

# Guest Post: Prepare for Adulthood by Being an Explorer

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What is the main purpose of a formal education? Is the main purpose to disseminate information? Is it to prepare students for the workforce? Is it to bring people together to have discussions, solve problems, and connect with each other? Depending on the subject and the teaching method, all these purposes have their place. Each student brings with them their own personality traits and life circumstances that influence how they feel about and perform in their formal education. There is one certainty for all students, however. Sooner or later, your formal education will end. And after the structure provided in school, there comes the uncertainty of the adult world. We all enter the adult world eventually, so the key is to be as prepared as you can be before school is over.

One of the most important things you can do to prepare is to develop personal confidence. Throughout my school years, I was confident in my schoolwork but felt

much less confident about any extracurricular or social endeavors. I could have done better at developing my talents beyond the classroom. I discovered after graduating from college that, without homework to focus on anymore, my confidence was quite low. It is something I am continually working on. The earlier you can start developing confidence and social connections, the easier it can be to navigate the adult world.

Another way to prepare for life after school is through career exploration. I could have done better at this as well. Looking back, I now realize that I was focused on getting my homework done and getting good grades to the exclusion of most other things, including career exploration. As a senior in high school, I felt pressured to declare my future career. I liked to read so I told people I wanted to be a librarian, without doing any research.

College coursework was even more demanding than high school homework, so, once again, I was focused on getting through school. As a senior in college, I interned at my local library and job shadowed at the college library technical services department and discovered library science wasn't for me. I graduated from college without any definite career plans. Had I taken the time to explore more careers in a thorough way, I may have felt less nervous after graduating from college.

You can explore career options through internships or volunteer work, even while you're in school. ONET (<https://www.onetonline.org/>) is a fabulous place to start your career exploration. ONET includes an interactive tool called My Next Move, which enables job seekers and students to learn more about their career options. My Next Move has tasks, skills, salary information, and more for over 900 different careers. Users can find careers through keyword searches; by browsing industries that employ different types of workers; or through the ONET Interest Profiler, a tool that offers personalized career suggestions based on a person's interests and level of work experience.

Another way to prepare for adulthood is to start taking responsibility for your own life sooner rather than later.

In elementary through high school, my teachers and one-on-one aides made sure I had the accommodations I needed to succeed. But college was completely different. I was responsible for meeting with the Disability Resource Center to talk about my needs, talking to each of my professors, making sure my note taker took notes (or getting notes from someone else), getting the textbooks in an accessible format, and trying out various assistive technology devices. It felt overwhelming at times, and I wish I had taken charge a bit more before college. Practice makes you more prepared.

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You can learn by gathering information, but it is also incredibly valuable to learn by doing. The more things you experience, the more you'll be able to draw from. My biggest tip is to be curious about the world around you.

When you seek to learn something because you are curious about it, the more likely it is that you'll remember what you learn. Staying curious about life may lessen your fears. I am discovering that it's better to face what's hard head on than to hide from it. Never stop exploring in life because there's always more to learn.