

Summer Planning Guide

By Collegewise counselors and lovers of all things summer:
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**COLLEGE
WISE**

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Introduction

Which of the following summer activities would be most impressive to colleges?

- A. Attending Harvard summer school
- B. Working part-time bagging groceries at the local grocery store
- C. Taking a cooking class and learning how to make pasta from scratch
- D. Attending a summer service program in Costa Rica
- E. Going to soccer camp

It's a trick question. They can all be equally impressive.

Planning for college can be a confusing time, and many families feel pressure to create a summer strategy that will improve their student's chances of admission. From taking courses to get ahead of the masses, to tutoring in order to shore up perceived academic or testing weaknesses, to expensive summer programs promising to improve your admission chances, summer has become less about what kids want to do and more about getting ahead in the college admissions race.

It doesn't have to be this way.

Why did we write this guide?

Many of our students at [Collegewise](#) ask us for advice about how they should spend their summers. There isn't one right answer to this question, and there are seemingly limitless options for students to consider. So we help our students think about what they enjoy, what they might like to learn about, and most importantly, what they actually *want* to do with their summer months. We help them explore options and choose summer programs or activities that aren't just productive, but also enjoyable. We wrote this guide to present students, parents, and counselors with a variety of different opportunities and perspectives, and to help students come to their own decisions about which summer activities are worthy of their time.

Three Myths of Summer Planning

There is no right or wrong way to spend your summer. And while some of the programs in this guide might sound really exciting and interesting, there is also no substitute for taking the reins and creating your own summer experience. Whether it's planning a two-week backpacking trip with your friends, calling a local business to see if you can do some job shadowing, or spending every evening getting caught up on the books you've always wanted to read, what's important is that you pursue the activities that genuinely interest you. It's a great way to learn, and there isn't a college admissions officer in the world who will look at your list of accomplishments and say, "Hmmm—it looks like Johnny took *too much* initiative in high school. We're *not* looking for that at Stanford."

So let's dispel some of the myths surrounding summer planning and college admissions.

Myth #1: Your summer must be "impressive"

Unless your summer activities result in the discovery of extraterrestrial life or the authorship of the next Great American Novel, there's pretty much nothing you can do in two months that will cause an admissions officer to stop reading your application and choose the "admit" option. Summer is an important part of your high school years, but it's certainly not the only part, and colleges know that.

Students who try too hard to impress colleges often find themselves in summer programs they don't really enjoy AND end up doing things that lots (and lots) of other students do. That's no way to stand out.

As our fearless leader, Kevin McMullin, wrote in his college admissions guide, [*If the U Fits*](#):

“Lots of kids go to expensive summer programs at colleges. But we’ve only ever met one who spent his summers taking history classes at his local community college for \$20 per unit. He got to know one of his professors who shared the reading assignments for her upper division course on George Washington. That student didn’t care whether any college would look favorably on it– that’s not what it was about for him. He was just obsessed with history and wanted to know more. He went to Yale, where he majored in history, and then to Georgetown Law School.”

So don’t worry about what “looks good.” Worry about what you will enjoy and what will help you to grow, whether it’s intellectually, athletically, or artistically. Remember, admissions officers are just people, and what’s impressive to one person isn’t always impressive to another. Most importantly, you don’t have any control over what your application reader finds impressive. But no matter who is reading your application, everyone will be impressed by the student who takes the time to figure out what she wants out of her summer and then does everything she can to make it happen.

“But what if I want to go to a really competitive college?”

Really, there isn’t a summer program out there that will “guarantee” you admission to those universities with single-digit admit rates. While some programs like Telluride Association Summer Program (TASP) and the Research Science Institute (RSI) have developed reputations for being the proverbial “Golden Ticket” into an Ivy or other highly selective college, it’s important to remember

that correlation isn't causation. These are programs with extremely selective application processes that tend to draw some of the most creative, ambitious, intelligent, and hardworking high school students out there—the same kind of students who are already successful in applying to places like Swarthmore and Princeton.

So if you're considering a highly selective school, don't look for shortcuts. There's no summer program or activity that will magically ensure your admission. Instead, the admissions officers will look for evidence that you're hungry to learn, and that you will have a positive impact on the community around you. And while some programs absolutely provide for that kind of experience, so do a lot of other things that don't involve flying halfway across the world to practice your Spanish or scuba dive in the Bahamas in the name of science.

In fact, one thing that we've learned over the years from our students who attend places like Duke or Amherst is that they're not typically the sorts of kids who packed their summers with formal "programs." Sure, many of them had a couple of experiences like this—especially in the summers before their sophomore and junior years. But many more of them simply built themselves a great summer by bagging groceries at the local market, wedging in an online course or two in the evening, and spending their weekends diving even deeper into a volunteer program they'd already been a part of throughout high school. In other words, doing more of what they already loved—even if it didn't come with a fancy certificate of participation.

Myth #2: You need to spend a lot of money to have a productive summer

If your family has the means to send you to shear sheep in Tibet this summer, knock yourself out. But please don't do it because you think you need a splashy or expensive summer experience to get into college. There's no need to break the bank in order to have a productive summer, and you won't impress Harvard just by paying thousands of dollars to attend their summer school. There are plenty of productive things you can do with your summer that don't cost a thing—or that pay you, like a summer job—that are just as valuable in the admission review process.

As you look through this guide, you'll find that some of the programs and summer activities our students have done are free and some of them cost money. Some of them cost A LOT of money. What's important is that you choose what you want to do (not what mom and dad choose for you) and that you do it well. So, if a language immersion program isn't in the cards for you, that's completely fine. Get a job at the supermarket. Take a cooking class. Volunteer or intern at the community newspaper, or coach a Little League team. You'll shine just as brightly in your college applications as the kid who went to robotics camp at Caltech.

Myth #3: You can't have downtime during the summer

We don't really know who came up with the idea that students shouldn't relax or have any fun at all during the summer (and if we did, we might let the air out of their tires). You officially have permission from us—and from colleges—to take a step back and enjoy yourself without feeling just as busy and rushed as you do during the school year. Colleges know that being a student is more

than a full-time job. You put in long hours, including nights and weekends, and you deserve to have some time to recharge your batteries and get ready for the upcoming school year. If you enjoy some downtime over the summer, you'll be better prepared to make an impact and hit the ground running at the start of the school year. Sure, if you spend three months doing nothing but sleeping in and watching TV, colleges will start to wonder what kind of a contribution you'll make to their campuses. But work ethic, curiosity, and passion aren't seasonal traits. Kids who love to learn want to do it all the time. Kids who enjoy being productive don't just suppress that trait for three months. And a student who loves playing soccer, programming computers, or playing guitar will probably find some (enjoyable) way to maintain a connection with that interest over the summer. Some formal program options, like the ones offered by our friends over at [Summer Discovery](#), even offer great experiences as short as two or three weeks.

Learn, be productive, have fun, and relax. You really can have it all.

How to Use This Guide

We will mention specific programs in this guide, but these are by no means the only programs worth doing. And we're not endorsing these particular programs over any others that you may discover either. They're just summer opportunities that our students have had experience with, or that we've heard good things about, or that just plain sounded cool (to us). But your mileage may vary. So feel free to look into some of the specific options we mention, but also remember that this is a guide, not a prescription. So take the time to think about what you really want out of your summer, do your own research, and see what might be interesting to you.

To get you started, we've chosen to highlight some specific categories that tend to be most popular with our students at Collegewise (Academic, Business, Leadership, Scholarship Programs, STEM, Language Immersion, Travel, and Visual and Performing Arts). If your interests lie outside of those areas, that's fantastic, and hopefully we'll still provide you with some good ideas.

At the end, we've also provided some specific examples of interesting summer experiences that some of our very own Collegewise students have enjoyed. These ideas came straight from our counselors in response to the question: "What are some cool things your students have done over the summer that really stuck out to you?" As you look through these ideas, you'll see that they are as diverse and unique as the students themselves. Again, this isn't intended to be a prescription. It's just an illustration of how varied individual students' summers can be.

But let's be clear: our students didn't just come up with their summer plans on the spot. It took a lot of questioning, thinking, and conversation to determine what was most important to them and to figure out exactly how they wanted to spend the summer months, so don't expect any shortcuts.

Important Questions to Ask Yourself

Before you begin your search for summer activities, you may want to consider the following questions:

1. How much time do you have this summer to devote to a particular activity? Do you have to balance a summer job, sports practice, vacation, or family responsibilities with whatever else you choose to do? A good first step is to figure out how much free time you will have and at what point in the summer you'll be available. And remember that your school and family responsibilities always come first.
2. Do you want to earn money or spend money? Perhaps both? If you're in a position to spend some money on a summer program, how much? (This is probably a good time for a family meeting to discuss finances.) And if you'd love to do a summer program, but you're not sure if you can afford it, check out the section of this guide that highlights programs offering scholarships (and know that there are many more opportunities out there for students who demonstrate financial need).

3. What do you hope to gain from your summer experience? Do you have any goals you'd like to accomplish or projects you want to complete before the start of the school year?
4. Is there something you've always wanted to learn more about? Or a skill you already have, but you'd like to improve? If so, exploring that interest further might be a good idea.
5. Is there anything you need to do to prepare for the upcoming school year? Would an extra math or language course help you get a leg up next year? Your counselor and teachers can be a great resource to think about options and make sure that the credits will transfer to your high school.
6. Do you want to stay at home and take part in a program during the day, or would you prefer to spend some time away from home? How far away would you be comfortable going? (And are your parents as comfortable as you are with that expedition program to Antarctica?)

How to Get Started on Your Summer Search

1. Start Local – Whether you're interested in an academic experience, internships, or job opportunities, start in your own community. Look online and in-person for opportunities near you. You might explore a community college course nearby, ask local businesses if they can provide internships or see if there's a need in your community that you'd like to address (this can be anything from volunteering at an elementary school to picking up trash at a local park). Be sure to ask your guidance counselor/teachers if they know of any opportunities available such as Summer Governor's Schools, state college programs, and other enrichment programs.

Useful Search Engine Keywords

"community colleges near [hometown]"

"[area of interest] near [hometown]" Ex: "environmental organizations near Sonora, CA"

"summer activities for high school students near [hometown]"

2. Focus on an Interest – If you're already certain of what you want to focus on or learn more about this summer, you can expand your search to include opportunities outside of your hometown. You may find yourself exploring research programs in another state, summer internships at a government agency, or an immersion program abroad. Get creative with your search keywords here, and go beyond the first page of search results.

Useful Search Engine Keywords

"summer [area of interest] programs for high school students"

"high school [area of interest] research"

"learn about [area of interest] as a high school student"

3. Do Your Research – There's a lot more to this process than meets the eye. While you're looking at programs or experiences that sound like a great fit, make sure you're aware of things like deadlines, eligibility, and application requirements. That arts program you're looking at might be exclusively for undergraduates (or students younger than you), require a counselor or teacher nomination, might be capped at a number of students from a certain region, or require you to have a particular skill. Make sure you're aware of whether you meet eligibility requirements for the program and if there are any requirements such as resumes, essays, letters of recommendation, or portfolios. Even if you're making your own summer program through internships or online courses, make sure you have a resume or any necessary prerequisites.

Summer Planning Timeline

Just as it's never too early to start gathering information on colleges and visiting them, there is no right or wrong time to start developing your plan for the summer. While a few select summer programs have early and rigid application or scholarship deadlines, most will welcome applications from interested students well into March (and sometimes into April or even later). Summer programs are unlike college admissions in that way: most want you to enroll if you are a good fit,

and submitting an application nine months early probably isn't necessary—or even possible!

Nevertheless, for programs that require an application (as opposed to the ones that just ask you to sign up), it's important to be aware of the program's application deadlines and selection criteria. Many of the more selective summer programs will ask that you provide an essay and one or two teacher recommendations, just like a college would, and you want to make sure that you give yourself and your recommenders enough time to do a thoughtful job. To be on the safe side, we typically recommend that students start exploring summer programs by the end of December in order to get a sense of application requirements, deadlines, enrollment dates (many programs will have multiple sessions throughout the summer), cost, etc., and begin narrowing down options by the end of February or March.

By taking the time to do your research, assess your goals for the summer, and put your best foot forward on your applications, you can set yourself up for a truly unique summer experience that any college admissions office will want to read about. And if you need help narrowing down program options, then see our [Summer Research Worksheet](#) in the [Additional Resources](#) section of this guide for a handy way to compare programs. But also bear in mind that plenty of students have just as much success constructing meaningful summer experiences for themselves, and you don't need to submit an application three months early to do something worthwhile.

And parents (we know you're out there), this is a great opportunity to practice taking a step back and letting your child take ownership of the process. Imagine a year from now, when your kid is

sitting down for a college interview, and the interviewer says, “I see you volunteered at a doctor’s office last summer. How did you get involved with that?” There’s a big difference between the kid who says, “I’ve always been interested in medicine, and I thought this would be a good way to see what it was really like to be a doctor. So I called my family practitioner and asked about shadowing her for a couple days during the summer, and she offered me a volunteer position.” There’s a big difference between that answer and the kid who says, “My mom signed me up for it.” Stepping back allows your child to take more initiative, and that’s what will really impress colleges.

Summer Program Categories

If you’re interested in applying to a more formal summer program, you’ll first want to decide what *type* of program is the best match. Many students come to us eager to try something more structured, but unsure where to start their search. To help, we’ve listed the most popular program types below to give you a sense of the scope of options available to you. If any catch your eye or sound like a great way to spend a summer, start to look for programs in your area.

Academic

While many students may want to run as far away from school as possible over the summer, some students can’t get enough. Academic programs can be a great fit for the student who wants to dive deeper into a certain subject, be it sports literature, environmental sustainability, or the Civil War. Of course, for a more affordable alternative, students can always take coursework at a local community college or online. More formal programs will usually have the advantage of social time built in, may include an overnight component, and will be limited to fellow high school students.

They also are frequently hosted on college campuses, so it's a great way to familiarize yourself with dorm living.

On that note, we do want to include an academic program disclaimer: academic programs abound on college campuses all over the country. But there is a misconception that if you go to a summer program at Stanford it will help you be admitted to Stanford as an undergraduate. This is simply not the case. Stanford actually used to address this very topic on their FAQ page:

Question: Would attending Stanford summer programs improve one's chances for freshman admission?

Answer: We do not have a preference for students who attend Stanford specific summer programs, but overall, engaging in enrichment opportunities and advanced courses may demonstrate your enthusiasm for learning and discovery. The fact that you are taking summer or enrichment programs is not in and of itself the value-add to your application; it is what you take from that experience, how you share that experience with us through your essays and how that experience has enhanced your intellectual life that is of importance.

There are plenty of fantastic programs held on college campuses over the summer. And while it can be a wonderful experience to live on a college campus and have that first taste of independence while taking interesting courses, we want to be clear that a summer program on a college campus has no more inherent benefit than taking a class at your local community college or teen center.

Examples:

[Telluride Association Summer Program](#)

[Summer Discovery](#)

[Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth](#)

Business

During the college search process, a lot of students tell us that they're interested in majoring in business. Usually, this interest stems from one of two things: either they had an especially successful lemonade stand/Girl Scout cookie sales experience as a kid, or they're picturing themselves as the CEO of a Fortune 500 company, gazing out the window of a corner office on the 57th floor. In reality, business involves a lot of different roles and responsibilities, from managing a team of people, to promoting and selling your product, to taking care of your customers. If you're thinking about majoring in business, but you're not quite sure what that means, consider signing up for a program where you can get a small taste of that world. And if you can't find a program that fits your interest, think about other ways you can get involved, from interning with a local company you admire to starting a website and selling your world-famous brownies.

Examples:

[Economics for Leaders](#)

[National Student Leadership Conference – Business and Entrepreneurship](#)

[Wall Street 101](#)

Leadership

Leadership has become something of a buzzword in college admissions these days. Students vie for a limited number of president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary slots as a way to check off that imaginary “leadership” box on their applications. But as was noted in a classic [Collegewise blog](#) post, “Holding a formal leadership position isn’t necessarily the same thing as leading. Leading means seeing a future and rallying people to join you in reaching it, often without step-by-step instructions.” Maybe you’re looking for a way to share your love of reading with other kids at your school, so you start a science fiction book club. Or your softball team wants to get sweatshirts but it’s not in the budget, so you organize a fundraiser. That’s leadership. And leadership matters to colleges because students who make an impact in high school are the same people who make an impact in college. Leadership programs can be a great opportunity to dive into areas like communications, legislation, and public policy. But remember, leadership is more than just a box to check off.

Examples:

[Global Youth Village](#)

[Junior Statesmen of America](#)

[World Affairs Seminar](#)

STEM

We’re not talking forestry or horticulture classes! STEM is an acronym that stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math. Now, we know what you’re thinking. Aren’t technology and

engineering basically just science and math? The answer is yes, which is why STEM has become one of the most overused shorthand terms in the world of educational jargon. Google the term “STEM Summer Programs,” and you will come up with scores of hits, only a smattering of which might actually be related to something you’d like to take part in over summer break.

Rather than taking all STEM summer programs at face value, we encourage you to do what an engineer might do and break it down to its component parts. Think about what your own interests and goals are and find a program that delivers. To help you get started, we’ve broken down each of the STEM categories below, so that you can start your summer search process with a better sense of what you want.

If you want to learn even more about what it would be like to pursue a STEM program in college, or to work in a STEM-related field after college, check out [STEM’s Many Branches](#) by Collegewise counselor and STEM expert, Meredith Graham.

Science

There are many different branches of the scientific tree, starting with the “big picture” subjects that you’ve already heard of, like chemistry. But even if you just search for programs within the field of, say, biology, you are still going to be overwhelmed with options. Think about where your interests and passions lie. If you’re interested in studying pre-med, see if you can find a medical internship nearby, or if there are any National Youth Leadership Conferences on Medicine happening in your area. If you are passionate about the marine sciences and conservation, narrow your search down

to programs that specialize in marine biology. Or if sustainable agriculture is your game, why not start a garden in your backyard and see if you can get a stand at the local farmer's market?

Pursuing subjects you're already passionate about will help you enjoy the experience and make the most of it.

Examples:

[University of Pennsylvania Summer Research Academy](#)

[University of Colorado Science Discovery](#)

[Boston Leadership Institute](#)

[Summer Discovery University of California Santa Barbara Research Mentorship Program](#)

Technology

Obviously, the STEM fields have a lot of overlap, which is why they can share a single acronym. But while fields like science and math are relatively easy to differentiate, technology and engineering really go hand-in-hand. You don't find too many astronauts making intricate calculations on a sundial or civil engineers designing a bridge with a slide rule, so it can be difficult to extricate the work that engineers do from the technology that allows them to do it.

For the sake of this guide, we will go with the differentiation coined by our colleague, Meredith Graham, in [STEM's Many Branches](#): "Engineers really focus more on theories, ideas, and initial prototypes, while technologists focus more on the hands-on component of making things happen

and improving and maintaining something once it has been created. An engineer will design a new car while a technologist will ‘tweak’ the design to improve it for future models.” And that definition doesn’t even delve into the world of computer science and robotics that seems to drive everything within the field today.

So we invite you to look at technology and engineering as two sides of the same coin, and if there is an area of study that you find particularly appealing, you shouldn’t think twice about jumping in with both feet.

Examples:

[iD Programming Academy](#)

[Make School Summer Academy](#)

Engineering

As you begin to research traditional engineering summer programs, you will probably find that most of them fall into one of three main categories: exploratory programs, research and apprenticeship programs, or academic and college prep programs. It’s important to think about what you really want to get out of your summer experience and how the program you choose will help you achieve those goals. And try to look at each program more for what it offers than for where it happens to take place.

Examples:

[Notre Dame Introduction to Engineering](#)

[Michigan Summer Engineering Academy](#)

[Summer Discovery University of Texas at Austin Engineering Academy](#)

Math

If choosing a summer program in science, engineering, or technology confuses students due to the breadth and variety in these fields, mathematics programs tend to draw just as many questions due to their specificity. After all, what could you possibly do at a math camp besides, well, math?

Just about any local college will offer math classes in order to give students an opportunity to review, get ahead, or just stay fresh with their mathematics concepts during the summer break. Math-specific summer programs, on the other hand, tend to go beyond the numbers to look at the discipline from a more philosophical perspective—just the sort of thing that a mathematics major in college would do. If you are the type of student who thinks about math as an art rather than a science, and dissects calculus proofs with the same level of enthusiasm that an English teacher dissects a poem, a mathematics summer program just might be for you.

Examples:

[Ross Mathematics Program](#)

[The Hampshire College Summer Studies in Mathematics](#)

[University of Washington Mathematics Academy](#)

Language Immersion

Language immersion programs offered abroad can give students a wonderful opportunity to see the world and dive deeply into another culture. But you don't necessarily need a passport in order to learn a new language or advance in one that you've been practicing for years. There are plenty of great language immersion programs offered in the USA as well, so it's important to ask yourself some key questions before deciding which language program is right for you:

Do you want to live in a dorm with other students, or would you prefer a homestay with a local family? Do you want to spend your time in the classroom, out interacting with native speakers, or some combination of the two? Do you feel comfortable traveling halfway around the world, or would you be better suited to one of the many immersive programs closer to home?

Options abound in this category, from day camps at local colleges to living with a family in Barcelona or Buenos Aires, so be sure to think about what you hope to get out of the program (beyond language study) in order to find the best fit.

Examples:

[Middlebury Monterey Language Academy](#)

[STARTALK Summer Language Programs](#)

[Concordia Language Villages](#)

Travel

Although many people associate study abroad programs with junior year of college, high school students will also find that summer can be a great time to visit a foreign country. And trust us, you'll do much more than post photos of you and your friends squeezed into a London telephone booth or pretending to hold up the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Immersing yourself in another country's language and traditions (and let's be real here—eating the food!) can have an extraordinary impact on your perspective and worldview. And the challenges that come with visiting a foreign country are similar to those all college freshmen face when they're on their own for the first time, so a summer abroad program can be a great practice run before heading off to college. Plus, there's nothing quite like studying Shakespeare in London, or wildlife preservation in the Galapagos Islands, or international relations in Beijing.

Examples:

[Global Leadership Adventures](#)

[National Geographic Student Expeditions](#)

[Oxbridge Academic Programs](#)

Visual and Performing Arts

So you're an aspiring Meryl Streep or Michelangelo who's wondering what your options are now that you've decided to follow your dreams? Well, before you head off to college, it will be important to figure out if you're interested in a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), which would give you a well-rounded academic education within your chosen arts major, or a Bachelor of Fine Arts (B.F.A.), which would

require a much more intensive, hands-on approach to your chosen discipline. For instance, an actor getting a B.A. will still take all the general education courses that every student takes. For a B.F.A. student, however, the degree is considered a professional degree and course requirements will revolve around the arts. Students will take classes on set design, lighting, and playwriting. Exploring a summer program can help you decide which path is best for you. It can also be a lot of fun even if you're not considering a visual or performing arts major in college. And since most major art museums offer summer programs, you have the option of staying local or traveling farther afield.

Examples:

[School of the Arts Summer Institute Residency Program](#)

[School of the Museum of Fine Arts](#)

[French Woods Festival of the Performing Arts](#)

Scholarship Programs

As we've stated before, attending a summer program is by no means essential to your success as a college applicant. There are plenty of other ways to demonstrate your enthusiasm for dark matter or your obsession with Henry VIII and all of his wives. But the cost of a summer program doesn't necessarily mean you have to forgo the opportunity. Many of the programs we've mentioned throughout this guide offer scholarships, but we also wanted to highlight a few programs that offer full or substantial financial assistance.

Examples:

[Bank of America Student Leaders](#)

[Girls on Ice](#)

[Summer Search](#)

[Gettysburg College Civil War Institute](#)

[J Camp](#)

Online Options

By now, we've talked at length (if you've been reading along) about how there are summer opportunities for every student, regardless of interest, means, or location. But we also know that there may be students—and parents—who have gotten to this point in our guide without really finding an option that feels like a fit for them. It happens!

For those of you who may not be ready to spend a summer away from home, who are concerned about finances or securing scholarships, or who just don't feel sure enough of an interest to dive into a full-blown summer excursion, this section may be for you. The beauty of the world going digital is that there are now *countless* options for students of all ages to explore the world from the comfort of their own homes, and often at their own pace. So keep an eye out for online learning opportunities—not all are necessarily labeled as "programs" or "camps"—that will help you build on an interest and discover new passions in a way that feels genuinely exciting. Take a dive into that internet search engine; the world is at your fingertips.

Examples:

[Codecademy](#)

[Alison Training Courses](#)

[CreativeLive](#)
[edX](#)
[SciStarter](#)

Examples From Collegewise Students

If you just decided to fast-forward to this section, please go back and read the beginning of this guide, too. If you've already read it, you probably noticed that we're more interested in helping students figure out for themselves what will make for the most productive summer rather than simply prescribing certain activities and checking off boxes. But we also understand that it can be difficult to figure out where to start, so we polled our counselors and compiled a list of some interesting things that successful Collegewise students have done in the past in order to get you started.

- Memorize 1,000 digits of pi
- [Yale Young Global Scholars](#)
- Record an album with your garage band.
- [Stanford Institute for Medicine and Research \(SIMR\)](#)
- [Lewis and Clark Fir Acres Writing Program](#)
- Read as many books in the local library as possible
- [Summer Discovery UCLA Business of Entertainment, Media & Sports Academy](#)
- Set up an informal job shadowing experience with a local pediatrician
- Fastidiously document, blog about, and watch every single World Cup game

- [National Youth Leadership Forum on Medicine](#)
- Arrange an internship with a local technology startup
- [Wash U Pre-Engineering Institute](#)
- Volunteer with [Bikes Not Bombs](#)
- Self-study for the SAT
- Complete a specialization in music production through Berklee College of Music on [Coursera](#)
- [Unitarian Universalist College of Social Justice Youth Program](#)
- Volunteer at a local veterinarian's office
- Take advanced studio art classes
- [Diller Teen Fellows Israel Summer Seminar](#)
- Do maintenance on the Appalachian Trail
- Attend the residential Governor's School of Virginia in visual and performing arts
- Complete a guided research project with [Pioneer Academics](#).
- Work as a dockhand
- [Girls Who Code Summer Immersion Program](#)
- Become a certified EMT
- Run for charity
- [Crow Canyon Archaeological Field School](#)
- [Stevens Summers at Stevens Institute of Technology](#)
- Volunteer to teach art classes at a summer camp for kids with special needs
- [Telluride Association Summer Program](#)
- [Junior Statesman of America](#)

- Organize a hackathon
- [African Leadership Academy Global Scholars Program](#)
- Train for (and run) a half marathon
- Take a two-week canoe trip in the Boundary Waters of Minnesota
- [Boston University Summer Term Research in Science and Engineering](#)

How to Create Your Own Summer Program

We can't say enough about the importance of taking initiative, and a great way to do that is to find your own way to get more involved with something you enjoy, or explore a brand-new interest. That might mean taking your résumé to the local office of an organization you admire and asking about volunteer opportunities. Or contacting a business leader in your community to find out about a possible internship. Or organizing a weekly nature sketching group at different spots around your town. We know it can be intimidating to make the first move, so visit *Wise Like Us*, a super-helpful blog written by Collegewise founder, Kevin McMullin, for a few tips on [how to rethink your cover letter](#), [write a good email](#) or [make a better phone call](#). Remember, communicating with an individual makes a much stronger statement than just submitting a form online.

Additional Resources

We've done our best to get you started with your summer program research. These sites can help you pick up where we've left off:

[50 Ways to Spend Your Summer](#)

[Summer Discovery](#)

[Summer Program Finder](#) (thanks to Paul C. Kaser of Bergen County Academies for creating this database)

Tips for Making the Most Out of Your Part-Time Job

Planning to work this summer instead of or in addition to attending a summer program? Good for you- we love that work ethic! For those students who secure part-time employment in high school, here are five ways to get the most out of your experience and actually do a great job.

Don't treat it like a part-time job

Sure, this job isn't your life (it is a *part-time* job, after all), and you may have plans for a future that doesn't involve folding clothes or making sandwiches. But it matters a lot to someone there. If the clothing store doesn't perform well, your manager could lose his job. If the deli doesn't sell enough sandwiches, the owner might not be able to pay her mortgage. And the other employees at your gig who won't be leaving it at the end of the summer care a lot about keeping their jobs too. You'll do better work and be a better employee if you treat this part-time job like your future depends on it. For someone there, it does.

Anticipate your boss's requests

A good employee will cheerfully take out the garbage when her boss asks. A great employee picks up on the fact that the garbage needs to be taken out when it's full and just takes care of it without being asked. Every day that you go to work, listen to what your boss asks you to do and think about

how you could anticipate that request the next time. Every time you do something your boss would normally have to ask someone to do, you're showing her that you're a smart employee who can be trusted.

Take your mistakes seriously

You're going to make a few mistakes at your job. It happens to the best of us. When it does, take it seriously. Let your boss know that you realize it matters that the ketchup gets changed out at the end of the day (see tip #1). Apologize and resolve not to make the mistake again. When you take a mistake seriously, you actually prove yourself to be a better employee. Mistakes happen. But they can actually help you become a better employee when you treat them seriously.

Don't worry about credit

The most respected and valued employees don't spend a lot of time worrying about whether or not they're getting credit for what they do. If you clean the windows after closing (without being asked), your boss may not ever know it was you. Do it anyway. You're not going to get credit for every good thing that you do in this job or in this life. That's the way it goes. The most successful people care more about doing good work than they do about getting credit for every good thing they do. The credit—and its associated rewards—will eventually show up. But in the meantime, don't expect, demand, or wait for it.

Be a happy worker

Positivity is contagious. When you're cheerful and pleasant to be around, people gravitate towards

you. No, you may not leap out of bed every morning excited to get to work, but once you get there, act like there's no place you'd rather be. Be nice to customers, your coworkers, and your boss. Smile a lot. You won't just make yourself happier; you'll make everyone around you happier too. That's the kind of impact I write about here, the kind that makes people miss you when you move on to something else. Work hard, do a good job, and make a point to be a happy worker. You'll thrive at this part-time job and improve your chances of getting the next job that you want.

Collegewise Summer Research Worksheet

Name of activity, summer program, and/or affiliated institution (if applicable)			
Location			
Duration of activity and/or program dates			
Cost (if applicable)			
What do you hope to gain from this experience? What are your learning goals for this activity/program?			
What do you like about this program?			
What do you dislike about this activity or program?			
Application requirements or next steps?			
Rate your interest 1 to 10 (10 being the highest)			

About the Authors

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Summer Discovery

You may have noticed a few enthusiastic mentions of [Summer Discovery](#) and their programs at various point in this guide. Their mission statement is, “To provide the best experiential, university-based summer academic programs that positively change the lives of students from around the world.”

That’s something we can totally get on board with at Collegewise and we hope you’ll consider them carefully when planning your own summer!

Acknowledgments

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Want more?

Collegewise is a private college counseling company that holds two beliefs: (1) the college admissions process should be an exciting, adventurous time for every family, and (2) accurate, helpful college information should be made available to everyone. So even though we are private counselors who work with families who can afford to hire us, we also enjoy working with anyone who is interested and willing to listen, whether we're writing, speaking, or teaching. If you'd like to learn more about how we can help your family or your students enjoy a more successful, less stressful college admissions process, just reach out and [contact us](#).

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