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4 Keys to College & Career Readiness

If you're a high school senior, it won't be long before you go shopping for the items on your "things to bring to college" list, move into your residence hall, and head over to the campus bookstore to pick up your textbooks. Once you've done all that, you'll be ready for your first day of college, right?

Well...it's certainly a good start! However, "college readiness" goes far beyond finding the perfect shower caddy and those extra-long twin sheets for your bunk bed. The fact is college readiness starts *well before* you unlock the door and enter your dorm room for the very first time.

What is Readiness?

According to Inflexion (a non-profit organization that "strives to help educators better equip student for success"), college- and career-ready students have ***"the knowledge and skills to keep learning beyond secondary school, first in formal settings and then in the workplace through their careers, so that they are capable of adapting to unpredictable changes and new economic conditions and opportunities."***

- ***College Readiness:*** In its broadest sense, *college readiness* refers to your level of preparedness for any academic work beyond high school that leads to a credential (such as a skilled trade license, certificate, associate's, or bachelor's degree). Therefore, by definition, this preparation includes apprenticeships as well as studies at two- or four-year institutions.

As defined by Inflexion, you're college ready if you can ***"enter a college classroom, without remediation and successfully complete entry-level college requirements."*** Remedial classes (also known as developmental or basic-skills courses), are "catch-up" classes that don't provide credits toward your degree. Instead, these classes give you the opportunity to improve your skills in order to tackle college-level coursework.

- ***Career Readiness:*** To become *career-ready*, you need both the knowledge and skills necessary for employment in your desired occupation. Say, for example, you plan to become a high school math teacher. To reach your goal, you must be skilled in math applications, have knowledge of educational policy and practices, complete the



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necessary coursework to earn your bachelor's degree, and pass the required Board of Education exams to earn your teaching certification.

Therefore, **career readiness begins with college readiness!** You need to navigate the pathways that connect education and employment in order to achieve a fulfilling and rewarding career.

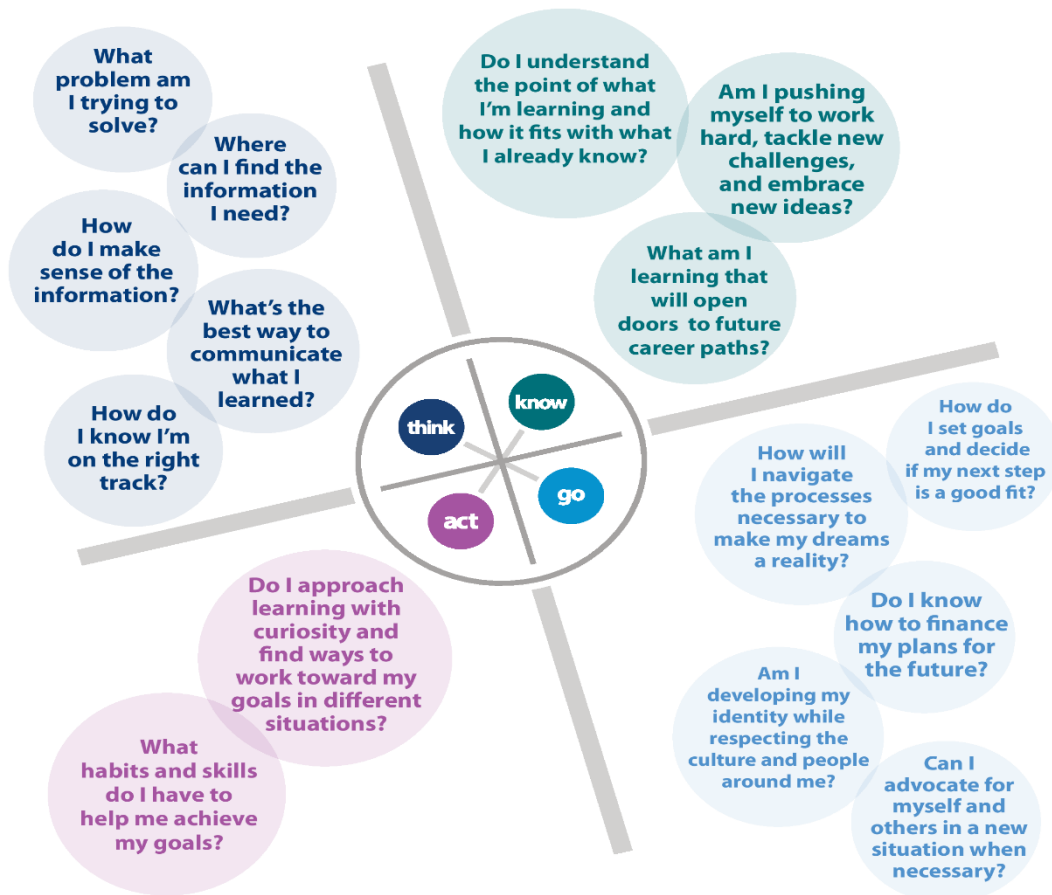
4 Keys to Readiness

According to David T. Conley, author of *College and Career Ready: Helping All Students Succeed beyond High School*, your college- and career-readiness depends on the degree to which you've mastered elements in four key areas, as described in the model below:

4 Keys to College and Career Readiness

Think ~ Know ~ Act ~ Grow

(Source: Inflexion)





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Here's a closer look at the four keys:

1. **Key Cognitive Strategies:** *How do you think?*

To prepare for college-level coursework, you need to do more than memorize facts and follow directions. College and workplace success requires thinking skills and strategies that enable you to develop and demonstrate your ability to *learn, apply, and use knowledge and information* to solve problems.

Conley says there are five strategies that are essential to the insightful thinking required to succeed in post-secondary education:

- **Problem formulation:** *What problem are you trying to solve?*

Do you have a clear understanding of the problem and how it should be approached? Can you develop strategies for exploring all parts of the problem and identify possible outcomes resulting from the issue?

- **Research:** *Where can you find the information you need?*

Can you identify the information, data, and research necessary to solve the problem? Judge the quality of the data and sources? Assess the usefulness of the information? Generate original information and data?

- **Interpretation:** *How do you make sense of the information?*

Are you able to identify and assess the most relevant information or data? Synthesize the information, make connections, and draw logical conclusions? Identify potential solutions to the problem?

- **Communication:** *What's the best way to communicate what you've learned?*

Can you draft a clear, organized, and effective message summarizing the problem and potential solutions? After seeking feedback on your draft, reflecting upon that feedback, and revising the information, can you put together a coherent and complete final version that follows a structured line of reasoning?

- **Precision and accuracy:** *How do you know you're on the right track?*

Throughout the entire process, do you ensure the problem is addressed accurately and thoroughly? Are you using language, terms, expressions, rules, and terminology appropriate for the subject matter and the problem?



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2. Key Content Knowledge: *What do you know?*

To prepare for college coursework, you need strong foundational knowledge in core academic subjects. (For specific information: [National College and Career Readiness Indicators](#).)

Yet, simply completing the recommended high school classes is not enough! Your success in mastering subject-matter content takes motivation, time, energy, effort, and the use of learning strategies. Students who learn key content knowledge effectively and efficiently:

- regard the content as worth learning;
- understand why the content is important and can see how it connects to what they already know;
- are motivated to learn relevant facts, terms, and concepts *and* understand how they fit together *in order to identify the big ideas and overarching principles*;
- push themselves to work hard, knowing that their effort has value and deepens learning;
- are able to organize information well;
- and understand how the knowledge they're acquiring *now* connects to future college and career options.

3. Key Learning Skills & Techniques: *How do you act?*

Conley notes that no single factor is more important to your success as a student than the degree to which you **take ownership for your learning**. Do you approach learning with curiosity? Find ways to work toward your goals? Practice good study habits? If so, you're building the toolkit you need to transition from the teacher-dependent learning that's typically the norm in high schools to the independent learning that is essential in post-secondary education.

High school students who *truly know how to learn* have developed and habitually utilize these critical skills: *time management, study skills, test taking skills, note taking skills, memorizing, strategic reading, collaborative learning, and technological proficiency*. (For more information: [How To Study](#).)



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4. Key Transition Knowledge & Skills: *How do you go?*

To transition smoothly from high school to college and career, you may have to navigate through some complex challenges – personally, culturally, financially and professionally. From knowing how to apply to college, exploring and choosing your career path, paying for school, advocating for your own best interests, to adjusting to the work environment, *you need to know how to get where you want to go.*

Here's a summary of the essential knowledge and skills that will help you find your way:

- **College knowledge:** *How do you navigate the processes necessary to make your college dreams come true?*

Choosing a college takes time and effort and requires:

- knowledge of post-secondary options / college types (*for more information: [Types of Colleges: The Basics](#), [Selecting a College Type](#)*);
- self-insight and awareness regarding the qualities, characteristics, and academic programs / majors that you're looking for in a "good fit" college (*for more information: [Qualities that Will Make a College Right for You](#); [Self-Knowledge Questionnaire](#)*);
- tools and resources for college search (including information on the school's admission / college major requirements as well as college selector programs that can match schools to your pre-determined selection criteria and help you assess the probability of success in the program (*for more information: [College Navigator](#), [Peterson's](#), [College Board](#)*);
- and in-depth understanding of the college application process, requirements, and deadlines (*for more information: [College Admissions Guide: Process and Prep](#)*).

- **Career awareness and exploration:** *How do you find and choose a career path that's a good fit?*

There are hundreds of careers in our economy and many ways to group them into categories. To explore the world of work, start by learning how occupations are classified into 16 [career clusters](#) representing multiple career pathways. This



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career clusters framework is designed to help students navigate their way to greater success in college and career.

- **College costs:** *Do you know how to finance your plans for the future?*

Students and parents need to understand the actual costs of college, applying for financial aid through the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#) and loan options to pay for college. (*For more information:* [FinAid.org](#).)

Doorways to College- and Career-Readiness

What should you do *while you're in high school* to develop college- and career readiness? Start here:

- Set ambitious learning goals and take challenging classes. Studies in math, science, and language arts with an emphasis on researching, analyzing, and writing, as well as career-related classes have been shown to improve student achievement.
 - Take math classes even if they're not required. Research shows that students who continue their math studies through their senior year in high school have higher achievement in college-level math.
 - If appropriate, take honors and [advanced placement \(AP\)](#) classes.
- Take a class on study skills / test taking / research techniques. If not available at your high school, enroll in a class at your local community college.
- Read widely on our own. If you read beyond what's *required* for your class, you'll not only increase your vocabulary, but you'll enhance your writing skills at the same time. And you'll get a better idea of what to expect in college (where each class requires extensive reading of highly-complex content).
- Keep up with your assignments and ask for help when you need it.
- Make sure you have time for homework. Cut down on your extracurricular activities if you're spreading yourself too thin.
- Learn about careers of interest through research and experiential learning activities.
- Stay focused during your senior year. While you may have been accepted to the college of your choice already, your remaining high-school coursework is important (not only in terms of what you *know*, but how you *think* and *act* - all of which are essential to college readiness).



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- Become a self-directed learner. Motivated learners do in better school. And lifelong learning is essential to on-going career development.

Oh, by the way, there's one more thing you need to do *before* your first day of college.
Get that lanyard for your dorm-room key!