

Getting Started in High School

It is intimidating to begin high school, but you're able to do so. Having just gone through it myself, I thought I'd share three important pieces of advice that helped me get through my Grade 9 year.

Don't Be Afraid to Ask for Help or Guidance

High school is bigger, faster, and more complex than elementary school. Nobody expects you to be an expert on the first day. Teachers and guidance counselors are all there to help you navigate this new environment.

When you're confused about the location of a classroom or how to use a locker, just ask. Grinding silently does not make you self-sufficient, it makes you nervous. The students who succeed are not the all-knowing ones; they're just the ones who understand when to ask. Whether it's homework help or just information about lunch, asking questions proves maturity instead of not weakness.

Stay Organized

This cannot be stressed enough: organization is more important than ever in high school. With more teachers, multiple classrooms, differing due dates, and activities outside of class, keeping it all together can be hard.

This is what worked for me: use a planner or calendar to note down all tests and assignments. Keep a different binder or folder for each course with labels (if you're online, file folders work too). Go through your schedule every night and pack your bag (if applicable). Designate a study space at home where you can focus. Spend a minute every day to recheck your to-do list for tomorrow.

When you're organized, it's easier to focus on things that you actually enjoy. The students who fall behind aren't always stupid; they just aren't as organized.

Missing Work is a Death Spiral

This may be the most important thing I ever learned the hard way 😊. In elementary, you could likely get away with missing a project or two and not suffer that much. High school is very different.

Each assignment is built on the last. If you skip one, and the next is harder to understand. Skip a few, and suddenly you're drowning in makeup work while new assignments keep

piling up. Your grades suffer, you're stressed out, it's hard to catch up – it's not fun. Next thing you know, you're so behind that quitting doesn't seem as bad as climbing back.

There's an easy solution though: finish the work as assigned. Even if it's not perfect, submit it. If you're in a pinch, seek help immediately—don't let the work pile up until you're snowed under. If you do fall behind due to a cold or other issue (e.g., family), have catching up in a day or two—not a week or two, as your first priority.

Preparing for Change

High school comes with responsibility and independence. You will have more freedom in what courses you select and how you manage your time, but that freedom has expectations. Start building good habits now: manage your time wisely, take responsibility for your learning, and develop resilience when things get tough.

The most successful students are those who embrace change rather than resisting it. Be open to trying new things, whether that means joining a club, trying a harder class, or making a friend from outside your elementary school group.

Setting Achievable Goals

Good objectives are specific, measurable, and attainable. Instead of "get better at math," try "do all the math homework and attend help sessions if I get less than 70%." Instead of "get more involved," try "join one club during the semester and attend meetings regularly."

Break large goals into little baby steps. You want to improve your grades? Start with organizing your materials this week, organizing a study schedule the following week, and implementing it the subsequent week. Small wins build momentum and self-confidence.

Review your goals every month. Are they still relevant? Are you making headway? Adjust if needed - flexibility is the secret of successful planning.

What Makes Good Advice

Good advice is realistic, practical, and grounded in actual experience. It recognizes problems without glossing over them and offers tangible solutions. It's specific enough to be helpful but flexible enough to adapt to different circumstances.

The advice that I've provided is based on actual failures and actual successes throughout my Grade 9 year. Your experience will vary, but these basic principles: asking for assistance, staying on top of things, and staying up to date—have a universal foundation for your success throughout high school.