

ONWARD



ONWARD

Student leadership and college readiness
for grades 9 to 12

USING ONWARD

Onward is for high school students in grades 9 to 12. You might be joining a club, helping at home, working a paid shift or thinking about life after graduation. Start with a responsibility you already have. Use these pages to work out what you can offer, make decisions with other people and prepare for a next step that fits your life.

Pay attention to what a club project, part-time job or responsibility at home shows you about the work you enjoy and the support you need. Those details can help you compare your options later and explain what you've learned. You can start exploring before you've chosen a career.

Start with a real question

What would get easier if you clarified one responsibility or next step this week? Keep that question beside you. Go to the pages that help, try the example and use a worksheet to get ready for a conversation with an advisor or someone you trust.

Use the guide in a way that works for you

Use these pages on your own, with a partner or with a school group. You can explain your thinking aloud, type it or use another accessible format. Choose a fictional case whenever you'd rather keep a real situation private.

Use the tools privately or in the school's approved workspace. Do not place identity documents, financial records, passwords, disability records or confidential complaints in a club workbook. A counselor or appropriate office can help with those matters through its own process.

The practice cases, budgets and dates are fictional. For a real decision, check your local rules, the institution's current requirements and the right application year. These pages help you plan and ask useful questions; they can't predict admission, scholarships, employment or the impact of a program.

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CONTENTS AND WAYS TO USE THIS GUIDE

Find the topic that matches what you're trying to do. Each main section starts with a question and a quick preview, then gives you advice, examples and something to try. You can go straight to the work in front of you.

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CONTENTS AND WAYS TO USE THIS GUIDE

Reading for a real task

Start with an example that fits your situation, make your own attempt and compare how the decisions were made. Keep the tool that helps and adapt it with the person responsible for the real decision. Come back to the explanation whenever a question or unfamiliar term needs more time.

CONTRIBUTING AT SCHOOL

CONTRIBUTING

What can you take responsibility for right now?

Someone asks you to help with a club event. Before saying yes, you need to know what the job involves, whether you have time, and who can approve the parts you cannot decide. Those questions are a useful place to start.

Start with what you can take on, then look at who your decisions affect. Make a role map, find ways to hear from students outside your friendship group and compare your options honestly, including what each choice gives up.

Before you start

Bring one responsibility you already have, or use the club examples. Aim to leave with an action you can take, a question you need answered and a clear idea of whose perspective is still missing.



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What to work on

- 1 Choose a commitment that fits your week
- 2 Find the decision-maker and the approval route
- 3 Listen beyond your friends and explain a choice

CHOOSE A CONTRIBUTION THAT FITS YOUR LIFE

Before you say yes to a job, look at the next two weeks. Schoolwork, paid work, care responsibilities, travel and rest all need space. Ask what the group needs, then choose something you can finish with the support available. You can set a limit without explaining private circumstances.

Check your time and support

Write down the hours or meeting windows you can reliably use over the next two weeks. Mark a period that's already crowded. Then list what you'll need: materials, a room, approved access, transport arrangements or an advisor you can reach. If the task depends on one of those things, agree who will arrange it and when. That's a dependency: something that has to happen before your work can continue.

Ask the organizer what output is needed and who will use it. "Help with outreach" may mean drafting copy, distributing an approved notice, answering routine questions or collecting feedback. Those are different commitments. Choose one you can complete well.

What this could look like

A student with afterschool shifts wants to contribute to a club welcome session. The event team asks them to coordinate the whole event. They offer a smaller job: collect common questions during two lunch periods and prepare a one-page answer sheet using information the advisor verifies.

Their agreement is: "I can gather questions Tuesday and Thursday at lunch and draft the answer sheet by Friday. I need approved answers from the advisor by Thursday afternoon. I cannot attend the evening event. Someone else will distribute the final sheet." The event lead accepts the task and names a check-in.

CHOOSE A CONTRIBUTION THAT FITS YOUR LIFE

This student has made a meaningful contribution with a clear boundary. A visible title would not make the original commitment more feasible.

Build your agreement

Record the need, your output, the finish condition, your available time, the person who will check the work and the point at which you will flag a problem. Add one fallback if the information or approval arrives late.

If you are overcommitted, propose a change early: “I can finish the draft or staff the table, but I cannot do both this week. Which is more useful, and who can take the other part?” Do not silently transfer a task to a friend. The new owner must agree.

Check your plan: Someone else can explain what you will deliver, when they can expect it and what you will do if the plan changes.

UNDERSTAND YOUR AUTHORITY BEFORE ACTING

Being asked to organize something leaves a few questions to settle. Which decisions are yours? Which need approval? Check your group's rules, role description and school procedures. Ask the advisor about anything that's missing, and keep the answer where the next student can find it too.

Separate four kinds of action

You may own a delegated task, such as drafting an agenda. The group may decide something together, such as which approved project to propose. A staff member may control approval, such as room bookings, spending or publication. Some questions remain unknown until checked. Keep that fourth category visible.

A club coordinator may organize a planning conversation without having authority to sign a contract, collect funds, approve travel, change account access or speak for the school. The school's actual delegation determines the boundary. Do not use a title to imply institutional approval to a partner.

A fictional authority check

A student president wants to book a community speaker. The constitution permits the club to propose speakers. The advisor says a school office must approve visitors, and a separate employee handles any payment. The student can prepare the proposal and gather questions; the student cannot promise a date or fee to the speaker.

A precise question is: "Who approves this visitor, what information do they need, and when should we submit it? May I draft the invitation for your review once approval is confirmed?" This moves the work forward without pretending permission already exists.

UNDERSTAND YOUR AUTHORITY BEFORE ACTING

Read governance rules in context

Before an election or formal decision, check who is eligible to participate, how notice is given, how many members must be present if a quorum is required, how decisions are recorded and how conflicts of interest are handled. Do not invent a voting threshold or import a rule from another club. If your documents conflict, ask the authorized adult or body to clarify before proceeding.

When a proposal is declined

Ask which requirement it does not meet and whether a smaller or different version would be acceptable. A useful response is: "Would an in-school session with no outside visitor meet the supervision requirement?" Record what is still pending. Do not announce an event while approval is unresolved.

Use My role and decision map for your current role. Recheck it when the role, school year or project changes.

MY ROLE AND DECISION MAP

Complete this with the advisor or authorized role owner. This page helps locate authority; it does not create it. Use official role contacts rather than personal contact details.

Role or contribution _____

Group and period of responsibility _____

The purpose of my role is

The current document or person confirming my responsibilities is

Checked on _____ Checked with _____

MY ROLE AND DECISION MAP

Decisions and boundaries

Task or decision	Who decides	Approval or consultation route	Source or open question

My first conversations

The person I need to learn from and my question

MY ROLE AND DECISION MAP

The people affected by this work and how I will hear from them

A decision I will not act on until it is checked

If the usual contact is unavailable I will use this approved route

Read it back: Name one action you can take now, one decision the group owns and one action that needs approval. Keep uncertain items marked as uncertain until someone with authority answers them.

REPRESENT STUDENTS BEYOND YOUR FRIENDS

If you're representing students, your friends' views are one part of the picture. Start with everyone affected by the decision. What could change for them? Whose views have you heard, and who is still missing from the conversation?

Plan who to hear from

Start with a neutral question tied to a real decision. For a welcome activity, ask what times and participation routes are workable. Avoid collecting private explanations for a person's availability. Offer an advisor-approved paper or digital route and a clear closing time. Tell respondents how you will summarize answers and where the decision will be reported.

Consider who your method misses. An afterschool discussion may miss students who work or take an early bus. A social-media poll may miss students without that account. Add an appropriate school-day route instead of assuming the first group represents everyone.

How you could explain the recommendation

In a fictional planning exercise, 18 students respond to a lunch-period question. Ten prefer a lunchtime session, five prefer after school and three can use either. Four respondents mention that an afterschool event would be difficult to attend. These categories can overlap, so the four access comments are not four additional respondents.

The recommendation says: "Among 18 voluntary respondents reached at lunch, ten preferred lunch. We recommend a lunchtime trial with a written option for people who cannot attend. We have not reached all year groups, and the advisor still needs to confirm the space." It does not say "Most students at our school demand this event."

REPRESENT STUDENTS BEYOND YOUR FRIENDS

Handle friendship pressure

If a friend says, “You’re supposed to be on our side,” you can answer: “I’ll explain your view accurately, and I need to consider the other students affected too. I can show you how the recommendation was made.” Do not trade a vote for friendship or reveal another student’s private response to defend your choice.

Report back to the people who contributed

After the decision, publish an approved short update: what you heard, what was decided, why and what happens next. Include a meaningful limitation or unanswered question. If the request is declined, give the actual reason you are allowed to share and the next available route. Silence leaves people guessing whether their input mattered.

MAKE A DECISION YOU CAN EXPLAIN

When your group chooses an option, people should be able to understand why. Agree on the requirements every option has to meet, including safety, permission, access and the spending limit. Then compare the differences using the same questions for each option.

A practice case with competing needs

The club can hold a welcome session during lunch or after school. Lunch gives more students a transport-friendly route but less time. After school allows a longer activity but requires supervision and may exclude students with shifts or buses. The group has one week to prepare.

Rather than awarding points without evidence, discuss the trade-offs. Which option meets the actual purpose? What support is confirmed? What would make participation possible for people who cannot attend? The group chooses a short lunch session and an approved question sheet, then sets a review after the trial.

The decision record reads: “We chose lunch because the purpose is a brief introduction and the available feedback favors that time. The advisor will confirm the room. We will offer the same core information in writing. We will check whether students who missed lunch can still ask questions.”

Check a conflict of interest

Suppose a member proposes buying materials from a relative’s business. Disclose the relationship through the school’s process before taking part in the choice. Compare options fairly and follow the actual purchasing and decision rules. Ask the advisor who determines whether the member must step back from discussion or voting, and who handles the purchase.

MAKE A DECISION YOU CAN EXPLAIN

Record the choice and its reasons

Write the question, who was involved, the information considered, the options, the choice, the reason, concerns, approval status and review date. Keep private individual stories out of the shared record. If you have insufficient information, record the next question instead of filling the gap with confidence.

A vote may be an appropriate decision method when your rules allow it. It does not replace required permission or resolve a safeguarding or accessibility obligation. Ask the advisor to explain which matters are outside a student vote.

Before announcing the result, have someone who disagreed read the summary. Ask whether it fairly describes the decision and concern, even if they would still choose differently.

WORKING WITH A TEAM

WORKING WITH

How will a good idea become work people can finish?

Once a group chooses an idea, the practical questions begin. Someone has to confirm the room, prepare the information, and notice when a task is late. A smaller plan with willing owners gives you a better starting point than a long list assigned to “everyone.”

Follow the four-week welcome project and use it to think through meetings, disagreements, safety and public messages. Finish by preparing a handover that helps the work continue when someone leaves.



Photograph: see image credits.

What to work on

- 1** Set a useful result and a realistic budget
- 2** Run the conversation and respond when plans change
- 3** Check the public details and leave a usable handover

WORKING WITH A TEAM

Before you start

Pick a project small enough to discuss with an advisor. Keep the project and meeting tools from the back of the guide nearby. Ask someone else to read your plan and tell you what happens next. What they struggle to find is what you need to make clearer.

TURN AN IDEA INTO A MANAGEABLE PROJECT

Before you make something new, ask the person who'll use it what would help and find out what already exists. Agree on a result your team can finish, who will check it and what you're leaving outside this project.

Agree a short project brief

A welcome project might help new members find one way to contribute and one contact for questions. The team could prepare a 25-minute session and a checked information sheet. Agree who it is for, what you will finish, what you want to learn, who will lead, and when it is due. Add the approvals you need and the evidence you will use to review the result.

Divide the project into specific tasks and ask each person before recording them as responsible. Show what each task is waiting on: the invitation cannot be final until the room and schedule are confirmed. Set a date to check those details and agree what to do if they are late. Reduce or postpone the public step when a required approval is missing.

Use a simple practice budget

These fictional amounts illustrate arithmetic only; they are not current prices or an approved purchase.

TURN AN IDEA INTO A MANAGEABLE PROJECT

Item	Quantity and unit cost	Planned cost
Printed sheets	40 at \$0.10	\$4.00
Reusable name cards	20 at \$0.25	\$5.00
Markers	2 packs at \$3.00	\$6.00
Subtotal		\$15.00
Contingency for approved changes		\$3.00
Planning limit		\$18.00

Check tax, delivery, availability and school supplies before requesting a real amount. The contingency is room in the plan for approved changes; it is not permission to spend. An authorized adult manages purchasing, receipts, cash handling and reimbursements under school rules. Do not promise repayment or use a personal payment account for the group without the required process.

Agree what the team can take on

Ask what the team will pause or reduce. A plan that assumes unlimited volunteer time is incomplete. Offer tasks during the school day or tasks people can complete at different times. Make the information available in accessible formats. Students should not need to buy materials or disclose personal circumstances to participate.

TURN AN IDEA INTO A MANAGEABLE PROJECT

Check your plan: The team can explain the useful result, each person has accepted a task, the approval route is clear and a smaller fallback is ready.

WORK THROUGH A FOUR WEEK WELCOME PROJECT

Here's a fictional four-week plan you can borrow ideas from. It shows how work can fit together; you don't have to follow the same calendar. The team wants new club members to understand how to join a project, and the school's activity advisor confirms the need and checks the information.

Week one investigate and agree

Students review the existing welcome sheet and ask willing newcomers what is unclear. The group finds that the sheet lists officer titles but does not explain beginner jobs. It agrees to produce a one-page contribution menu and a short supervised trial. The advisor confirms what may be offered and which room can be requested.

The team agrees to work with one club at one meeting. It will not run a public recruitment campaign or collect private student information. Students want to find out whether clearer role descriptions help newcomers choose a realistic first task.

Week two prepare and rehearse

One pair drafts six small jobs. Another pair checks timing and access. A notes lead maintains the action record. The advisor checks factual details, permissions and any spending. The team rehearses the welcome instructions with students who can give feedback during an approved session.

If the room is not confirmed by the agreed check date, the fallback is a short introduction within an existing approved club meeting. Students do not advertise a location that is still pending.

WORK THROUGH A FOUR WEEK WELCOME PROJECT

Week three deliver the approved trial

The person leading the session explains its purpose and the ways people can take part. Students can ask aloud, write a question or speak privately with an approved adult. The team records only the aggregate counts and process feedback the advisor has approved. Joining is a choice, and nobody has to explain why they decline.

Week four evaluate and hand over

In this practice case, 12 students use the menu and eight choose a first task. Three comments say the time commitment is still unclear. The group adds an estimated time range to each role and asks the advisor to check it. Eight selections show uptake among these participants; they do not establish schoolwide impact or long-term retention.

The final handover includes the revised sheet, the decision record, the next review date and the adult who approves changes. The team agrees who owns unanswered questions. The project ends when the partner accepts the handover or decides to close the trial.

RUN A MEETING PEOPLE CAN USE

Before you call a meeting, ask what actually needs a conversation. Use the school's approved channel for routine updates that don't need discussion. When you do meet, share the decision question and useful information ahead of time so people can prepare.

A forty minute working agenda

Minutes	Purpose	Expected result
0 to 5	Confirm the decision and approval boundaries	A shared question
5 to 12	Review evidence and missing information	Facts separated from assumptions
12 to 23	Compare feasible options and hear concerns	A clear set of trade-offs
23 to 30	Decide using the group's actual rules	A choice and its reasons
30 to 37	Agree tasks and what each needs	Owners, deadlines and check-ins
37 to 40	Read back and confirm communication	One reliable record

RUN A MEETING PEOPLE CAN USE

Help the discussion move

Say: “We need to choose the format today. The room still needs staff approval, so we are choosing what to propose.” Invite a minute of quiet thinking before open discussion. Offer a written route and do not confuse silence with agreement.

When the conversation drifts, name the related issue and park it with an owner or later decision date. If a new fact changes the options, revise the question. Meeting the agenda is less important than avoiding a decision based on information you now know is wrong.

If someone dominates, redirect to the content: “We have heard the case for that option. What concerns or missing information have we not heard?” Do not force a quieter member to speak as a demonstration of inclusion.

Write a useful action record

A strong entry reads: “Jordan will draft the role menu by Wednesday lunch. The advisor will supply approved role details by Tuesday. If details are missing, Jordan will flag the gap Tuesday afternoon.” A weak entry reads: “Team to sort out roles soon.”

Record decisions, reasons, tasks and unresolved questions. Avoid unnecessary transcripts and identifying accounts of sensitive concerns. Share the record through the approved channel and ask owners to correct errors promptly. Read back accepted commitments before ending so the notes do not create duties someone never agreed to take.

HANDLE A MISSED COMMITMENT OR DISAGREEMENT

When a task is late, start with what you agreed and ask what's possible now. You can deal with the work without judging the person or asking for a private explanation. Starting that conversation early gives the team more room to change the plan.

A private recovery conversation

A teammate has not sent the event copy due yesterday. Try: "We agreed on the draft for yesterday, and the advisor needs time to review it. Is it ready, or should we change the plan?" Give them room to answer. You do not need a personal explanation to arrange the next step.

They reply that they can finish the opening paragraph tonight but cannot complete the whole page. Agree whether that part is useful, ask someone to take the remaining work or agree to do less. Ask the new owner before recording the assignment. Update the review date with the advisor; do not pretend the original schedule still works.

If the pattern continues, use the group's role process and advisor support. Document tasks and agreements factually. Avoid public accusations, gossip or taking over every job until you become overloaded.

Disagree with a proposal precisely

Instead of "This idea is terrible," say: "The evening timing leaves out students who depend on the 3:30 bus. Could we test a lunch version or offer the same information during the school day?" This gives the group a problem it can evaluate and an alternative it can examine.

HANDLE A MISSED COMMITMENT OR DISAGREEMENT

If you caused a problem, acknowledge the effect: “I announced the date before approval, which created confusion. I have told the advisor and will send the approved correction through the same channel.” A useful apology includes a concrete repair without inventing an excuse.

Know when to stop the peer process

Threats, harassment, discrimination, coercion, sexual misconduct or other safety concerns need the school’s appropriate adult response. Do not investigate, seek public testimony or require a targeted student to negotiate. Share only what the reporting route needs, and do not promise absolute confidentiality.

For an ordinary disagreement, ask at the end: What have we agreed, who owns each action and when will we check it? If no agreement is possible within your authority, state the unresolved question and take it to the authorized person.

CHECK SAFETY PRIVACY AND PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

Before an event or a public project step, check what the school or host requires. Your student role still sits within its supervision, consent, visitor, transport, financial and publishing procedures. Find the right approval route before moving ahead.

Review the real arrangements

Confirm the approved location, responsible adult, participant access, start and finish arrangements, emergency route and any activity-specific risks. The authorized adult checks matters such as food, equipment, accessibility and offsite travel. Students can identify concerns and help prepare, but should not carry adult safeguarding responsibility.

If approval is missing, pause the affected step. Do not advertise a room you have not been permitted to use or promise that someone will be transported. Offer a smaller approved version when possible.

Collect less information

For a process-improvement project, aggregate attendance and a short feedback question that does not identify respondents may be enough. Do not create a student database just because a form makes it easy. Avoid health, immigration, financial, family or disability details in project tools. Keep confidential complaints in the school's designated process, not the action board.

Use approved platforms and access settings. Do not upload private student information or school records to an AI tool. Ask the advisor before using AI for project work; verify facts and follow school authorship rules. AI output is not evidence that a policy, price or source is real.

CHECK SAFETY PRIVACY AND PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

Publish carefully and correct clearly

Have the authorized person review the final audience, wording, date, location, links and permissions for any names, images or quotes. Offer an equivalent role to anyone who does not appear publicly. Check images for identifying details in the background.

If information is wrong, alert the advisor and prepare an approved correction for the same audience. For example: “The session time in yesterday’s notice was incorrect. The confirmed time is 12:20. The location is unchanged.” Use only verified facts. If personal information was exposed, follow the school’s incident process instead of circulating it again in an explanation.

Keep account access with authorized owners. A handover should identify who can arrange access, never list passwords or recovery codes. External adults and partners should use the school-approved contact route, not secret or private channels with students.

LEAVE THE NEXT PERSON READY

Picture the next person starting tomorrow. Put the nearest deadline and the most important unfinished task where they'll see them first. Then show them the regular work, approval routes and current records they'll need during their first month.

A handover note you can work from

"Next task: update the welcome menu before the first meeting. The editable file is in the school-approved club folder. The advisor approves role descriptions and publicity. We changed the menu last term because students could not tell how long each task took. The open question is whether the library role will run again; the advisor is checking with the librarian by the next planning meeting."

The note gives a next action and the reason behind a previous decision. It does not promise an unconfirmed role or send the successor to a private message archive.

Give the next person what they need

Record who owns each unfinished item and whether that person has accepted it. Separate current instructions from old examples. Keep the official record location clear so copies do not compete. Ask the authorized owner to arrange account access; never include passwords, recovery codes or private member records.

For money or pending reimbursement, state the status accurately and identify the adult who handles the process. "Receipt submitted; approval pending" is different from "Payment approved." Do not pass a personal financial obligation to the incoming student by implication.

LEAVE THE NEXT PERSON READY

Run three tests

Ask the incoming person to find the next deadline, explain one approval route and identify the next action on an open item using only the handover. Anything they cannot find becomes a repair task. A fifteen-minute walkthrough may reveal more than another hour of filing.

Agree on the end of your responsibility. You can offer a limited period for questions if you wish, but the role should not remain yours indefinitely. If no successor is available, the advisor or authorized group owner must decide how continuity will be handled.

Your final check: Does the next person know what to do, where to find the current material, who can approve a change and what still needs an answer? If yes, the handover is doing its job.

EXPLORING YOUR NEXT SETTING

EXPLORING YOUR

What would help you compare your options fairly?

You can explore what comes after high school while your plans are still taking shape. Start with work you've tried, subjects you want to explore and the conditions your next setting needs to meet.

Use your experience record to describe what you've actually done. Then compare college, technical training, apprenticeships and other routes. The planning calendar helps you spot which questions are worth asking at different points in high school.

Before you start

Choose two programs or routes to investigate. Note what interests you, what still needs checking and the person or official source that can answer. Change the list as you learn more.



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What to work on

- 1** Describe your contribution with accurate examples
- 2** Investigate education and work routes
- 3** Compare fit and make a calendar from verified requirements

DESCRIBE YOUR EXPERIENCE HONESTLY

Keep a short record while the details of your work are still fresh. What was your task? Who helped? What happened? You can return to those details when you're choosing a next step, writing an application or getting ready for an interview.

Build the record while details are fresh

Write the activity, your role, dates, a realistic time commitment, specific actions, a result you can support and one thing you learned. Paid work, household responsibilities, hobbies, classes, service and clubs can all contain meaningful experience. Share only the personal context you choose and the application actually requires.

A description that fits the facts

Practice facts: A student helped welcome new employees at a part-time job for six weeks. The manager supplied the procedures. The student showed four new employees where supplies were stored and helped test a revised opening checklist.

Accurate description: "Helped four new employees learn supply locations and opening tasks; tested a manager-approved checklist and suggested clearer labels."

Exaggerated description: "Managed staff training and transformed company operations." The second version implies authority and impact the facts do not support. The first still shows useful work.

For a team project, distinguish "our group produced" from "I drafted," "I checked" or "I coordinated." Use numbers only when you can explain how they were counted. Do not multiply attendance by an assumed benefit or claim that your work caused a result from a small informal test.

DESCRIBE YOUR EXPERIENCE HONESTLY

Connect experience to a next step

Ask what the new setting actually needs. An application may have a specific character limit or prompt; an interview may ask for a short example. Follow those instructions and choose relevant evidence. Common App's first-year guide explicitly includes activities, work and responsibilities; individual colleges set their own requirements. See the resources section.

A useful reflection adds: "The first version confused new users, so I changed the labels after feedback." Growth does not require a dramatic hardship story. Keep your writing recognizably yours, and follow the institution's rules on editing help and AI use.

Use the experience worksheet in the reference section. Remove other people's private information from any sample you retain. Ask the authorized owner before copying a group document for personal use.

WHEN YOUR EXPERIENCE DOES NOT COME WITH A TITLE

A form or conversation may ask about leadership when the work you know best happened at home, in a hobby or in an informal community group. Start with the actual responsibility. Who needed something done? What part did you take on? What did you decide, check or change? You can explain a useful contribution without inventing an office or turning private family life into a public story.

Look for the work inside an ordinary task

'I helped at home' is a starting point. Look closer at a moment you are comfortable discussing. Perhaps you organized shared materials, compared instructions, kept track of an agreed task or explained a change. Separate doing the task from deciding how it would be done. Also name the support you received. Taking responsibility for one part of a plan doesn't make you responsible for everything around it.

A household routine may be meaningful without being a leadership example for every question. If the question is about comparing options, describe a choice you actually helped make. If it asks about following through, explain how you kept an agreement or raised a problem. If it requires a particular kind of experience or verification, check those instructions. You don't have to make one example answer every prompt.

A fictional example with an ordinary responsibility

A student shares a household computer with two relatives. An adult sets the household arrangements, and everyone needs different times for their own tasks. The student offers to draft a schedule. They ask each person which times would work, mark a clash instead of deciding whose task matters more, and bring two possible arrangements back for discussion. Everyone agrees to try one. After a week, a relative explains that one slot is too short. They review that part of the plan together and agree a revised slot.

WHEN YOUR EXPERIENCE DOES NOT COME WITH A TITLE

The student is preparing for a conversation about a community workshop helper role. Their first note says, 'Managed household operations and made everything more efficient.' It hides the task and claims a result they haven't measured. It also suggests broader authority than the student had.

A fuller, accurate answer

I helped draft a schedule for a shared computer at home. I asked what times people needed, identified a clash and brought two options back for discussion. We agreed on a trial, then reviewed a slot that turned out to be too short. I organized the information; I did not decide what other people could do. I could use the same habit of checking availability and asking before changing a plan in a supported workshop task.

This answer shows preparation, a choice, feedback and a revision. It doesn't claim that the student ran the household, saved money or improved everyone's experience. It also leaves out relatives' names and circumstances. The activity is enough context for the listener to understand the work.

Build a description you could explain

Use the experience record in Reusable experience and next step tools. Keep its questions about your actions, support, result and learning. For a home example, add these two checks before you share a description.

Which household details can I leave out while still explaining the task and my contribution?

WHEN YOUR EXPERIENCE DOES NOT COME WITH A TITLE

Which decisions belonged to other people, and how will I make that clear?

Try saying the description aloud or reading it to someone you trust. Ask them to point to the part that explains your action. Then ask whether any sentence sounds larger than the facts. A reader should be able to distinguish your contribution from the work of everyone else.

Carry the habit into a new setting

In the workshop conversation, the student can ask, 'Who coordinates the volunteer schedule, and is there an existing way to raise a timing clash?' That question matters. A useful household arrangement may not fit a community activity with set opening times, access needs or staff procedures. Offer to learn the current system before proposing a change. Keep any new task within the training and supervision the host provides.

You may not have a document, photograph or official title to attach. Keep a private note of facts you can honestly explain. Don't create an endorsement, ask someone to confirm work they didn't see or copy a private household record into an application. If a process asks for evidence you cannot provide, ask the relevant contact what it accepts rather than guessing.

WHEN YOUR EXPERIENCE DOES NOT COME WITH A TITLE

When you would rather keep the example private

Choose a different example or describe the task at a level you are comfortable sharing. You can say that it was a responsibility at home without explaining why your family needed it. An application with specific requirements needs its own careful check with a counselor or trusted adult. This practice tool doesn't require disclosure, and it isn't a reason to take on extra care work just to build a leadership story.

Next step: keep two short examples that answer different questions. One might show a revision; another might show how you asked for help before committing. Revisit the actual opportunity's prompt before choosing which one to use.

EXPLORE WHAT COMES AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

Start with something you'd like to learn or try. Which education or work routes could help you explore it, and what would make each one workable? You can compare possibilities before choosing a major or occupation. Keep room to change the plan as you learn.

Compare routes without ranking people

A community college may offer associate degrees, certificates and transfer routes. A four-year college may offer a bachelor's degree and other programs. Certificate and technical programs vary in length, cost and purpose. Registered apprenticeships combine paid work and related instruction, with requirements set by the sponsor. Verify the particular program rather than assuming every example of a route has the same features.

If transfer is part of your plan, ask both institutions which credits count toward the intended degree and what conditions apply. A course that transfers as elective credit may not satisfy the major requirement you expected. Request the current official agreement or written guidance.

Start with three questions

What do I want to try learning or doing? What constraints must the plan respect? What information would help me compare a different route fairly? Include schedule, transport, cost, support, location and whether you need paid work while studying.

A fictional student interested in building design compares a community-college transfer route, a four-year program and an apprenticeship in a related skilled trade. They investigate the daily work and qualification each leads toward. These routes are not interchangeable, and the student should check any career-specific licensing or educational requirements through official sources.

EXPLORE WHAT COMES AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

Try a small exploration

Read two official program pages. Attend an approved information session or ask a counselor to help arrange a conversation. Use My Next Move to explore occupations and Apprenticeship.gov to investigate registered apprenticeship opportunities. A search result is a starting point; the institution or sponsor confirms current entry requirements and availability.

Record what you learned and one unanswered question. Avoid choosing only from names you already recognize or treating a ranking as a personal-fit decision. Include at least one financially and practically feasible possibility after checking actual costs and support.

You are allowed to revise your plan when new information arrives. Keep the next action concrete: one program to check, one question to ask and one date to review your options.

BUILD A PLANNING CALENDAR FOR YOUR GRADE

Use your grade as a starting point for the next questions to ask. Then check the actual requirements with your counselor and the institution. Application, testing, scholarship and aid deadlines vary by student, program and year.

Grades nine and ten

Learn the school's graduation requirements and ask how course choices connect to options you may want later. Build study and help-seeking routines. Try a manageable activity or contribution and keep a brief experience record. Explore careers and education routes without pressure to build a perfect résumé.

Ask about course prerequisites before registration. If a class or activity is inaccessible because of cost, schedule or support needs, speak with the counselor about alternatives. Do not assume a missed early opportunity permanently closes every route.

Grade eleven

Develop a small set of possible programs and compare their official requirements. Check course preparation, testing policy, application route, portfolio or audition requirements where relevant, and how costs are estimated. Testing policies can differ by institution, program and entry year; verify each one rather than relying on a friend's experience.

Plan any visits or virtual sessions, identify possible recommenders and start a private list of application tasks. Discuss fee-waiver and aid questions with the counselor. Give yourself enough time for official records and school processes.

BUILD A PLANNING CALENDAR FOR YOUR GRADE

Grade twelve

For each option, confirm the exact application plan, entry term, deadline and time zone. Separately record scholarship, aid, housing, placement and response deadlines where applicable. Read any binding application or enrollment commitment carefully with an appropriate trusted adult and the institution before agreeing.

Complete requirements, review before submission and check the institution's confirmation or portal for missing items. A submitted application and a complete application may be different statuses. Save the confirmation in your private records and follow the official correction route if needed.

Work backward from verified dates

If a deadline is Friday, do not assume a teacher or counselor can prepare a required document Thursday. Ask about the school's lead time, set your own earlier target and leave time for questions. Put the source URL and date checked beside each requirement. Recheck whenever the application cycle changes.

If you started later than this sequence, ask which routes and deadlines remain available now. Prioritize a feasible next action instead of trying to recreate every earlier step at once.

RESEARCH FIT WITH THE SAME QUESTIONS

Ask the same questions about each option so you can compare what matters to you. Check the specific program and entry year rather than relying on a campus image or an old description. Keep the source and date beside anything that could change your decision.

Ask about the actual experience

Check the credential, program content, teaching format, course schedule, entry requirements and expected time to completion. Ask what happens if you attend part time, work while enrolled or change your major. Investigate tutoring, advising, accessibility, mental-health support and help with basic needs through the institution's official offices.

For a commuter plan, test the realistic travel time at the relevant hours and ask whether required courses or placements occur at another location. For a residential plan, check housing availability and the costs and rules that matter to you. Do not assume the sample schedule applies to every student.

RESEARCH FIT WITH THE SAME QUESTIONS

Compare evidence rather than impressions

Question	Option A	Option B
Exact program and credential		
Entry requirements and source		
Schedule and travel or housing		
Cost estimate and what it includes		
Support I would contact		
One unresolved question		

Keep detailed financial or disability information in the appropriate private process, not this shared comparison. You can write “contact accessibility office” without explaining a diagnosis.

Use a precise inquiry

“Could you confirm whether the required first-year courses for this program are available in the evening? I am comparing the published schedule with the sample plan. Where can I find the current schedule and advising contact?” This is easier to answer than “Is your school good for working students?”

RESEARCH FIT WITH THE SAME QUESTIONS

For a campus visit or online session, prepare three questions you cannot answer from the official site. Afterward, separate what you observed, what a representative told you and what still needs written confirmation. A student ambassador's experience can be valuable without being a guarantee about your own.

Choose a next action for each option: investigate further, keep under consideration or remove with a reason. Your list should become more useful as you learn, not simply longer.

FINDING COLLEGE COMMUNITIES

FINDING

Where could you contribute and feel comfortable asking questions?

College involvement can mean a service project, a professional chapter, student government, a music group, or a fraternity or sorority. Their names and structures can be unfamiliar at first. Learn the differences before treating any invitation as a good fit.

Start with organizations, chapters, and councils. Then explore examples and compare the actual work, eligibility, cost, time, and support at the campus or training provider you are considering. Recognition and membership information must be checked locally.



Photograph: see image credits.

What to work on

- 1** Understand chapters and councils without confusing their roles
- 2** Explore professional, service, cultural, and Greek-letter organizations
- 3** Check the local group and choose one manageable first step

FINDING COLLEGE COMMUNITIES

Before you start

Use the involvement research card to compare two kinds of groups. Aim for a verified information session you can attend or a useful question to ask. You can explore all of this without joining an organization.

EXPLORE COLLEGE LEADERSHIP AND CHAPTER ORGANIZATIONS

You can begin imagining college involvement while you are still in high school. Look for the work you would enjoy doing and the community you want to learn with. Leadership can begin with a committee task, a project team or a reliable behind-the-scenes contribution before an elected office.

Learn the basic structure

A student organization brings people together around a shared purpose; campus recognition is a separate institutional process. A chapter is a local branch of a larger organization with its own campus and national requirements. A council coordinates or governs participating organizations within its stated authority. An individual usually joins an organization or chapter, not a whole council as though it were one club.

Student government, cultural groups, academic societies, creative organizations, recreation groups and service teams can all offer responsibility. Check the campus directory for actual recognized groups. A familiar national name does not prove an active chapter exists at your intended campus.

Two chapter examples to investigate

ALPFA, the Association of Latino Professionals for America, has student chapters connecting students with a Latino professional community and development opportunities. A chapter might be a place to investigate event planning, professional learning or member support. Ask the actual chapter which activities and beginner roles are available, what membership involves and what costs apply.

Find ALPFA student chapters

EXPLORE COLLEGE LEADERSHIP AND CHAPTER ORGANIZATIONS

SHPE supports Hispanic students and professionals in STEM and has student chapters at community colleges, colleges and universities, as well as a high-school junior chapter route. Explore the relevant chapter and current membership requirements rather than assuming every campus offers the same experience.

Learn about SHPE chapters

Picture a realistic first contribution

A high-school student who enjoys organizing club questions might later help prepare an approved chapter event question sheet. A student who manages supplies might support a project team's materials record. These are possible transferable contributions, not promised roles or membership offers.

Ask: "What does a new member do in the first month? Who supports them? Can I contribute if I commute or work?" Do not assume ethnicity, gender, major or interest from an organization's name alone. Read its current mission and eligibility policy and ask respectful questions through official channels.

UNDERSTAND FRATERNITY AND SORORITY COUNCILS

Greek-letter organizations differ in purpose, history, membership and campus structure. A council and its member organizations are separate entities. Use these descriptions as orientation, then check the institution's official fraternity and sorority life office for its actual recognized chapters and rules.

Interfraternity Council

An Interfraternity Council, often IFC, brings participating fraternities together at a campus. The North American Interfraternity Conference provides IFC operating resources. A local IFC may coordinate shared matters within its rules, while each member fraternity retains its own identity and requirements. Joining one fraternity does not make a student a member of every IFC fraternity.

Read the NIC explanation of IFC functions

College Panhellenic

A College Panhellenic Association, sometimes called a Panhellenic Council or Panhel locally, facilitates cooperation among participating sorority chapters. The National Panhellenic Conference is the national association of its member sororities. NPC and a local College Panhellenic are related but distinct bodies. The campus explains its recruitment process and participating organizations.

Read about NPC members and College Panhellenics

UNDERSTAND FRATERNITY AND SORORITY COUNCILS

National Pan Hellenic Council

The National Pan-Hellenic Council, NPHC, coordinates nine historically Black Greek-letter organizations, collectively known as the Divine Nine. It is different from NPC or a College Panhellenic. Each Divine Nine organization has its own history, identity and membership process; local collegiate councils support cooperation among chapters.

The nine are Alpha Phi Alpha, Alpha Kappa Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, Delta Sigma Theta, Phi Beta Sigma, Zeta Phi Beta, Sigma Gamma Rho and Iota Phi Theta. Learn each organization's full name, history and current official requirements from its own materials. Do not treat the nine as interchangeable.

Explore NPHC and the Divine Nine

Recognition, recruitment or intake timing, eligibility, dues, housing and expected commitments vary. An event invitation or expression of interest does not guarantee membership. As a high-school student, use approved informational opportunities; do not participate in an unofficial membership process or assume college enrollment alone makes you eligible.

RECOGNIZE LOCAL COUNCIL DIFFERENCES AND SAFE CHOICES

Some campuses organize culturally based, independent or other Greek-letter organizations through additional councils. Names and membership vary, so an acronym should start a question rather than end your research.

Multicultural Greek Council

A Multicultural Greek Council, often MGC, generally brings together participating culturally based or multicultural fraternities and sororities at a campus. The precise organizations and council powers are local. A cultural history or mission deserves careful reading; do not assign a student to a group based on their appearance or assume the name supplies every eligibility rule.

For example, Penn State's fraternity and sorority life directory includes an MGC among its campus councils. Use that directory to see how one institution organizes its community, then check the corresponding official office at the campus you are considering.

See Penn State fraternity and sorority life

Independent Greek Council

Some institutions use Independent Greek Council, or IGC. At UNC Charlotte, the IGC is the council for registered independent fraternity and sorority social groups that are not members of the university's other councils. Other institutions may define similar terms differently. "Independent" does not automatically mean unrecognized, unsafe or free of institutional rules.

See UNC Charlotte as one IGC example

RECOGNIZE LOCAL COUNCIL DIFFERENCES AND SAFE CHOICES

Verify before making a commitment

Check the current campus recognition and conduct-status information, then confirm the chapter through the organization's official directory. Ask about total dues and other required costs, time commitments, membership education, academic requirements, accessible participation, withdrawal obligations and the process for raising concerns. A national website and a campus directory answer different questions; use both.

No membership goal requires accepting humiliation, threats, coercion, forced consumption, dangerous activity or secrecy about harm. Leave an unsafe situation when you can and contact a trusted adult or the institution's official reporting or emergency route. Do not investigate a chapter yourself or agree to keep dangerous conduct secret. Ask the campus office about its current anti-hazing guidance before participation.

A useful question is: "Where can I find the recognized chapter list, current conduct status and official membership process?" If the answer is only "Trust us," pause and verify independently through the institution.

LOOK BEYOND SOCIAL GREEK ORGANIZATIONS

Professional, service, music and honor organizations have distinct missions and membership rules. A Greek-letter name alone does not explain them. Their relationship to campus councils varies locally.

Professional and service organizations

Alpha Kappa Psi describes itself as a professional co-ed business fraternity. Investigate its team projects, event work and professional learning through official information, then check the chapter's recognition and requirements. No organization can guarantee a job.

Explore Alpha Kappa Psi

Alpha Phi Omega is a national service fraternity with a gender-inclusive service mission. Explore how its chapter connects service, leadership development and community. Ask which activities are open to visitors and which require membership.

Read Alpha Phi Omega mission and vision

Music and band organizations

Kappa Kappa Psi is a national honorary band fraternity centered on college and university bands. Music organizations can involve performance, service or recognition. Check requirements with the music department and organization; an interest in music may not satisfy a particular group's membership criteria.

Read Kappa Kappa Psi background

LOOK BEYOND SOCIAL GREEK ORGANIZATIONS

Keep every education route visible

Community colleges and technical programs can offer student government, technical chapters and service projects. Phi Theta Kappa is one community-college honor society to investigate; membership is by invitation and requires an active campus chapter. Check criteria and costs, and ask what fits your program and schedule.

A vocational student might explore a SkillsUSA chapter where offered. A commuter might choose school-day project meetings. An apprentice can ask the sponsor about appropriate peer representation or service opportunities. Check what the specific provider actually offers.

You can contribute without joining a selective or dues-based organization. Compare the work, support, cost and commitments.

Check Phi Theta Kappa membership information

Explore SkillsUSA college and postsecondary involvement

PLAN A FIRST COLLEGE INVOLVEMENT STEP

Choose two different kinds of organizations to look into. One might connect to an academic or professional interest; another could be about service, culture, music or student representation. Looking into them doesn't commit you to joining.

How someone might compare the options

A future commuter student is interested in business and community service. They find a recognized ALPFA chapter and a campus service group in the official directory. The ALPFA chapter's public event fits their schedule, while the service group's current project meets during a work shift. They ask whether a later service project or a planning task is available rather than promising attendance they cannot sustain.

The student attends an approved information session, asks about expectations and chooses one small next step. They keep a second option under consideration. They do not claim membership, a chapter office or an invitation before it is confirmed.

My involvement research card

Institution or training provider _____

Organization and official chapter or campus link

Its purpose in my own words

Is it a chapter, a council or a local group _____

Recognition and status checked with _____ on _____

PLAN A FIRST COLLEGE INVOLVEMENT STEP

Eligibility or membership process I still need to verify

Expected time and total costs to ask about

A beginner contribution that interests me

An access or schedule question I can ask without private disclosure

My next approved information step and date

Keep names accurate: ALPFA and Alpha Phi Alpha are different organizations. NPC and NPHC are different councils. If you are unsure, look up the full name before writing to a group. Use official contact routes, and do not send private documents or payment through an unverified invitation.

PREPARING YOUR NEXT MOVE

PREPARING YOUR

What needs to be ready before you apply or arrive?

Once you have a few possibilities, separate the tasks: checking costs, meeting requirements, explaining your experience, and preparing for the first weeks. Each has its own information and deadline.

When you compare an aid offer, keep grants, loans and work-study separate. When you track documents, distinguish a request from a confirmed submission. Write about your own experience, ask for support early and leave room to learn your new setting during the first month.



Photograph: see image credits.

What to work on

- 1** Compare costs and ask the right aid questions
- 2** Track applications and request recommendations
- 3** Prepare your routine and know where to get support

PREPARING YOUR NEXT MOVE

Before you start

Bring one option from Chapter 3. List the requirements you've verified and a question that's still open. Use the private next-step worksheet, and take financial, identity or other sensitive records through the right official process.

UNDERSTAND COST AND FINANCIAL AID

Compare what an option may cost you, not only the headline tuition or the largest aid number. This page teaches a comparison method; it does not recommend a loan or determine your aid eligibility. Use the current award-year information and ask the financial-aid office about your circumstances.

Keep the categories separate

Cost of attendance usually includes billed costs and estimates for other expenses. Check exactly what the institution includes. Grants and scholarships generally do not require repayment, but conditions and exceptions can apply. Loans are borrowed money with repayment terms. Work-study is an opportunity to earn wages through eligible employment; it is not an automatic discount on the bill. Check the actual award and job process. See the Federal Student Aid links in the resources section.

A net-price estimate helps you investigate what may remain after grants and scholarships. It is an estimate, not a final aid award. Keep the year, assumptions and living arrangement with the number. Do not assume a scholarship renews; ask about duration, enrollment and other conditions.

UNDERSTAND COST AND FINANCIAL AID

A fictional annual comparison

Item	College A	College B
Total estimated annual cost	\$24,000	\$31,000
Grants and scholarships	\$10,000	\$15,000
Remaining estimated cost	\$14,000	\$16,000
Loan offered separately	\$5,500	\$5,500
Work-study opportunity separately	\$2,000	\$2,000

The remaining cost is total cost minus grants and scholarships. College B offers more gift aid but still has a higher remaining estimate in this example. Loans and work-study do not turn that remaining cost into free aid. These are invented teaching figures, not typical prices or award promises.

Ask what is due, when it is due, which expenses occur before wages arrive and what changes in later years. Review borrowing and any binding commitment with an appropriate trusted adult and the official provider before deciding.

UNDERSTAND COST AND FINANCIAL AID

Use official routes and protect your account

The FAFSA form is free. Check federal, state and institution deadlines separately for the relevant year. Never share an account password with a club, consultant or this workbook. Be cautious of guaranteed scholarships, pressure to pay immediately or fees to apply for a scholarship. The FTC resource in the resources section explains common scam warning signs.

ORGANIZE APPLICATIONS WITHOUT LOSING REQUIREMENTS

Keep one private tracker for the institutions or programs you're considering. Put each requirement beside its official source and application year. Colleges using the same application platform can still ask for different materials and set different deadlines.

Record the whole process

For each option, note the application route, entry term, plan type, deadline and time zone, fee or waiver route, required school records, recommendations, testing policy, essays and any program-specific requirements. Add separate aid and scholarship dates. Mark unknown items for follow-up instead of assuming they do not apply.

Common App's first-year guide explains the application sequence and the role of supporters. The institution controls its own requirements. A counselor may have an earlier internal deadline for transcripts and school forms; ask before setting your personal schedule.

Use clear status labels

"Not started" means no work has begun. "Drafting" means you are preparing the item. "Requested" means someone else has been asked, not that it has arrived. "Submitted" means you completed the submission step. "Confirmed complete" means the institution's official process shows the required materials are received or the office has confirmed them.

A fictional tracker entry reads: "Recommendation requested 7 October; teacher agreed; school submission target 28 October; check official portal after submission." Those dates illustrate tracking only. Replace them with your actual verified schedule.

ORGANIZE APPLICATIONS WITHOUT LOSING REQUIREMENTS

Review before you submit

Check your name and contact details, entry term, program, facts, dates and responses. Make sure an essay answers the specific prompt. Follow the application's authorship and assistance rules. Review fees, agreements and any binding commitment with appropriate support. Do not enter financial or identity information into a copied or suspicious link; navigate through the official institution or application platform.

After submission, save the confirmation and check the official status. Ask the admissions office how to correct an error; do not submit duplicate applications unless instructed. If a recommender or school document is late, contact the counselor and institution rather than inventing a substitute or claiming it was sent.

Set one weekly review time to update your tracker and identify the next dependency. A short reliable review is more useful than repeatedly checking every portal without a plan.

WRITE IN YOUR VOICE AND ASK FOR SUPPORT

An application essay or short answer is a chance to help someone understand your experience through accurate details and your own reflection. Follow the actual prompt and length limit. A thoughtful answer doesn't require you to share trauma, family finances or other private information.

Start with a small true moment

List three moments when you made a choice, learned from feedback or changed how you worked. Pick one you can describe specifically. Explain the situation, what you did, what happened and what you understand differently now. Avoid turning every paragraph into a claim that you are a leader.

A useful planning note might be: "I assumed a welcome sheet was clear. A new member could not find the first task. I asked them to show me where they got stuck, then rewrote the instructions." The reflection could explore learning to test assumptions. This fictional example is a writing model, not text to claim as your own experience.

Draft before polishing. Ask a trusted reader whether the meaning is clear and whether the voice sounds like you. Editing help should support your thinking; follow the institution's rules on outside help and AI. Never submit invented achievements, someone else's story or generated personal experiences as your own.

Request a recommendation respectfully

Choose someone who can discuss relevant work, learning or responsibility. Ask whether they can provide a supportive recommendation and give the real deadline and submission route. Allow the lead time your school or recommender requests.

WRITE IN YOUR VOICE AND ASK FOR SUPPORT

A draft request: “Would you be comfortable writing a recommendation for my application to [program]? The deadline is [verified date], and the school asks for [relevant requirement]. I can share my activity record and a short note about what I learned in your class. Please let me know if the timing will not work.”

Provide accurate context and reminders, not a letter they are expected to sign as their own. Thank them and follow up politely through the agreed route. Do not pressure them to reveal a confidential letter or describe achievements they did not observe.

Find the right person to ask

Ask the counselor about requirements, the teacher about learning evidence and the financial-aid office about aid. Different questions belong with different people. If a trusted adult is unavailable, ask the school for another appropriate support route. You do not have to manage every unfamiliar process alone.

PREPARE FOR THE FIRST WEEKS AFTER ARRIVAL

Once you've chosen a next step, use the provider's official checklist to see what needs doing before you arrive. Enrollment, orientation, registration, placement and aid may be separate jobs. Keep the dates together and ask the relevant office what to do if a step is delayed.

Plan the routine before adding roles

Map classes or training, travel, paid work, meals, sleep and existing responsibilities. Leave time for preparation and unexpected tasks. In the first weeks, try one manageable contribution before joining several groups. Ask each organization what beginners can do and what time it actually requires.

A commuter student might choose a lunchtime project and a planning task they can complete at another time. A student in an apprenticeship might first learn the workplace's safety and reporting procedures before volunteering for an extra responsibility. The useful plan depends on the setting, not on copying a residential-campus schedule.

Find support while things are manageable

Locate the advisor or program coordinator, tutoring or learning support, accessibility office, financial-aid contact and appropriate wellbeing or basic-needs support. Check how to make an appointment and what information each office requests through its secure process.

If you use accommodations or other support in school, ask the new institution what its own process requires. Do not assume arrangements automatically transfer. Keep documentation private and share it only through the appropriate official route. A student club leader does not need your diagnosis to offer an accessible participation option.

PREPARE FOR THE FIRST WEEKS AFTER ARRIVAL

Practice a help request

"I am having trouble keeping up with the reading schedule. I have tried planning two study blocks, but I am still unsure which preparation matters most. Could we discuss how to use the course guidance and where to get study support?" Name the difficulty and what help would be useful without waiting until every option has failed.

Keep a first-month check-in with yourself or a trusted support person. Ask: Is my schedule workable? Do I know whom to contact? Is there a commitment to reduce? What information am I missing?

Carry one contribution record with you, but leave room to be a beginner again. A new setting may have different authority, expectations and support. Reuse the habits from Onward while checking the local rules afresh.

LEARNING FROM PRACTICE AND FEEDBACK

LEARNING FROM

Put this to use

A crowded week makes it tempting to count study minutes and hope they add up to understanding. A more useful question is what the next attempt will show. Can you explain the connection in an essay, complete a step without copying the example, or identify exactly where you need help?

Turn one assignment into a small practice plan, look at what your attempt tells you and use feedback to revise it. Samira's two-deadline situation gives you a place to start, and the short learning record helps you keep track. Use it to make a better next decision about your work, not to rate how independent or motivated you are.



Photograph: see image credits.

Work out what the assignment needs you to do, then choose practice that fits. Compare two attempts against the same requirement. Explain what you changed and what support you used. If your available time changes, show the trade-off in your plan rather than quietly adding hours you don't have.

LEARNING FROM PRACTICE AND FEEDBACK

Before you start

Bring assignment instructions you can access, an example or rubric, and a small piece of work you're allowed to use. Whoever is supporting the group can offer a fictional task instead. Keep grades, private feedback and the reasons behind your schedule to yourself unless you choose to share them. Ask a teacher to check the method when the subject is unfamiliar.

READ THE TASK BEFORE MAKING A SCHEDULE

Before deciding how long to study, identify what you will need to do. An instruction to define a term asks for something different from explaining a relationship, evaluating evidence or using a method on an unfamiliar problem. Read the actual task and any rubric. Underline the action words, identify the material they apply to, and check what a successful response must include.

Name the performance

Replace “get better at history” with a task you can attempt: “Explain two reasons for the change, using the class sources, and distinguish those reasons from an event that happened afterward.” The narrower goal helps you choose practice. It also gives you a question to ask if the teacher’s expectations are unclear. A specific goal can change as your understanding develops.

A rubric describes criteria for the work. It is not always a complete recipe. If a criterion says “use evidence effectively,” ask what that looks like in this assignment. You might need to select a relevant source, explain its meaning, connect it to the claim and acknowledge a limit. Copying more quotations would not automatically do those jobs.

Separate learning from production

Some steps help you understand; others turn that understanding into a submission. Reading an example, trying a problem and discussing an error are learning steps. Formatting references, checking the file name and uploading the correct version are production steps. Both may be necessary. A plan that leaves out the learning work can produce a neat file with weak reasoning.

READ THE TASK BEFORE MAKING A SCHEDULE

List the required parts, then mark which you already understand and which you need to investigate. Estimate the next small step rather than the whole assignment at once. After trying it, revise the estimate. “Draft one paragraph, then check whether the evidence actually supports it” gives you a useful checkpoint before writing several more paragraphs in the same way.

A fictional example

A biology task asks students to explain a process using a labeled diagram and a paragraph. Lina’s first plan is to copy definitions. When she rereads the instructions, she notices that she must connect the parts and explain what changes. She decides to draw the process from memory, compare it with class material, and ask about one connection she cannot explain. Only then will she prepare the final version.

Lina still needs to meet the teacher’s requirements. Her revised plan makes the uncertain part visible early. If a source, rubric or example is inaccessible, ask for an equivalent format before treating that access problem as a failure of effort.

CHOOSE PRACTICE THAT REVEALS WHAT NEEDS WORK

A worked answer can feel familiar while it's in front of you. Try a small part before looking again to find out what you can do yourself. Let the assignment's requirements guide the attempt: explain a history claim with a source, for example, or choose a mathematics method and explain the first step. Ask the teacher what support is appropriate while you practise.

Make a check possible

Choose a question with a trustworthy checking route: an agreed model, a teacher's explanation, a class source or a criterion you can apply. Close or turn over the example for the part you are trying, then record what you could do and where you stopped. Reopen it and compare. If you cannot explain why the answer differs, take that precise gap to someone who can help.

Correcting an answer after checking it is useful, but keep the original attempt visible to yourself. Otherwise the neat corrected version can hide the part you could not yet do. A note such as "I chose the right formula but did not convert the units" points to a different next step from "I did not know which relationship applied."

Return after a gap

Where the task allows, make another attempt later instead of repeating the same answer until its wording feels familiar. The 2007 What Works Clearinghouse practice guide recommends spreading learning across time and alternating worked examples with problem solving; it rates these recommendations as supported by moderate evidence in that guide. Its recommendations have different evidence ratings and do not prescribe one ideal timetable for every learner or subject.

CHOOSE PRACTICE THAT REVEALS WHAT NEEDS WORK

In a school week, choose a realistic later window with the teacher's advice. Keep the question close enough to the original skill that you can compare the work, while avoiding a test of whether you memorized one answer. Record changes in difficulty or help. If you use a simpler question on the second attempt, explain that before claiming improvement.

Explain a choice rather than copying a step

Ask why the step is appropriate, what information it uses and what would change if the conditions changed. Suppose a worked example compares two quantities. Explain what each quantity represents before copying the calculation. If you can carry out the arithmetic but cannot describe the quantities, your next practice should address the meaning as well as the procedure.

You can make the explanation aloud, in writing, with a labeled diagram or through an agreed accessible format. A practice method should reveal the learning the assignment requires. It should not turn an unrelated barrier, such as an inaccessible page or a handwriting difficulty, into evidence that you do not understand the subject.

Use a stopping point

Agree what to do if you remain stuck after a reasonable attempt. Mark the exact step, keep the work, and ask a focused question. Move to another useful task while you wait if that is possible. Persisting without new information is not always the best use of a short study window. A good practice record can show both effort and the need for teaching or support.

TURN FEEDBACK INTO A REVISION

Start with the comment, the assignment and your own work side by side. Find the part the reader means. Are they asking you to change the meaning or the way you present it? Those can call for different revisions. The useful next step is a change you can actually make.

Locate the next action

Suppose a teacher writes, “Explain the connection to your claim.” Find the relevant claim and the sentence containing evidence. Try adding your explanation of why that evidence matters. Then check whether the explanation makes a supported connection or merely repeats the claim. The task is to improve the reasoning, not to add a longer sentence for its own sake.

When several comments compete, choose an order. An inaccurate central claim needs attention before a decorative title. A missing required part may matter more than polishing a passage already doing its job. Ask which issue should be addressed first if the instructions or feedback do not make that clear.

Ask a question someone can answer

Bring the attempted work and say what you have tried. For example: “I added an explanation after the quotation, but I think I am still summarizing it. Could you show me where my reasoning stops connecting to the question?” This gives the teacher something specific to respond to. You can ask in writing, use a scheduled conversation or use another agreed format.

TURN FEEDBACK INTO A REVISION

If feedback feels discouraging, you can pause before replying and return to the actual work. You do not need to agree that every suggestion is right. Ask for an example or clarification, compare it with the assignment and explain a reasoned concern. If a comment raises discrimination, harassment or another serious issue, use the school's appropriate support route rather than trying to solve it as an ordinary peer-editing disagreement.

Show what changed

Keep a short before-and-after example. State the change, why you made it and what still needs checking. "I replaced a claim about every student with the group we actually heard from" is more informative than "I fixed the paragraph." If a revision creates a new problem, return to the requirement rather than defending it simply because you spent time on it.

The Education Endowment Foundation's 2025 guidance emphasizes explicitly teaching and modeling how learners plan, monitor and evaluate their work in particular subjects. In this guide, the revision record is a way to practice that thinking. It is not a separate test of personality or a universal score for independence.

TWO DEADLINES IN A CROWDED WEEK

Fictional case. Samira has a source-based essay due Thursday at 3 pm and a science quiz Friday. Her checked available study windows are 25 minutes on Monday, 35 on Tuesday, 45 on Wednesday and 30 at Thursday lunch: 135 minutes altogether. Paid work and family responsibilities fill the remaining time. The teacher has supplied the essay criteria and an example science problem.

Begin with what the tasks need

Samira's essay notes contain a claim and two possible sources, but she has not explained the connection between them. In science, she can follow the example while reading it, but she has not tried a question independently. She has two different gaps. Spending every session making tidy notes would not address either one directly.

Window	Planned work	Evidence to check
Monday 25 minutes	Science attempt for 15 minutes; check errors for 10	Which step could I not explain?
Tuesday 35 minutes	Essay outline for 25 minutes; verify source details for 10	Does each source support the proposed claim?
Wednesday 45 minutes	Essay draft for 25 minutes; optional formatting for 5; a new science attempt for 15	Can I use the method after a gap?
Thursday lunch 30 minutes	Essay revision for 20 minutes; science check for 10	Is the essay ready to submit, and what is still uncertain?

TWO DEADLINES IN A CROWDED WEEK

These are planning estimates, not a claim that every learner can complete those tasks in those times. Samira leaves a clear note whenever an estimate proves wrong. Her first science attempt shows that she cannot explain the second step, so her help request includes that attempt rather than a general request to “go over everything.”

When the plan loses time

Wednesday’s travel change removes 20 minutes. Samira now has 115 minutes across the week. She cannot keep every part of the original plan. She uses Wednesday’s remaining 25 minutes for the essential essay draft, drops five minutes of optional formatting, and postpones the 15-minute science attempt. Thursday’s shorter science check will need to focus on the unresolved step.

The smaller plan has a cost: she will have less practice evidence before Friday. She tells the teacher which step remains unclear and asks what would be most useful to try next. If the essay draft is not ready for revision, she asks about available support or a deadline change; she does not assume an extension. The record shows the trade-off instead of describing an overloaded plan as complete.

Try a different decision

Change the case: the essay requires a source Samira cannot access at home. Identify whom she should ask, what alternative access or material she needs, and which task can continue while she waits. Write a revised plan that respects the same time windows. Check that you have not quietly added an evening she does not have.

Revised plan

RUN ONE LEARNING EXPERIMENT

Choose a small part of a real assignment, or use the fictional case. Agree a suitable practice question and checking method with the teacher. You are examining how to approach a task; you are not conducting research on classmates or collecting their grades.

The assignment and the specific thing I need to be able to do

The instruction, criterion or example that tells me what good work requires

My first attempt and the help I used

RUN ONE LEARNING EXPERIMENT

The particular error or uncertainty I can identify

The practice method I will try and why it fits this task

When I will make another attempt and how I will check it

What changed in the work and what still needs support

RUN ONE LEARNING EXPERIMENT

Compare the attempts

Use the same task criterion when reviewing both attempts. Explain what the later response does better, what it still cannot do and whether you used different support. If the second question was easier, record that limitation. A larger score alone is not enough to explain what you learned.

Finish with a concrete next step: revise one explanation, try one appropriate new problem, or ask one focused question. Keep the record private unless sharing the work is useful and agreed. You may describe the learning without publishing a grade.

OPTIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE STUDY PLAN

Optional notes if you're helping someone with a study plan. Use a real subject task instead of giving a general talk about good habits. Read it aloud or offer an equivalent accessible version. Show a small imperfect attempt and explain how you check it. Make clear how a requirement changes the next action, including when the useful move is to ask for more teaching.

One way to work through this together

Allow about 45 minutes, adjusting for the group and task. Use five minutes to identify what the assignment asks for and five to model an attempt with one visible uncertainty. Give students ten minutes for a small attempt and comparison. Spend ten minutes on Samira's changed schedule, then ten on a revision or focused help request. Use the final five minutes to agree a realistic next check. A later attempt belongs in an actual available window, not in time silently added to the student's schedule.

Students may use the fictional case throughout. Do not ask them to display grades or justify paid work, care responsibilities, disability-related support or family circumstances. Let them identify the support used without explaining a diagnosis. Keep records in the school-approved private space and follow its retention arrangements.

Questions worth asking

Ask what the task needs, where that requirement appears and why the chosen practice fits. Then look at what the first attempt showed. If someone says "I need to try harder," bring the conversation back to the work: which step, connection or interpretation needs attention? Help them find or understand the requirement before judging their plan.

OPTIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE STUDY PLAN

For Samira's case, check the arithmetic: 25 plus 35 plus 45 plus 30 is 135 minutes. Losing 20 leaves 115. Her revised Wednesday keeps the essential 25-minute draft and removes the five-minute optional formatting and 15-minute science attempt. A different feasible answer is possible, but it must show its effect on both deadlines and cannot assume a deadline extension or an extra evening.

Four things to check together

Look at four things together. Is the goal a specific piece of work? Does the attempt show what the student can do and where they still need help? Does the revision respond to that evidence? Does the next step fit their time and support? Give one useful comment about the work and a chance to revise it. Keep this as feedback rather than adding it into a universal learning or leadership score.

When you compare attempts, note any change in question difficulty, support or conditions. Improvement in one short task does not show that a method caused a grade increase or will work equally well elsewhere. Use the learning record to plan and review practice; it is not a research study or a diagnostic assessment.

Come back to it later

Next time you check in, ask which choice the student changed and why. They can bring a different subject, but help them check that the method fits. The Education Endowment Foundation's guidance connects planning, monitoring and evaluation to subject teaching and explicit modeling. Keep that connection to the actual work, rather than rewarding a polished reflection on its own.

CHECKING INFORMATION BEFORE USING IT

CHECKING INFORMATION

What to try

You may use an online claim to choose a study method, prepare a club proposal or compare a future program. Before the claim affects a decision, find out what it actually says and what supports it. A convincing image, a confident answer or a familiar account name cannot do that checking for you.

Follow a claim from a short post to the material behind it. Compare the wording with the evidence, check a percentage and work out how an AI tool could fit within your school's rules. Keep a short evidence note so someone else can see what you checked.



Photograph: see image credits.

Find who made the claim and locate the original evidence. Keep what changed separate from the explanation of why it changed. When you use a number, keep its group, measure and comparison attached. Adjust your conclusion until it says only what you can support.

CHECKING INFORMATION BEFORE USING IT

Before you start

Use the fictional packet here or public material approved by the person supporting your group. You can take part without an AI account, a social-media account or a personal device. Printed extracts work too if they show where the material came from and its date. Leave student records and other private information out of the task.

FOLLOW A CLAIM TO ITS SOURCE

Before you start collecting links, write down the claim you're checking. "This course guarantees a job" makes a promise about what will happen. "Some former students report finding work" tells you what a particular group has reported. Keep that difference in view. If your checking leads you to change the sentence, save both versions so you can explain why.

Find out who is behind it

Find the person or organization behind the information and check what they're in a position to know. An admissions office can explain its published requirements. A former student can tell you about their own experience. A company can describe the features it says its product offers. Each can help with a different question; no one source automatically settles every claim about the topic.

Step away from the page and look up the producer through a reliable independent route. Where an official directory exists, compare the name and web address. A polished design and an "About" page can tell you how an organization presents itself. They may be useful, but they aren't an independent check of what it says.

Go to the evidence behind the sentence

Open the report, data table, policy or announcement the claim points to. Read around the quoted sentence. Note the date, the group or setting it covers, and the question it was meant to answer. If the link takes you to another summary, keep going toward the original evidence when you can.

Watch for several sites repeating the same press release or unnamed source. That can make a claim look widely supported without adding any independent evidence. Ask what each source adds: a separate observation, another analysis, an official rule, or simply another copy.

FOLLOW A CLAIM TO ITS SOURCE

Check whether the wording goes too far

Does a finding about volunteers turn into a claim about all students? Does a report that people liked something become proof that they learned? Does a possible explanation become a definite cause? Write the more limited sentence the evidence supports. Then decide what else you need to check.

Digital Inquiry Group's Civic Online Reasoning materials focus on who produced information, the evidence behind it and what other sources say. That's the approach behind the fictional examples here. Use those questions to guide your checking; completing a checklist doesn't prove a source is right.

Keep what you can actually use

A weak argument can contain a useful fact. A trustworthy institution can publish something that's too old or too general for your question. Say exactly what the source supports and what it leaves unanswered. If you can't get the original material, say so. "I couldn't check this" isn't the same as "this is false" or "this must be true."

KEEP THE DENOMINATOR AND COMPARISON VISIBLE

A count tells you how many. A proportion tells you how many out of a stated total. To interpret “24 students agreed,” you need to know who was asked, how many responded and what agreement meant. Twenty-four out of 30 respondents and 24 out of 300 respondents describe different results. Neither automatically describes everyone who did not respond.

Name the measure

Keep the unit beside the number. A percentage of students, an average percentage score and a percentage change are different measures. If a source does not define its measure clearly, ask or mark it as unclear before using it. Rounding should not hide the underlying count when a small group is involved.

Suppose a fictional report gives an average practice-quiz score of 60 percent at one point and 72 percent later. The difference is 12 percentage points because 72 minus 60 is 12. Relative to the first score, the increase is 20 percent because 12 divided by 60 is 0.20. Both calculations describe the same two values, but the labels must stay attached.

Ask whether the comparison is fair

Check whether the people, questions, conditions and timing are comparable. A later quiz could be easier. Participants could have received teaching between attempts. The group reporting a result might differ from the group that started. You need evidence about these possibilities before deciding how much the change tells you.

KEEP THE DENOMINATOR AND COMPARISON VISIBLE

An observed increase does not by itself show that a particular app, event or strategy caused it. To make that stronger claim, the investigation would need an appropriate design and analysis that addresses other explanations. You do not need to run that investigation for a club project. You do need to avoid saying more than your information establishes.

Use a proportionate conclusion

An accurate note might say, “The report gives higher average scores on a later practice quiz among its volunteers, but it does not establish that the app caused the difference.” That conclusion leaves room to investigate the app without promising an outcome. It also tells the next reader why the large headline number is insufficient.

When preparing your own small activity report, keep the question, count, total and limitations together. Describe what happened among the people involved. Ask the advisor what information is useful and permitted to collect; do not gather classmates’ grades or private records just to make a more impressive chart.

USE AI ASSISTANCE WITH A CLEAR CHECKING PLAN

Start with the rules for the actual assignment or project. Ask what assistance is permitted, what must remain your own work and how help must be acknowledged. Permission to brainstorm does not necessarily include permission to submit generated paragraphs. If the instruction is unclear, ask before using the tool for the uncertain part.

Give the tool a bounded job

For permitted use, define a job you can check. You might ask for questions to consider about a fictional proposal, then decide which questions are relevant. Asking a tool to produce the entire proposal creates more claims and choices for you to verify and may bypass the learning the assignment is meant to develop.

Use public or invented material when you practise. Keep student records, private messages, application documents and anyone else's personal information out of the tool. You can work through the supplied fictional packet without opening an account or transferring real student information.

Treat output as material to examine

A fluent answer may contain an inaccurate fact, an invented reference or a conclusion that does not follow from the evidence. Follow citations to the actual source and check that the cited passage supports the sentence. If you cannot locate a reference, do not include it as evidence. Asking the same tool whether its answer is correct is not an independent check.

Look for assumptions as well as factual mistakes. A suggested activity may assume every student has a phone, free evenings or money for transport. A draft may treat a school office as having authority it does not have. Compare the suggestion with the actual task, the people affected and the verified permission route.

USE AI ASSISTANCE WITH A CLEAR CHECKING PLAN

Keep ownership of the decision

Record the assistance you used in the format the teacher requires, what you accepted, what you changed and how you checked important claims. You remain responsible for the work you submit. If the output offers an argument you cannot explain, return to the source material or ask for teaching rather than using a polished sentence to hide the gap.

UNESCO's student AI competency framework, published in 2024, includes human-centred thinking, ethics and critical judgment alongside technical understanding. It is an educational framework, not permission to use a particular service or proof of a tool's accuracy. Local school rules and the assignment still govern this activity.

A HEADLINE ABOUT BETTER QUIZ SCORES

Fictional evidence packet. A study-app company posts, “Our app improves student scores by 20 percent.” Its linked report describes 40 volunteers whose average score was 60 percent on a practice quiz and 72 percent on a different practice quiz later. All 40 took both quizzes. The report does not establish that the two quizzes were equally difficult, describe the teaching received between them, or provide a comparable group that did not use the app. The company sells the app.

Start with the exact claim

The post claims that the app causes an improvement for students. The linked report supplies two average quiz scores for a specific volunteer group. The calculation of a 20 percent relative increase is correct, but the causal and population claims require more than that calculation.

Write down the arithmetic separately: 72 minus 60 equals 12 percentage points; 12 divided by 60 equals 20 percent relative to the first average. Neither calculation identifies the reason for the change. The number 40 describes the participating group, not all students or all app users.

Prepare a claim the packet can support

A careful replacement is: “In the company’s report, 40 volunteers averaged 60 percent on one practice quiz and 72 percent on a later, different quiz. The report does not establish that the app caused the difference.” Keep the source attribution so readers know whose report you are describing.

The company’s financial interest is relevant context, but it does not prove that every number is false. The missing comparison information also does not prove that the app has no value. It limits what this packet can establish. A fair review explains both points without turning uncertainty into a promotional claim or an accusation.

A HEADLINE ABOUT BETTER QUIZ SCORES

Decide what to do next

The school media club is considering including the post in a notice about study resources. Your task is to recommend whether the proposed wording is supported, not whether the school should purchase or endorse the app. Give the advisor the revised sentence, the supplied packet, the limitation and one useful question for further checking.

A useful question might ask whether there is independent evidence using comparable measures. If that evidence cannot be found, a short notice can omit the performance claim rather than filling the space with an assurance. The advisor still checks any link, age-related access requirement and school permission before publishing an external resource.

Try the review

Write one sentence that is supported by the packet, one sentence that goes beyond it, and a short explanation of the difference. Then identify a separate source that would answer a real unresolved question. Explain why a second copy of the company's post would not answer that question.

Supported sentence and the exact evidence behind it

Unresolved question and a suitable independent checking route

KEEP AN EVIDENCE NOTE ANOTHER PERSON CAN CHECK

Use the fictional packet, or choose a public claim with the person supporting your group. Keep private information out of your notes. Save the original wording alongside your revised conclusion so another reader can see why you changed it.

The precise claim and the decision it could affect

Who produced it and how I checked that identity

The original evidence and its date or version

KEEP AN EVIDENCE NOTE ANOTHER PERSON CAN CHECK

The people or setting covered by that evidence

The measure including its unit and denominator

An independent source and what it adds

A limitation or alternative explanation that matters

KEEP AN EVIDENCE NOTE ANOTHER PERSON CAN CHECK

My supported conclusion and what I would check next

Test the record

Give the note and public sources to a partner. Ask them to find the evidence for your conclusion without a spoken explanation. If they cannot, add the missing locator or narrow the sentence. The partner should also be able to name what remains uncertain.

If AI assistance was permitted and used, record its limited role and the checks you performed as the assignment requires. If you did not use it, there is no need to invent a technology step. The quality of the conclusion depends on the reasoning and evidence, not the tool used to draft it.

OPTIONAL SUPPORT FOR CHECKING SOURCES

Optional notes if you're working through source checking with a group. Share the complete fictional packet before the conversation. If you use live sources, make sure students can reach them without personal sign-ins or disclosure. Offer an accessible printed version with enough context to follow the claims. Leave classmates' personal posts out of a public critique.

Model a narrow check

Show how finding out who made a claim differs from checking whether it is supported. Talk through how you find the evidence, compare it with the summary and mark a question you can't answer. Give students room to explain a limitation instead of expecting an instant good-source or bad-source label. That limited conclusion may be the accurate one.

Let students first review the app packet individually or with a partner. Ask them to underline the causal word in the headline, compute both changes and identify the group described. Then compare proposed replacement sentences. A strong answer retains the two values and the volunteer group, attributes the report, and removes the unsupported causal promise.

Common errors to work through

If a student writes "12 percent," ask whether they mean percentage points or change relative to the first score. If they write "the app did not work," ask what evidence would support that stronger negative conclusion. If they reject the report only because the company sells the app, ask them to separate the producer's interest from the sufficiency of the actual evidence.

OPTIONAL SUPPORT FOR CHECKING SOURCES

Keep the task to interpreting the supplied claim. Students should not have to experiment on peers or collect grades. Use the same evidence questions whether someone likes the product or not. If you discuss an AI-generated response, bring an invented sample or an approved demonstration so everyone can join in without an account.

Four decisions to talk through

Can the student state the claim accurately, find the right evidence, name a limitation that matters and write a conclusion that fits? Ask them to revise a sentence that reaches too far or a number that lacks its denominator. Keep the feedback about those choices, rather than treating speed, confidence, vocabulary or device access as a score for judgment.

Try a second short fictional claim about an event or resource. Give it a different problem, such as a missing response denominator or an old policy date. Ask which parts of the earlier approach still help and which question matters most now. This lets you see how the reasoning travels to another situation; one successful attempt doesn't prove lasting competence.

MAKING A PROPOSAL AND EXPLAINING YOUR CONTRIBUTION

MAKING A PROPOSAL

Put this to use

You have noticed a problem or found an opportunity that interests you. The next conversation needs more than enthusiasm. You need to explain what you have observed, what you are asking for, what you can contribute and what remains for someone else to decide.

You might be proposing a small improvement or talking about a possible role. Either way, bring accurate examples and questions worth asking. Prepare a short proposal, practise explaining your own contribution and leave with a clear record of the next step.



Photograph: see image credits.

Make a request the actual decision-maker can answer. Explain your part in the work while giving other people their credit and keeping results accurate. Ask about the role, support and conditions before you commit. Write down what was agreed and follow up through the approved route.

MAKING A PROPOSAL AND EXPLAINING YOUR CONTRIBUTION

Before you start

Choose a school-approved proposal or a fictional opportunity. Keep any real application, employment or volunteer requirements beside their official source. Working through these pages doesn't create an offer, approval or guarantee of selection. Bring an example from paid work, care responsibilities, classwork or a hobby, sharing only the private context you choose.

BUILD A PROPOSAL AROUND A DECISION

Begin with the decision you want someone to make. “Please improve our media club” leaves the reader to work out the problem, the action and the authority involved. “May we test a revised export instruction sheet during an already approved club session?” gives the advisor a specific request to consider.

Establish the need without inflating it

Describe what you observed and how you know it. Name the people or setting covered by the observation. A difficulty noticed in one small practice group can justify examining the instructions; it does not prove that the whole school has the same difficulty. Separate the observed problem from your proposed explanation.

Find out what already exists. Someone may have an approved guide, a current improvement underway or a reason the process works as it does. Ask before replacing it. A proposal becomes more useful when it shows where the new work fits and what it would leave unchanged.

Compare a feasible alternative

Consider at least one other way to address the need. Explain the practical difference using the same questions: which option addresses the observed problem, who can prepare it, what access or permission is needed, and who will maintain it? A comparison does not need an invented scoring system. A clear trade-off can be more informative than unexplained numbers.

For a confusing instruction, a short revision may be easier to keep current than a new video. A demonstration could be useful for a different learning need. The best option depends on the task and the people using it. Do not label a format accessible solely because it is digital or because you prefer it; check whether the intended users can actually use it.

BUILD A PROPOSAL AROUND A DECISION

State your part and the dependencies

Say what you can deliver, when, and what you need first. “I can draft the revised steps by Wednesday lunch after the advisor confirms the correct export settings” identifies both work and a dependency. Ask the other person before assigning them a review or support role. Leave unconfirmed arrangements visibly pending.

Include the finish check. The task might end with an approved revised sheet in the club folder and a named owner for the next update. A trial also needs a check of what happened and a decision about whether to continue, revise or stop. Publishing a document is not the same as establishing that people can use it.

Make the request easy to answer

End with the specific approval or advice needed. Offer a smaller version if the full request is not feasible, and give the decision-maker a realistic time to respond. If there is no answer, follow the agreed contact route. Do not announce a plan or start an approval-dependent step simply because a proposed date is getting close.

EXPLAIN EXPERIENCE WITH EVIDENCE AND HONEST LIMITS

Choose an example that helps answer the actual question. If someone asks how you handled unclear instructions, an example about a difficult task may be useful. If they ask about availability, a long story about teamwork will not answer it. You can pause, ask for the question to be repeated, or check what kind of example would help.

Give enough context to understand your action

Explain the situation briefly, your responsibility, what you personally did and what happened. Name important support and other people's contributions. If an outcome is unknown, say what you completed and what is still being checked. A specific modest account is more usable than a large claim that you cannot explain.

For example, a student might say: "Our club's instructions confused some new members. I compared their questions with the guide, drafted clearer steps and asked the advisor to check the settings. Another member prepared the screenshots. We had an approved draft ready for the next session; we had not yet checked whether it reduced the difficulty." This gives the listener evidence of preparation and collaboration without inventing impact.

Make the reasoning visible

Explain one choice and why you made it. You could describe reducing the scope when time was short, checking permission before publishing or changing a question after feedback. If the first attempt failed, identify what you learned from the actual result and what you changed. You do not need a dramatic story or an invented crisis.

EXPLAIN EXPERIENCE WITH EVIDENCE AND HONEST LIMITS

Avoid making another person's private circumstances part of your example. "A teammate could no longer take the task, so we agreed a smaller plan" can explain the work without disclosing why they became unavailable. Ask the authorized owner before using a group document as a work sample, and remove information you are not entitled to share.

Prepare rather than memorize

Keep a few accurate notes instead of a script that must be recited word for word. Practise adapting the example to different questions. If the example does not fit, choose another or explain the limit of your experience. You can say, "I have not held that role, but here is a smaller responsibility that helped me practise the same task."

CareerOneStop's interview guidance recommends researching the opportunity, preparing truthful examples, practising answers and asking questions. Those are useful starting points here too, adapted for school-age learners. Focus feedback on the substance of an answer. Eye contact, a handshake, accent, speed and an outgoing personality don't prove someone's competence.

USE THE CONVERSATION TO LEARN ABOUT THE OPPORTUNITY

A conversation about a role should also help you decide whether its conditions are workable. Read the official description first. Mark the information you can verify and the questions that remain. For a job, training placement or volunteer role, use the provider's approved contact route and ask a counselor or trusted adult to help check unfamiliar requirements.

Ask about the actual work

Find out what a beginner does, who teaches the task and how the work will be checked. Ask which responsibilities need supervision or approval. "What would I be expected to complete during the first few weeks, and who would I ask when I am unsure?" is more useful than guessing from a title.

Check timing, location, travel, required costs and how schedule changes are handled. A general description such as "flexible hours" needs explanation before you can compare it with school and existing responsibilities. Ask where current terms and requirements are recorded. Do not treat an informal conversation as a confirmed offer or agreement.

Set a boundary accurately

You can describe availability without giving private reasons. "I can attend Tuesday after school until four, but I cannot take evening shifts" is a practical limit. If the role requires something different, ask whether a smaller or alternative contribution exists. Do not promise time you do not have in the hope of changing the arrangement later.

USE THE CONVERSATION TO LEARN ABOUT THE OPPORTUNITY

Ask for an accessible conversation format or the appropriate official support contact where needed. A club discussion does not need your medical documentation. Keep confidential information in the institution's designated process. A legitimate opportunity should be understandable without pressure to send private documents through an unverified message.

Close with a checked next step

Before finishing, summarize what you understood and invite correction. Record what each person actually agreed, what remains conditional, and the date or event that triggers the next contact. If you promised a permitted work sample, send only that material through the agreed route. If nothing was agreed, record that honestly.

A short follow-up can thank the person, confirm a useful detail and complete an accepted action. It should not imply that a positive conversation guarantees selection. Continue checking other feasible options while you wait, and use the stated process rather than repeatedly contacting people for an answer they cannot yet give.

A CLEARER INSTRUCTION FOR THE MEDIA CLUB

Fictional case. During a supervised media-club practice, six of ten participants could not find the export step in the current instruction sheet. The advisor asks for a proposal to improve that instruction. Students may draft material, but the advisor must verify the technical steps and approve anything placed in the shared club folder. There is no approval for a public video or a new student-data collection form.

Identify the decision

The observation concerns finding one step in a particular sheet. It does not establish that six participants cannot edit media or that the software is unsuitable. The group needs to decide what revision to propose and how to check it within its existing permission and time boundaries.

One option is to revise the heading and add a labeled screenshot to the sheet. Another is to prepare a short supervised demonstration. A public tutorial video would involve different publishing and maintenance questions and is outside the current approval. The students choose to propose the sheet revision because it directly addresses the observed navigation problem and can be checked before use.

A CLEARER INSTRUCTION FOR THE MEDIA CLUB

A proposal the advisor can review

"In the supervised practice, six of ten participants could not find the export step in the current sheet. We propose renaming that heading and placing a labeled screenshot beside the steps. I can draft the revision by Wednesday lunch after you confirm the correct settings. A teammate has agreed to prepare the screenshot using a fictional practice file. We would like your approval to try the checked sheet in the next existing club session. We would ask participants to locate the step and note any instruction that remains unclear, without collecting names or grades. Afterward we would bring you the observations and a recommendation to keep, revise or stop using the change."

The proposal specifies the observation, change, owners, dependency, permission and review. It does not promise that the sheet will solve every problem. Before the trial, the advisor still needs to confirm what process feedback can be recorded and who will maintain the approved copy.

Respond to a changed condition

The advisor replies that the technical settings cannot be checked until Friday. The proposed Wednesday finish is no longer possible as written. Identify which preparation can continue safely and which step must wait. Draft a revised schedule that does not place unchecked instructions in the shared folder.

Then practise explaining your contribution to an interviewer for a different school activity. Use only what has happened at that point: an observation, a comparison of options and a proposal. Do not say the new sheet improved performance before it has been tried. If the work later produces a result, update the account with the actual evidence and its limits.

A CLEARER INSTRUCTION FOR THE MEDIA CLUB

Revised next step after the approval dependency changes

A truthful short account of my contribution at this stage

PREPARE AND REVIEW AN OPPORTUNITY CONVERSATION

Choose a real approved conversation or the fictional media-club case. Use notes that help you listen and answer, rather than a script you must recite. Keep application records and private information in the appropriate secure place.

The purpose of the conversation and who can answer the decision question

The relevant need or requirement and where I verified it

A truthful example of my action and the support I used

PREPARE AND REVIEW AN OPPORTUNITY CONVERSATION

What the example shows and what it does not establish

The specific request or contribution I am proposing

Two questions about the work, support or conditions

My available time and any limit I need to state

PREPARE AND REVIEW AN OPPORTUNITY CONVERSATION

The agreement after the conversation including what remains conditional

My accepted follow-up action, route and check date

Review with a partner

Ask the listener to describe your request and your contribution using only what you said. If they infer authority or an outcome you did not have, revise the wording. Ask them which question still needs an answer before a sensible commitment can be made.

After the real or simulated conversation, compare the planned next step with what was actually agreed. Correct your record rather than treating the original plan as a promise from the other person. Complete your own accepted action or communicate a changed limit early.

OPTIONAL SUPPORT FOR PROPOSAL PRACTICE

Optional notes if you're supporting proposal or conversation practice. Choose a request or role that students can understand and influence within clear boundaries. They can practise the preparation and follow-through in a simulation without contacting an unfamiliar adult, applying for a real position, publishing work or creating an external commitment.

Make the listener role explicit

In pairs, one student explains a proposal or contribution while the other asks a relevant question. Give the listener a defined role, such as advisor deciding whether to review a draft. Do not let the listener pretend to approve spending, travel, publication or employment that the exercise has not authorized. Swap roles and compare what each person understood.

Offer a written, spoken, supported or approved recorded response. Focus on the explanation and questions rather than performance style. Students can use fictional experience. A carefully explained household, work or classroom responsibility deserves the same consideration as an expensive extracurricular opportunity.

Review the media-club reasoning

Look for a limited problem statement: six of ten participants could not find one step in this sheet during this practice. A suitable proposal addresses that problem, names the advisor's approval and technical-check role, and keeps public publication and new data collection outside the agreed scope. An alternative option is acceptable when its requirements are explained and checked.

OPTIONAL SUPPORT FOR PROPOSAL PRACTICE

When the advisor's response arrives late, the revised plan must distinguish preparation from approval-dependent use. Students could draft headings or arrange an agreed review while leaving technical claims unconfirmed. They should not distribute the unchecked sheet. Ask how the changed schedule will be communicated and who has accepted the new task.

Give feedback someone can use

Listen for an accurate need, a specific request, claims that fit the evidence and a clear next step. When someone describes experience, check their own action, other people's contributions and what has actually happened. Try a comment like "Your example makes the group result clear; now identify the part you personally completed."

Give students a chance to try again after feedback. A shorter, more accurate answer may work better. Keep any practice rubric limited to the work you're discussing and explain what it looks at. It should not become a universal interview score, a personality rating or a prediction of who will be selected.

Check follow-through

At a later session, ask students to locate the agreement they recorded and name the action they accepted. If the action is incomplete, review what changed and what communication is needed. Reliable follow-through includes correcting a promise that has become unworkable, not merely keeping a confident tone about an old plan.

TOOLS PRACTICE AND SUPPORT

TOOLS PRACTICE

Which record will make your next conversation easier?

The project and meeting worksheet helps a team agree what happens next. The experience and next-step worksheet is for your own planning. Copy the parts you need and keep sensitive information in the appropriate private records.

Optional support for advisors and supporters

If you're supporting a group, the suggested sessions offer one way to use these pages together. Adapt the pace, response format and local examples. Use the source list to check information with students when they're making real decisions.



Photograph: see image credits.

For students

Use a blank tool after you have worked through an example. Ask someone else to read it and identify the next action. If they need you to explain every line, revise the record.

REUSABLE PROJECT AND MEETING TOOLS

Copy this page for a real project. Use the school's approved workspace and keep sensitive information elsewhere. Ask each person to agree before writing their name beside a task.

One page project brief

The need and the person who confirmed it

The result we will finish and the work we are not taking on

The people affected and how we will hear from them

Who can approve this and what still needs checking

How we will check whether the result is useful

REUSABLE PROJECT AND MEETING TOOLS

Action record

Who agreed	Task and finish check	Due date	Waiting on or help

Decision record

We decided _____

Our reason and evidence were

REUSABLE PROJECT AND MEETING TOOLS

The concern or missing information we will revisit is

Approval status _____ Review date _____

Our fallback if the key step is delayed is

End the meeting by reading back the decision, owners, dates and communication route. Correct the record when an agreement changes.

REUSABLE EXPERIENCE AND NEXT STEP TOOLS

Use this privately. Summarize what matters without putting financial records, identity documents, passwords or another person’s private information into the workbook.

My experience record

Activity or responsibility _____ Dates _____

The situation and what I personally did

Who else contributed and what support I received

What happened and the evidence I can support

What I learned or changed

A truthful short description for my next opportunity

REUSABLE EXPERIENCE AND NEXT STEP TOOLS

My next option check

Program or opportunity and official source

Entry term or year _____ Date checked _____

The requirement or deadline I verified

The question I still need answered and the right office to ask

My next action and date

My weekly review

What is ready _____ What is waiting on someone else

The commitment I need to reduce or renegotiate

The one action that will make the biggest practical difference next week

Keep requested, submitted and confirmed complete as different statuses. A tracker should reveal uncertainty so you can resolve it, not hide it behind a check mark.

OPTIONAL NOTES FOR ADVISORS AND SUPPORTERS

Optional notes for advisors and supporters. Help students make real choices with clear boundaries. Onward offers practical planning and discussion tools. It is not a validated assessment, an admissions service or a substitute for school safeguarding and financial-aid expertise.

An optional eight session plan

Session	Student focus	Useful output
1	Capacity and contribution	A manageable agreement
2	Authority and representation	A checked role map and listening plan
3	Decisions and project scope	A brief with approvals and fallback
4	Meetings and difficult conversations	An action record and rehearsed response
5	Delivery and evaluation	An evidence-based revision
6	Experience and next options	A truthful record and comparison
7	Requirements and cost	A verified calendar and cost questions
8	Handover and transition	A usable transfer and first-month plan

OPTIONAL NOTES FOR ADVISORS AND SUPPORTERS

Allow roughly 40–50 minutes for a session, adapting to the setting and students' capacity. A real project or application process will need additional check-ins. Earlier grades can focus on exploration; students near graduation may need more time on current deadlines and transition. Do not treat the sequence as a mandatory ladder.

Make access concrete

Provide the materials before the session in a readable format, with clear headings and text descriptions of essential visuals. Check that students can use the response fields, and offer a spoken, typed, handwritten or assisted response. Include school-day participation options. Review the quality of the student's work rather than public visibility, unpaid hours or opportunities their family could afford. Paid work and care responsibilities can provide evidence of learning without private disclosure.

Use school-approved systems and retention practices. Keep sensitive application, financial, health and family information out of shared club tools. Tell students the limits of confidentiality and the appropriate safeguarding route. Adults retain responsibility for permissions, supervision, spending and institutional commitments.

Review the quality of the work

Look at the task, checked boundaries, evidence, accepted commitments and what the student revised. Ask them to explain their thinking and the support they used. Keep feedback about the work rather than giving a universal leadership score or predicting future selection.

Verify the entry year and institution before giving college-planning advice. Take aid, accessibility, and other specialist questions to the relevant office. If sources conflict, help the student obtain a current answer.

FURTHER READING FOR LEARNING EVIDENCE AND CONVERSATIONS

These sources were checked on 4 October 2026 for the added sections. They inform some of the advice here; none has reviewed, sponsored or validated Onward. The fictional cases, practical tools and review questions are material to work through, not reports of program results. Use current school rules and the actual assignment when applying them.

The earlier resource section remains in the complete guide. Its institution-specific and financial information keeps its original scope and verification date. This addendum does not turn those earlier checks into a new verification of every external requirement.

What Works Clearinghouse — Organizing Instruction and Study to Improve Student Learning

2007 practice guide. Used narrowly for its recommendations on spacing and alternating worked examples with problem solving, both rated moderate evidence there. No effect size or guaranteed learner outcome is claimed.

What Works Clearinghouse — Organizing Instruction and Study to Improve Student Learning

Education Endowment Foundation — Metacognition and Self Regulated Learning

Guidance updated in 2025. It supports showing learners how to plan, monitor and evaluate work within a subject. It has not validated the advice or worksheet in this guide.

Education Endowment Foundation — Metacognition and Self Regulated Learning

FURTHER READING FOR LEARNING EVIDENCE AND CONVERSATIONS

Digital Inquiry Group — About Civic Online Reasoning

Digital Inquiry Group explains checking who produced information, the evidence behind it and what other sources say. The fictional packet, arithmetic practice and worksheet here are original material, not a reproduction of its curriculum.

Digital Inquiry Group — About Civic Online Reasoning

UNESCO — AI competency framework for students

2024 framework, article updated January 2026. Used for the educational emphasis on human-centred thinking, ethics and critical judgment. No service recommendation, age eligibility rule or efficacy claim is inferred.

UNESCO — AI competency framework for students

CareerOneStop — Get ready to interview

Official CareerOneStop guidance, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor. Used for research, truthful examples, practice, questions and follow-through. Its appearance and body-language prescriptions are not used to judge the work here. The school proposal and media-club case are original educational examples.

CareerOneStop — Get ready to interview

VERIFIED RESOURCES AND FINAL REVIEW

Links were checked on 2 October 2026. Requirements can change by institution, program and entry year. Use the official provider for current decisions. These organizations do not sponsor or endorse Onward.

College planning and applications

College Board BigFuture offers college-planning tools and grade-level checklists. Use it to organize questions, then verify requirements with each institution.

Explore BigFuture college planning

Common App's first-year guide explains application preparation, supporters and college-specific requirements. Use only if the institutions you are considering accept that route.

Read the Common App first year guide

Cost aid and scams

Federal Student Aid explains how to compare offers. Keep grants, loans and earned work-study wages separate in your comparison.

Evaluate financial aid offers

Check FAFSA timing by the relevant year and confirm state and institution deadlines separately.

Check FAFSA deadlines

The Federal Trade Commission describes scholarship and financial-aid scam warning signs, including upfront fees and guarantees.

Recognize scholarship and aid scams

VERIFIED RESOURCES AND FINAL REVIEW

Career and apprenticeship exploration

My Next Move lets students explore occupations and interests. Use it to generate questions rather than treat an interest result as a fixed career decision.

Explore My Next Move

Apprenticeship.gov explains registered apprenticeship and links to opportunities. Confirm requirements and availability with the specific sponsor.

Explore registered apprenticeship

Before you finish

Before you finish, check who has agreed to take each open task and whether the necessary permissions are clear. Make sure your experience record matches what happened and your next-step dates come from current official sources. Choose one manageable action and a person you can ask for help. Revisit the plan when your circumstances or the requirements change.

FIND YOUR WAY THROUGH ONWARD

Start with the work in front of you. You might be looking for a first task, joining a different group or already carrying a responsibility that has become difficult. These routes help you find the pages you need. You can switch whenever the situation changes.

Getting involved is a way into a new setting, even if you already lead elsewhere. Already leading is for decisions and pressures you are handling now, with or without a title. Neither route is a level to pass.

Getting involved

Find a first role, a new group or one useful thing to try. Start with a manageable contribution and the support it needs.

Find a contribution that fits your week

What could you finish without pretending the rest of your week is empty? Read Choose a contribution that fits your life.

Work out what you can decide

Which part can you do, which part belongs to the group and which needs an adult decision? Read Understand your authority before acting; My role and decision map.

Help shape a choice

Whose experience would you miss if you only asked your friends? Read Represent students beyond your friends; Make a decision you can explain.

FIND YOUR WAY THROUGH ONWARD

Try one piece of real work

Could you test a useful contribution inside an activity that already has support? Read Turn an idea into a manageable project; Work through a four week welcome project; Reusable project and meeting tools.

Name what you learned

What did you actually decide or change, including outside a club? Read Describe your experience honestly; When your experience does not come with a title; Reusable experience and next step tools.

Already leading

Start with the decision, pressure or responsibility on your mind. Use the question below to look past the first obvious answer, then keep the existing tool beside your own situation.

Check what you promised people

Are students influencing a choice, advising on it or being asked to deliver a plan already chosen? Read Understand your authority before acting; Represent students beyond your friends; Make a decision you can explain.

Look at who keeps doing the extra work

Does the plan work only because the same person catches every missed task? Read Choose a contribution that fits your life; Run a meeting people can use; Handle a missed commitment or disagreement; Reusable project and meeting tools.

FIND YOUR WAY THROUGH ONWARD

Protect people while telling the group enough

What does the group need to know to act, and what would unnecessarily expose someone? Read Handle a missed commitment or disagreement; Check safety privacy and public communication.

Make a proposal that can be tested

What could change in the next decision, and what would show whether it helped? Read Build a proposal around a decision; A clearer instruction for the media club; Prepare and review an opportunity conversation; Make a decision you can explain.

Leave a role without leaving a hidden problem

Which obligations or unfinished work will still exist after you stop? Read Leave the next person ready; Reusable project and meeting tools.

Keep the rest of your life in the picture

The pages on study, feedback, explaining experience and life after school are available from either route. College exploration and applications are not requirements for leading at school. You can choose a contribution that fits your life now and come back to future planning when it is useful.

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