

Things to Do BY and IN Early 2022

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BY MID-DECEMBER, most college students are finishing up finals. High school seniors may be working on end-of-the-year projects and reports or studying for exams.

Before 2021 concludes, I believe we should strongly encourage students, their families, and the rest of their support system to stop and celebrate all that has been accomplished since the start of the school year. Notwithstanding any ups and downs or significant challenges, it is important to praise effort and celebrate wins, even though they may be fewer than students were striving to achieve.

During the year-end break, students should prioritize relaxing and recharging after all they have done and experienced in the past four months, especially during such an unprecedented time in our history.

Before heading back to school, students should reflect on the first semester. It is still fresh, yet a limited distance provides more perspective. Students, hopefully in a collaborative and productive way with their families and others supporting their efforts, should examine what worked well for them academically, socially, and in other areas requiring independent living skills, and what did not work well.

As students think about the upcoming semester, they should be asked in a person-centered way their academic, social, emotional and other goals. What do they need to know to do, learn, and successfully implement in order to achieve these goals?

I suggest students think about the ending semester and the start of the new one in three ways:

1. Maintain and build.

What worked well last semester that they want to keep doing? Could they achieve even more by building upon success or using their strengths in new ways?

2. Adjust.

If some efforts were only partly successful, which parts worked well, and which fell short? What could they do to correct course? Do they have insight and skills to independently make adjustments? Might they benefit from additional and/or different types of support?

3. Redo.

If students were not successful or failed, figuratively or literally, are there opportunities to try again, such as retaking a class or applying again to be a member of a club? If a redo is not possible, understanding that mistakes and setbacks lead to growth is an important, although often painful, lesson.

These are things both college students and high school seniors should do. There are also some unique and important differences in what I believe these students should focus on as they begin their new semester.

Suggestions for College Students and High School Seniors

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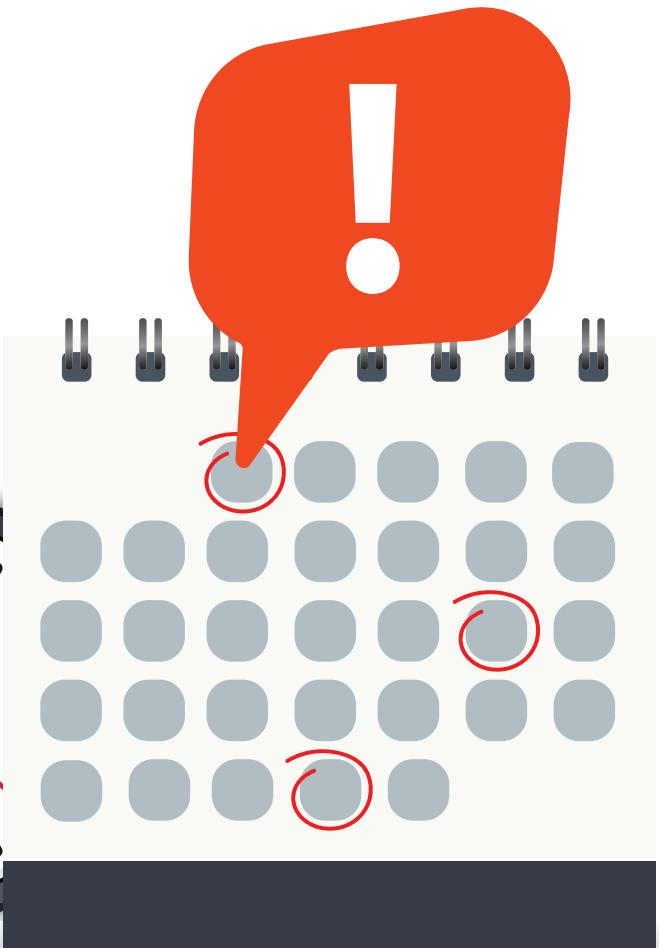


COLLEGE STUDENTS

Renew accommodations. Many students do not realize that at most colleges, accommodations have to be renewed each semester and initiated by the student. Although renewing is typically not time intensive, it is time sensitive. If students have not yet renewed their accommodations for second semester, they should contact disability or accessibility services (the title of this office varies by college) as soon as possible, so their accommodations do not lapse.

Use accommodations. For a variety of reasons, many students with ADHD qualify for accommodations, but do not request them. Sadly, a majority of students with accommodations do not use them. If students did not have the level of success they sought last semester, they may be more open to using accommodations for this next semester.

Request additional accommodations, if needed. It may be beneficial to explore with the disability services office accommodation changes or additions. If students with ADHD do not have priority registration as an accommodation, they might want to pursue this accommodation to help them have a class schedule with breaks in between classes and at times when they feel they are most productive. It is important to do this early in the semester, so that if approved, it will go into effect before registration opens in the spring for Fall 2022 classes.



New social opportunities. Many college students who have earlier struggled with social problems may be struggling with similar social issues now. A new semester brings opportunities for new social connections. Each class may expose a student to new individuals with which to connect. Or someone who was an acquaintance last semester might be in a class the second semester, so there is opportunity to develop a deeper connection. If students did not fully explore clubs and organizations, doing so at the start of the semester may improve social connections, especially since in-person opportunities have increased.

Roommate relations. This may be a good time to re-examine what students expect from their roommates. They can discuss what has been successful that they want to continue, and changes to their schedule for the new semester. They may benefit from creating new agreements regarding the room or additional necessary boundaries.

HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

College application deadlines. The majority of four-year colleges have regular decision deadlines in early January. If students miss this deadline, more than a hundred colleges have later deadlines. Numerous schools also have rolling admissions. And, although not frequently advertised (and definitely not

something students can count on), colleges that have not met their enrollment goals may accept more applications after May 1, the stated date by which accepted students must commit. Also, students interested in community college can usually apply as late as the summer for a fall start.

Availability and cost of academic supports. Students must understand the type and extent of support offered before committing to a college. All colleges must meet minimum levels of support under the ADA. Many offer significantly more, and a rapidly increasing number have programs for learning differences and neurodiversity (from free to significant fees). Free tutoring is likely offered, often through peer tutors. Although these tutors may understand the subject matter, they might not be a good fit for the unique needs of a student with ADHD.

Non-academic supports. Except for a few exceptions, the vast majority of colleges offer limited to no support for developing social and independent living skills. For college that have programs that offer these, students should delve into what is specifically offered and how frequently to make sure it meets their needs. It may only be one hour a week. Students may want to consider a growing number of support options offered by private coaches, although this can be cost-prohibitive.

Required documentation for accommodations. Many colleges require a neuropsychological or psychoeducational evaluation completed within the past three years. However, there may be flexibility around this. Students should contact the college they want to attend about specific documentation policies, as it may be necessary for students to have updated or new testing. Specific documentation likely varies by disability. Students with co-occurring issues, such as anxiety or depression may need documentation from a current mental health provider.

AS WE SPRINT TOWARD THE END OF 2021, we have hopes and dreams for the year ahead. My hope is that with planning, continuous effort and ongoing reflection, students will make their goals a reality in 2022. 

Scot Marken is the founder and CEO of EdRedefined, a national educational consulting firm that supports neurodiverse students and those with mental health issues and learning differences through their college experience, from assessing college readiness to college search and accommodations through ongoing independent living coaching. The ideas expressed in this article are based on his professional and personal experience. He can be reached at scot@edredefined.com.