



Preparing for College with Confidence

An ASU Prep playbook for grades 9–12



Your college journey begins here

At ASU Prep, you earn advantages you'll keep for life

Going to college is one of the most exciting steps in your student's journey, but it can feel overwhelming. That's why we created this playbook to help families and students navigate high school with clarity, confidence and purpose.

At ASU Prep, we've helped thousands of students prepare for college and everything after. In fact, nearly **9 out of 10 eligible seniors** from our Class of 2025 were admitted to Arizona State University and more than **two-thirds of our students** earned college credit before graduation. It's a testament to the confidence and momentum our students develop along the way and will travel with them throughout their lives.

Inside this guide, you'll find practical tools, tips and step-by-step guidance for all four years of high school. Whether it's building study habits, exploring interests, earning college credit or preparing for tests, this guide will help your student take meaningful steps toward college readiness, one year at a time.

About ASU Prep

We've helped thousands of students prepare for college and we know firsthand what it takes to succeed. From rigorous coursework to early college experiences, we provide students with the tools, guidance and support they need to confidently step into college life.

Class of 2026

68% students earning college credit

40% students earning 12+ credits

8,372 total college credits earned

What is college readiness?

It's a combination of mindset, skills and experiences that help students confidently step into college life. Being college-ready means students can:

- ✓ Set goals & stay on track
- ✓ Solve problems & think critically
- ✓ Balance school, activities & growth
- ✓ Prepare and take standardized tests
- ✓ Explore courses & internships
- ✓ Plan your future with purpose

Why early preparation matters:

Students who explore early feel more confident.

Trying new courses, clubs or projects in 9th and 10th grade gives students a head start and reduces stress later.

Access to rigorous coursework builds readiness.

Early exposure to university-level courses helps students develop the skills, habits and confidence they need to succeed in college.

Small steps lead to big results.

Every course, test and activity adds up. By starting early, students can explore more opportunities and make more informed choices for their future.

Make a plan-of action:

College readiness isn't about doing everything at once. It's about building momentum over time. We have included a simple 9th–12th grade plan that shows how each year opens new opportunities to grow, explore and prepare for what's next.

Grades 9–12

Your college-ready checklist

9th grade: Build foundational habits

- ☐ Join at least one club, sport or extracurricular
- ☐ Start consistent study habits
- ☐ Take the PSAT for practice
- ☐ Set 3–5 academic and personal growth goals
- ☐ Enroll in your first university-level course
- ☐ Start understanding and tracking GPA

10th grade: Explore & prepare

- ☐ Explore potential career or academic interests
- ☐ Take the PSAT for scholarship opportunities
- ☐ Enroll in university-level courses
- ☐ Continue developing study habits and GPA awareness

11th grade: Deepen & refine

- ☐ Take SAT or ACT (consider multiple attempts)
- ☐ Enroll in university-level courses
- ☐ Refine college resume: academics, activities, service, leadership
- ☐ Take on leadership roles or new initiatives
- ☐ Revisit and adjust academic & personal goals

12th grade: Apply with confidence

- ☐ Enroll in university-level courses
- ☐ Finalize college list and applications
- ☐ Submit SAT/ACT scores
- ☐ Secure letters of recommendation
- ☐ Complete college essays and application materials
- ☐ Continue meaningful activities and leadership
- ☐ Celebrate accomplishments & plan next steps



Start with a college-going mindset

A student's mindset shapes how they approach challenges, bounce back from setbacks and stay motivated over time. Students with a growth mindset believe they can improve through effort and persistence, which leads to:

- + Greater confidence tackling difficult courses
- + Higher motivation to reach academic and personal goals
- + Resilience when faced with setbacks or unexpected challenges

Trust the process: Mindset is something students can develop. The earlier they start, the stronger their foundation for high school and beyond.

Try on a growth mindset:

These activities and conversation prompts are designed to help students practice a growth mindset. Encourage them to try, reflect and see how each effort adds up toward college readiness.



For students

Identify 3–5 actions you can take to grow and learn during high school. This is about stepping outside your comfort zone, not about being perfect.

Examples:

- ✓ Ask a teacher for feedback on one assignment and use it to improve your skills
- ✓ Take on a challenging course, like Honors, or a college-level class
- ✓ Try a new leadership role, club or activity you haven't done before
- ✓ Explore a potential career or field of interest through research, shadowing or a project

Tip: Revisit and update your goals each semester, celebrating effort and progress, reflecting on challenges and adjusting as you grow.

For families

Families can play a key role in shaping mindset. Try using these questions with your student to spark discussion.

Examples:

- ✓ What's one thing you learned this week that challenged you?
- ✓ What's a small goal you want to achieve before next week?
- ✓ If you could try a new activity or class this semester, what would it be?
- ✓ Do you feel the classes or activities you're in are helping you grow?

Tip: Keep conversations short and supportive and focus on praising effort. Remember, it's about guidance, not pressure.

Establish academic confidence

Academic confidence comes from knowing what's expected, having a plan and knowing how to get help when you need it. Students who understand how GPA works, develop strong study habits and use support systems effectively are better prepared to take on challenges and succeed in high school and beyond.

Understanding GPA

GPA stands for Grade Point Average. It's a numerical representation of a student's overall academic performance.

How it works: Each grade you earn in a class is assigned a point value (for example, A = 4, B = 3, C = 2, D = 1, F = 0).

Calculation: Your GPA is the average of all your grade points across your classes.

Weighted vs. Unweighted:

- ➔ **Unweighted GPA:** Treats all classes equally (A = 4.0), regardless of difficulty.
- ➔ **Weighted GPA:** Gives 1 extra point (A = 5.0) for Honors, AP or university-level courses.

Why it matters: GPAs give colleges insight into achievement and growth. The most important factor is growth over time, so focus on building skills, taking on challenges and improving steadily.

Unweighted	Weighted
Calculated on a standard 4.0 scale regardless of course difficulty	Adds extra points for challenging courses (Honors, AP, college-level)
Focuses on overall grades	Reflects both grades and course rigor
Easy to compare across students and schools	Shows how students take on and succeed in challenging coursework
Colleges see consistent performance	Colleges see ability to handle advanced courses

Meeting college GPA standards

At ASU, the minimum GPA for admission is 3.0 (B average). Use the examples here to understand which grade combinations meet the requirement and which do not.

Meets requirements (3.0+)	Would not qualify (<3.0)
2 As, 2 Bs, 2 Cs	5 Bs, 1 D
3 As, 3 Cs	2 As, 2 Bs, 2 Ds
6 Bs	1 A, 3 Bs, 2 Ds



Three steps to building academic confidence:

Confidence in school doesn't happen overnight. It grows from habits, effort and knowing where to find support. Students who understand how to manage their coursework, develop study skills and ask for help when needed set themselves up for success.



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Step 1: Build strong study habits

Start small. Consistency matters more than perfection. A few essential habits can make a big difference:

- + **Daily review:** Spend 10–15 minutes each day reviewing notes and reinforcing what you learned.
- + **Active note-taking:** Summarize, highlight or create visual maps to make concepts stick.
- + **Set specific goals:** Break large assignments into smaller, manageable steps.
- + **Limit distractions:** Phones, social media or multitasking reduce focus and retention.
- + **Reflect:** After tests or assignments, ask yourself, "What worked? What can I improve?"

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Step 2: Use support wisely

Asking for help isn't a weakness. It's a sign of proactive learning and growth. Even confident students need help sometimes. Knowing when and how to seek support is part of becoming independent and resilient:

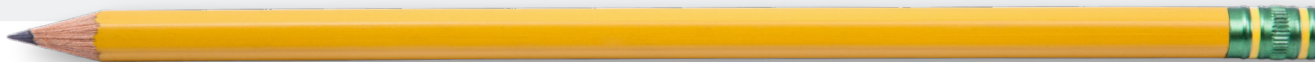
- + **Tutoring:** Identify subjects where extra practice can strengthen skills.
- + **Teacher check-ins / office hours:** Ask questions and get feedback on assignments.
- + **Peer support:** Study groups provide encouragement, accountability and new perspectives.

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Step 3: Partner with your family

Parents and caregivers can guide without taking over. Supportive families help students practice independence while staying accountable:

- + **Encourage routines:** Help students create a study schedule and stick to it.
- + **Ask reflective questions:** "What part of this assignment do you feel confident about? What's challenging about this?"
- + **Celebrate effort, not just results:** Recognizing progress builds motivation and a growth mindset.
- + **Provide resources:** Access to tutoring, study tools and quiet study spaces makes learning easier.



Choose courses with a plan in mind

Think of your high school transcript as a story. It should show curiosity, commitment and growth. Remember that colleges not only look for grades, but for patterns such as:

- + Challenging yourself with increasingly rigorous courses
- + Showing consistent effort and growth over time
- + Committing to activities and subjects that reflect your interests and curiosity



Balancing core classes + electives: It's important to find the right mix between core academic courses and electives that explore interests or potential careers. Start small in 9th grade and increase challenge level gradually, so your transcript shows a story of growth.

Tip: Challenge yourself academically by taking Universal Learner Courses (ULC) or concurrent courses. This shows colleges you're willing to stretch yourself and you're committed to improving over time.

Sample four-year course progression

Grade	Core classes	Electives & enrichment	Focus area
9th	English 9, Algebra I/II, Biology, World History, Spanish I Consider enrolling in your first college-level courses.	Art, Band, Coding Club	Focus on habits & exploring interests
10th	English 10, Geometry/Algebra II, Chemistry, US History or Civics + Economics, Spanish II Build confidence by enrolling in at least 1 college-level course per semester.	Debate, Robotics, Volunteer	Introduce challenging courses (Honors)
11th	English 11, Pre-Calc/Trig, Physics, Spanish III Lean in by enrolling in more advanced college-level courses.	Leadership role, Internship	Increase rigor, show growth & leadership
12th	English 12, Calculus/Stats, Science, Government/Economics, Elective Finish strong by enrolling in college courses that align with your future goals.	Capstone project, College prep	Finish strong, demonstrate depth & commitment

Building growth opportunities: With guidance from ASU Prep Digital, Gianni turned a school closure into opportunity. He designed a path to his dream college, gaining access to engineering courses that accelerated his skills and confidence. [Watch Gianni's Story→](#)



Self-check: Does my schedule show growth?

Core requirements:

Y N

- ☐ ☐ Am I completing all [required courses for graduation](#)? If not, what is left to enroll in? (list courses below)

Challenge & rigor:

Y N

- ☐ ☐ Am I taking at least one Honors, ULC or concurrent course each year?
- ☐ ☐ Do my course choices push me out of my comfort zone while remaining manageable?

Electives & interests:

Y N

- ☐ ☐ Do my electives reflect my interests, talents or potential career paths?
- ☐ ☐ Have I explored new subjects or activities that could broaden my skills?

Balance & workload:

Y N

- ☐ ☐ Is my schedule balanced so I can succeed without overwhelming stress?

Growth mindset reflection:

Y N

- ☐ ☐ Does my schedule show that I'm learning from challenges and improving over time?

Planning ahead:

Y N

- ☐ ☐ Are there opportunities to strengthen my schedule next semester or year?

If you answered "No" to any question: Identify adjustments you can make to strengthen that area next semester or year. Remember, it's never too early to adjust your plan.



Earn early college credit

At ASU Prep, students can get a head start on college through real university courses where they can earn college credit. These opportunities help students build confidence, experience and savings, while preparing them for the expectations of university-level work.

With online and in-person learning options, ASU Prep offers two ways to earn college credit that work with a student's schedule and goals.

Universal Learner Courses (ULC): These select courses are offered online and provide students the opportunity to take college level courses and choose at the end of their course if they would like ASU Academic credit.

Concurrent Courses: These courses are offered in person at an ASU campus or online and provide students the opportunity to take any ASU course offered in the course catalog, with the final grade automatically reflecting as ASU Academic credit.

Benefits of early college credit

- + **Confidence:** Students gain experience with college-level work before leaving high school
- + **Savings:** Earn credits early, potentially reducing tuition costs later
- + **Exposure:** Understand expectations of university courses, building readiness and self-assurance

The sky's the limit! By taking concurrent university courses through ASU Prep Digital, Caleb fast-tracked his path to becoming a drone pilot. Watch how he turned early college credit into real-world opportunity. [Watch Caleb's Story→](#)



Personalized college pathways

Every ASU Prep student works with a counselor or Learning Success Coach (LSC) to create a personalized college pathway to complete high school and begin working on college and career goals. This accelerated track gives students the chance to take university courses and earn credits in their major while still in high school, saving both time and money when they get to college.



Did you know? Students who follow an ASU college pathway are earning real university credit toward their majors while in high school. Unlike AP, there is no extra test required to receive credit. And unlike many dual enrollment programs tied to community colleges, the credits are transferable to most colleges and universities in the world.

Learn More See the full comparison and [find detailed information about earning college credit.](#)

Get **test ready** with the PSAT, SAT & ACT

Standardized tests can feel overwhelming, but they don't have to be. Here's a clear overview of the main tests students encounter, what colleges look for and why each one matters, so families and students can plan with confidence.

Test	When taken	How it's used	Why it matters
PSAT 8/9	9th grade	Familiarizes students with standardized testing; identifies any skill gaps	+ Builds test-taking confidence and establishes a baseline + Helps students understand where to focus effort before the official PSAT in 10th grade
PSAT	10th & 11th grade	Practice for SAT; qualifies for National Merit Scholarship Program	+ Helps students get comfortable with question types and timing + High scores can lead to scholarships & recognition + Results highlight strengths and areas for growth
SAT	11th & 12th grade (often multiple attempts)	Part of college admissions; may be used for scholarship consideration	+ Demonstrates readiness and growth- Enhances applications, especially for merit-based scholarships + One part of a holistic review (GPA, coursework, extracurriculars, essays)
ACT	11th & 12th grade (often multiple attempts)	Alternative to SAT for college admissions; in Arizona, it also serves as the required state assessment for 11th grade.	+ Shows readiness in English, math, reading and science + Enhances applications and scholarship eligibility + One part of a holistic review (GPA, coursework, extracurriculars, essays)



Good to know! Many colleges accept either SAT or ACT, letting students choose the test that best fits their strengths.

Tips for test success

Consistency beats cramming. Here's a practical, low-stress approach:

- ✓ **15 minutes/day:** Review vocabulary, math concepts or practice questions.
- ✓ **Practice tests:** Take one full-length practice test each month to track progress.
- ✓ **Use free resources:** Tools like Khan Academy provide tailored SAT practice plans.
- ✓ **Review mistakes:** Focus on understanding errors. This builds skills faster than repeating questions you already know.



Build a strong college resume

A strong college resume isn't about being perfect. It's about showing who you are, what you care about and how you grow.

Four areas colleges look for on an application

A student's experiences in high school fall into four key areas, each helping to show colleges who they are and how they contribute. Students should focus on depth and growth in each area, not quantity. Even one meaningful activity in each area tells a strong story.

	Why it matters	Examples
Academics	Shows colleges you can handle challenging material, grow over time and succeed in structured learning.	Classes, grades, honors, academic awards
Activities	Demonstrates passions, curiosity and commitment beyond the classroom, building teamwork and problem-solving skills.	Clubs, sports, arts, hobbies, competitions
Service	Highlights empathy and responsibility, showing how you make a positive impact in your community.	Volunteering, community service, mentoring
Leadership	Reflects initiative, influence and responsibility, whether in formal roles or informal actions that guide and inspire others.	Formal and informal leadership roles, initiatives, team captainships

How to pick meaningful extracurriculars

When choosing activities, focus on depth and alignment rather than quantity. Ask yourself:

- ☐ Does this activity reflect my interests or passions?
- ☐ Am I learning new skills or improving existing ones?
- ☐ Do I contribute meaningfully to the group or project?
- ☐ Can I commit consistently throughout the year?
- ☐ Does this activity challenge me or stretch me beyond my comfort zone?

Tip: Fewer meaningful activities are better than many shallow commitments. Growth, impact and curiosity matter most.



What counts as leadership?

Leadership is about taking initiative, influencing others and showing responsibility. Colleges want to see that students can step up, contribute meaningfully and make a difference in their communities.

Leadership can show up in many ways:

- **Formal roles:** Positions with titles, responsibilities or official recognition.
- **Informal roles:** Moments when students take initiative, mentor peers, organize projects or inspire others.

Formal leadership	Informal leadership
Club president, team captain, officer roles	Mentoring peers, organizing group projects, leading a community initiative
Student council, committee chair	Starting a new tradition or activity
Project leader, class representative	Supporting teammates, helping younger students or inspiring others through action



Passion meets preparation: When her dance troupe began touring, Ania found a new rhythm for learning with ASU Prep Digital. By taking courses online, she stayed on track academically, prepping for college while pursuing her passion. [Watch Ania's Story→](#)

Self-check: My leadership path

How have I shown leadership so far?

(Formal roles, informal actions, moments I stepped up)

How do I want to show leadership before applying to college?

(Opportunities, roles, projects, actions I want to pursue)

Your pathway to college starts here

From the start, students at ASU Prep rise to high expectations with support that meets them where they are. They develop essential skills and learn the routine for success: plan the work, do the work, show what you know, *repeat*.

Students also gain early exposure to college-level courses and concepts, building confidence and experience so that hard work feels familiar, not foreign. Through immersive projects, ASU courses and real-world experiences, they see the standards they will meet and embrace the opportunities ahead, carrying skills and confidence into college and beyond.



The ASU Prep advantage

ASU Prep students earn their first college credits, gain confidence and see how today's work moves them closer to the life they want. That means credits add up and skills grow as the time and cost for college shrink.

We pair that momentum with practical support. Teachers and Learning Success Coaches guide students on course selection, workload and timelines that fit real life. By graduation, ASU Prep students have earned thousands of college credits and millions in scholarships. But more importantly, they leave with lasting habits—how to think critically, study, ask for help, make choices and follow through.

It's not just a head start. It's a lifelong advantage.

What's next?

Your journey doesn't stop here. The playbooks in this series will guide you through:

- + **Paying for College:** Scholarships, FAFSA, financial aid and cost planning
- + **Applying to College:** Essays, application timelines, letters of recommendation and submission guidance

- ✓ **Prep for college.**
- ✓ **Prep for careers.**
- ✓ **Prep for life.**



Learn More

To learn more about ASU Prep Digital and enroll, visit www.asuprepdigital.org or call 844-692-3372.