



"Not 13th Grade"

ADVICE FOR YOUR FIRST YEAR OF COLLEGE



ALABAMA
Goes to
College



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Academics

- + **Always address your professors** as “Professor ____” or “Dr. ____” unless they specifically tell you otherwise. Since they have a Ph.D., they are not teachers, so “Mr./Mrs.” is not appropriate.
- + **Go to class**, and make sure to review your classes’ attendance policies. Missing a certain number of class meetings per semester could lower your grade. Attendance is an easy way to keep your GPA high!
- + **Know the deadline for selecting a major/minor**, and do what you can to prepare to choose. Take introductory classes in the subjects that interest you. Meet with your academic advisors and your favorite professors if you have questions or doubts about which major to choose.
- + **If you took AP or IB courses in high school**, there’s a chance you may be able to skip some GERs (General Education Requirements, or introductory classes that all students at the university or college must take to graduate).



Placing out of these classes means you have more room in your schedule to take courses that interest you, and could even help you graduate earlier.

- + **“Office hours” are the hours when you are welcome to visit your professor** – not when your professor is busy!



Take advantage of office hours, because it’s an opportunity to build connections that can be personally rewarding, and also professionally beneficial. This is the time not only to ask questions about the course or homework, but also just to talk and get to know each other. Professors love having visitors, so don’t be shy. You don’t only need an “academic reason” to see your professor during office hours.

- + **Know how to remain disciplined.** In college, you will probably have more free time than in high school or you might have to work more hours to fund your education, so you will need to practice discipline to fulfill your obligations.
- + **Read through the syllabus** and make sure you are aware of assignment deadlines and test dates.



Unlike in high school, if you miss a test or do not hand in a major assignment on time, you might get an automatic zero – many professors will not make exceptions to this rule.

+ Get into the habit of working ahead.

+ Create a schedule for yourself. Professors won't necessarily contact you if you're missing assignments, lagging behind, or underperforming, so it's up to you to make sure you're keeping up with the material.

+ Look into getting your textbook/class materials for free or at a reduced cost

– your professor may be able to provide free materials or have other resources you can look into.

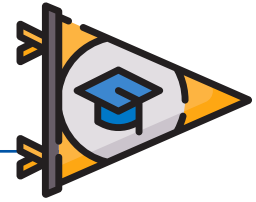
+ Fight for the classes you want!

- Take enrollment periods and times seriously – popular classes fill up very quickly!
- If a class is full, you can try emailing the professor directly and expressing interest for said class.
- Devote a good amount of time to researching course offerings, selecting ones that interest you, and building potential schedules.
- Know your attention span when making your schedule: Monday/Wednesday/Friday classes are usually shorter than Tuesday/Thursday classes.
- Ask other students about classes and professors they have loved, as well as ones that may have been a bit challenging.
- [Coursicle.com](https://www.coursicle.com) - a great resource to build potential schedules.

+ Before the first day of class, navigate to all the classrooms and buildings you will need to go to (ask directions if needed). Determine how long it takes to get there so that you can arrive on time on class day. Write down location and direction notes, if needed.



Campus Life



+ **Get involved:** at the beginning of the year, there will be club fairs and general body meetings (GBMs) for all types of clubs and campus organizations; attend the ones that interest you to see if you'd like to join!



Campus involvement will not only be personally fulfilling, but also a good addition to your résumé as you apply for jobs.

+ Take advantage of campus resources:

- There are often guest speakers, free events, free food, and other opportunities to have fun and meet people.
- Take advantage of facilities like the dining halls, gym, shuttle buses, and other amenities that will make your life easier.

+ Finding a roommate:

- Know that your roommate doesn't need to be your best friend, and may not be. If you have a high school friend or classmate going to the same college as you, don't opt to room with them – this insulates you from meeting new people, and living with a close friend often results in problems. You can still see your friends without living with them!
- Use Facebook, Instagram, and other school resources to meet other rising first year students and see if you connect with anyone whom you'd like to room with. You can then note this preference with your school.
- Ideally, your roommate will be someone who you like and can live with while maintaining certain degree of separation.
- When you find someone you think you'd like to live with, talk about your habits, preferences, and other needs. You should live with someone who prefers the same lifestyle and routines that you do, to make sure you are compatible as roommates (examples: what time they sleep/wake up, whether they listen to music out loud in their room, etc.).



+ Navigating roommate difficulties:

- If your roommate and you have problems, address them as soon as they arise. If you need help addressing the situation, a Resident Advisor (or RA, an older student at the school who lives in the dorm) can help you.
- If the problems persist and cannot be overcome, you may be able to request a switch.

- + **Bring shower shoes!** Community bathroom floors are used by lots of people and full of bacteria, so you definitely don't want to be barefoot in there.
- + **When you do laundry in the dorms,** make sure you're nearby during the entire laundry cycle, because if someone gets to your clothes before you do, they may take them out of the washer or dryer and leave them on the ground or elsewhere. Leaving your laundry unattended also gives other people the opportunity to steal your clothes, so make sure to set a timer and switch your loads over as soon as they're finished washing.
- + **Keep your parents/guardian/family informed** of important updates and events going on at the school – colleges and universities do not have the close contact with families that high schools typically do.
- + **Experience college** – get to know the city you're in, make new friends, try new things – it's not all about academics! It's also a time of immense personal growth where you will likely make lifelong friends and memories.

Professional Development



- + **Take advantage of the career center** – it will likely offer services such as mock interviews, free interview attire, résumé and cover letter workshops, and more.
- + **Attend career fairs,** even if you aren't sure what type of job you want. They can offer great networking opportunities.
- + **Try to get summer internships or professional experiences** – these will help you market yourself when looking for a full time job.



You may find a summer internship during a job fair or through a career center newsletter, so keep your eyes out!

- + **Make a good first impression** and/or have a good relationship with professors for potential professional opportunities/connections (particularly in your field of interest).
- + **The career center will likely have advisors for different majors** and “career clusters,” so if you're looking for a certain type of job but don't know where to start, meet with the designated person for those jobs. They will most likely have ideas, as well as connections to networks and resources.



Safety



- + **Be aware of the safety of the surrounding area** of your school and the crime rate.
- + **Sign up to receive notifications** about safety alerts on and near campus.
- + **Save all campus emergency phone numbers in your phone.**
- + **When out on weekends, especially at night, have a buddy** – do not put yourself in an environment where you are alone and don't know anyone else.
- + **Your school will likely require you to take courses on these subjects during orientation, but be aware of the dangers of alcohol and drug use, as well as sexual assault.** These dangers are especially prevalent during your college years, so you need to understand how to keep yourself safe.
- + **Always take your dorm room keys and key-card** (or whatever you need to enter buildings/your dorm room) wherever you go.

Health and Wellness



- + **College is a different lifestyle than high school**, with different routines and habits, so it's important to be mindful of the way these changes may impact your health.
- + **Manage your mental health:** if you are experiencing stress, anxiety, depression, or another mental health-related condition, your school will have resources to help you!
 - Most schools have a free CAPS (Counseling and Psychological Services) program and other resources to help manage stress and anxiety.
 - Consider meditating, exercising, and engaging in other stress-relieving activities.
- + **The stress that accompanies transitioning into a new phase of life can also affect physical health, including your appetite.**
 - Try to maintain healthy patterns and make sure you are eating well.
- + **Your sleep schedule will also look different** than it did in high school, but one huge perk is that you can probably sleep in later!
 - After you've settled your routine, consider what changes you need to make (if any) to ensure you are getting around 7-9 hours of sleep most nights.



- + **Be honest with yourself** about how you are enjoying and adapting to college life.



College is supposed to be a great experience, but it's okay if you take some time to adjust!

- + While your family and high school friends might be a great support system during this difficult transition stage, **take time to connect with new friends on campus who can relate to your current experience.**

Managing Money



- + **College is a wonderful time of your life – but it can also get expensive!** However, there are ways you can keep up with the costs and minimize expenses.

- + **Try to find a part-time job on campus.** If you qualify for student aid, you may be eligible to get a job through a campus work-study program.



If available, search for a job that allows you to get homework done during your shifts – these could be jobs like managing the desk at the gym or the library.

- + **Many banks, especially ones near campus, will try to convince you to buy a credit card – this is a bad idea!** A debit card is much more well-suited to your needs and general spending habits during college. Make sure not to overdraw an account. This would lead to overdraft charges.

- + **Protect your valuables!** Lock your room when you're not in it, hide valuable items in places no one else knows about (or don't bring them to school in the first place). Don't leave your money, wallet, computer, phone, or other important items lying around unsupervised. People might steal them, and the school will probably not be able to help you get the items back.

This document has been prepared by Southern Education Leadership Institute 2022 Fellow, Julia Laico and edited by the Alabama Possible Team. The information in this document is intended to assist high school students navigate their first year in college. For 30 years, Alabama Possible has been transforming conversation around educational attainment and economic opportunities. The organization's mission is to remove barriers to prosperity through education, collaboration and advocacy. For more information on Alabama Possible visit our website: alabamapossible.org and/or email: info@alabamapossible.org.