



Golden School Days

Most of you have probably heard something about school in the US and England, but what is it really like to go to a secondary school in these two English-speaking countries? We asked two of our writers to remember their student years.

High School: Fun and Pressure

I'm lucky; I went to a great high school in Orlando, Florida. It's not easy for a classroom to compete with nearby beaches and amazing year-round weather, but cool classmates and **dedicated**¹ teachers made showing up for school worthwhile.

I'll be honest with you though, one of my favorite things about high school was the social life. There were new friends to meet and many plans to make! It was a big change from junior high school.

In the US, school isn't always out at 3 o'clock; there are a lot of after-school activities, like the school newspaper, yearbook* staff, drama

and Spanish club. Young people usually **take up**² sports and compete locally for their school team, for example in track and field*, American football or baseball, depending on the season.

On the other hand one of my least favorite things about high school was the pressure! The day a student starts ninth grade his or her 'high school **record**'³ starts. This includes grades (GPA or grade point average*), participation in **extracurricular activities**⁴ (like sports, clubs, and service organizations), SAT scores (a college entrance exam that tests ability in subjects like math, writing, and critical reading), and any kind of

Grades 1-12

In the US students attend grades (classes). The first grade is equivalent to the first year of school in the Czech Republic.

Aged: 4–6 years	kindergarten / preschool program
6–10 / 12 years	elementary / grade school Enter school: at 6 – Grade 1
10–14 years	junior high school / middle school
14–18 years	high school Exit school: at 18 – Grade 12
After 18 years	college/university

VOCABULARY

- ¹ **dedicated** [ˈdedɪkeɪtɪd] – oddaný
- ² **to take up** – zabývat se
- ³ **record** [ˈrekɔːd] – záznam
- ⁴ **extracurricular activities** [ˌɛkstrəkʊˈrɪkjələ(r)] – mimoškolní činnosti
- ⁵ **principal's office** – ředitelna
- ⁶ **discipline** – potrestání, trest

- ⁷ **paves the way** – připravuje základ
- ⁸ **price tag** – cenovka
- ⁹ **tuition fee** [tjuːˈɪʃ(ə)n] – školné
- ¹⁰ **at an alarming rate** – znepokojivou rychlostí
- ¹¹ **dreaded** – obávaný
- ¹² **in debt** [dɛt] – zadlužený
- ¹³ **equal** [ˈiːkw(ə)] – rovnat se
- ¹⁴ **to cut classes** – chodit za školu

GLOSSARY *

- yearbook** – a school chronicle published by the graduating class with photos and records of all their classmates' names and important events
- track and field** – athletic disciplines, track is running, field is jumping and throwing

- grade point average** – adding grade points from all courses divided by the number of courses, the highest GPA is 4, which equals to getting an A in each class
- guidance counselor** – a person who advises on career and other issues
- balancing act** – trying to work out, balance two big responsibilities

trouble that could send a teen to the **principal's office**⁵ for **discipline**⁶. Parents, teachers, and guidance counselors* are forever reminding you that your high-school performance **paves the way**⁷ for your entire future.

Getting into a reputable college or university isn't the only thing for teens and parents to keep in mind. There's also a big **price tag**⁸ attached to higher education. **Tuition fees**⁹ are increasing at an **alarming rate**¹⁰ and it's every student's responsibility to apply for as many scholarships and grants as possible to avoid the **dreaded**¹¹ 'student loans'. Of course, your high school record also determines what kind of scholarships and other financial assistance you can receive. Many graduates leave university in serious **debt**¹². Tuition fees for post-graduate students can **equal**¹³ the price of a family house!

I remember high school really was a balancing act*. It wasn't always easy to put my studies at the top of my priority list. I even admit **cutting class**¹⁴ a few times to go to the beach with friends! Overall though, I'd say that my high-school years were a great introduction to the world of making decisions.

Monica Boháčová (USA)

Going to a Secondary School in the UK



Secondary School in the UK is a big change from primary school. Primary schools are usually quite small and local. Secondary schools can have as many as two or three thousand pupils. Mine was much smaller than this. There were about 50 pupils in my year group¹ though I only knew three of them from primary school.

The real **challenge**² begins at the age of fourteen, in year 10, which is when you start your GCSEs (General Certificates of Secondary Education). You study eight or nine subjects for two years and take an exam at the end. **Core subjects**³ like maths and English are compulsory and pupils can choose the others. At the age of 16, after GCSEs, you're allowed to leave school to **take up an apprenticeship**⁴ or **vocational training**⁵, to get a job or to **drop out**⁶ altogether.

Nowadays, young people usually stay in education after taking their GCSEs and also most pupils at my school were fairly academic and carried on to A levels. These are the equivalent of the Czech maturita. Pupils pick four or five subjects they want to study and normally drop one after one year.

During the last year of school, university applications are sent out. In England it's usual to study away from your home and students apply to a maximum of six universities. **It's quite competitive**⁷ and you won't necessarily get into your first choice. Normally, a university will give you a 'conditional offer'. This means that you will be allowed to study there on the condition that you get the grades the university asks for in your A levels.

Going to university is expensive, though less so than in the US. You can get financial help if your family aren't very well off, and most people take out a student loan from the government, so most students leave university in debt.

When I think about my secondary school days, I appreciate the opportunity I had to do many of the extracurricular activities on offer. For example, I played in the school orchestra. On the other hand, it was sometimes frustrating as some of the subjects I wanted to study weren't available. In my small school there were fewer teachers and so a smaller variety of subjects. On the whole, I was very lucky to go to a good school and get into a good university.

Alex Jordan (UK)

College versus University

In the US, a **college** is an institution for advanced education where you study for your bachelor's degree. A **university** is a larger academic institution made up of specialty schools where, in addition to your bachelor's, you can also get your master's and doctoral degrees. However, in spoken English people typically use the terms interchangeably, for example saying "I go to college" while the institution they are studying at may technically be a university.

In the UK, 'college' has different meanings. It's mostly used to talk about **sixth-form colleges** (the sixth form of secondary school in which people study towards A levels), but college can be used to mean almost any school where people

go to study after the age of 16, other than university. For example, you can go to a **catering college** or a **music college** after you have left school.

College also refers to the institutions in Oxford, Cambridge, St Andrews and Durham where students live and work. Students at these colleges are students from the university.

Class, Grade or Year?

A class refers to the group of people who are studying together, it doesn't describe the year of your studies. In the US students go to different grades, in the UK to different years.

Years 1-13

In the UK students attend years, year groups.

Aged: 5-7	Primary infant school Enter school: at 5 – Year 1
7-11	Primary junior school
11-16 years	Secondary School
14-16 years	Studying towards GCSEs
16-18 years	Studying towards A levels Exit school: at 18 – Year 13

VOCABULARY

- ¹ **year group** – ročník
- ² **challenge** – výzva, úkol
- ³ **core subjects** – hlavní vyučovací předměty
- ⁴ **to take up an apprenticeship** – přihlásit se na učňovský obor
- ⁵ **vocational training** – odborný výcvik
- ⁶ **to drop out** – odejít ze školy
- ⁷ **it's quite competitive** – je o to veliký zájem