

Please write and title a 500-700-word essay on the following theme:

What advice would you give an incoming 9th grader at your high school to help them maximize their high school experience?

Dear Incoming Freshman,

From your first day of freshman year until the day you graduate, every single thing you do or say is important. You are building a reputation and a portfolio. You want your portfolio to be diverse and full for the future, but fun for the present. It can be difficult to find that balance, but I promise it will be okay! The most important things you need to put in your portfolio are your academics, closely followed by your involvement, and your character.

Firstly, academics. This is all about your Grade Point Average (GPA) and your standardized testing scores. The most common regret I hear is: "Darn, why didn't I do what I was supposed to freshmen and sophomore year? Life as a senior would be so much easier now." When you choose to not do your homework and turn in quality work on time, you create habits that last far longer than they should. Being lazy, slacking off, or simply not asking for help drops your GPA. Your GPA is a formulated number based directly off your grades and comes in handy when you apply for college and scholarships. If you have a good GPA, you qualify for so many beneficial opportunities. Likewise, if you have good standardized testing scores, they will open up doors for you, too. These include your End of Course (EOC) tests, the ACT, SAT, and the ASVAB. You'll learn what they all mean and why they are vital, but all you need to know is study for them, practice for them, and try your best when it comes time to take them. The best advice I can give you about academics is to ask for help! Teachers want to be asked questions! If you're scared of looking dumb, ask after class. (Hint: talking after class will usually help you understand more because the teacher is completely focused on you!)

Here's the second thing you need to add to your portfolio: involvement. Find something you love doing! If you like running, join the basketball or track team. If you enjoy hunting, go trap shoot with FFA. Not sure what you want to do? Join FCCLA or FBLA. They focus on family and business, but they have so many different contests that you can try out to figure out what you like! If you really want to, join all of them! It's a blast and looks good on your applications! But, if none of that interests you, go to your community and find out what you can get involved in there. Scouting? Traveling volleyball team? Volunteering at an animal shelter on the weekends? You can do it, you just have to ask around and make connections. By being involved, you build your character and reputation, the next thing on our list.

Your character is who you are, it defines you. It's how you treat people and that is what leaves an impression. You can look great on paper, but if you don't have good character, you won't get very far in life. So, be kind to others and treat everyone with the respect you expect from others. You don't have to be cruel to get your point across. I know it's hard because this was the toughest thing for me to learn, but I assure you, this is so important in your life, not just high school.

High school is going to be hard, but it's going to be fun. Just remember: ask for help, get involved somehow, and just be a good person. I promise, you'll do great!

Sincerely Yours,
A senior who's been there before.