focus should be on the growth opportunities of the summer experience, rather than how it will look on their college application.



SEIZE THE SUMMER!

INTEREST

What activities and subject areas spark your student's interest? How do they spend their time? What are their favorite books, YouTube videos, documentaries?

Don't forget to consider non-traditional activities such as personal projects, research, or hobbies. For example, if your student plays drums in the church band or teaches themselves foreign languages, these are great areas for further exploration.

INVOLVEMENT

How much involvement is required for each possible summer activity? When trying to decide between summer experiences, evaluate the time commitment, leadership potential, and range of responsibilities and/or learning opportunities.

Summer is a great time for a student to up their involvement level because they don't have as many other commitments.

INITIATIVE

College admissions officers highly value when students take the initiative in planning their summer activity. For example, it takes more initiative to design a video game or start a dog walking business than it does to attend a summer program.

Think about your student's personality and previous experiences taking initiative. Are they comfortable being more self-directed, or would they rather take part in an established program? Often, this depends both on age and personality. Younger students may feel more comfortable in a structured program while juniors and seniors may be able to work on their own to find and apply for a job, internship, academic program, or research opportunity. Or they may even be able to start their own enterprise.

IMPACT

How will this program or opportunity impact your student and your community? Is your student taking a risk or challenging themselves in this activity or program? Impact may come in the form of individual challenge or serving the greater good. Regardless, a great activity or program will be both engaging and impactful.

Being willing to stretch and go outside one's comfort zone is important to grow as a person. It's okay if your student attempts a challenging activity but ultimately fails. In fact, that would make for a great college essay.

WHY AGE AND PERSONALITY MATTER FOR SUMMER PLANNING

It's absolutely possible for students to participate in more than one activity during the summer. If they're considering pursuing multiple activities, we encourage them to include them all in their summer plan to see how the summer might flow. Depending on what grade your student is in, you might even consider making a loose, multi-year plan for the summers ahead. Map out possible activities for the next few summers, and see if you're able to identify a common thread or interest.

- **Freshman and sophomores:** Summer programs, camps (including CIT programs), and travel are great options for exploring interests.
 - » Paid programs on college campuses probably won't have any impact on college admissions but can be helpful for students — especially those who are less engaged in the college process or who are the first in their family to go to college — to experience what it's like to live on a college campus and think about what they want in a college.
- **Juniors and seniors:** Consider something that is more self-driven, such as a job, internship, or academic research.
 - » Students gain valuable experience from researching, applying to, and interviewing for jobs or internships.
- **Parents:** Know your student and their schedule.
 - » Make a plan that ensures the student doesn't become too busy or overwhelmed; students should never return to classes in the fall feeling burnt out and exhausted.

FINDING THE RIGHT MEANINGFUL SUMMER OPPORTUNITY

The following ideas for summer activities are just a few ways that students can explore possible areas of interest while growing and developing as a person.

PRE-COLLEGE SUMMER PROGRAMS

More and more pre-college summer programs are available for high school students, with unique topic areas such as STEM, cultural immersion, performing arts, wilderness skills, and more. Whatever your student is interested in, there's likely an academic enrichment program available for them.

Programs often take place on a college campus, sometimes formally connected with the college or university, and they typically run anywhere from one to ten weeks. While some programs cost as much as \$10,000 or more, others are more reasonably priced, and many offer the potential for scholarships.

If you're trying to decide if a pre-college program is right for your student, consider the benefits:

- They can give students who are highly motivated by a specific topic or field a deep dive into that subject. This also gives their credentials for their first-choice major a boost.
- They can offer exposure to new subjects and experience for students who still don't have any idea what they are interested in or aren't engaged in the college process. A student might even discover a potential college major.
- They often allow students to experience life on a college campus.
- They give students an opportunity to make friendships with others from around the globe.
- They often offer college credit.

When researching pre-college programs, look for programs that truly reflect your student's interests, academic or otherwise. For example, if your student wants to be a doctor, a science-based summer program might show them what it's like to study and practice medicine. Colleges will see that your student takes their potential career path seriously and that they are genuinely interested in learning more about it.

RESEARCHING SUMMER PROGRAMS

Once you've identified programs that your student might be interested in, look beneath the surface, and ask these questions to ensure it's a quality program that is also right for your students:

- What is the program's philosophy?
- What are the unique features of the program?
- How will my child be challenged?
- What are the opportunities for leadership and personal growth?
- What is the education and experience level of the staff?
- How long has the staff been with the program?
- What is the ratio of counselors/teachers to students?
- How does the program measure and reward success?
- How does the program deal with conflict or rule violation?

You should also try to contact former program participants and their parents for deeper insight into what it's like to participate. Here are some questions you can ask:

- How did your child grow from participating in this program?
- How are you using the experience you gained from the program?
- What would you have changed about the program?

A word of caution here: We prefer programs that are actually run by the college instead of a third-party provider. It's important to be a careful consumer, so be sure to ask who will be teaching the program. If a student is aiming for highly selective colleges, the summer program should also be selective. Just remember: Attending a summer program on a college campus does not typically give your student a leg up in admissions for that college.

Take It Up a Notch: It's especially powerful for students entering 12th grade to create their own summer program to teach something they know. For example, a student might lead a short day camp for kids in the neighborhood (or their cousins/siblings while on a family vacation) to teach coding, cartooning, or any subject they're interested in and skilled at. If that sounds too logistically daunting, they can create an instructional video, share it widely, and ask for feedback about the impact it had.

SUMMER JOBS

Work experience is really valuable for your student's resume and college applications. Most summer jobs for high school students are part-time, but especially if your students has previous work experience, it's possible to hold a full-time summer job.

Common summer jobs include lifeguard, cashier, golf caddy, stocker, babysitter, sales associate, waiter, and camp counselor, but encourage your student to think outside of the box. A summer job that relates to your student's potential major or career path communicates the student's interests—and level of commitment to them—to a college. Of course, when it comes down to it, any job will provide a valuable learning experience.

Take It Up a Notch: Like any other activity, a summer job can impress colleges when a student works at the same place over a longer timeframe and increases their responsibilities. Encourage your student to think about ways to take initiative on the job in ways that add value while also allowing them to utilize their strengths and gain valuable skills. For example, if your student is interested in marketing or writing, they could propose writing social media posts or designing event flyers for the organization, even if their actual position isn't related to marketing.

SUMMER INTERNSHIPS

A summer internship involves working part-time or full-time for a company or organization. Summer internships are more closely

HOW TO TURN A SUMMER JOB INTO AN INTERNSHIP (OR VICE VERSA)

Let's say your student spends their summer assisting customers at a clothing boutique or stocking shelves at a grocery store. They learn the business, do a good job, and land a great reference. Now think: Is there an opportunity to dive deeper into other parts of the business (marketing, advertising, accounting, public relations, product selection, etc.)? Because your student is a known quantity, they may be able to gain valuable, resume-building experience by proposing an internship.

For example, if your student is interested in several different business areas at the company they worked for over the summer, they could propose their own "business internship program" and spend a few weeks (or even months, if it's during the school year) working in multiple departments.

We've seen many students capitalize on successful summer jobs by doing this very thing. It takes a little creativity and initiative, but if the company they worked for valued them as an employee, chances are it'll be happy to take them on as an intern. And it works the same in the other direction. If your student successfully completed an internship at a company or organization and saw an opportunity for growth, pursuing a part-time paid job on staff could help them show increasing responsibility and learn new skills.

related to a student's career interests and are often unpaid. They allow students to gain experience with a variety of tasks, typically consistent with some of the responsibilities of an entry-level position in that field.

You can help your student find an internship by connecting them with friends and family members in potential fields of interest—those that align with your student's skills, aptitudes, and motivations. (If you don't know these, have your student take the **YouScience** test as a helpful starting point). When students pursue summer internships that relate to a future career path or subject they plan on studying in college, colleges often interpret that as genuine interest in a field. In the admissions process, schools are looking for students who are passionate about something and who are willing to go the extra mile to understand a field of interest.

Take It Up a Notch: Encourage your student to volunteer for projects in their interest area that nobody else has time for, to ask if they can sit in on meetings in different departments, and to keep a “success folder” with anything they've produced (presentations, flyers, graphics, etc.) and any emails praising their work. And make sure they update their LinkedIn profile with these accomplishments—or create a profile if they haven't already.

SUMMER CLASSES

Taking summer classes can help students stay on track as they prepare for college—or it can just be a fun way to dive deeper into an area of interest. Increasingly, students are pursuing classes over the summer as a way to take college courses or advanced high school classes.

Students can take summer classes in a variety of ways, either through their high school, at a community college, through an academic program at universities, or even online, through sites like **Coursera**. College classes on a student's transcript can indicate to schools that they are able to handle the rigor and workload of college. This is an especially good option if a student's high school doesn't offer many advanced classes or if a student wants to strengthen their transcript.

Take It Up a Notch: This is also a wonderful time to add professional courses—or even certifications—in your student's interest area. For example, students can take real estate classes and sit for the real estate exam or they could take CAD classes for architecture, SEO, or coding.



INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS

Is there something your student has talked about wanting to do? Invent something? Create an app? Write a novel? Produce a play? Design a website? Read 50 books?

Digging deeper into an established interest is a great way to spend part of a summer break. To be able to demonstrate this time as meaningful—and to help them stay on task—students should create a goal for themselves of what the output and/or accomplishment should be and determine the steps necessary to achieve it. Even if your teen ultimately doesn't end up achieving their goal, they will still have gained valuable knowledge and be that much closer to achieving it. Students should also keep track of how many hours per week/weeks per summer they spend on this activity to be able to report it on college applications.

Take It Up a Notch: Getting to know community members with similar interests can create valuable connections. Sites like Meetup can help your student find established groups by interest area. Plus, by working with a teacher or advisor when developing the idea, students may be able to earn course credit for their project. Creative projects can even be submitted for contests or publication, if appropriate. If a student creates an app or online video, being able to tout high usage, a large number of followers, or decent revenue can be impressive.

VOLUNTEERING

There are many places where a student can volunteer, including schools, non-profit agencies, museums, and more. Most volunteer work is done where the student lives, but there are also opportunities to do volunteer work abroad during the summer.

While volunteering is all about helping others, it's possible to choose volunteer work that relates to a student's college or career interests. Volunteering is also a wonderful way to learn leadership skills and gain a better understanding of the world. [VolunteerMatch](#) and [DoSomething.org](#) are good resources for students to explore opportunities.

Take It Up a Notch: Just completing a few hours of volunteer work won't have as much impact as making a longer term commitment to one organization. Working in a field of interest over a long period of time gives students the opportunity to make a significant impact on the organization. Over time, a student's commitment will lead to greater responsibility and possible leadership positions.

ASK THESE 5 QUESTIONS TO FIND THE RIGHT VOLUNTEER FIT

1. What does your student want to learn?

The answer to this question can include specific skills, like teaching or public relations, or more general exposure like "learn more about animals." Listing 2-3 items here is a great start.

2. In what areas does your student want to grow?

This may include gaining exposure to issues and experiences that will broaden their perspective or a skill they want to develop, such as "becoming more comfortable meeting new people."

3. What is your student curious about?

The focus here is the *big* questions your student has about how the world and society works, such as "what can we do to keep rhinos from becoming extinct?"

4. What kinds of experiences does your student most enjoy?

Do they prefer working one-on-one or in groups? Working outside or inside? Working with thoughts and conversations or doing hands-on activities?

5. What level of impact does your student want to make?

This is very much related to the previous question. Someone who most enjoys working one-on-one may want to have a more personal impact, while someone who enjoys large groups may prefer something on a larger scale. This is often the area of greatest mismatch between volunteers and organizations, so it's helpful to spend a bit of time thinking about and discussing this one.



TRAVEL

Travel can expand a student's horizons and allow them to experience other cultures. Travel abroad programs can also be a good way to gain proficiency in a second or third language. There are programs offered in the areas of service, adventure, skill training, and academics. Students can also consider working while they travel abroad and visit multiple countries. Seek out immersive programs that are at least six weeks long, or better yet, the entire summer. Colleges value the cultural insights gained and independent skills learned when a high school student travels during the summer.

Take It Up a Notch: There are plenty of ways to expand on a travel experience. If your student is interested in film, they could create a movie about their travels. An artist could keep a sketchbook and chronicle their travels on the page. If they enjoy writing, they could keep a blog or write an article for their local or school newspaper about their experience. And if your student has perfected their language skills, they could begin tutoring, start a language club at their school, or join a meetup group to keep practicing the language.

TOP 7 SUMMER PLANNING MYTHS FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS

- 1. School is so stressful that my student just needs to relax this summer.** Don't be afraid to make your student do something; doing nothing should not be an option.
- 2. My student is a great math student so they need an engineering program.** Your student may not know what they're interested in yet; find broad opportunities to let them explore their interests.
- 3. Attending an Ivy League summer program will help my child get into that school.** Unless your child is genuinely interested in the program, this type of "gaming the system" to gain a leg up for college admissions is not recommended.
- 4. My teen should do more than just be a cashier or waiter.** Summer jobs can have a powerful impact on students by teaching responsibility and enhancing communication skills.
- 5. Volunteer work isn't enough.** Don't underestimate the power of volunteer work to impact both your student and your local community. Just be sure there's a solid level of involvement.
- 6. Getting over 100 service hours over the summer is critical.** It's not the amount of community service hours that matters — showing impact is more important.
- 7. My teen should stick with what they're already good at.** Encouraging your student to try new things is a good way for them to learn more about themselves and increase their confidence.



i⁴ SUMMER PLANNING WORKSHEET

Top Academic and Personal Interests

(Consider your **interests** and **involvement** in activities. What are you most passionate about—or think you might be?)

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

Summer Goals And Desired Takeaways

(What do you hope to accomplish and how do you hope to grow as a person? In other words, what **initiative** do you want to take and what **impact** do you hope to have? *Examples: course credit, certifications, increased knowledge about a certain career or subject, foreign language proficiency, research experience, etc.*)

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

Summer Research:

Program or Opportunity	Goals/Takeaways Addressed	Application Requirement/Deadline or Resources Needed

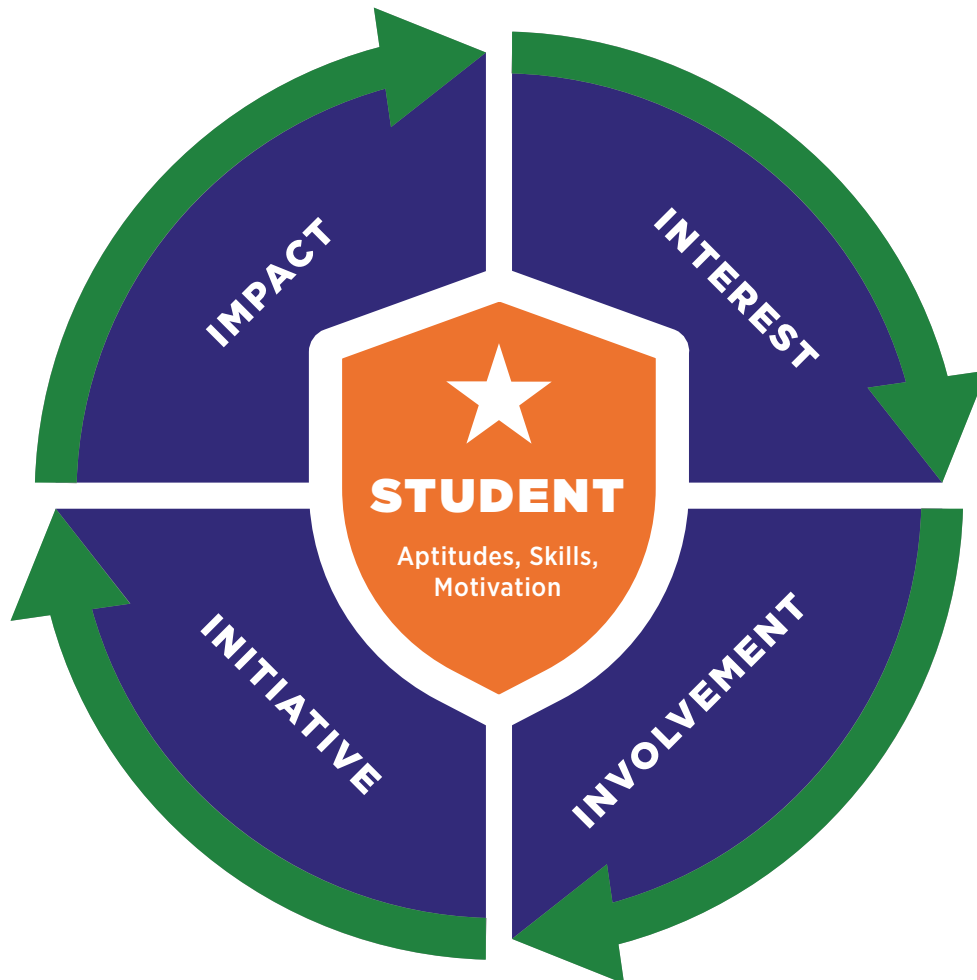


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At College MatchPoint, we believe the college process can be organized, personal, and sometimes even fun. We guide our students and parents through every step of the process. Our one goal throughout the process remains the same: for your student to thrive in their selected college. Yes, this means we want them to love it — academically and socially — and we want it to fit within your family's budget.

Our team includes experienced educational consultants, college admissions specialists, and college essay writing coaches. We are also experts in motivating teens. We get the work done and we make sure that your student's application stands out from the stack.

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