



DURHAM ACADEMY  
COLLEGE COUNSELING  
COMPASS

NAVIGATING THE POST-GRADUATION JOURNEY





# DURHAM ACADEMY COLLEGE COUNSELING COMPASS

NAVIGATING THE POST-GRADUATION JOURNEY

This College Counseling Compass is a tool for you as you embark on the college admissions process. It will help you chart the path to your destination while empowering you to learn more about yourself along the way. We hope this awareness brings confidence in tolerating the uncertainty of the college process and navigating the complicated parts of the landscape. All of this work — the curiosity, the wandering, the self-discovery — represents the long and winding road of your Happy, Moral, Productive life.

The College Counseling team hopes this journal will structure your 10th- and 11th-grade years as you plan your post-DA adventures. This is a place just for you.

This is your journey, your path and, ultimately, your choice. You get to choose the trail toward your dream school, vocation or experience. You get to focus on what matters most in your heart. Your time is precious, and your journey is important.

**WE ARE EXCITED TO SUPPORT YOU  
AS YOU TAKE THE NEXT STEPS.**

In this book you will find the following sections



## THE TRAILHEAD:

### *Taking the first steps*

Identify who you already are — the essential parts of yourself — to help guide your next steps.



## PATHS & TRAILS:

### *Exploring all the options*

Highlights options not just for which college to attend, but also potential career paths.



## PACKING LIST:

### *Preparing and planning ahead*

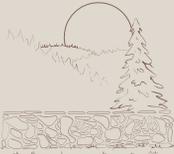
Collecting and organizing everything you need for interviews, college visits, essay prep, and so much more.



## TRAIL GUIDES:

### *Experts to help point the way*

Walk with your college counselor. They have traveled this path many times and have wisdom to help you.



## OVERLOOKS:

### *Surveying the landscape*

Whenever you visit a school, your job is to take it all in like a magnificent vista. Breathe. Observe. Listen.



## CAMPFIRE:

### *A place to process*

A place for you to be open and honest with yourself. To address your fears and frustrations, as well as your celebrations and joys throughout this process.



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# **ANY TIME REFLECTIONS**

## **OVERLOOKS**

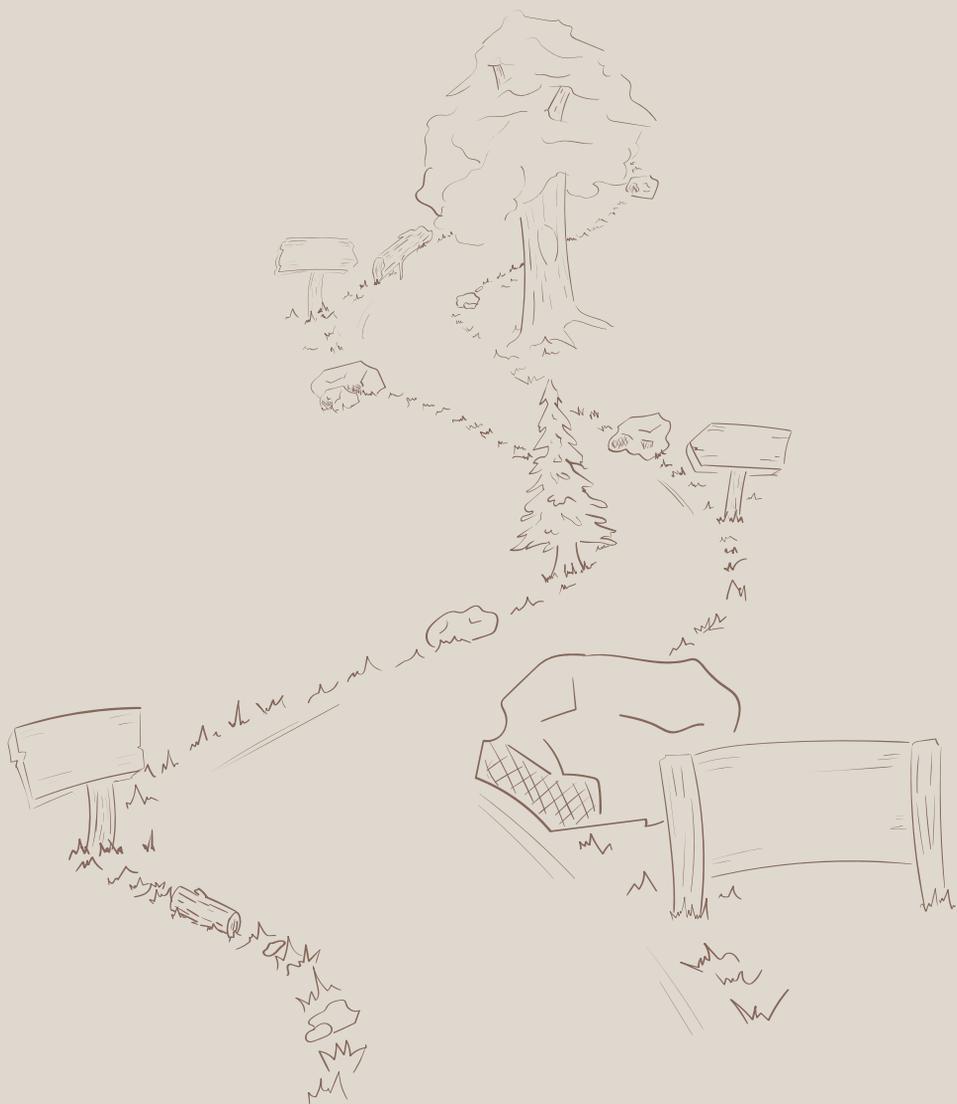
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## **CAMPFIRE**

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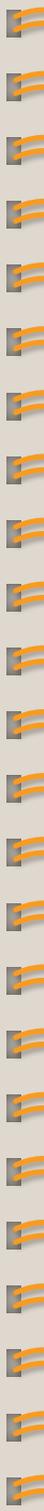
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# THE TRAILHEAD

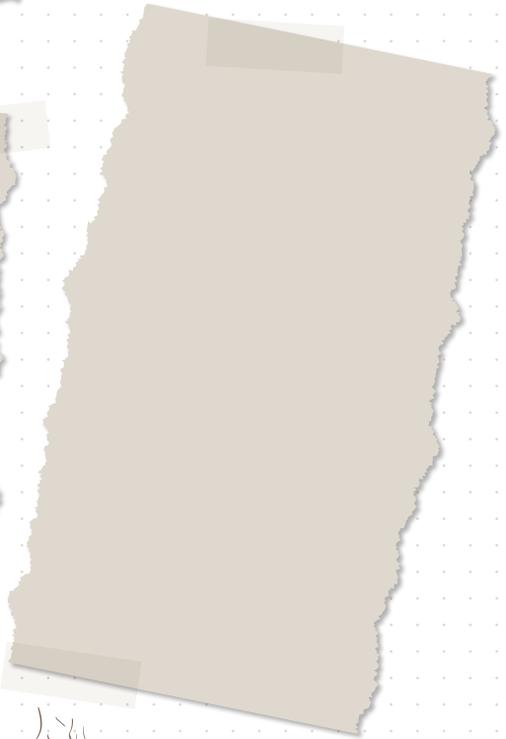
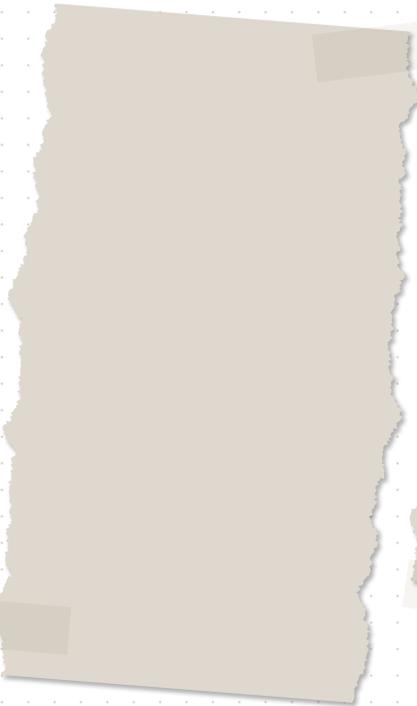
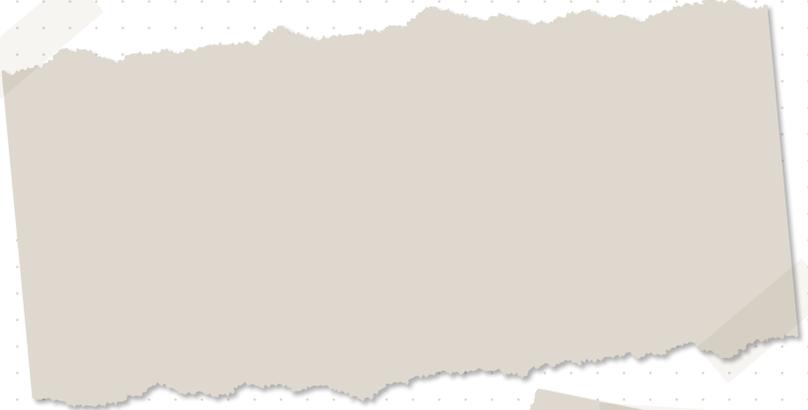
*Taking the first steps*

GRADE 10 REFLECTIONS

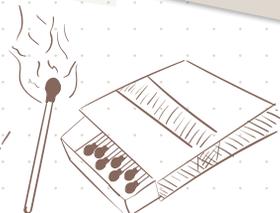


# What Do I Value?

Here are three principles or qualities that I find *intrinsically valuable or desirable* and why:



*NEVER* forget the essentials!



# Lists of My Interests

Exploring *anything and everything* | find interesting

Things I am Interested In:

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

My Favorite Books:

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

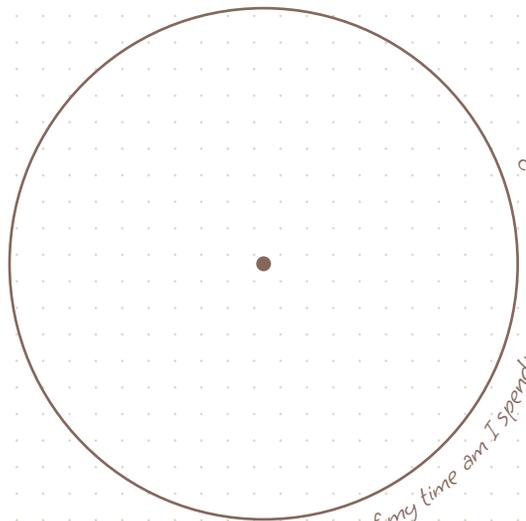
My Favorite School Subjects:

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 



Seeing the forest **BECAUSE OF** the trees

How do I spend my time?



What percentage of my time am I spending on these things?

# Who <sup>Or What</sup> Inspires Me?

Make a list of who or what inspires you, and why.

What do I do well?

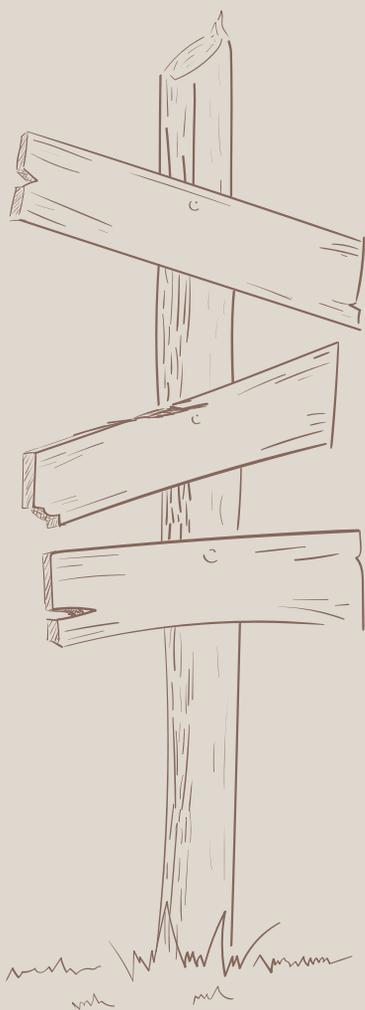
What do I excel in?



What are areas where I can grow or improve?

*What do I want to do  
after high school?*

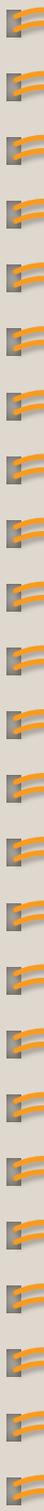
What has influenced my decision?



# PATHS & TRAILS

*Exploring all the options*

GRADE 10 REFLECTIONS





Turning my  
**DREAMS** into **REALITY**

If I could pick any career to have for the rest of my life with no financial reward (*only self-satisfaction*), what would it be?

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

WHY?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Here are some other careers I am interested in:



# MY CAREER GOALS

What do I want to do?

---

---

Why? How would this career utilize my gifts and strengths?

---

---

---

*Can this be achieved with ...*

A Bachelor's  
Degree

An Associate's  
Degree

Work  
Experience

\_\_\_\_\_

*Will I need further education?*

Master's Degree

Doctorate

\_\_\_\_\_



What is the  
starting salary?

---

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What industry do  
I want to work in?

---

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Where do I  
want to live?

---

---

# MY CAREER GOALS



What do I want to do?

---

---

Why? How would this career utilize my gifts and strengths?

---

---

---

*Can this be achieved with ...*

A Bachelor's  
Degree

An Associate's  
Degree

Work  
Experience

\_\_\_\_\_

*Will I need further education?*

Master's Degree

Doctorate

\_\_\_\_\_



What is the  
starting salary?

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What industry do  
I want to work in?

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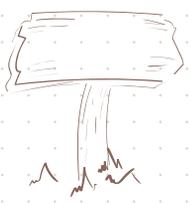


Where do I  
want to live?

---

---

# MY CAREER GOALS



What do I want to do?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Why? How would this career utilize my gifts and strengths?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Can this be achieved with ...*

A Bachelor's Degree       An Associate's Degree       Work Experience       \_\_\_\_\_

*Will I need further education?*

Master's Degree       Doctorate       \_\_\_\_\_



What is the starting salary?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



What industry do I want to work in?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



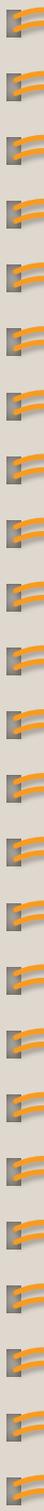
Where do I want to live?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



# PACKING LIST

*Preparing & planning ahead*

GRADE 10 REFLECTIONS





# RÉSUMÉ PREP

Durham Academy College Counseling  
guidelines to prepare for college applications

Creating your résumé may seem like a daunting process, but the most difficult part is getting started. Résumé-writing is simply a matter of **compiling your qualifications** in a logical way that **highlights your achievements**.

## SECTIONS TO INCLUDE\*

- Contact information  
*Name, phone number, and email*
- Academic profile  
*Name of school, GPA, standardized test scores, academic honors and awards*
- Work experience
- Extracurriculars
- Volunteer activities
- Special skills  
*Languages, programming, etc.*
- Summer enrichments
- Personal differentiators  
*Unique hobbies, interests or extensive travel experience*

\*These sections **fit the needs of most students**. Some will have information for all of these sections and some students will need different or additional sections.

## RÉSUMÉ WRITING TIPS

- Keep it brief, concise and specific  
*One page maximum*
- Use action verbs and short statements
- Highlight your strongest accomplishments first
- Avoid personal pronouns and vague descriptions
- Eliminate repetition
- Include the length of time you were involved in extracurriculars  
*List as hours/week, weeks/year*
- Order your sections and activities based on what you want to highlight and what is most important to you  
*This may or may not be in reverse chronological order*
- Be consistent with style and formatting
- **PROOFREAD**

Talk to your College Counselor with any questions regarding if or how to include activities on your college résumé.



## TOP 10 THINGS TO NOTE ABOUT THE RÉSUMÉ PROCESS

10. **Your résumé is a working document.** It will change as you continue gaining experience and should be updated as you add new experiences.
9. **"Th" does not belong.** Use 9, 10, 11, and 12 to indicate grade level. *Having 'th' notations makes a résumé difficult to read.*
8. **Do not restate your transcript ...** unless you are taking a specific class that should be brought to the attention of college admissions officers. *It is ok to highlight 1-3 courses that speak to your interest in a special field (art, music, robotics, independent study, etc.)*
7. **Colleges are only concerned with your accomplishments in grades 9-12.** *The only exception to this rule would be for long-term activities (i.e., martial arts, scouts, fencing, etc.) that you have consistently participated in over a long period of time.*
6. **The résumé is for information that pertains to you.** Do not include the school's contact information, mission statement, or other information that pertains to your school.
5. **Do not use abbreviations.** Assume that your reader will NOT know what any acronyms stand for; spell them out.
4. **Do not turn your résumé into a novel.** Keep descriptions brief and concise. Use the whole page's margins.
3. **Use consistent fonts and style** to make it easier to read. Your résumé should look as professional as possible.
2. **Group information together logically.** Your résumé should have a flow that provides a clear narrative of your activities and accomplishments.
1. **Do not plan to submit your first draft.** Edit, rewrite, revise, and seek advice! Get your résumé into tip-top shape now and update it as needed during your senior year.

Who is one person I can ask to edit my first draft?



# ACTION WORDS

*Of these action verbs, which ones can I use to give my résumé-writing some punch?*

- |   |                                       |                                       |  |
|---|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> accomplished   | <input type="checkbox"/> demonstrated | <input type="checkbox"/> instituted   | <input type="checkbox"/> recorded      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> addressed      | <input type="checkbox"/> designed     | <input type="checkbox"/> instructed   | <input type="checkbox"/> recruited     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> administered   | <input type="checkbox"/> directed     | <input type="checkbox"/> integrated   | <input type="checkbox"/> referred      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> advanced       | <input type="checkbox"/> developed    | <input type="checkbox"/> interpreted  | <input type="checkbox"/> regulated     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> advised        | <input type="checkbox"/> diversified  | <input type="checkbox"/> interviewed  | <input type="checkbox"/> rehabilitated |
| <input type="checkbox"/> analyzed       | <input type="checkbox"/> drafted      | <input type="checkbox"/> introduced   | <input type="checkbox"/> repaired      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> appraised      | <input type="checkbox"/> edited       | <input type="checkbox"/> investigated | <input type="checkbox"/> represented   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> approved       | <input type="checkbox"/> educated     | <input type="checkbox"/> launched     | <input type="checkbox"/> researched    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> arranged       | <input type="checkbox"/> enabled      | <input type="checkbox"/> led          | <input type="checkbox"/> restored      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> assembled      | <input type="checkbox"/> encouraged   | <input type="checkbox"/> maintained   | <input type="checkbox"/> restructured  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> assigned       | <input type="checkbox"/> engineered   | <input type="checkbox"/> managed      | <input type="checkbox"/> retrieved     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> assisted       | <input type="checkbox"/> established  | <input type="checkbox"/> marketed     | <input type="checkbox"/> reviewed      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> attained       | <input type="checkbox"/> evaluated    | <input type="checkbox"/> mediated     | <input type="checkbox"/> revitalized   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> audited        | <input type="checkbox"/> examined     | <input type="checkbox"/> moderated    | <input type="checkbox"/> scheduled     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> balanced       | <input type="checkbox"/> executed     | <input type="checkbox"/> monitored    | <input type="checkbox"/> screened      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> budgeted       | <input type="checkbox"/> expanded     | <input type="checkbox"/> motivated    | <input type="checkbox"/> set           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> built          | <input type="checkbox"/> facilitated  | <input type="checkbox"/> negotiated   | <input type="checkbox"/> shaped        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> calculated     | <input type="checkbox"/> focused      | <input type="checkbox"/> organized    | <input type="checkbox"/> skilled       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> cataloged      | <input type="checkbox"/> forecast     | <input type="checkbox"/> overhauled   | <input type="checkbox"/> solidified    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> chaired        | <input type="checkbox"/> formulated   | <input type="checkbox"/> performed    | <input type="checkbox"/> solved        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> clarified      | <input type="checkbox"/> founded      | <input type="checkbox"/> persuaded    | <input type="checkbox"/> specified     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> coached        | <input type="checkbox"/> generated    | <input type="checkbox"/> planned      | <input type="checkbox"/> stimulated    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> collected      | <input type="checkbox"/> guided       | <input type="checkbox"/> prepared     | <input type="checkbox"/> streamlined   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> compiled       | <input type="checkbox"/> identified   | <input type="checkbox"/> presented    | <input type="checkbox"/> strengthened  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> completed      | <input type="checkbox"/> implemented  | <input type="checkbox"/> prioritized  | <input type="checkbox"/> summarized    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> composed       | <input type="checkbox"/> improved     | <input type="checkbox"/> processed    | <input type="checkbox"/> supervised    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> computed       | <input type="checkbox"/> increased    | <input type="checkbox"/> produced     | <input type="checkbox"/> surveyed      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> conceptualized | <input type="checkbox"/> influenced   | <input type="checkbox"/> programmed   | <input type="checkbox"/> systemized    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> conducted      | <input type="checkbox"/> informed     | <input type="checkbox"/> projected    | <input type="checkbox"/> taught        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> contributed    | <input type="checkbox"/> initiated    | <input type="checkbox"/> promoted     | <input type="checkbox"/> trained       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> coordinated    | <input type="checkbox"/> innovated    | <input type="checkbox"/> publicized   | <input type="checkbox"/> translated    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> created        | <input type="checkbox"/> inspected    | <input type="checkbox"/> purchased    | <input type="checkbox"/> traveled      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> critiqued      | <input type="checkbox"/> installed    | <input type="checkbox"/> recommended  | <input type="checkbox"/> upgraded      |

*Are there other action words I can use?*

# Résumé Template

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

~~~~~ *Academic Profile* ~~~~~

School name: \_\_\_\_\_

GPA: \_\_\_\_\_ Anticipated graduation date: \_\_\_\_\_

SAT: \_\_\_\_\_ ACT: \_\_\_\_\_

Academic honors: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

~~~~~ *Volunteer/Work Experience* ~~~~~

Employer: \_\_\_\_\_

Description: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Dates worked: \_\_\_\_\_

~~~~~ *Volunteer/Work Experience* ~~~~~

Employer: \_\_\_\_\_

Description: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Dates worked: \_\_\_\_\_

~~~~~ Volunteer/Work Experience ~~~~~

Employer:

Description:

Dates worked:

~~~~~ Extracurriculars ~~~~~

~~~~~ Awards/Honors ~~~~~

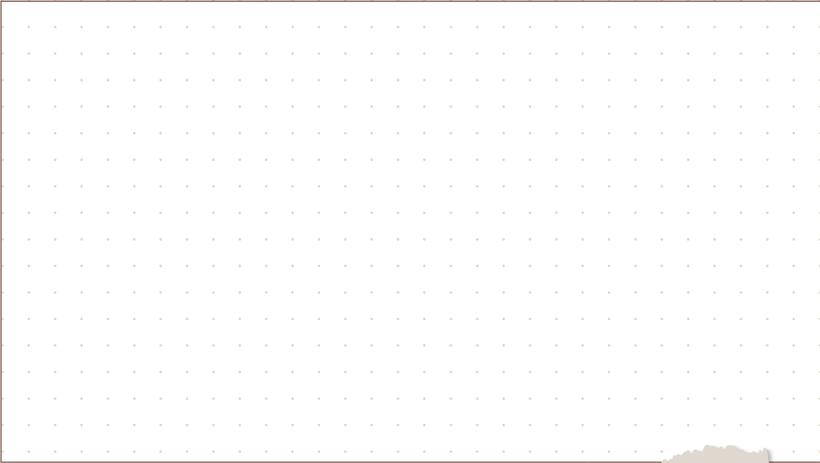
~~~~~ Skills ~~~~~

# Course Selection Reflections

*What am I required to take next year?*



*What are my options for next year?*



*Is there an opportunity to challenge myself in any of my core interests?*

*Don't forget to factor in outside-of-academic life, too!*

# Standardized Testing

Practice Test Scores

SAT

ACT

Which test did I prefer?

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Was the format/timing better on one test versus the other?

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How will I prepare for my first official standardized test?

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When is my schedule most flexible?

What are my ideal test dates?

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# It's Summertime!

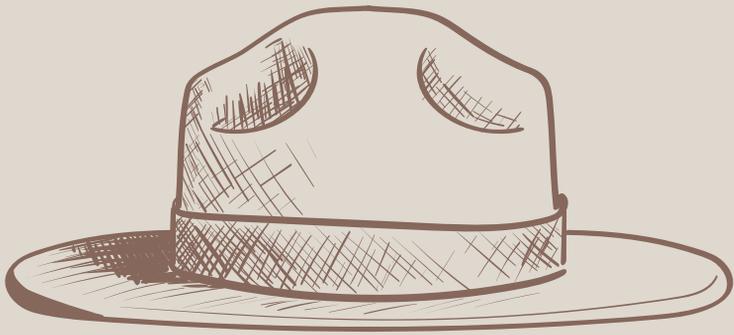
How do I want to spend my summer?

- Volunteering*  
Do I want to volunteer my time for a meaningful endeavor in my community?
- Working*  
Do I want to make money to support my or my family's goals?
- Learning*  
Do I want to follow a passion or interest?  
In a class? In an internship?

Where? Why? What do I need to do to make it happen?

Should I consider applying for a Jack Linger Explorer Grant?

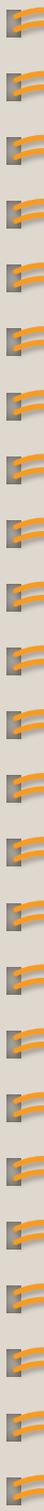




# TRAIL GUIDES

*Experts to help point the way*

GRADE 10 REFLECTIONS



# Navigating the Options

Understanding different types of schools and what they offer me

## Liberal Arts Schools

*Strengths:*

*Weaknesses:*

*Example:*

## Research Institutions

*Strengths:*

*Weaknesses:*

*Example:*

## Military and Service Academies

*Strengths:*

*Weaknesses:*

*Example:*

## International Schools

*Strengths:*

*Weaknesses:*

*Example:*

## Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)

*Strengths:*

*Weaknesses:*

*Example:*

## Women's Colleges

*Strengths:*

*Weaknesses:*

*Example:*

## Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

*Strengths:*

*Weaknesses:*

*Example:*

## Community Colleges, Trade Schools and Vocational Schools

*Strengths:*

*Weaknesses:*

*Example:*

# What should I know about college visits?

Walk through these questions with your College Counselor.

*What is a college visit?*

What do I need to know? How do I prepare for them?  
How do I optimize them?

When should I **start** my college visits?

|            |            |            |
|------------|------------|------------|
|            |            |            |
| 10th Grade | 11th Grade | 12th Grade |

What if I cannot visit each school in person?

# Career Explorations

Complete the O\*Net Interest Profiler at [mynextmove.org/explore/ip](http://mynextmove.org/explore/ip).  
Share the results and discuss with your College Counselor.

Realistic

Investigative

Artistic

Social

Enterprising

Conventional

## Processing the results

What is important about the results?

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---

Aspects I agree with

---

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---

---

Aspects I disagree with

---

---

---

---

What did you learn when you explored the different job options?

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---

EXPLORE  UNKNOWN

## Career Directions

3 career examples from O\*Net that fit my profile

Job Title

Have I considered this career before?

Yes

No

Thoughts on this career?

Overall impression?



Job Title

Have I considered this career before?

Yes

No

Thoughts on this career?

Overall impression?



Job Title

Have I considered this career before?

Yes

No

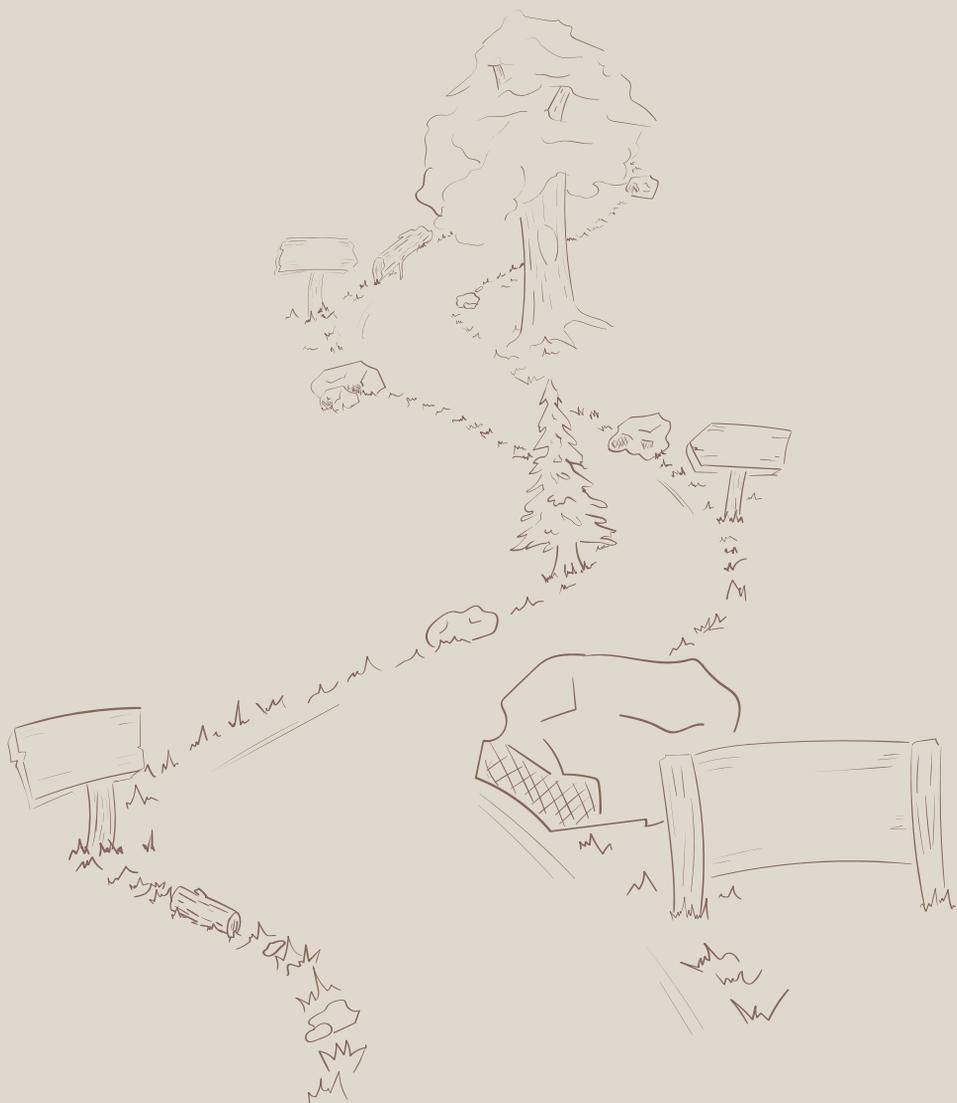
Thoughts on this career?

Overall impression?



*Other helpful career links*

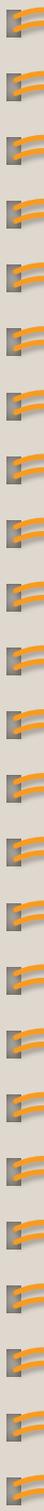
**onetonline.org**  
**nccareers.org**  
**roadtripnation.com**



# THE TRAILHEAD

*Taking the first steps*

GRADE 11 REFLECTIONS



**IKIGAI**  
A Japanese concept meaning  
“a reason for being”



What I love:

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What I am good at:

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What I can be paid for:

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What the world needs:

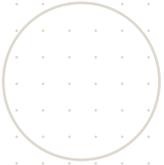
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# Care + Support

How do I currently take care of myself?

*Include in your answers what you do, and how often you do it.*

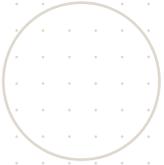


*Mentally*

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*Emotionally*

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*Spiritually*

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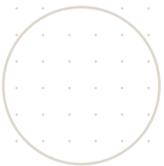


*Physically*

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*Nutritionally*

---

---

---

*How do I structure my time?*

Where do I find belonging?

Who are my people?

Where are my places?

|       |       |
|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |

What do you believe is most uncomfortable about the college application experience?

What is something that you think will help you manage it?

*More about my care and support system* →

*I can't make everyone happy all the time, so I need to determine who my trusted community is!*

The **Universal Rejection Truth (URT)** is the idea that no matter what you do, not everyone and everything will respond to you the way you want. It's a law of nature that can help you be more honest with yourself and others, and it can help you understand your worth and fight for your goals. It is your job throughout life to set boundaries with loved ones and community members.

*Teamwork makes the dream work!*  
In the end, everyone needs a community.

*Talk to your caregivers and ask them these questions*

How often do you think about college?

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How often do people ask you about the college process?

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---

Who or what most influenced your college choice?

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---

Who or what do you think will influence me the most in the process?

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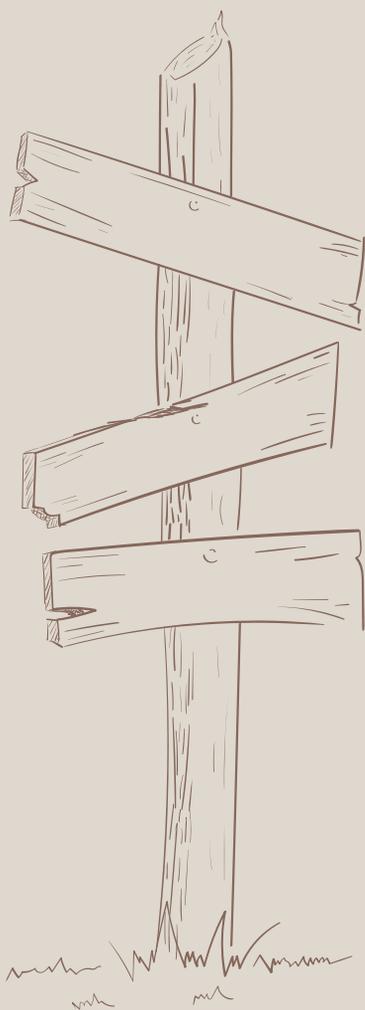
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Is there anything in particular that concerns you about the college process?

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# PATHS & TRAILS

*Exploring all the options*

GRADE 11 REFLECTIONS



Which of these do I care about?



Are there any I don't care about?

What traditions matter most to current students and alumni?

What extracurriculars are available?

Do they offer career services for students? What about alumni?

What are students most involved in on campus?

What percentage of students live on campus? Do they have Greek life?

## Campus Life

What varsity sports are offered? At what level?

Are there intramural or club sports?

Average student loan debt at graduation?

Percentage of student body receiving aid?

## Financial Aid

Do they offer study abroad?

## Programs

How do their clubs function as a part of campus life?

What opportunities are there for work study?

# What are YOUR Priority Factors?

Will I need a car?

Rural?

## Location

Proximity to home?

College town?

Is the campus walkable?

How big is the campus?

Is there public transportation? City?

Suburb?

How will I travel there and back?

How big is the student body?

## Size

What is the average class size?

Student/faculty ratio?

What academic supports do they have in place?

What are the graduation requirements?

What is the graduation rate?

## Academics

Do they offer things I am interested in studying?

What is the racial/ethnic breakdown of the student body?

## Diversity

What is the gender ratio?

How much is the average financial aid package?

## What are your priority factors?

Before you decide where to apply, it's important to consider what elements of the college experience are most important to you.

**Common factors that students consider when choosing where to apply include:**

- **Location:** Some students value being near home; some want to try somewhere new.
- **Size:** Large campuses feel comfortable to certain students, while others thrive in a smaller student body.
- **Diversity:** What am I looking for in my peer group? Diversity of experience? Of thought? Of perspective?
- **Academics:** Different schools offer different academic programs. Are you interested in the degrees offered?
- **Programs:** What non-academic opportunities does the school offer? Service opportunities? Study abroad?
- **Campus Life:** Greek life? Varsity athletics? Clubs? Suitcase campus? Different aspects of the college experience appeal to different students.
- **Financial Aid:** How much support does this institution provide? How important is this to my family and me?

Every college is unique in what it has to offer. In the same way, every student is unique in where they will thrive. In order to find the right fit for your college journey, you first have to decide ...

what matters to you?



Durham Academy  
College Counseling  
Finding the Right Fit



# What Matters to Me?

Considering common factors (*location, school size, diversity, academics, programs, campus life and financial aid*), what is **most important to me** when it comes to my post-graduation options?

## EXAMPLE

|                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>Location</i></p> <p>How much of a priority is this for me?</p> <p>★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆</p> | <p>Why is this important? What specifically do I need?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>This is important to me because</b> I know that I want to stay close enough to my family to be able to visit on holidays and long weekends.</li><li>• <b>I need a school that is:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- within a four-hour drive</li><li>- accessible by public transportation (train or bus)</li><li>- in a suburban or urban environment</li></ul></li></ul> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|                                                                                       |                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>Location</i></p> <p>How much of a priority is this for me?</p> <p>☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆</p> | <p>Why is this important? What specifically do I need?</p> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|

|                                                                                   |                                                            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>Size</i></p> <p>How much of a priority is this for me?</p> <p>☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆</p> | <p>Why is this important? What specifically do I need?</p> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|

|                                                                                        |                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>Diversity</i></p> <p>How much of a priority is this for me?</p> <p>☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆</p> | <p>Why is this important? What specifically do I need?</p> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|

## Academics

How much of a priority  
is this for me?



Why is this important? What specifically do I need?

## Programs

How much of a priority  
is this for me?



Why is this important? What specifically do I need?

## Campus Life

How much of a priority  
is this for me?



Why is this important? What specifically do I need?

## Financial Aid

How much of a priority  
is this for me?



Why is this important? What specifically do I need?

## Other

How much of a priority  
is this for me?



Why is this important? What specifically do I need?

# Setting my Coordinates

*Thoughts and doodles about the  
kind of community I want to be a part of.*

Imagine your ideal school. Consider setting (urban, suburban, rural), climate, size of the student body, class sizes, diversity, academics, sports and extracurriculars, campus life, etc. How do I make friends? Where do I want to live? What do I want to study?

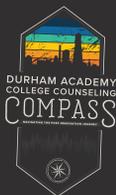


# My Core Priorities

When I did the “What Matters to Me” worksheet (p. 41) and wrote about my ideal school (p. 43) what patterns did I see about what is essential to me?

# My Core Questions

These are the questions that I need answered about an institution **before** I decide to apply.



# WHERE TO APPLY

Creating a Balanced College List

A **balanced college list** consists of a minimum of 6 schools (2 *likely schools*, 2 *target schools* and 2 *reach schools*).

Each student's list is different. There are no hard and fast rules.

## CHOOSING SCHOOLS

### LIKELY SCHOOLS

Often defined as schools that have **above a 70% admit rate**. The 30% that are not admitted right away may be deferred, waitlisted or denied admission.

### TARGET SCHOOLS

Often defined as schools where a **student's academic profile matches** the average admitted student profile for that college. The probability of gaining admission may be around 50/50.

### REACH SCHOOLS

Often defined as a school where **fewer than 20% of applicants are admitted** or a school where a student's academic profile is below the college's average admitted student academic profile.

TIP:

Use **College Kickstart** to maintain a balanced college list.

Here are some potential schools for my list.

### Likely Schools

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### Target Schools

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### Reach Schools

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### Helpful hints for determining your list

Use **SCOIR** to see how different schools align with you, your academic intentions and personal goals. This will help you categorize schools to optimize your college list.



# PACKING LIST

*Preparing & planning ahead*

GRADE 11 REFLECTIONS



# Interview & Essay Prep

DON'T BE MODEST, BUT BE REALISTIC.

| <i>Strengths</i>     | <i>Weaknesses</i> |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Opportunities</i> | <i>Threats</i>    |



# My Personal Pitch

An **elevator speech** seems like it's more about time — roughly the same number of seconds spent in an elevator. If you meet a prospective college or career networking connection, you have a narrow window to introduce yourself and make your point. So when you stumble upon that prized opportunity, how will you make the connection in the time it would take for an elevator to reach its destination?

## Who am I?

This is your opportunity to make a lasting impression.

1. Engage your listener with a hook.
2. Describe yourself.
3. Explain what you do and why you value this as part of your life.
4. SHOW ENTHUSIASM.

## What is my objective?

What is your objective or goal for a specific interaction?

- A) To show what you can offer by describing a problem you have solved or a contribution you have made to your community.
- B) To highlight your passions, skills and special talents.
- C) To make a connection between your life and the person or group you are talking to.
- D) What other objectives can you think of?

## What should I emphasize?

This is your chance to set yourself apart.

Think about ways to incorporate:

- Your strengths
- Your values



*Write out a few short examples.*

Your personal pitch can change depending on where the interaction is happening and for what purpose — so it could be helpful to have a few different pitches prepared.

# DIMENSIONS OF IDENTITY

How does your identity impact how you perceive yourself?



## Dimensions of My Identity

|    |    |    |    |
|----|----|----|----|
| 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  |
| 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  |
| 9  | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 |
| 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |

## DIMENSION EXAMPLES

Below are a few examples, feel free to use your own language for your identities.

### CORE/INTERNAL DIMENSIONS

#### 1. RACE

*Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, Latino/Hispanic, Black, Middle Eastern/North African, white, bi/multiracial*

#### 2. ETHNICITY, HERITAGE + CULTURE

*Irish, Chinese, Puerto Rican, Italian, Mohawk, Jewish, Guatemalan, Lebanese, European-American*

#### 3. SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND

*low income, middle income and upper income*

#### 4. GENDER, GENDER IDENTITY, EXPRESSION

*female, male, transgender, agender, intersex*

#### 5. SEXUAL ORIENTATION

*lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, queer, questioning*

#### 6. AGE

*child, teenager, young adult*

#### 7. FAITH, BELIEFS, VALUES + IDEOLOGY

*Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, pagan, agnostic, atheist*

#### 8. PHYSICAL + DEVELOPMENTAL ABILITY

*disabled, temporarily disabled, visually impaired, hard of hearing, able-bodied*

#### 9. MENTAL + EMOTIONAL ABILITY

*ADHD, depression, anxiety, OCD, autism, substance use disorder*

#### 10. LANGUAGE

*English, ESL, Spanish, Arabic*

#### 11. NATIONALITY/BIRTHPLACE

*United States, Nigeria, Korea, Turkey, Argentina, Canada*

12. \_\_\_\_\_

### SECONDARY/EXTERNAL DIMENSIONS

#### 13. CITIZENSHIP + IMMIGRATION STATUS

*U.S. citizen, immigrant, temporary visa*

#### 14. GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

*urban, suburban, rural*

#### 15. LITERACY + EDUCATION BACKGROUND

*literate, functionally illiterate, high school grad*

#### 16. RELATIONSHIP STATUS

*single, seeing someone*

#### 17. HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE

*caretaker, multi-family, divorced etc.*

#### 18. PHYSICAL APPEARANCE + BODY TYPE

*trim, overweight, fit, short, tall, average*

#### 19. FAMILY HOUSING STATUS

*single-family home, rental, housing insecure, unhoused*

20. \_\_\_\_\_

What identities am I most aware of or think about most often?

\_\_\_\_\_

What identities am I least aware of or do I think about least often?

\_\_\_\_\_

Which identities have the most impact on how I perceive myself?

\_\_\_\_\_

Which identities do I think have the most impact on how others perceive me?

\_\_\_\_\_

How do my identities influence my sense of belonging?

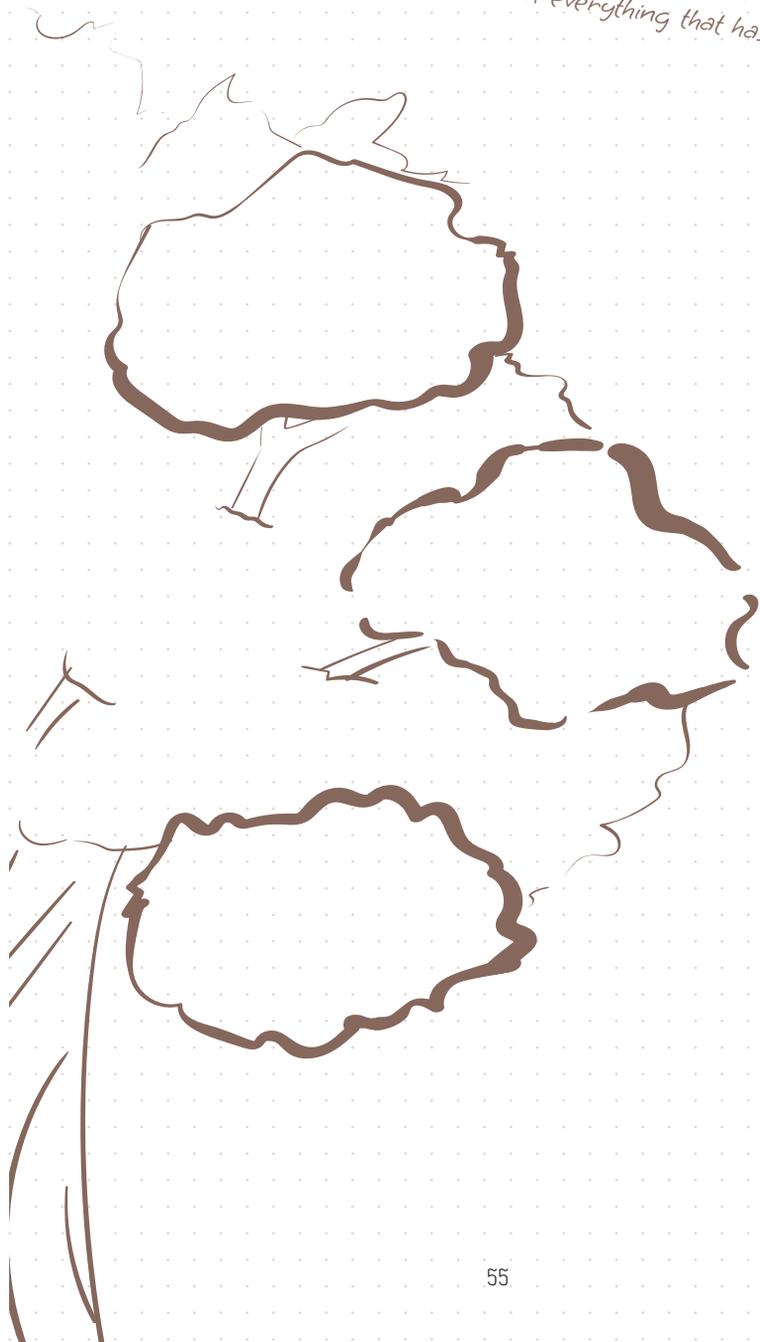
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# BRANCHES of my PERSONALITY

Utilize the branches to highlight your core traits. Surround them with any and all moments, memories, qualities and aspirations that make you singularly, uniquely and unmistakably YOU.



*My personality grows from challenging and rewarding experiences; memories painful and jubilant; and choices unremarkable and transformative. I'm the only "me" I have — and I'm proud of everything that has made me.*





# WRITING THE ESSAYS

Telling Your Story in a Clear and Convincing Way

The goal of college application essays is simple: Construct a full narrative of yourself with your application. What should the admission reader know about you that isn't in another part of your application?

## THE WRITING PROCESS

Crafting and refining your story will take time; expect to write several drafts of each essay. Admissions officers read armfuls of essays each admissions cycle. Taking the extra time to nuance your essay could be the thing that sets you apart.

1

### MIND DUMP

You should write **1 to 3** "*mind dump*" drafts for your essays. This gives you the opportunity to get all of your thoughts onto a page.

2

### NARRATIVE MESSAGING

After your mind dump drafts, you should spend time curating your story. Compile information from the mind dump drafts into a cohesive story. Aim for **1 to 3** "*narrative messaging*" drafts for your essays.

3

### FINAL TOUCHES

Your final essay can take many shapes. Take a few days between when you finish your narrative messaging drafts and your final edits. Go through with a fine-tooth comb to find any errors, but also look for ways to improve sentence structure and word choice. Take your time with this. Students should craft anywhere from **1 to 3** "*final touches*" drafts.

Telling your personal story is a new experience for **all** high schoolers; it is a skill you can learn.

# Telling MY Story

After completing the essay prep activities (*Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats Chart* (p. 49); *Personal Pitch* (p. 50); *Dimensions of Identity* (p. 52) and *Branches of Personality* (p. 54)), determine what elements of your story are essential to share with colleges.

# The College Perspective

## Supplemental Essay Topics

Find examples of essay prompts for each of these topics.  
Make sure to note which schools are asking what questions.

*Extracurricular*

*Impact on Your Community*

*Academic Essay*

*Identity*

*Why College X.?*

What do I notice about these questions? Similarities? Differences?

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Would these topics be challenging for me to write about if I had to do it today? Why?

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# *Non-Essay Admission Materials*

Find examples of schools that require each of the following non-essay submissions. For each supplemental material, include the school, the specific directions, and what software is used to facilitate its submission.

*Video*

*Résumé*

*Graded Paper*

*Picture/Photo*

*Portfolio*

# INTERVIEW INSIGHTS

Some colleges recommend interviews, and some don't even offer them. As the only face-to-face part of the admissions process, interviews can make a difference.

## TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

- **On-Campus One-on-One:** 30-60 minute conversation with admissions officer. Arguably, the most important type because the interviewer is often a decision-maker.
- **On-Campus Group:** more useful to students in helping them gain information about the school, than it is for the school to learn about individual students.
- **Alumni:** increasingly popular and can provide critical information to an admissions committee.
- **High School Visit or Admissions Event:** similar to campus group interview; you can distinguish yourself in the crowd by asking thoughtful questions.

## OBJECTIVES

Your foremost objective is to **convince the college representative that you are a good fit for that school.**

- How do you want the interviewer to **remember you?**
- How can you articulate the **special qualities that will distinguish you** from other applicants?
- How can you **find out if the school is right for you** — and how do you want to communicate **why you think the college is a good fit for you?**

Remember that the interviewer has objectives, too. Their primary objective is to **learn about you and your interest in their school.**

## HOW TO PREPARE

- **Think of five things** that you believe are most important to share.
- **Practice answering questions:** Discuss the type of student you are: your favorite subjects, most challenging courses, what you like best about school and your extracurricular pursuits.
- **Read the literature shared by the college** in guidebooks or on the college's website.
- **Candor and maturity will work in your favor.** Take responsibility — in an accountable, excuse-free fashion — for any past missteps.

## INTERVIEW ETIQUETTE

- **Be yourself.**
- **Maintain eye contact.**
- **Dress professionally.**
- **Try to avoid one-sentence or one-word answers.** Every question is an invitation for a conversation. Keep it going.
- **Show interest. Be engaging.** Pay attention to the questions and the answers your interviewer gives.
- **Prepare a few questions** about the school ahead of time.
- **Relax. Have fun!** Remember: The interviewer is trying to sell their college as the right fit for you as much as you're trying to sell yourself.
- **Send a thank you note** within 24 hours of the interview's completion.
- **Be positive. Smile!**
- **Listen.**
- **Be honest.**

## THE INTERVIEWER'S QUESTIONS

College interviews usually touch on your high school record, personal interests and college goals. Give some thought to these areas before your first interview:

- **About you:** Some of the discussion topics may include books you enjoy reading; people you admire or consider to be heroes; your family and friends; how others see you; your dreams and aspirations; and your views on current events.
- **About college:** Be prepared to discuss why you are interested in the college; what you're looking for in a college environment; your academic interests ("undecided" is a valid answer); and your long-term goals. You're not obligated to discuss any other colleges in which you're interested.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

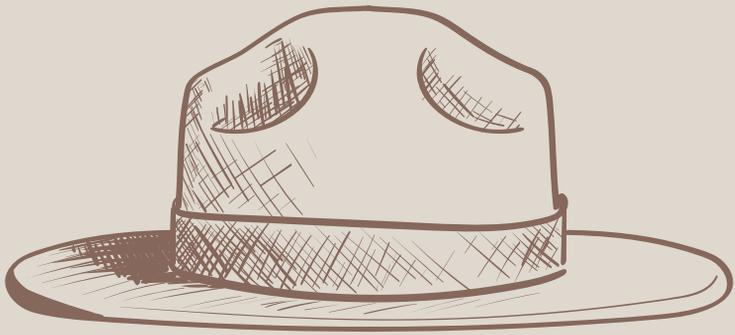
Most importantly: Relax and be yourself. The admission decision does not depend exclusively on the interview, which is a friendly, informative conversation. This is your opportunity to not only establish a personal connection with the college through the interviewer, but to also carefully consider whether a school is the right fit for you.



### REMEMBER:

College is a match to be made,  
not a prize to be won.

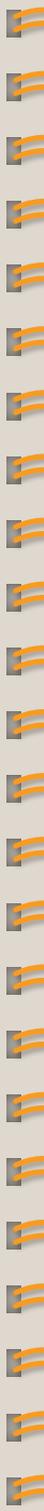




# TRAIL GUIDES

*Experts to help point the way*

GRADE 11 REFLECTIONS



# A Skewed Perspective

*What do I think college admissions officers are looking for?*

# INSIDE THE MIND OF A COLLEGE ADMISSIONS OFFICER

The admissions process holds two complementary truths:  
every component of an application matters, and each piece tells a rich story.

## PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Is there anything about the student's background or family information that stands out in relation to the college? Are there any special circumstances you should be aware of when evaluating the more objective parts of the application? Has the student ever been suspended or received disciplinary action from the high school?

## ESSAY:

Does the essay tell you something about the student beyond the transcript? What did you learn? What qualities or talents does the student reveal? Do you hear the student's voice? Do you get a sense of the student as a person? Does the student tell their story effectively? Are the grammar, spelling and punctuation correct?

## SAT/ACT:

What are the student's results on standardized tests? Are there areas that are significantly higher or lower? How important do you think test scores will be in the evaluation process? Do the SAT/ACT scores correlate with the student's GPA? Is one significantly higher than the other?

## HIGH SCHOOL PROFILES:

What can the admissions committee learn from the high school profile that might assist them? Does the high school profile give you information that might better help you understand the student's educational opportunities and accomplishments? (How does your school profile present its academic program?)

## COLLEGE CLASS PROFILE:

What kinds of students were recently offered admission to the college? Academics, gender identity, racial/ethnic identity, majors, geography. How many applications were recently applied/accepted/enrolled? Number of students receiving and amount of financial aid given to students?

## TRANSCRIPTS:

What kind of grades has the student received over the years? Is there a trend — an upward or downward one? Has the student taken advanced and/or challenging classes? Look at the high school profiles to quickly understand what is offered. Does the high school have strict prerequisites for entrance into these courses? If shown on the transcript, what kind of program does the student plan to take in their senior year — is it challenging or weak? What are the student's curricular interests?

## ACTIVITIES:

What has the student done outside the classroom, both connected to school and out of school? How much time has the student committed to those activities? How much depth is presented? Has the student pursued a leadership role in those activities?

## RECOMMENDATION LETTERS:

What two or three things have you learned about the applicant through the recommendation? How will this student impact our campus? Is there more information that will help the admissions committee determine how capable the student is in meeting the academic demands of the college?

## INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES:

Colleges and universities establish institutional priorities that shape the strategies and decisions related to building their incoming class of students. These priorities typically align with the institution's broader mission and strategic goals, reflecting a balance of academic, cultural and operational considerations. *Examples include but are not limited to: athletic recruitment, legacy admissions, talent in the arts, geographic diversity and interdisciplinary interests.*

# An Inside Look

How do college admissions officers make the hard choices?

|                                            |               |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------|
| <p><i>Candidate 1</i></p> <p>☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆</p> | <p>Notes:</p> |
| <p>Questions for committee:</p>            |               |

|                                            |               |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------|
| <p><i>Candidate 2</i></p> <p>☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆</p> | <p>Notes:</p> |
| <p>Questions for committee:</p>            |               |

|                                            |               |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------|
| <p><i>Candidate 3</i></p> <p>☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆</p> | <p>Notes:</p> |
| <p>Questions for committee:</p>            |               |

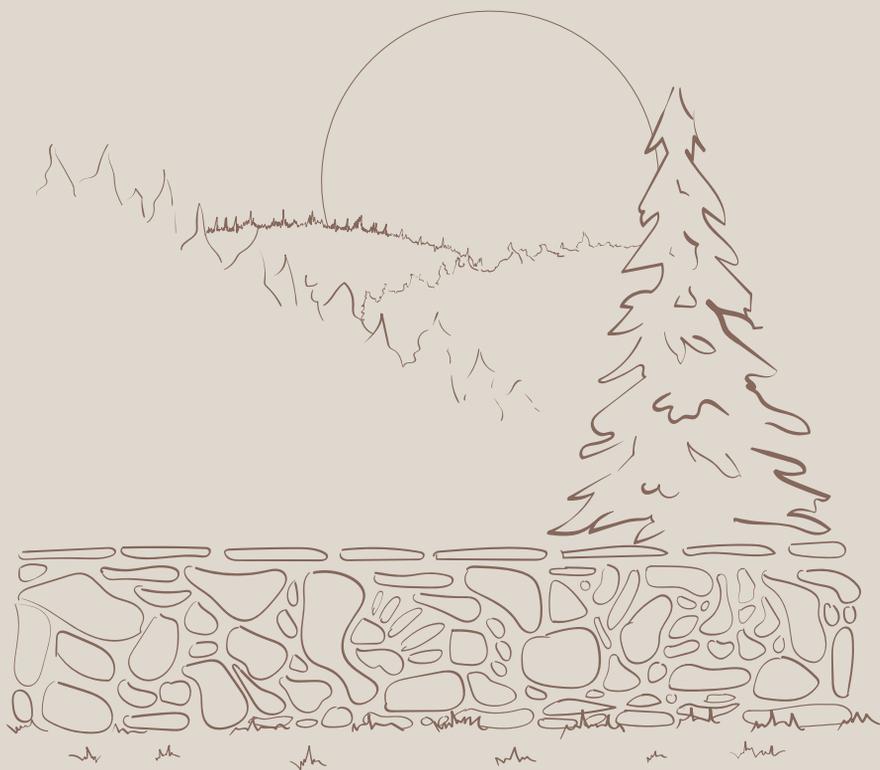
# The Full Picture

*How have my thoughts on what admissions officers are looking for changed?*

*What element of my application portfolio do I consider my weakest? Why?*

*Are there aspects I can still improve?*

*What element of my application portfolio do I consider my strongest? Why?*



# OVERLOOKS

*Surveying the landscape*





# ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

These may help you find your way.

These are **some example questions** to help guide your conversations with admissions representatives during your campus visits. **Note the ones that may apply to you.**

## ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

- What is the typical level of **faculty involvement** in student research projects? Are there specific majors that tend to have more research opportunities?
- How frequently do students engage in discussions about ideas **outside of formal class settings**?
- Is there a **required first-year program**, as well as a culminating experience for seniors?
- How accessible are courses outside of a student's major? Is it common for students to pursue **double majors**, and are there any restrictions on this for certain majors?

## CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT

- What percentage of students participate in **community-based service projects**?
- How accessible are **leadership opportunities** for students? Is the administration receptive to student feedback regarding campus issues?
- What proportion of students **study abroad**, and are there specific programs that mandate study abroad participation?
- What activities do most students engage in for **leisure and socialization**?
- Are there organized opportunities for **school spirit and involvement in athletic events**?
- What **extracurricular activities** are the most popular among students?
- Are participation opportunities in **music, theater and fine arts** exclusive to students majoring in those disciplines?
- Is **athletic participation** restricted solely to varsity athletes, or are there opportunities for non-varsity participation?

**REMEMBER:** Don't ask questions you could have found the answers to on their website!

Be sure to take pictures during your visit!

# College Visits

*What stood out to me on my visit?*

Taking detailed notes during visits will aid in the college application process, including essay-writing and interview preparation.

---

College/University Name

Date of Visit

---

Tour Guide/Admission Professional (Name and Title/Role)

## *Programs of Interest*

Specific programs/majors that appealed to me at this school.  
Include any unique features of these programs,  
such as internships, faculty expertise or research opportunities.

## *General Impressions*

Overall feelings about the school:  
atmosphere, student interactions, facilities, diversity, community feel, campus culture, etc.



---

## *Concerns or Dislikes*

Aspects of the visit that I found unappealing or concerning,  
such as the condition of facilities, lack of resources, or student culture

## *Unanswered Questions*

Do I have any questions that were not addressed during the visit that I may want to ask in a follow-up email?

## *Additional Notes*

Other observations that may help with future applications or interactions, such as memorable quotes, campus highlights or interactions with students

## *Reflection*

How did this visit align with my academic and personal goals?  
What stood out to me, and how do I envision my experience at this institution?

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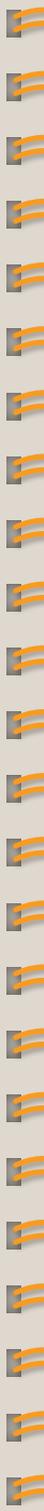
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# CAMPFIRE

*A place to process*



**When sitting around the campfire, people  
tend to be open and honest about their  
*hopes, fears and struggles.***

The next several pages are your space  
to do exactly that — to process, to be honest,  
to reflect, to hope, to dream and to fear.

**Give yourself permission  
*to want, to be mad, to be overjoyed,  
to be envious, to wish ...***

**This is your safe space to open up to yourself.**

The Durham Academy College Counseling team  
has included questions on the following pages.  
Answer them or don't answer them; it's your choice.  
This is your space.

Do not be afraid to express anything you think or feel.



What could I change if  
I were able to break  
free from the fear of  
rejection?

What risks am I  
not taking?

What goals do I have  
that are unrealized?

What do I  
really want?

What do I want to  
create, experience  
or change?

Is there anyone I think  
I will disappoint in  
this process?



Am I holding myself back  
because I feel it is too big  
of a risk? Who or what can  
help build my confidence?

What do I want to  
be proud of at the  
end of this process?

What can I control?  
What can I not control?

What do I need to  
celebrate? What  
have I overcome?

What do I want  
to grieve?

What type of  
boundaries do I  
want to set in this  
process?

# Calendar

## AUGUST

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## SEPTEMBER

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## OCTOBER

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## NOVEMBER

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# Calendar

## DECEMBER

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## JANUARY

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## FEBRUARY

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## MARCH

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# Calendar

## AUGUST

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## SEPTEMBER

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## OCTOBER

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## NOVEMBER

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# Calendar

## APRIL

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## MAY

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## JUNE

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## JULY

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