

## How to Plan a Fun (or Productive) Pre-College Summer: A Five-Step Guide

For more summer planning tips, check out my [podcast episode](#) with summer planning expert Jill Tipograph, in which we discuss everything from to whether or not expensive academic programs are worth it to tips for STEM students looking to do research and then potentially get published.

### **Step 1: Decide if you want your summer to be fun, productive, or both.**

Here are five ways to have fun this summer:

1. **Travel somewhere you've never been before.** And it doesn't have to be super far away. [Click here](#) to find places to camp near you. Or use [this roadtrip planner](#) and go see some weird stuff. (Pro Tip: Actually check the box that says "weird stuff.") Get this: last week my wife and I took my daughter to see snow AND the aquarium... *in the same day*. #CaliforniaFTW
2. **Take a look at your summer to-do list and cross one thing off of it.** Just take it off the list; decide you're just not gonna' do it. There, doesn't that feel better already? Or, on the flip-side, do what Kevin McMullin from [CollegeWise](#) suggests:
3. **"Set a goal that you are 99% certain you won't be able to achieve this summer.** Then go all out and try to achieve it as though your life depended on it. You'll either get there or get much, much closer than you were at the beginning of the summer." #FailBetter
4. **Just keep doing the thing that you love to do, but do it more.** Don't have anyone to do it with? Check out [meetup.com](#). There are probably people within miles of you already doing that thing.
5. **Do one good deed a day for 30 days, then [blog about it](#).**

Here are five ways to make it a productive summer:

1. **Take a class at a local community college.** So that a) you don't have to take it during the school year, and b) you've got something that looks super fancy on your transcript.



Yeah, like cat-on-a-unicorn fancy.

2. **Prep for the SAT or ACT.** I know, I know, but stay with me. My favorite free or low-cost test prep resources for the SAT are [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). For ACT prep, check out [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#). Or, for a list of colleges that are test-optional (i.e. don't require SAT/ACT scores), check out [Fairtest.org](#). Then cross that off your list.
3. **Get rid of some stuff.** That's right, do that [Marie Kondo thing](#) where you get rid of anything that doesn't bring you joy. I did, donating over 1,000 books and  $\frac{2}{3}$  of my clothes. Now I have no winter gloves and I can't find my copy of *The Illustrated Guide to Becoming One With the Universe*. But our bookshelf is [color-coded](#)!
4. **Read the [Four Hour Work Week](#).** Trust me, just read it. If you're into nutrition and health, read the [Four Hour Body](#). And if you like those, you'll love [Tools of Titans](#). Or if you don't want to commit to a whole book:
5. **Read some longform articles.** But there are so many out there, which should you pick? What if someone spent two years culling the internet for the best ones and put them all on a Google spreadsheet? I did and the result is this: [Ethan's Top Secret Stash of Really Great Reads](#).

Here are five ways to have fun *and* be productive:

1. **Binge-watch some TED talks.** Get your mind blown every 12 minutes. Too lazy to search the website? [Here's a Google spreadsheet](#) with every single TED Talk. Yeah, that's 1756 videos from the greatest minds of our time. Should keep you busy for 440 hrs or so.
2. **Take an online course in something that fascinates you.** Here are [1200 FREE Online Courses from Top Universities](#). Looking for something more practical? [Lynda.com](#) has over 5,000 courses in everything from How to Draw Good and Evil Comic Book Characters to How to Market and Monetize on YouTube. And don't even get me started on [Coursera](#). In fact, in an upcoming post I'll show you how a student's obsession with Coursera led to the greatest "Why Harvard" essay I've ever read.
3. **Do something for someone else for once in your life.** Just kidding, I'm not your mom when she's super mad at you. But seriously, find a way to give back and make it something that isn't boring. Work in a garden. Read to kids. And if all of those are boring, click [here](#) for a list of like a billion other things.

In fact, take things to the next level and...

4. **Create your own online course.** What's something you can do so well that you could teach people? My brother's friend, for example, teaches [design sketching](#). My brother's brother teaches students [how to write their personal statements for college](#). (Just kidding, that's me.)
5. **Build something that solves a problem.** A student I worked with this year created an app to remind him which books to bring to school on block-schedule days. Another created an app to prepare for the AP Bio test. It's got 10K+ downloads and counting. Do you think he included this in his college application? Eh, oui.

Ready for more inspiration? Time to search within.

**Step 2: Do my 2-minute exercise that's guaranteed to make your summer more fun and productive.**

Check it out: I'm a big fan of guided meditations and (did you know?) I'm a certified hypnotherapist. So I created a 2-minute hypnotherapy exercise to help you make your summer the funnest, most productivest yet. (I know those aren't words.)

Not a fan of guided meditations or being hypnotized?

Then definitely do not click [this button right here](#).

Okay, if you listened to the exercise, you should have one fun thing and one productive thing in mind. (And, if you didn't listen to it, go ahead and just pick one fun thing you'd like to do this summer and one productive thing.)

And while ideas are great, execution is even better. To that end...

**Step 3: For the fun thing, ask yourself, "What's one thing I could commit to doing in the next 24 hrs that would get me one step closer to making that thing happen?"**

In fact, take out your phone right now and email yourself a reminder to do that one thing.

Do it now.

Yes, actually.

Done it?

Good. Next I'm gonna' teach you the secret to *How to Get Anything Done in 30 Days*.

It's dangerously simple, but it's the secret to how I was able to launch a six-figure [voiceover career](#). (Didn't know about that, did you? #FullofSurprises #OrSomething)

**Step 4 (Minute 5): For the productive thing, create your "30 Days" doc.**

Do this:

- a. Open up a brand new Google doc and at the top of it type the words "30 Days to [Name the Thing You Want to Get Done]." Example: "30 Days to Creating My Own Website" or "30 Days to Playing Stairway to Heaven on the Guitar."
- b. Underneath your goal, write today's date. Do one thing today to work towards that goal. And if you can't do one thing today, just write, "I created this doc."
- c. Tomorrow, write the date above the old date, do only one action, and write it down under the date.

- d. Repeat for 30 days, or until you've completed your task. [Here's an example of an actual 30 days doc that I kept](#) on my way to building a six-figure voiceover career.

Pro-Tip: Ask someone to be your accountability partner by sharing your Google doc with them and challenging them to create their own 30 days doc *by putting their goals on the same doc!*

Go through those steps and you'll be five billion percent (okay, let's say 50 percent) more likely to get done the productive thing you're hoping to get done. Then...

**Step 5: Congratulate yourself on having set yourself up for the funnest, most productivest summer ever.**

Now go and do the thing you said you'd do in Step 3.

Yes, now.

And if you're looking to procrastinate a little more, there are worse ways than listening to the Jill Tipograph podcast in which we talk about:

- What summer opportunities matter most to colleges on an application (because Jill actually surveyed them)
- Whether or not expensive summer programs are "worth it"
- What students and parents should do but often don't do when it comes to planning their summer

You can find it here.

- - -

Also: This actually can help you get anything done, so you can check out the longer version of this, which has a few actual examples of docs I used here: [How to Get Anything Done in 30 Days](#).