

How to Become Valedictorian

Explore this Article ■ Getting Ready ■ Working Hard ■ Staying Centered ■ Expert Q&A
■ Tips and Warnings ■ References

Co-authored by Jennifer Kaifesh and 61 contributors

Last Updated: September 20, 2021

Weird Al Yankovic, Alicia Keys, and Jodi Foster. What do all of these celebrities have in common? They were all valedictorians of their class. Though being valedictorian won't make you a supermodel or singer, it can set you on an impressive path that can lead you to succeed in your college career and in the world at large. All you need is to have mental toughness, endurance, and an unbeatable work ethic. So how do you do it? Just follow these steps.

Part 1

Part 1 of 3: Getting Ready



1 Start young. Unfortunately, in most cases, you can't just waltz into your high school on the first day of freshman year and decide to be valedictorian. You'll need to have proved yourself in middle school by taking the most rigorous math and English courses that your middle school had to offer. Some middle schools don't have tracking for their classes, but some do offer Honors courses as early as seventh or eighth grade. Being in these courses will set you on a path to honors courses in high school, so make sure you've laid the groundwork for this.

- You can move up in English more easily, but once you're "locked" into a math track, it'll be harder to move ahead. For example, if you're in regular Algebra in 8th grade, you'll have to go to regular Geometry in 9th unless you've really proven yourself. If you can take two math classes, as this can help you get ahead.



2 Learn how your school chooses its valedictorian. Some schools rank students with an unweighted GPA, while others award extra points for harder classes.^[1] Most schools *do* offer extra points for taking harder courses so you should aim to take these; and even if your school doesn't offer extra points for harder courses, you should still aim for success; after all, if you want to be valedictorian, then you probably want to go to a top-notch school, which means you'll have to take the most challenging classes anyway.

- For example, if your school does use a weighted GPA to determine valedictorian, then you may receive a 4.0 for an "A" in regular classes, a 5.0 for an "A" in honors classes and a 6.0 for an "A" in AP classes.
- A valedictorian also typically gives a graduation speech in front of their classmates. But if this is the part that appeals to you the most, then make sure that the speech-giver is the valedictorian. Some schools have the student body president give a speech, some have students vote for which student should give the speech, while others have the valedictorian *and* the student body president and another student give a speech.
- Some schools have more than one valedictorian -- or as many as 29! ^[2]



3 Choose your classes wisely. If your school does factor the weighted GPA into their decision to choose the valedictorian, then you should take the most rigorous courses whenever possible. If you think that the harder classes may be too tough for you, then you may need to rethink being valedictorian. To be the valedictorian, you have to *get As in the hardest classes at your school pretty much every time*. Are you up for the challenge?

- Take AP classes over honors classes when you can, if they are worth more points.
- Your electives can really hurt your weighted GPA because they tend to be considered regular classes. However, all students in your school will most likely be expected to take some electives, such as gym or art class. Whenever you can, though, try to take an elective that is worth more points, if you have the option. For example, don't take Creative Writing if it is considered a regular class; take AP Language and Composition if it is offered to everyone instead.
- Sure, you may end up missing out on some fun classes over the course of your high school career. But those classes will NOT get you to be the valedictorian.
- If your school has the option of not having to take gym if you do a sport, then consider picking up a sport if not taking gym will boost your GPA. If you want to be valedictorian, then you should also be well-rounded so you stand out in college applications for more than just your grades. You should obviously not take a sport, though, just to make your GPA higher, because the extra time you devote to sports may keep you away from your studies.



4 Remember that being the valedictorian will NOT guarantee you a spot to any elite college. If you want to be valedictorian, then you must be very ambitious, having your sights on elite schools such as Harvard, Yale, Duke, or Amherst. But remember that when you apply to colleges such as these, valedictorians will be a dime a dozen. Being valedictorian will keep you in the running and will impress admissions officers, but you want to avoid looking like a cold grade-obsessed automaton and show that you have depth, several other interests, and that you're a good citizen of your community.

- Even William R. Fitzsimmons, the dean of admissions at Harvard, recently said, “I think, it’s a bit of an anachronism. This has been a long tradition, but in the world of college admissions, it makes no real difference.”^[3]
- Being valedictorian in addition to showing strengths in sports, community service, or the arts will help you be an amazing candidate. But being ranked #10 in your class and doing these same things won't make you look much worse.
- Your SAT score will also have a major impact on your college acceptances. Many colleges place equal weight on your GPA *and* your SAT score -- that means your effort for four years of high school courses will amount to about as much as your efforts on a 3.5 hour exam! Sound fair? It isn't, but you've got to get used to it.



1 Study smart. If you want to be a valedictorian, then you have to study smart to **get good grades**. This doesn't mean that you should spend all of your waking hours perched over your book, but it does mean that you should study as efficiently and thoroughly as possible. Here are some tips to get you studying hard:

- Make an efficient study schedule. Maybe you will spend 2-3 hours of studying a night, or maybe you will study for 3-4 hours every other night. Whatever you do, make a plan in advance so you don't end up getting overwhelmed or procrastinate.
- Pace yourself. Set a goal -- 10-15 pages per day, and don't go overboard too much or you'll burn out.
- Take advantage of practice quizzes. Your history books, math textbooks, or other course material may come with practice questions that you can use to see how well you know the course materials. Even if your teacher doesn't use these resources, they can be valuable to you.
- Make flashcards. If flashcards help you memorize historical concepts, foreign languages, or even mathematical operations, use them.



2 Stand out in the classroom. You don't have to be the teacher's pet to be stellar in the classroom. You should, however, arrive to class on time, participate in class discussion, and ask questions when you're confused about something. Being focused in the classroom will help you absorb the course information more, which will lead you to do better on tests, and it will also make your teacher like you more and will help you earn any in-class points allotted for the course, such as participation points.

- Keep your chatter with other students to a minimum. You may be missing some important information.
- Take stellar notes to study from. Don't just write down what the teacher is saying word for word -- try to put the notes in your own words so you really absorb the material.
- Talk to your teacher after class occasionally. You don't have to annoy your teacher by always being there, but getting to know your teachers a bit more will help you stand out in their eyes.



3 Get organized. If you want to succeed in the classroom and throughout your studies, then you have to be organized. You need to have a notebook for every class, clearly labeled binders, a clean locker, and an organized desk at home. If your life is filled with clutter, then you won't be able to retain information as easily and you won't have as much to focus on your coursework as you'd want.

- Keep a planner where you write down all of the homework due each day.
- Keep a calendar over your desk where you can mark important test dates.



4 Read ahead. Reading ahead to the material that your teacher will cover the next day or next week will give you a leg up on the course content and will keep you from getting confused or not absorbing as much information as you could. As long as you're not covering anything too difficult that would be easier to comprehend if it were first explained by your teacher, you'll be giving yourself a leg up by doing this.

- Reading ahead is a great way to give yourself an edge. Just don't bring it up when you participate in class or the teacher may get annoyed that you're stealing her thunder or confusing other students with additional information.



5 Get extra help. You may be thinking, "If I'm trying to be the valedictorian, then why would I need extra help?" This is where you're precisely wrong. If you want to be the valedictorian, then you have to get an edge over the competition. Get more information or more repetition of the subject matter, whether you ask your teacher for extra help after class, ask your parents for more help if they understand your homework better than you do, or even ask an older successful student for some assistance.

- You can also invest in a private tutor, but those can get pretty pricey.



1 Participate in extracurricular activities. Always leave time for clubs, sports, volunteering, or other activities outside of class. Believe it or not, extracurricular commitments can boost your grades because they can help you organize your time better. Studies even show that student-athletes tend to do better in school than non-athletes.

- This will also help you stay grounded and will keep you from obsessing over your studies too much.



2 Maintain your social life. You don't want to be holed up in your room, studying for ten hours under the glare of a too-bright light bulb. You want to have time to study, sure, but you also want to make time to pursue your friendships, go to parties, hang out at the movies, or even go to the school carnival. If you spend 100% of your time with your nose buried in a book, you may start to feel a little bit unhinged and lonely. You don't have to be the life of the party, but having at least a few meaningful friendships will make you feel more motivated to study. Be sure that you stay away from most of the drama at your school, for it can be very time consuming.^[4]

- Find some friends that you can study with. Having a group of like-minded students can help you make studying more fun and productive. Try starting a study group for one of your classes and see how it works out; if you're able to stay focused, then you've just improved your chances of acing your classes.



3 Be aware of your competition, but don't obsess about rivals. You don't want to waste time on narcissism and nervous back-stabbing. Don't go around asking your rivals what they got on their tests, how much time they spent studying for the latest exam, or what grade they think they're going to get in a class. This will make you focus your efforts in the wrong places and will keep you focused on what *you* have to do.

- Remember that everyone is different. Maybe you need to study for 4 hours to ace an exam and the student next to you only needs to study for 3 hours to do well. You don't have to be the most naturally gifted to be the valedictorian -- you just have to work the hardest.



4 Treat your body with care. Becoming valedictorian isn't a test of raw intellect, it's a test of endurance. Be healthy. Eat breakfast, and stay away from drugs and alcohol. Only when your body is strong can you perform at the highest level. Though you can splurge on pizza and candy once in a while, eating power foods like nuts, vegetables, and proteins will keep you focused on your work and will keep you from crashing or losing steam.

- You can still have a social life while avoiding drugs or alcohol. If you want to be valedictorian, then you have to stick with the right crowd.



5 Get plenty of rest. Getting 7-8 hours of sleep a night and going to bed around the same time and waking up around the same time will keep your body feeling energetic and strong, and will give you the fuel you need to pay attention in class, succeed in your exams, and to be a stellar student. Make sure you give yourself plenty of time to study so you don't end up going to bed at three in the morning and sleeping through your classes.

- Try to go to bed no later than 10 or 11 PM and give yourself at least 45 minutes to an hour before you leave the house in the morning so you feel alert when you head to class.



6 Don't put too much pressure on yourself. If you want to be the valedictorian, then you have to relax a little bit. Don't tell yourself that every little grade matters and will influence your fate and your chances of going to a good college. Sure, grades are important, but so is being mentally sound and having great friendships. Remind yourself that it's not the end of the world if you don't get a perfect test grade -- you'll get 'em next time.

- To be the valedictorian, you'll have to be in a calm state of mind or you may find that the pressure is suddenly too much to deal with.
- Stay positive and always look forward -- doesn't waste your time stressing about your test grade from a month or a year ago. It just isn't worth it.



Expert Q&A

Question

How can I manage all of my homework?



Jennifer Kaifesh

Founder, Great Expectations College
Prep
Expert Answer

Start using a calendar. Take some time every weekend to assess the work due in the upcoming week and come up with a realistic estimate of how long each assignment will take. Set aside time -- by class, by assignment, by day -- to ensure that you are allotting enough time to do each well before the due dates. When you have an exam looming on the horizon, don't wait until the night before to study; make time to organize your notes, research confusing topics, and/or make flashcards.

Helpful 2 Not Helpful 0

Question

How should I take and study notes?



Jennifer Kaifesh

Founder, Great Expectations College

Prep

Expert Answer

This depends entirely on the subject of the class as well as whether you have access to a laptop/tablet or will be writing notes by hand. Try to highlight keywords and concepts and, whenever possible, organize your notes in a clear, structured way. Even better, record the lecture on your phone and type up notes after class when you have time to hit "pause" and search confusing terms/concepts as you go.

Helpful 2 Not Helpful 0

Question

When can you become a valedictorian?



Community Answer

The valedictorian is the person with the highest GPA by graduation. It happens at high school graduation and at many colleges.

Helpful 208 Not Helpful 22

Question

Do I still have a chance at being valedictorian if I received a B?



Community Answer

You have the chance to be valedictorian, especially if you are not a senior yet or it was a B on an assignment rather than in a class. It depends on who has the highest GPA, so try to keep your other grades high, take some honors classes that hold more weight in your GPA, and keep working hard.

Helpful 196 Not Helpful 29



Tips

- If you want to become a valedictorian, make sure you're not distracted and never give others the chance to excel over you when they shouldn't.
- Stay focused. If you really want to be valedictorian, then you have to fight for it.
- Becoming valedictorian is only half the battle. It only gets you half of the way. You also have to [Write a Valedictorian Speech](#).
- Take as many Honors and AP classes as you can. If your school goes by weighted GPA, they give you more points than regular classes, allowing you to get over a 4.0 GPA.
- Stay away from drugs, alcohol, or bad influences. They will not help you become valedictorian and will have negative long term effects.
- Join as many groups and clubs at your school as you can, such as CSF and National Honor Society.
- If your school has the international baccalaureate program, it is advisable to join it because it gives you more rigorous courses to choose from.
- Don't spend a lot of time sitting in front of a TV or computer. It's not moving you forward at all. Spend your time and money on books and/or experiences instead.



Warnings

- Remember: there's more to life than class rank! Don't be afraid to fail. Ten years from now, it won't matter who the valedictorian was. What will matter are the friends you kept and the passions you discovered. Just keep your chin up and follow your dreams.
- Becoming valedictorian is not a significant advantage that guarantees acceptance into any Ivy League school. Valedictorians get rejected all the time, often for those in second or third place. Do sports or other extracurricular activities too, unless they become too time-consuming.

References

1. ↑ Jennifer Kaifesh. Academic Tutor. Expert Interview. 8 November 2019.
2. ↑ <http://schoolsofthought.blogs.cnn.com/2012/05/16/one-high-school-25-valedictorians/>
3. ↑ <http://www.campusexplorer.com/college-advice-tips/C3B11F09/Valedictorians-Who-Are-They-and-How-Are-They-Chosen/>
4. ↑ http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/29/nyregion/nyregionspecial2/29RvaldWE.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

About This Article



Co-authored by:

Jennifer Kaifesh

Founder, Great Expectations College
Prep

This article was co-authored by **Jennifer Kaifesh**. Jennifer Kaifesh is the Founder of Great Expectations College Prep, a tutoring and counseling service based in Southern California. Jennifer has over 15 years of experience managing and facilitating academic tutoring and standardized test prep as it relates to the college application process. She takes a personal approach to her tutoring, and focuses on working with students to find their specific mix of pursuits that they both enjoy and excel at. She is a graduate of Northwestern University. This article has been viewed 618,035 times.

★★★★☆
31 votes - 80%

Co-authors: **61**
Updated: **September 20, 2021**
Views: **618,035**

Categories: **School Stuff** | **Intellectual Types**

<https://www.wikihow.com/Become-Valedictorian>

The text and visual content in this PDF is intended only for your personal, non-commercial use. Any commercial reproduction of the contents of this document without the express written permission of wikiHow, Inc., is prohibited.