

How to Earn a Bachelor's Degree

Earning a bachelor's degree at a college or university can serve as the gateway to your career aspirations. You can typically earn bachelor's degrees in the arts, sciences, or fine arts, so choose the path that suits your future goals....

Part 1 of 3:

Choosing the Degree That Meets Your Needs

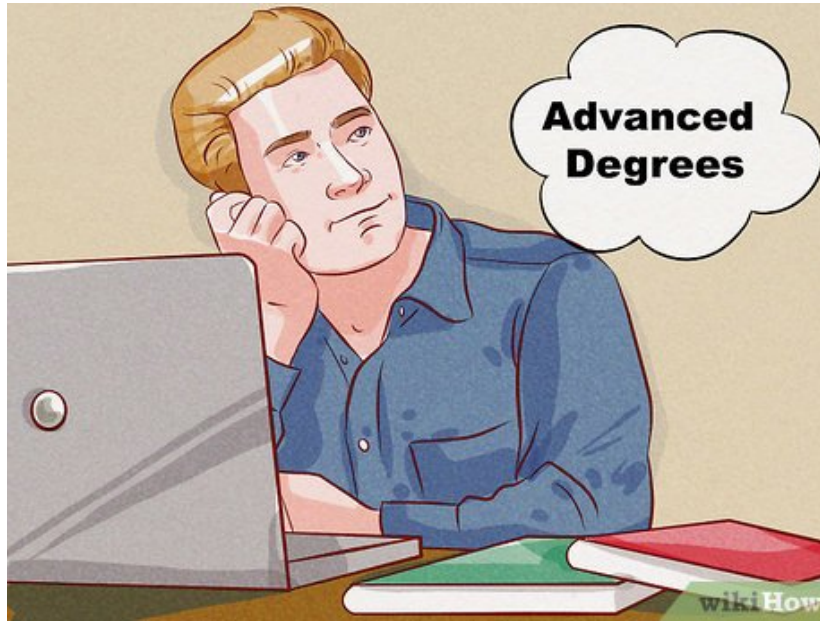
1.



Evaluate your employment potential and earning prospects. There's nothing wrong with earning a degree just so you can become more intellectually well-rounded, but most people see it as an investment in their future. Unless you have a career path in mind that you know would benefit more from other types of training—vocational programs or apprenticeships, for instance—a bachelor's degree will usually be to your career advantage.^[1]

1. Many companies are more likely to hire candidates with degrees than those without, as a degree shows you have the proper training to do the job.^[2]
2. As of 2016 in the U.S., the median earnings for people with bachelor's degrees are roughly \$500 USD per week higher than those with high school diplomas.
3. Similarly, the unemployment rate is nearly halved for those with bachelor's degrees.

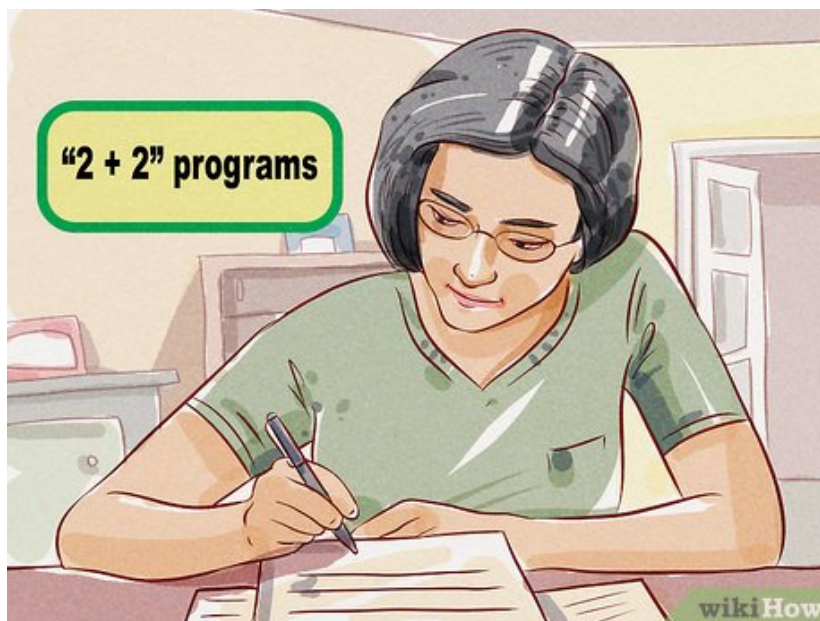
2.



Plan ahead for any advanced degrees you'll need or want. If you're planning on a career in business, law, medicine, computer science, teaching, or a host of other fields, you'll eventually need advanced degrees—like a master's degree or doctorate—to get ahead in your career. Since a bachelor's degree is a prerequisite for earning advanced degrees, take earning it seriously as an important stepping-stone.^[3]

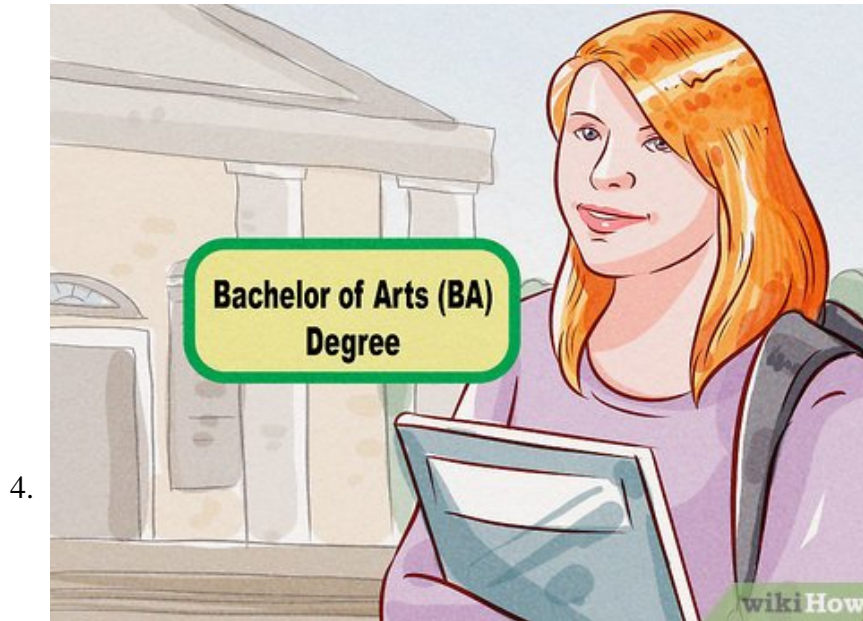
1. Some advanced degrees require a bachelor's degree in a particular field, while others do not. For example, if you want to go to med school, plan to major in a physical, biological, or social science.
2. If you hope to eventually earn an MBA, for instance, look for bachelor's programs that have good placement rates into MBA programs.

3.



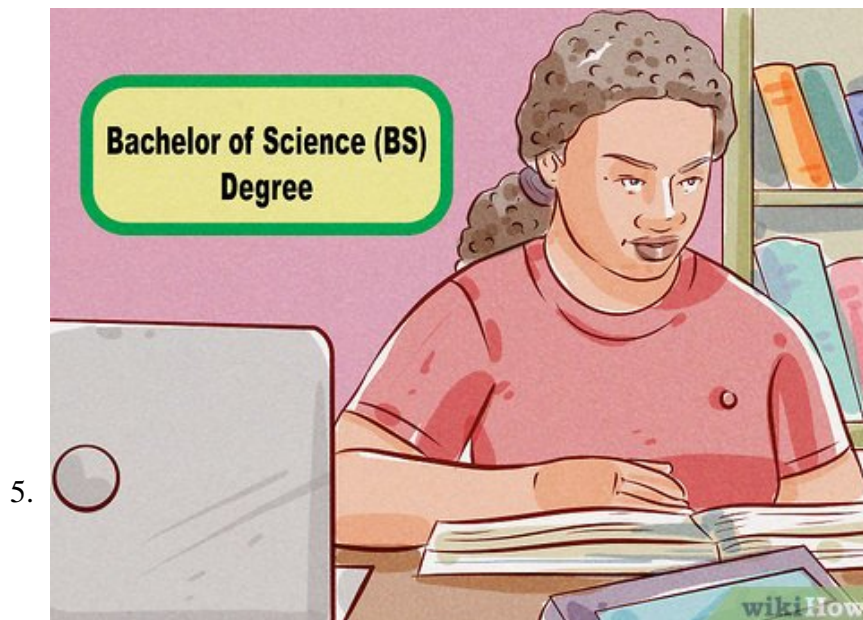
Look into '2 + 2' programs that include an associate's degree. If having only a high school diploma is limiting your job prospects, earning a 2-year associate's degree might unlock several doors for you. So-called '2 + 2' degree programs award you an associate's degree after 2 years, after which you can spend 2 more years completing your bachelor's degree.^[4]

1. '2 + 2' programs might be particularly useful if you're a part-time student who may need a longer period of time to complete the bachelor's degree.



Choose a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree for the most flexibility. BA programs still require you to choose a major and complete a set number of courses in that area, but they usually have a less rigid overall structure than BS or BFA programs. If you're not yet certain about your career or future goals, or you just want to experience the broadest range of courses, a BA program may be the right choice for you.^[5]

1. BA programs often offer majors in fields like English, communications, and history. With a degree like this, you could work in public relations, marketing, sales, consulting, advertising, broadcasting, and more.

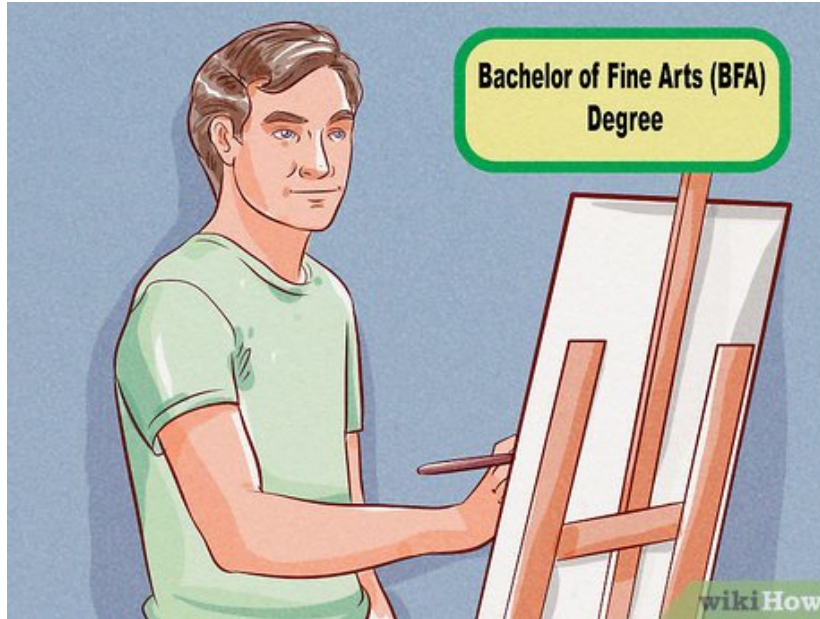


Pick a Bachelor of Science (BS) degree for a more specific major focus. BS programs usually have more class requirements tied to your chosen major than BA programs, but you'll still have room to explore some elective classes. People who earn BS degrees tend to have a more clear idea of the career they want

to pursue, typically in the fields of science or medicine.^[6]

1. BS programs typically offer majors such as computer science, biology, and nursing.

6.



Earn a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) degree for the creative arts. BFA degrees are intended primarily for people who plan to make a career in creative fields like painting, dancing, acting, etc. You'll have a good deal of major-focused classes to take, but still have a bit of space for electives and general education courses.^[7]

1. BFA programs aren't as ubiquitous as BA or BS programs, but you still shouldn't have much trouble finding schools that offer BFA programs.

Part 2 of 3:

Deciding on a College or University

1.



Look for schools with quality reputations. Especially with the explosion in online universities, your options in choosing a bachelor's program can seem endless. Don't assume, however, that all bachelor's degrees—whether earned on campus, online, or in hybrid form—are created equal.^[8]

1. Check well-known college rankings publications, such as U.S. News & World Report, for evaluations on institution's that you're considering.
2. Talk to your employer, guidance counselor, or teachers about the general reputations of college programs in your area.
3. In the case of online degrees offered by campus-based universities, look for online degrees that are conferred with equal status to on-campus ones. In the U.S., this is the case with Penn State University's highly-ranked 'World Campus,' for example.

2.



Factor in the amount of flexibility you need. Under ideal circumstances, a bachelor's degree is intended to take 4 years of full-time study to earn. However, in the real world, the average bachelor's degree in the

U.S. takes more than 5 years to complete. If you work, have kids, or have other commitments, prioritize flexibility in your program choice.

1. Online institutions can obviously provide a lot of flexibility, but many community colleges and larger colleges and universities offer part-time and hybrid online/on campus programs.
2. Note that certain areas of study offer less flexibility and are available only at traditional campuses.



Compare costs of attendance. The cost of earning a college degree, especially in the U.S., continues to increase rapidly—the median cost is now roughly \$11,000 USD per year. These costs can be several times higher at elite universities, or substantially lower at community colleges or online institutions.^[9]

1. The quality of your education and the reputation of your institution are important factors, but putting yourself into heavy debt to earn a degree from a 'name-brand' school may not necessarily be worth the investment.
2. Leave no stone unturned when looking for financial aid options. You can get scholarships and grants from both federal and private agencies. Your school may also offer both need- and merit-based aid. There is money out there, but you have to put in the effort to get it!

4.



Look for programs that let your transfer credits in or out. If you've attended college previously but didn't earn a bachelor's degree, ask about the credit transfer policies at any institutions you're considering. The more credits you can transfer over, the further ahead you'll be in completing your bachelor's degree. [10]

1. Also, if you know you'll be moving on to a master's or similar advanced degree program, see if it's possible for you to take coursework that can transfer into the program.
2. If you're still in high school, find out if you can take classes that will earn you college credits. It never hurts to get a head start!

Part 3 of 3:

Completing the Requirements for Your Degree

1.



Clarify the essential degree criteria at your institution. Generally speaking, a 4-year bachelor's degree requires 120 credits of coursework (following the semester system in the U.S.), or about 40 individual courses. Often, around 30-36 of these credits (10-12 courses) are requirements based on your chosen major.^[11]

1. There may also be a list of 'core courses' that every student is required to take, and you'll probably need to keep up a minimum grade point average (GPA)—a 2.0 or 'C,' for example—to earn your degree.^[12]
2. Talk to your academic advisor to make sure you're on track with your course selections. Ask them about any university rules that may impact graduation as well (such as adhering to the code of conduct).

2.



Choose a major in a timely fashion. You don't need to have already decided on a major when you start a bachelor's program, and it's OK to switch majors, especially early in the process. But, by around halfway

through the program, it is usually required that you select a major.^[13]

1. You might, for instance, have to declare a major by the time you've completed 72 credits.
2. Keep in mind that declaring a major helps set you up for your career, but doesn't fully determine it. There are history majors that go to medical school, and chemistry majors that go to law school. But choosing a major related to your career goals is usually best.



Manage your time so you can keep up your grades. Finding and getting into a bachelor's degree program is only the beginning. The real work involves finding the time and giving the effort needed to excel in your coursework. Remember that this is a pricey investment you're making, and give it your best effort!^[14]

1. Allow yourself time for a social life and some personal time, but also create a weekly schedule for coursework and studying.
2. If you're struggling to keep up, talk to your professors or academic advisor for guidance. See if there are tutoring programs available.
3. If necessary, move from a full-time to a part-time school schedule.

4.



Clear away any graduation obstacles from your transcript. At the last minute, you might find that long-forgotten things like an 'I' (incomplete) grade in a course or some unpaid fines are blocking you from graduating. Instead of being surprised by these right before graduation, keep up to date on your academic progress and standing.^[15]

1. Take care of these obstacles well in advance so they don't trip you up as you approach the finish line!

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