

# Homeschool to Grad School

Get Into the Grad School  
of Your Choice: **A How-To  
Guide For Homeschoolers**



CollegePlus.



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# FROM HOMESCHOOL TO GRAD SCHOOL

I'm a homeschool high school graduate. My mom was always a little worried about homeschooling us all the way through to college but after graduating a decade ago, I can't say I've starved yet.

In fact, I'm doing a lot better than a lot of college grads these days and the autonomy that comes through homeschooling was the catalyst that's made my success a reality. Like my mom, others who homeschool their kids often wonder if they're making the right

choice, if the opportunities will still be there on the back end. I can say from personal experience that they absolutely are.

After I graduated high school, I turned down the opportunity to attend a local university so that I could get real life experience for a couple of years before attending college. In 2007, I graduated with my BA in English and a few years later started looking at grad school options.



Early in 2010, I was accepted into the MBA program at the University of Texas at San Antonio and started classes that summer. Even though I'm a non-traditional student, I was easily accepted into the program because I not only met but exceeded the requirements for acceptance.

Here's what I did to get accepted and what your student absolutely has to do to get in. Leaving any of these elements out could jeopardize their entrance into college for their bachelor's degree and by default, into grad school.

# GED = DROPOUT: DON'T DO THAT TO YOUR STUDENT

Many homeschool parents are concerned that their student's academic ability is invalid without outside validation. This uncalled for anxiety has motivated some parents to have their kids take the GED and use it instead of a homeschool high school transcript.

## Bad Idea.

While the GED does validate a student's academic record, it makes them look like a dropout. Yes, stellar students can take the GED to finish with their studies early but academia perceives the GED as a last resort for students who can't handle traditional high school studies.

The reality is that as a homeschool parent, you are absolutely qualified to validate your student's academic record. You do this by creating your own transcript. Now you might be thinking, "Wait a second--I'm not an accredited institution, I can't do that!"

High schools do it all the time, though.

Most high schools aren't evaluated by an independent accrediting body. In fact, during state evaluations, many high schools fail dismally yet their students are still accepted into top universities.

This happens because admissions officials are more interested in the student's individual performance than in the school's overall performance.

# A TRANSCRIPT IS A TICKET TO RIDE

Want a transcript model that has put countless homeschoolers into college? Here it is:

A simple, one page document that lists a student's courses, amount of credit, and grade for each course. Put the overall GPA at the bottom and list some extracurricular activities.

That's it.

Oh, and don't forget to sign and date it at the bottom. It's not a valid document unless you sign and date it. Sign each transcript you or your student sends to colleges--no copied signatures will be accepted.

## **Course Titles Have to Make Sense**

When you list courses on the transcript, you want to use language that makes sense to academia. To figure out how to name the courses they've completed, look at a college transcript and see how the wording appears. Don't copy a

course title verbatim but use the titles in the catalog for ideas on how to word your student's courses.

## **Make Your Student Standout With Honors Courses**

If your student takes an AP course (even if they don't test) or if they take a standardized college exam like the College Level Exam Program (CLEP), list that course as "advanced" in the title or put an asterisk next to the title and note at the bottom of the transcript that courses marked with an asterisk are college-level.

## **CLEP Tests**

CLEP tests are a really good idea for students to take because they provide some measure of outside validation that students can handle college-level coursework. While this validation isn't necessary, the student will stand out above their peers because they've proven themselves on the college level.

Also, if your student takes a CLEP test, you simply use the title of the CLEP as the course title. If the exam title parallels a high school course too closely, simply put “Advanced” in front of the title to show that it’s an honors course.

Three credit CLEPs are worth half a high school credit and six credit CLEP tests are worth a full credit.

To look good to college admissions, your student should have at least 24 high school credits. If you can list up to 36 credits, that looks even better and will increase the likelihood that they’ll be admitted.

If you haven’t considered your student taking CLEP tests, you should. While curriculum is really expensive these days, CLEP tests cost \$80 and study materials are as low as \$30. Compared to most study resources, that’s a bargain.

## **Build Your Transcript Before High School**

It’s always a good idea to begin with the end in mind. We suggest that you envision what your student’s transcript will look like even before they start high school.

Figure out what their passions, interests, and bents are and figure out how to translate that into academic credit, if it isn’t readily apparent. If your student is interested in computer programming, for instance, look at college catalogs to see how similar courses are titled.

Also, if your student has an idea of where they would like to attend college, make sure the transcript reflects courses that meet the requirements for admittance. Do this as early as possible in the student’s high school studies.

# NETWORK FOR RECOMMENDATION LETTERS

Graduate schools look at more than a student's GPA when considering them for a program--recommendations from professors are a key part of their decision.

Each program usually asks for two or three letters from professors the student had during their undergraduate studies.

From day one of my English degree, I knew I might attend grad school sometime in the future. Because I had these plans in the back of my head, I went out of my way to stay in contact with my professors since I knew I would be asking them for recommendation letters later on.

When the time came to apply to grad school, all three professors I asked wrote really positive recommendation letters. They knew my work and my passion and didn't hesitate to help me out.

I also made friends with the people I worked with. Two of them attested to my real world business knowledge when recommending me to the MBA program I applied to. Having their backing was a huge boost towards getting accepted as well.

# SCORE WELL ON STANDARDIZED TESTS

When I say “standardized tests,” I’m not talking about the ones given in grade school. There are several standardized exams college students take before they start applying to graduate programs.

Depending on where a student wants to go to grad school, they should take one of these exams since their scores are also taken into consideration by graduate admissions committees.

The LSAT is taken by those considering law school, the GMAT is for business school applicants, the GRE for liberal arts programs, and the MCAT for medical school. There are some other standardized exams out there for more specialized programs but these are the most common.

Because I was considering some liberal arts graduate programs before deciding

on business school, I took the GRE and scored pretty well on it. Fortunately, a growing number of business schools accept the GRE so I didn’t need to take the GMAT. My scores were much higher than the average applicant to the school and that really helped me get accepted.

There are a number of great prep courses out there for these exams. I suggest using a couple of them--a variety of resources can add definition to all the different scenarios you can expect when taking any of these exams.

Both the GRE and the GMAT, the most commonly taken standardized exams,

focus on three areas: analytical reasoning through essay writing, verbal skills questions, and quantitative skills questions.

I used the Princeton Review *Cracking the GRE* to prep for my exam. even though I had a strong background in verbal communication, the book was really effective in preparing me for exactly the type of questions I would encounter on the test.

I scored in the 94th percentile of test takers in verbal and scored about average on the quantitative so I know the

study materials I used were really helpful. While the GRE has beefed up the quantitative section recently to compete more directly with the GMAT, most business schools expect applicants to take the GMAT because of its heavy emphasis on measuring math skills. Be ready for some heavy algebra but nothing more than that.

Some companies offer in-person test prep classes at a local learning center. However, a friend of mine who has taught this type of class for the GMAT has told me that numbers are dwindling.

# ONLINE

# TEST

# PREP

From what I can tell, it's just not worth it when there are less expensive online options. A couple of these are [Grockit.com](http://Grockit.com) and [Knewton.com](http://Knewton.com). With Grockit you pay a small monthly fee as long as you're subscribed to their prep site.

For Knewton, a GMAT and LSAT test prep service, it's a one time fee but they guarantee that you'll improve your score by 50 points if you've taken the GMAT or LSAT before taking their course.

## **Beware of the Essay Section**

Both exams require two written essays. Here are some general things for your student to keep in mind since each essay is timed. If they're not careful, they could run out of time before they finish their final draft. This could result in a bad essay score and lower their chances

of getting accepted into the grad school of their choice.

I scored a 5 out of a possible 6 points on my essays with minutes to spare. For my first essay, I had 9 minutes left and just sat there for a bit to catch my breath before moving on. Your students could probably use some similar breathers as well.

## **Read the topic and scenarios carefully**

Your student may think they know what's being asked and start in on writing before realizing what will make an effective response. It's okay to take some extra time to be sure that we write exactly what the test is asking for.

# WRITE AN OUTLINE

This is where a test taker can really save time. Essays can be written in a 5 paragraph format:

- Introduction
- First point
- Second point
- Third point
- Conclusion

Those points, first, second, and third are one idea written out in one paragraph and then summarized in the conclusion.

Writing an outline takes extra work at the beginning, but in the end it's a huge time saver because then your student will know exactly what they want to say. In timed essay writing, it's not creating the content that's difficult but organizing your thoughts into three cohesive points.

And one more thing: make sure your test taker doesn't start by writing the introduction first. Write all three middle paragraphs first and then go back and write the introduction and then the conclusion.

The first timed essay I ever wrote was almost a disaster. I didn't write an outline beforehand and submitted my essay with just 9 seconds left. I wasn't happy with it either, I knew I was hurrying at the end.

When I did the GRE, however, I wrote an outline of the main ideas first and then started fleshing them out. That's the time I had 9 minutes to spare and all but obliterated it on the high score I received.

## **Practice writing timed essays before your test**

I got this idea while working on my English degree, before I took the GRE. I figured that if I couldn't simulate writing an essay beforehand in the allotted time, I would have trouble in the real testing environment.



I wrote several sample essays before taking the test, trying to get within the target time. Once I achieved that, I knew I was ready for the real thing.

Bottom line with standardized exams: Get familiar with the exam's format so you're not surprised by anything. This means taking as many practice exams and working through as many sample questions as possible.

# WHAT'S THE GRADUATE PROGRAM'S TYPICAL STUDENT PROFILE?

Many programs outline the characteristics of the students who have been accepted in the past. They list GPA, standardized test scores, and sometimes average age of the candidates. If your student fits the bill academically, they're probably a good fit. If not, it might be worth looking elsewhere.

Average age is important because if the program is looking for mid-career applicants, they probably won't be interested in a student who has just completed their bachelor's degree but has little or no work experience.

**BE**

**LEADERSHIP**

**MINDED**

Just about every graduate program asks students to write a personal statement in which they spell out their reasons for applying and how attending the program will help them achieve their goals. They also want to know how a student's non-academic activities have contributed to achieving their life goals.

Homeschoolers are especially suited for standing out from the crowd since we tend to be very service-minded. I was able to truthfully say in my personal statement that I spent thousands of hours in community service, which indicated my drive to positively influence the world around me with the skills I had learned.

# CRUSH THE PROGRAM INTERVIEW

For whatever reason, my graduate program didn't require an interview--I even requested one but they said it wasn't necessary. The same thing happened to a friend of mine who just started law school. Fewer programs are relying on interviews these days, but in case your desired program includes one, here's what to do.

## **Prepare Answers Beforehand**

Your child is going to get asked some of the same questions over and over again: what you're interested in, why you're applying, etc. Have them take time beforehand to sharpen their answers so that they can present themselves in the best light and not seem like they're searching for an answer each time they're asked those open-ended questions.

## **Identify Life Goals**

It really helps if your student's calling in life expands beyond attending the grad program they're applying to. Program officials want to see motivation and drive to accomplish something great. Have your son or daughter take time now, as high school students, to identify their passions and goals in life.

This life purpose discovery process will not only help get them into the grad school of their dreams but will help define which program they want to attend in the first place.

Your student can start on this life purpose discovery process with programs like [Chazown](#) from [LifeChurch.tv](#) or the book and evaluation [StrengthsFinder 2.0](#).

# SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Nobody wants to get turned down by a graduate program they want to attend. But it happens, even to the best of us.

I got rejected by two programs I applied to, but not because I was homeschooled. The chosen applicants just happened to have spent significant time in the Middle East and were fluent in languages like Arabic, Farsi, and Urdu.

I'm bilingual but not in any of those languages. And the furthest east I've gotten is France. What did that equal? Two rejection letters.

But the reality is that I got over the rejection quickly and started looking for programs I was better qualified for. Once I found one that I liked (and there were a lot of them), I applied and got accepted.

While we all think we should be accepted by every program we apply to, it doesn't happen that way unless you're a child prodigy. The prodigies are out there--maybe your kid is one of them. But if not, help them get ready to hear a no.

# HOMESCHOOL STUDENTS NOW IN GRAD SCHOOL

Lauren took the GRE twice to make sure she got the best possible score, took vocal lessons on the Butler campus to start building relationships with the faculty, and networked with professors so that she would have solid references when she applied. All of this took hard work, but it all paid off in the end as she is now on the path to realizing her dream of becoming a music teacher.



**Lauren Whitney**



The son of a chiropractor, Josh grew up hearing about bones and backs his entire life. Josh earned his BA in History through CollegePlus but his end goal was graduate school. Before starting his undergraduate classes, Josh thought ahead and chose the graduate chiropractic program he wanted to apply to. He worked with his CollegePlus degree consultant to map out a comprehensive plan that would get him into the program of his choice and dedicated himself to spending long hours studying to ensure his acceptance into the program. At just age 20, Josh is the youngest student in Life University's Chiropractic school.

**Josh Wurdemann**

Brittany was accepted to Georgetown law school, William and Mary law school, and University of Virginia's Master's in Government program. Georgetown is notorious for being hostile to homeschoolers and students with distance education undergrad degrees, so Brittany definitely had her work cut out for her when she decided that she wanted to apply to their law school. However, Brittany focused on getting an excellent LSAT score, creating a story for her face to face interview that showcased her innovation in her educational choices, and her vision for the future. With that kind of preparation, she nailed all her interviews.

Despite the fact that Georgetown accepted her, Brittany decided to attend William & Mary's law school on a partial scholarship.

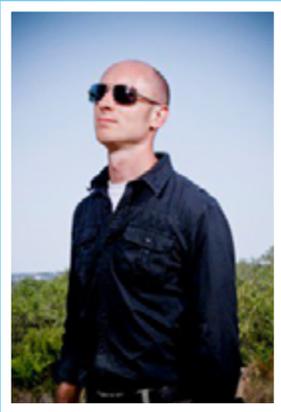
## Brittany Sadler



That's what worked for us and the same leadership approach to education can catapult your student into the graduate program of their choice as well. You're homeschooling your kids to help ensure their success in life--you don't have to worry that any educational achievement is out of their reach because they were homeschooled.

On the contrary, leverage the flexibility and customization of homeschooling to open every door for them to pursue a successful future.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Shawn Cohen graduated from his home-school high school in 1999 and earned a Bachelor's Degree in English from Thomas Edison State College in 2007, after only twelve months of distance learning study. He is now Learning Systems Director at CollegePlus.

## About CollegePlus

CollegePlus creates a customized accredited degree program designed around your specific needs, personality, and life purpose. CollegePlus allows you to earn your accredited bachelor's degree in about two years and then successfully launch into the workforce or graduate school.

You can learn more about CollegePlus [here](#).