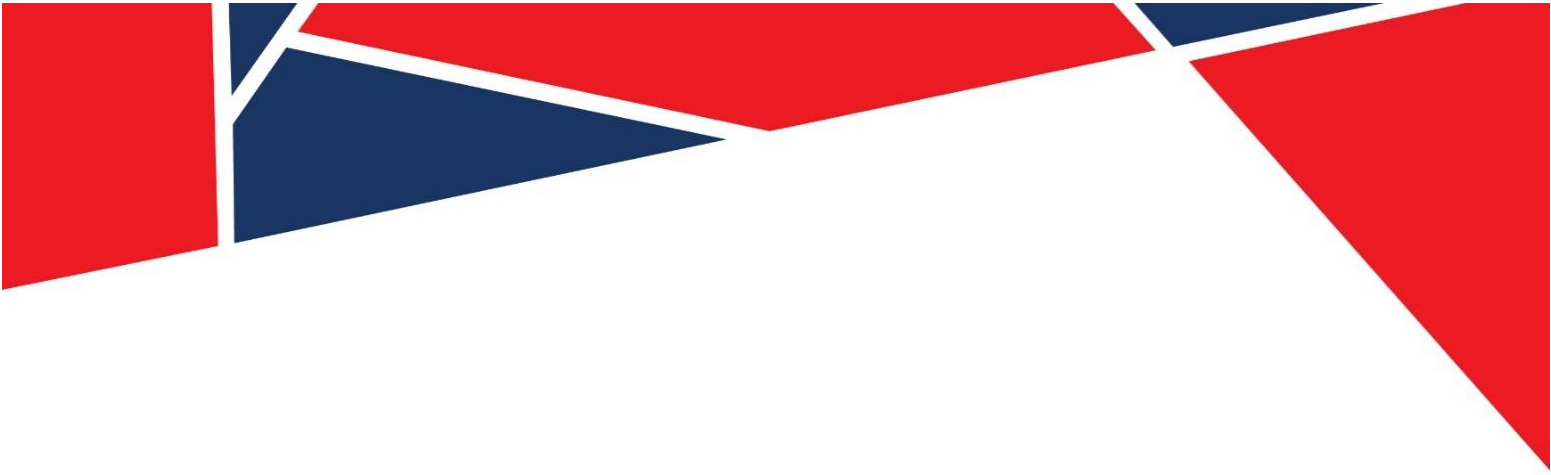
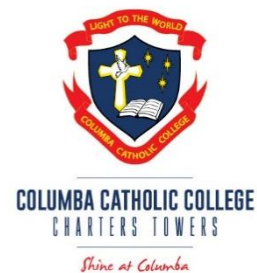




Careers Newsletter



Weekly Careers News for Columba Catholic College

October 13, 2025

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Events

Future Events

Careers with STEM & QUT – Tech Careers Webinar for Students, Teachers & Parents

Organisation: Careers with STEM

Location: Online

Date: November 5, 2025

Imagine building the next big thing in AI, helping fight climate change with smart data, or even designing the tech behind the next generation of electric cars or space travel. Technology is now woven into every industry – from music and gaming to medicine and sustainable energy – which means a career in tech doesn't just mean one path; it means limitless possibilities.

And here's the exciting part: many of the jobs you'll be doing in the future haven't even been invented yet.

So how do you get started? Join us for a free Careers with STEM webinar on Wednesday 5 November at 12pm AEDT/11am AEST with leaders, experts and entrepreneurs in tech that will share their journeys and advice for anyone considering pursuing technology.

Whether you're a high school student, a teacher guiding your students' next steps, or a parent supporting your child's future, this webinar will provide the knowledge and inspiration you need to explore the exciting world of tech careers.

[Find out more and register](#)

CQUniversity Online Chat Session for Future Students in November

Organisation: CQUniversity

Location: Online

Date: November 20, 2025

Are you thinking about starting a TAFE or university qualification in 2026? Or, are you eager to get started sooner and study a TAFE course in our December intake? If you're considering your study options at CQUniversity, you probably have a few questions about getting started.

Get to know CQU a little better at our November Online Chat Session on Thursday, 20 November at 3 pm AEST. All you need to do is head over to our CQUniversity Facebook page and send us a message during the session and you'll receive real-time answers to all your questions.

Our team will help you with information on your course of interest, pathway options, student support services, or anything else you might like to know about studying with us.

[Find out more and register](#)

CQUniversity Change of Preference Online Chat for Future Students

Organisation: CQUniversity

Location: Online

Date: December 12, 2025

Didn't get the ATAR you need or changed your mind about what course you want to study in 2026?
We're here to help!

All you need to do is head over to Facebook Messenger and send us a message during our Change of Preference event and you'll receive real-time answers to all your questions. Alternatively, you can call us on 13 27 86 to speak directly to a student adviser.

Speak with our expert team and discover your options at our Change of Preference event on Friday, 12 December at 9 am AEST. Get guidance on how to change your preferences and learn more about CQUni's alternative pathways.

[Find out more and register](#)

Scholarships

Bond University First Nations Medical Scholarship Program

Organisation: Bond University

Location: Australia

Value: 50% tuition fee remission

Open Date: January 8, 2026

Close Date: January 22, 2026

[Find out more](#)

Australian Medical Association Scholarship for Indigenous Medical University Students

Organisation: Australian Medical Association

Location: Australia

Value: \$11,000 AUD per year

Open Date: November 1, 2025

Close Date: January 31, 2026

[Find out more](#)

Alphacrucis NextGen Scholarship

Organisation: Alphacrucis University College

Location: Australia

Value: 20% tuition fee reduction

Open Date: August 1, 2025

Close Date: March 20, 2026

[Find out more](#)

Competitions

Storyfest National Novella Writing Competition for High School Students

Organisation: Somerset Storyfest

Location: Australia

Value: See details

Open Date: August 4, 2025

Close Date: December 5, 2025

[Find out more](#)

Australian Schools Cyber Challenge 2026

Organisation: Cyber Pathways

Location: Australia

Value: See details

Open Date: September 29, 2025

Close Date: April 22, 2026

[Find out more](#)

Weekly Posts

Study Tips, Time Management

Eleven factors that influence how much study you should be doing

When it comes to figuring out your ideal study schedule, there's no one-size-fits-all formula that works for everyone. What makes perfect sense for your best friend might leave you feeling overwhelmed or underprepared, and that's completely normal. The amount of study time that's right for you depends on a complex mix of personal and environmental factors that are unique to your situation.

Understanding these factors isn't about making excuses for studying more or less than others – it's about making informed decisions that work for your specific circumstances. Some of these factors you'll have limited control over, whilst others you can adjust or manage to better support your academic goals.

The key is being honest about your situation rather than trying to force yourself into a study routine that ignores your reality. When you acknowledge and plan around these factors, you're much more likely to create a sustainable approach that actually serves your goals.

Internal factors you need to consider

Internal factors are largely personal to you – they're related to your individual circumstances, abilities, and goals. You typically have less direct control over these factors, which means your study planning needs to work around them rather than trying to change them.

1. Your age and learning stage

Where you are in your educational journey significantly impacts how much independent study you should be doing. Primary students generally need much less formal study time compared to secondary students, whose workloads and expectations increase substantially as they progress through school.

This isn't just about the volume of content you're expected to learn – it's also about the complexity and depth required. A Year 7 student focusing on homework and basic revision will have very different needs compared to a Year 12 student managing multiple subjects at an advanced level, plus major assignments and exam preparation.

Different levels of education within the same year can also require different time investments. If you're taking extension subjects, advanced courses, or additional qualifications, you'll naturally need more time than someone following a standard programme. Similarly, university students typically need more independent study time than school students because so much more of the learning happens outside formal class time.

2. Your natural abilities and learning pace

This is about being honest with yourself regarding how quickly you grasp new concepts and how much practice you need to feel confident with material. Some students can read through content once and retain it effectively, whilst others need multiple exposures and lots of practice to achieve the same level of understanding.

Neither approach is better or worse – they're just different, and they require different time investments. If you're someone who needs extra time to process information, builds understanding gradually, or learns better through repetition and practice, you'll need to factor this into your study planning.

It's also worth noting that your abilities might vary significantly between subjects. You might pick up mathematical concepts quickly but need more time to analyse literature, or find science practicals easy to understand but struggle with historical essay writing. Recognising these patterns helps you allocate your study time more strategically.

3. Your future goals and ambitions

Your academic and career aspirations should heavily influence how much time you invest in study. If you're aiming for competitive university courses, prestigious scholarships, or careers that require top academic performance, you'll naturally need to dedicate more time to achieving the grades that will open these doors.

On the other hand, if your goals focus more on personal development, practical skills, or pathways that don't require exceptional academic performance, you might be able to achieve your aims with a more

moderate study commitment. Neither approach is right or wrong – they're just different paths with different requirements.

Your goals might also be subject-specific. Perhaps you're passionate about pursuing science at university, which means dedicating extra time to your STEM subjects whilst maintaining reasonable performance in other areas. Or maybe you're focused on creative pursuits that require a portfolio, meaning you need to balance academic study with developing your artistic skills.

4. Your mental wellbeing and stress levels

Your emotional and psychological state has a huge impact on both how much study time you can realistically handle and how effectively you can use that time. When you're feeling stressed, anxious, or overwhelmed, your ability to concentrate and retain information decreases significantly.

If you're going through a particularly challenging period – whether that's related to school pressure, family issues, friendship problems, or just the general stress of adolescence – you might need to temporarily reduce your study expectations and focus on maintaining your wellbeing alongside meeting your basic academic requirements.

This isn't about making excuses or lowering your standards permanently. It's about recognising that your mental health is the foundation that everything else builds on. Sometimes the most productive thing you can do is prioritise rest, stress management, and getting appropriate support rather than pushing through with an unsustainable study schedule.

5. Your physical health and energy levels

Ongoing health conditions, whether physical or mental, can significantly impact your available energy for study. If you're managing a chronic illness, recovering from injury, taking medication that affects your concentration, or dealing with sleep issues, you'll need to factor this into your study planning.

This might mean working in shorter bursts when your energy is highest, building in more breaks for rest and recovery, or accepting that your productive study time might be more limited than other students'. The key is working with your body rather than against it, and seeking appropriate medical support when needed.

Even temporary health issues like being run down, fighting off illness, or going through growth spurts can affect your study capacity. Being flexible and adjusting your expectations during these periods isn't giving up – it's being smart about managing your resources effectively.

External factors that shape your schedule

External factors relate to your environment and circumstances – the practical realities of your life that compete for time and attention alongside your studies. You often have more control over these factors, though sometimes adjusting them requires difficult decisions about priorities.

6. Work and employment commitments

If you're working a part-time job – whether that's a few hours a week or more substantial employment – this will directly impact your available study time. The key is being realistic about what you can achieve rather than pretending work doesn't affect your academic capacity.

Working whilst studying isn't just about the hours spent at your job – it's also about the mental and physical energy that work demands. If your job is physically demanding or mentally taxing, you might find that your study capacity is reduced even during your non-work hours.

However, many students successfully balance work and study by being strategic about their time management. This might involve doing lighter study tasks on work days and saving intensive sessions for days off, or adjusting your study schedule seasonally based on work demands.

7. Extra-curricular activities and sport

Regular training sessions, competitions, rehearsals, performances, or other structured activities require significant time and energy outside of your academic commitments. These activities are often important for your personal development, university applications, or simply your enjoyment and wellbeing.

The challenge is balancing these commitments with your study requirements. During particularly busy periods – such as competition seasons, performance seasons, or intensive training camps – you might need to temporarily adjust your study approach rather than trying to maintain peak performance in both areas simultaneously.

Many successful students find that being involved in activities actually helps their academic performance by providing structure, stress relief, and skills like time management and goal setting. The key is planning for the time demands rather than hoping you can somehow fit everything in without making adjustments.

8. Family and caring responsibilities

Some students have significant responsibilities at home that impact their available study time. This might involve caring for younger siblings, helping elderly family members, supporting family members with disabilities or health conditions, or taking on household responsibilities that other students don't have.

These responsibilities are often non-negotiable and need to be factored into your study planning from the beginning. This isn't about making excuses – it's about being realistic about your circumstances and finding study approaches that work within them.

If you have substantial caring responsibilities, you might need to be more strategic about using small pockets of time, studying during different hours than other students, or focusing on highly efficient study methods that maximise your return on limited time investment.

9. Travel and commuting time

Long commutes to and from school, work, or activities can eat up significant chunks of your day that could otherwise be used for study. If you're spending an hour or more travelling each day, this affects both your available time and your energy levels for other activities.

Some students successfully use travel time for certain types of study – reviewing notes, listening to recorded lectures, or doing reading on public transport. However, this requires good planning and might not work for all subjects or study tasks.

If long travel times are unavoidable, you might need to be more efficient with your at-home study time, focus on study methods that can be done during commuting, or adjust your overall time expectations to account for this practical constraint.

10. Social and community commitments

Your involvement in religious activities, community groups, volunteer work, or other social commitments can significantly impact your study schedule. These activities are often important for your personal values, community connections, and overall development.

Like other external commitments, the key is being honest about the time these activities require and planning your study schedule accordingly. This might mean having busier academic periods and lighter periods that correspond with your community commitments, or finding ways to integrate your values and study goals.

Some community commitments might actually complement your academic work – for example, volunteer work that relates to your future career goals, or leadership roles that develop skills you're also building through your studies.

11. Unexpected life events and disruptions

Life has a way of throwing curveballs that can temporarily or permanently change your study capacity. Family emergencies, changes in living arrangements, financial pressures, relationship issues, or other personal crises can all impact your ability to maintain your usual study routine.

The key with unexpected disruptions is being flexible and adjusting your expectations rather than trying to maintain impossible standards. This might mean seeking extensions for assignments, accessing support services, or temporarily focusing on your most essential academic requirements whilst dealing with the crisis.

Building some buffer time into your regular study schedule can help you cope better when unexpected events occur. If you're usually running at maximum capacity, any disruption will feel overwhelming. Having a bit of flexibility built into your routine gives you room to adapt when life gets complicated.

Using these factors to inform your decisions

Understanding these factors isn't about finding excuses for studying less or more than others – it's about making informed decisions that work for your specific situation. Your ideal study schedule should take into account your personal factors whilst working strategically with your external circumstances.

Start by honestly assessing which of these factors significantly impact your situation. You might find that several apply to you, or that one or two have a particularly strong influence on your available study time. Use this assessment to create realistic expectations and develop strategies that work with your reality rather than against it.

Remember that these factors can change over time. Your health, circumstances, goals, and commitments might all shift throughout your academic journey, which means your study approach should be flexible enough to adapt accordingly. Regular reassessment helps ensure your study schedule continues to serve your evolving needs and circumstances.

Superannuation

What to look for in your first superannuation fund

When you start your first proper job, one of the many forms you'll need to fill out asks you to nominate a superannuation fund. If you're like most teenagers facing this question for the first time, you might be tempted to just tick whatever box looks easiest or accept whatever your employer suggests. But spending a little bit of time choosing the right fund now could genuinely make a difference of tens of thousands of dollars by the time you retire.

This guide will walk you through what you actually need to know to make a sensible choice, without getting bogged down in financial jargon or overwhelming complexity.

What is superannuation, anyway?

Superannuation (often referred to as "super") is basically a long-term savings account for your retirement. Every time you get paid, your employer is legally required to put an additional percentage of

your wage into this account on top of what you actually receive. Currently, that's [12% of your ordinary earnings](#).

The benefit is that this money grows over time through investment returns and compounds over decades, potentially turning into a substantial amount by the time you finish working. The catch is that you generally can't access this money until you retire (unless you meet certain special circumstances).

While retirement probably feels impossibly far away right now, starting with the right fund matters because even small differences in fees or investment returns compound dramatically over 40 or 50 years.

What to look for when choosing a fund

Not all super funds are created equal, and the differences between them can have a real impact on your eventual retirement savings.

Fees

Super funds charge various fees to manage your money, and these can vary significantly between providers. The main ones you'll encounter are administration fees (usually a flat annual fee plus a percentage of your balance) and investment fees (the cost of actually investing your money).

When you're young and your balance is small, a high percentage-based fee might not seem like much in dollar terms. But remember, you're likely to have this account for decades, and those fees compound over time. Even a difference of 0.5% in annual fees can cost you tens of thousands of dollars over a working lifetime.

The [YourSuper comparison tool](#) from the ATO is incredibly useful here – it shows you fees and performance for different funds side by side.

Investment performance

Your super is invested in various assets like shares, property, and bonds. Different funds have different investment strategies and track records, and their performance can vary quite a bit.

Look at long-term performance (at least 5-10 years) rather than just the last year or two, as investment returns naturally fluctuate. Most funds offer different investment options ranging from conservative (lower risk, lower expected returns) to growth (higher risk, higher expected returns).

When you're young, you have decades for your super to recover from any market downturns, so most financial advisers suggest younger people can afford to take more risk with growth-focused options. But ultimately, you are free to choose whatever option you feel most comfortable with.

Insurance

Many super funds automatically include basic life insurance and total and permanent disability (TPD) cover. This can be valuable protection, but it also costs money through insurance premiums deducted from your super balance.

If you're young and healthy with no dependents, you might not need this insurance yet, and the premiums could be better spent growing your super balance. However, if you have people who depend on your income or you're in a high-risk occupation, keeping the insurance might make sense. You can usually opt out if you don't want it.

Investment options and values

Some people care about where their super is invested. If you're concerned about environmental, social, or ethical issues, you might want a fund that offers sustainable or ethical investment options. These funds typically avoid investments in things like fossil fuels, tobacco, or weapons manufacturing, and instead focus on companies with strong environmental or social practices.

Other people are less concerned about this and primarily focus on returns and fees. Neither approach is wrong – it just depends on what matters to you.

Industry funds vs. retail funds

You'll often hear about "industry funds" and "retail funds," and it's worth understanding the difference.

Industry funds were originally set up to serve people working in specific industries (like healthcare, education, or hospitality). They're run on a not-for-profit basis, meaning any profits go back into the fund rather than to shareholders, and they often have lower fees as a result. Common examples include [Australian Super](#), [Hostplus](#), and [Rest](#).

Retail funds are run by banks or financial institutions as for-profit businesses. They sometimes offer more bells and whistles like additional investment options or financial planning services, but they also tend to have higher fees.

Research consistently shows that, on average, industry funds tend to outperform retail funds after fees are taken into account. That said, some retail funds do perform well, so it's worth comparing specific funds rather than just choosing based on category.

Your employer's preferred fund

Some employers have a default or preferred super fund, and occasionally there are financial benefits to using it.

In certain sectors, particularly universities and some government roles, employers might contribute additional amounts if you use their specified fund. For example, if you work in the higher education sector, using [UniSuper](#) often means your employer contributes more than the standard 12%. This is worth checking, because these extra contributions can be substantial over time.

However, for most casual and part-time jobs that teenagers typically have, there won't be any extra benefits to using the employer's default fund. You have the legal right to choose your own fund, and your employer must respect that choice.

Student-focused super funds

A few super funds specifically market themselves to students and young people, offering features like low minimum balances, no fees on small accounts, or educational resources. Some examples include:

- [Student Super](#)
- [UniSuper](#) (particularly relevant if you work in education)
- [Australian Ethical](#) (focuses on ethical and sustainable investments)

These can be good options to consider, but don't just choose one because it's marketed to students. Make sure you're still comparing fees, performance, and features against other funds. Sometimes a mainstream industry fund might actually be a better choice even for younger people.

Your industry might also have a specific fund that's particularly suitable – for instance, if you're working in hospitality, Hostplus is often recommended, or if you're in healthcare, [HESTA](#) might be worth considering.

How to actually compare and choose

So with all that information, here's a practical approach to making your choice:

Ask your employer

Start by checking if your employer offers any additional contributions for using a specific fund. If they do, and that fund has reasonable fees and performance, it might be worth seriously considering. If there are no extra benefits, you're free to shop around.

Use a comparison tool

Use the [YourSuper comparison tool](#) to compare fees and performance across different funds. This tool is run by the government and gives you objective data.

Do some reading

Read through the Product Disclosure Statement (PDS) for any fund you're seriously considering. Yes, it's boring, but it tells you exactly what fees you'll pay and what you're getting. Pay particular attention to the fees section and the investment options available.

If ethical investing matters to you, look into the fund's investment approach and what they do and don't invest in.

Don't forget insurance

Check what insurance comes with the fund and whether you actually want it. If you don't need it, make sure you can opt out to avoid paying unnecessary premiums.

Choose what's right for you

Once you've done this comparison, pick a fund that has low fees, solid long-term performance, and aligns with your values (if that's important to you). There's no single "best" fund for everyone, but there are definitely some poor choices you can avoid by doing a bit of research.

Making it official

Once you've chosen a fund, you'll need to provide your employer with your super fund details. This includes the fund name, your member number (if you already have an account), and the Australian Business Number (ABN) of the fund. If you're setting up a new account, the fund will walk you through the process and provide these details.

Keep your fund details somewhere safe – you'll need them for every job you have. Also, try to stick with one fund rather than accumulating multiple accounts across different jobs. Having multiple super accounts means paying multiple sets of fees, which erodes your balance unnecessarily. If you do end up with multiple accounts, you can consolidate them through the [ATO's online services](#).

The choice you make now isn't permanent (you can switch funds later if you find a better option) but starting with a decent fund means you're not wasting years of growth on unnecessary fees or poor performance. Twenty minutes of research now is genuinely one of the best investments of time you can make for your future financial wellbeing.

Find out more

For more detailed information about how superannuation works and choosing your first fund, [MoneySmart](#) (run by the Australian government) has comprehensive guides. [Canstar](#) also offers useful comparisons and information specifically for young people.

[We also have more helpful information on money matters on our website here.](#)

Schoolies

Schoolies alternatives you want to know about

Schoolies has become almost synonymous with overcrowded beaches, expensive accommodation, and wild parties in places like the Gold Coast or Byron Bay. If that sounds like your idea of a great time, fantastic – go for it. But if you're reading this feeling a bit uncertain about whether that's really your scene, or if you're looking at the price tag and thinking there must be better ways to celebrate finishing school, you're absolutely right.

The truth is, schoolies is just a concept – it's about marking the end of your school years and celebrating with the people who matter to you. How you do that is entirely up to you, and despite what social media might suggest, plenty of people choose alternatives to the traditional schoolies experience. Whether that's because of budget constraints, personal preferences, family circumstances, or simply because you'd rather do something different, your choice is just as valid as anyone else's.

This guide will help you think through some alternative schoolies options and plan a celebration that actually suits you, rather than one you feel pressured into because "everyone else is doing it".

Why consider alternatives?

Before we dive into specific ideas, it's worth acknowledging why you might be considering alternatives in the first place. Maybe traditional schoolies destinations feel overwhelming or unsafe. Perhaps you're not much of a party person, or you'd rather spend money on something you'll remember for reasons beyond blurry photos and questionable decisions. You might have responsibilities at home, health considerations, or simply prefer smaller gatherings with people you actually know.

Financial reality is also a huge factor. Traditional schoolies can easily cost \$2,000-\$3,000 or more once you factor in accommodation, travel, food, and activities. Not everyone has access to that kind of money, and even if you do, you might prefer to save it for something else – like a car, future travel, or starting university without being broke.

Whatever your reasons, choosing an alternative doesn't mean you're missing out. It means you're making a decision that works for your circumstances, preferences, and values. That's actually pretty mature, even if it doesn't always feel like it when you're scrolling through other people's schoolies plans.

Alternative schoolies ideas worth considering

The beauty of planning your own alternative is that you can make it exactly what you want. Here are some ideas to get you thinking, but feel free to mix, match, or come up with something completely different.

Camping or road trip with friends

If you want the adventure and freedom of going away with friends but without the chaos and expense of traditional schoolies destinations, consider a camping trip or road trip. You could explore national parks, visit regional areas you've never been to, or even just set up at a local campsite and spend a few days hiking, swimming, and sitting around the campfire.

The costs are significantly lower than traditional schoolies – you're looking at campsite fees (often \$10-30 per night per site), petrol, and food you cook yourselves. You'll still get that sense of independence and celebration, but in a setting where you're more likely to actually talk to each other rather than just ending up at the same party venue. National parks like [those in NSW](#), [Victoria](#), [Queensland](#), or anywhere else in Australia offer incredible experiences that don't require massive budgets.

Travel with family

Yes, travelling with your parents or family might not sound like the coolest option, but hear this out. If your family is offering to take you somewhere you'd actually like to go – whether that's overseas, interstate, or even just somewhere regional you've wanted to visit – this can be an incredible opportunity, especially if they're covering most or all of the costs.

You'll finish school with minimal debt, see places you genuinely want to experience, and probably have better accommodation and food than you would have otherwise. Plus, if your relationship with your family is decent, this might be one of the last chances to travel together before university, work, and adult life make it harder to coordinate. You can always have a separate celebration with friends either before you leave or when you get back.

An epic D&D campaign or gaming marathon

If you and your friends are into tabletop games, video games, or any other immersive hobby, why not plan a multi-day session that you'll actually remember? Rent an Airbnb or use someone's house (with parental permission), stock up on supplies, and dive into an epic campaign or gaming tournament.

This works brilliantly if your friendship group has specific shared interests. You could run a week-long D&D campaign, have a video game tournament, binge-watch an entire series together, or even combine multiple activities. The point is spending quality time doing something you genuinely enjoy rather than something you feel obligated to do because it's "schoolies".

Festival or event-based celebration

Time your schoolies around a music festival, sporting event, or other occasion you'd genuinely be excited about. This gives you a focal point for the celebration and something concrete to plan around. Check out festivals through [Eventbrite](#) or other event listing sites to see what's happening when you finish school.

Depending on the event, this can be significantly cheaper than traditional schoolies, and you'll be surrounded by people who share your interests rather than just whoever ended up at the same resort. Plus, you'll have actual plans and activities rather than just "being at the beach for a week".

Volunteering or work experience trip

If you're already thinking about gap years or building experience for university applications, consider a volunteering or work experience opportunity that doubles as your schoolies celebration. Organisations like [Conservation Volunteers Australia](#) or [WWOOF](#) offer experiences where you can contribute to meaningful projects whilst exploring new places.

You'll meet people from different backgrounds, develop skills that matter for your future, and still get that sense of adventure and independence. It might not be the traditional party week, but you'll probably have better stories to tell and actual experiences to put on your resume or university applications.

Local celebration with close friends

Sometimes the best celebrations are simple. Rather than going away at all, you could plan a special dinner, have a small gathering at someone's house, or organise day trips to places nearby that you've always wanted to visit. Go to that restaurant you've been meaning to try, spend a day at the beach with your closest friends, have a fancy dinner party, or do a progressive dinner where you visit different houses.

This option is incredibly budget-friendly and can be just as meaningful as any trip away. The point of schoolies is celebrating finishing school with the people who matter to you – that doesn't require expensive accommodation or interstate travel. It just requires intention and a bit of planning.

Solo or small group travel

If you're comfortable with solo travel or prefer smaller groups, consider planning a trip that's just you and one or two close friends. This could be visiting a city you've wanted to explore, taking a train journey somewhere interesting, or spending time in a regional area that appeals to you.

Travelling in smaller groups or solo gives you much more flexibility and control over your experience. You can move at your own pace, change plans when you want to, and spend your time exactly how you

prefer. It's also often significantly cheaper because you're not coordinating with large groups or competing for limited accommodation.

A "schoolies at home" celebration

If going away isn't possible or appealing, don't let that stop you from marking the occasion. You could take a week to focus on things you never have time for during school – sleep in, work on creative projects, learn something new, catch up with friends individually, or finally get through that reading list you've been building.

This might sound anticlimactic compared to traditional schoolies, but for many people, having actual downtime and space to process finishing school is more valuable than a week of parties they won't remember. You could still mark specific days with planned activities – a nice dinner, a day trip, a gathering with friends – without the pressure or expense of a full week away.

Planning your alternative schoolies

Whatever you decide, a bit of planning makes everything run more smoothly and helps ensure you actually enjoy your celebration rather than just surviving it.

1 - Work out your budget first

Before you commit to anything, be realistic about what you can actually afford. Factor in all costs – not just the obvious ones like accommodation and travel, but also food, activities, emergency funds, and any gear or supplies you might need. If you're relying on money from family, have that conversation early so everyone knows what's realistic.

Remember that spending less doesn't mean having a worse time. Some of the best celebrations happen on tight budgets because you're forced to be creative and intentional about your choices.

2 - Involve the right people

Think carefully about who you actually want to celebrate with. This doesn't have to be your entire year level or even your usual school friend group. Choose people whose company you genuinely enjoy and who have similar ideas about what makes a good celebration. One or two close friends who are on the same page will give you a better experience than a larger group where everyone wants different things.

3 - Plan some structure but leave room for spontaneity

Having a rough plan prevents the "what should we do now?" conversations that can eat up your time, but don't schedule every minute. Know where you're staying, have some activity ideas, and sort out the logistics, but leave space for lazy mornings, spontaneous decisions, and just enjoying each other's company.

4 - Safety considerations that matter regardless of what you choose

Whether you're camping, travelling with family, or staying local, some basic safety considerations apply. Make sure someone responsible knows your plans and how to reach you. Have emergency contacts saved, including parents or guardians of everyone involved. If you're going anywhere remote, let people know when to expect you back.

Keep enough money aside for emergencies – this means actual emergencies, not "we ran out of food money because we spent it on other things". If you're travelling, know where the nearest hospital is and have your Medicare card and any necessary medications with you.

The [Australian Government's Smartraveller](#) website has excellent advice for staying safe while travelling, even within Australia. For mental health support during or after schoolies, [Headspace](#) and [Kids Helpline](#) (1800 55 1800) are available 24/7.

5 - Making it actually happen

Once you've decided on your alternative schoolies plan, the key is actually following through. Set dates, book what needs to be booked, and have clear conversations with anyone involved about expectations, costs, and logistics. Get parents or guardians on board if necessary – they're much more likely to support your plans if you can show you've thought things through properly.

Create a shared document or group chat for planning so everyone stays informed and can contribute ideas. Sort out the boring but necessary stuff like transport, accommodation, and food well in advance so you're not scrambling at the last minute.

Most importantly, resist the pressure to justify or defend your choices to people who question them. Your schoolies celebration is for you, not for Instagram or for meeting other people's expectations. If someone gives you grief about not doing traditional schoolies, remember that they're probably just following the crowd themselves and feel uncomfortable with anyone doing something different.

Your celebration, your rules

The best schoolies celebration is the one that actually works for you – your circumstances, preferences, budget, and friendship group. Whether that looks like traditional schoolies, one of the alternatives suggested here, or something completely different you've come up with yourself, the important thing is that it feels right for you.

You've just finished 13 years of formal education. However you choose to mark that achievement is valid, whether it's an epic adventure or a quiet week at home. Focus on celebrating in a way that you'll look back on fondly, rather than trying to meet someone else's definition of what schoolies should be.

Health & Wellbeing

Brain boosting snacks for better focus

Feeling peckish during study sessions or while working? This might be because your brain is actually your body's most demanding organ, [consuming about 20% of your daily energy](#). Just like a high-performance car needs quality fuel to run smoothly, your brain also needs the right nutrients to maintain concentration, memory, and mental clarity. When hunger strikes, it's tempting to grab whatever's close and easy, often processed snacks that give you a quick sugar rush followed by an energy crash, leaving you feeling foggy and unfocused.

The good news is that with a bit of planning, you can turn your snack breaks into brain-boosting opportunities - here are some foods you can try to increase your focus and keep your energy steady throughout the day.

Berries: Nature's brain food

Berries are like tiny powerhouses, [packed with flavonoid antioxidants and vitamin C](#). These compounds work together to improve communication between brain cells, reduce inflammation, and increase brain plasticity. Eating them could help your brain form new connections for better learning and memory.

Blueberries, strawberries, blackberries, blackcurrants, and mulberries are all excellent choices. If fresh berries are expensive, frozen or dried versions offer similar benefits and often cost less. Add them to your cereal, yoghurt, or blend them into smoothies. They're also perfect on their own as a quick, refreshing snack between study sessions.

Nuts and seeds: Sustained energy for your mind

Nuts and seeds are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, antioxidants, vitamin E, zinc, magnesium, B vitamins, and tryptophan - all of which can [help boost cognition, fight stress, and improve mood](#).

Trail mix, roasted pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, and mixed nuts make excellent portable snacks. Snack bars are good too, but be mindful of the ones with more sugar than healthy content. Peanut butter on apple slices or wholegrain crackers provides both protein and healthy fats. Coconut chips offer a naturally sweet alternative when you're craving something more indulgent.

Whole grains: Steady fuel for focus

[Whole grains](#) provide you with steady energy rather than the quick flare-up and burnout of refined sugars. Their low glycemic index (GI) means they release energy gradually, keeping your mental alertness consistent and helping you feel satisfied for longer periods.

Wholegrain breads, wraps, crackers, and chips make satisfying snacks. Oats in cereals, porridge, or muesli bars are particularly good options. These foods also often contain vitamin E, which supports brain health and cognitive function.

Avocados: Brain circulation boosters

[Avocados](#) are rich in monounsaturated fats that promote healthy blood flow, essentially giving your brain better oxygen delivery for improved performance. They also contain folate, vitamins B, C, and E, plus potassium, which may help reduce blood pressure.

Smashed avocado on toast is a classic, but try adding a quarter of an avocado to smoothies (you won't even taste it), or enjoy some guacamole with wholegrain chips for a more indulgent treat.

Dark chocolate: The sweet brain booster

Here's one you'll definitely enjoy implementing. [Moderate amounts of dark chocolate](#) (which contains flavanols, magnesium, and zinc) can boost blood flow to your brain and help combat stress. The key word here is "moderate" – think a few squares, not an entire block.

Choose dark chocolate with at least 70% cocoa content for maximum benefits. It's the perfect afternoon pick-me-up when you need both a mental boost and a mood lift.

Tomatoes: Antioxidant-rich brain support

Tomatoes contain [lycopene](#), a powerful antioxidant that may enhance brain function. Cherry tomatoes make excellent on-the-go snacks, or you could enjoy chips with salsa (cooked tomatoes actually help your body absorb lycopene more effectively).

Bananas: Quick energy and mood regulation

[Bananas](#) are high in potassium and magnesium, which provide your brain with energy and may help increase focus, attention, and learning ability. They can also help regulate your mood, making them perfect for stressful study periods.

They're wonderfully convenient to eat on their own, but you can also add them to smoothies, cereal, toast, yoghurt, or even create a banana split for a rewarding treat after a productive study session.

Start fuelling your brain better

Making the switch to brain-boosting snacks doesn't have to be complicated or expensive. Start by keeping a few of these options handy; maybe some nuts in your bag, berries in the fridge, or wholegrain crackers in your desk drawer. Your brain will thank you with better focus, improved memory, and more sustained energy throughout your day.

Ready to discover more ways to support your wellbeing while studying or working? [Explore our health and wellbeing resources for more practical tips to help you thrive.](#)

Accommodation, University

University accommodation vs private providers: Which type is right for you?

When you start researching student accommodation, you'll quickly discover there are several different types available. University-run accommodation, residential colleges, private student housing providers, and regular rental properties all offer different experiences, costs, and benefits.

Understanding these differences can help you make a more informed choice about where you'll call home during your studies. Here's a breakdown of what each option offers and what to consider when choosing between them.

University on-campus accommodation

This is probably what most people picture when they think about student housing. Universities operate their own accommodation facilities, usually located on or very close to campus.

The biggest advantage is convenience. You're literally living where you study, which means rolling out of bed five minutes before a lecture is entirely possible (though not recommended). You'll have access to campus facilities like libraries, gyms, and dining halls outside of normal hours, and you're right in the heart of campus life.

University accommodation typically includes utilities, internet, and basic furnishing in the rent. Many offer meal plans or have dining halls on-site, which takes the pressure off cooking when you're busy with assignments. There's usually on-campus security, student support services, and organised social events to help you settle in.

For example, the [Abercrombie Student Accommodation at University of Sydney](#) offers studio apartments and shared apartments right on campus, while [Macquarie University's Central Courtyard](#) provides a village-style community with various room types and meal plan options.

Some universities even offer [guaranteed accommodation](#) if you meet certain criteria, which can provide peace of mind during an otherwise stressful planning period.

The downsides? University accommodation can be expensive compared to private rentals, and spaces are often limited. You might have less choice in terms of room types or who you live with. Some students also find the rules more restrictive than private accommodation.

Residential colleges

These are often confused with university accommodation, but residential colleges are usually separate institutions that happen to be located on or near university campuses. They're run independently, not by the university itself.

Residential colleges tend to be smaller and more intimate than large university accommodation complexes. They often have strong traditions, close-knit communities, and extensive alumni networks that can be valuable for networking later in your career.

Many residential colleges offer additional benefits like:

- Academic support and tutoring programs
- Leadership development opportunities
- Cultural and social programs
- Sporting teams and competitions
- Formal dinners and college traditions

Some colleges have religious affiliations, though you typically don't need to share those beliefs to live there. The college community often becomes a major part of your university experience, with friendships and connections lasting well beyond graduation.

Examples include [Janet Clarke Hall at the University of Melbourne](#), which has been providing accommodation and community for women students since 1886, and [Wesley College at the University of Sydney](#), which offers a co-educational environment with strong academic and cultural programs.

The trade-off is often cost – residential colleges can be more expensive than other options. They may also have more formal rules around behaviour, guests, and participation in college life.

Private student accommodation providers

These are companies that offer accommodation specifically for students, but they're not affiliated with any particular university. Companies like [Scape](#), [UniLodge](#), and [Iglu](#) operate student housing in multiple cities across Australia.

Private providers often offer more modern facilities and amenities than older university accommodation. You might find better gyms, study spaces, social areas, and even things like rooftop terraces or cinema rooms. The buildings are purpose-built for student living, so they're designed with study needs in mind.

Because they're not tied to one university, you'll live alongside students from different institutions, which can broaden your social circle. The accommodation is often located in city centers or trendy suburbs rather than just on campus.

Private providers usually offer more flexibility in terms of lease lengths and room types. You might be able to find studio apartments, shared apartments, or rooms with private bathrooms more easily than through university accommodation.

However, this convenience typically comes at a premium price. Private student accommodation is sometimes an expensive option, and you might be further from your actual campus than university-provided options.

Private rental properties

This means renting a regular house, apartment, or room through the standard rental market, just like any other tenant. You'll deal with real estate agents, landlords, and standard tenancy agreements.

The biggest advantage is often cost – share housing in particular can be significantly cheaper than purpose-built student accommodation. You'll have more choice in terms of location, property type, and who you live with. You can live with friends, other students, or even non-students if you prefer a quieter environment.

Private rental gives you the most independence and flexibility. You can choose your own furniture, decorate however you like, and live according to your own rules rather than institutional policies.

The challenges include finding the property yourself, dealing with bonds and utility connections, and potentially being responsible for repairs and maintenance issues. You won't have the built-in support systems that come with student-specific accommodation, and you'll need to be more proactive about meeting other students.

You'll also need to consider additional costs like bond money, utility bills, internet connections, and potentially furnishing the place yourself.

On-campus vs off-campus considerations

Location impacts more than just your commute time. On-campus accommodation puts you in the center of university life – you're more likely to attend events, use facilities, and feel connected to the campus community. This can be particularly valuable in your first year when you're still finding your feet.

Off-campus accommodation might give you a better sense of the broader city or area you're studying in. You'll experience more of "real life" rather than the university bubble, which some students prefer.

Consider transport costs and time [when comparing options](#). Accommodation that seems cheaper might not be such a good deal once you factor in daily transport costs and the time spent commuting.

Making your decision

Start by being honest about your priorities. Looking for the full university experience with lots of social opportunities? University accommodation or residential colleges might be your best bet. Prioritising modern amenities and flexibility? Private providers could be worth the extra cost. Need to keep expenses down? Private share housing might be the way to go.

Consider your personality too. If you're naturally outgoing, you might thrive in any environment. If you're more introverted or anxious about meeting new people, the structured social environment of university accommodation might be helpful.

Think about your course requirements as well. If you'll be spending long hours in labs or have early morning classes, being close to campus might be worth paying extra for. If your course has a lot of online components or flexible scheduling, location might be less critical.

Don't forget to factor in what's included in the price. Accommodation that seems expensive might actually be reasonable value if it includes meals, utilities, gym access, and study support services.

Finally, remember that you can change your mind. Many students move between different types of accommodation during their university years as their needs and preferences evolve. Your first-year choice doesn't have to be your final choice.

The most important thing is finding somewhere that supports your academic success while fitting within your budget. Whether that's a traditional college experience, a modern private apartment, or a shared house with friends, the right choice is the one that works for your individual circumstances.

You can [read more about your future study and accommodation options on our website here](#). Or if you're looking for on-campus accommodation or residential colleges, you can [find a directory of all the Australian ones here](#).

Communication Skills, Skills for Work

Workplace communication and why we need it

Communication is the exchange of information and ideas between staff, managers, suppliers, and clients all working towards shared goals. In most workplaces, you'll spend up to 80% of your day communicating in various forms; from quick conversations with colleagues to writing emails and reading important documents.

Here's why it matters: imagine trying to build a house where the architect never speaks to the builders, the electrician doesn't know where the plumber is working, and no one tells the client when they can move in. That's exactly what happens in organisations without good communication.

When communication works well, it helps avoid confusion, provides clear purpose, builds positive work environments, facilitates teamwork, boosts productivity, and creates accountability. When it doesn't work, projects fail, deadlines are missed, and people become frustrated.

The four main types of workplace communication

Understanding the different ways we communicate at work helps you recognise just how much communication shapes your daily experience.

Verbal communication

This includes every conversation, phone call, meeting, informal chat, and presentation you'll have at work. For example, during your morning team meeting, your supervisor might explain the day's priorities, you might need to call a supplier to check on a delivery, or perhaps you need to discuss a project details with your client. The key is using clear language without overcomplicating things or using jargon that leaves people confused.

Non-verbal communication

You might not always realise you're doing it, but your tone of voice, facial expressions, body language or posture, hand gestures, eye contact, and even appearance all send messages. For instance, rolling your eyes during a meeting or checking your phone whilst someone's speaking can signal disrespect, even if you don't mean it that way.

Written communication

From emails and reports to contracts and website content, written communication makes up a huge portion of workplace information. You might write an email to update your team on a project, create a report summarising your week's work, or read safety procedures for new equipment.

Visual communication

This includes safety signs, equipment labels, charts, infographics, and social media posts. Visual communication helps share important information quickly. For example, a simple warning sign near dangerous machinery can prevent accidents more effectively than a lengthy written policy.

Why effective communication is crucial

When you receive unclear instructions for a task, don't understand what's expected in a meeting, or send an email that gets misinterpreted, communication has failed. These breakdowns create real problems such as missed deadlines, duplicated work, frustrated customers, and stressed colleagues.

For example, if a restaurant server doesn't clearly communicate a customer's dietary requirements to the kitchen, it could result in a serious allergic reaction. Or if a construction team receives unclear safety instructions, someone could get injured. Poor communication can be frustrating for everyone concerned, ineffective communications could even prevent you from doing your job properly. This ultimately costs organisations time, productivity, customers, and profit.

Tips for mastering workplace communication

Whether you're starting an apprenticeship, heading to university, or preparing for your first job, these practical tips could help you communicate effectively:

In conversations and meetings:

- Speak to people face-to-face when possible to read body language and tone
- Work on your active listening skills , really focusing on what others are saying rather than just waiting to speak yourself
- Ask questions to clarify anything you're unsure about
- Time your conversations strategically - don't ambush someone when they're stressed

In your written communications:

- Tailor your language to your specific audience
- Stick to the point and avoid unnecessary jargon
- Always proofread before hitting send
- Take a breath and think before responding to difficult messages

With your non-verbal communication:

- Make sure your body language matches your words
- Maintain appropriate eye contact and posture
- Be mindful of your tone of voice and facial expressions

In all interactions:

- Remain diplomatic and professional, even if you're feeling stressed out or frustrated (people will always respond better to you)
- Be positive and offer constructive feedback
- Build trust through openness and honesty

These skills take practice, but every conversation is an opportunity to improve. The communication abilities you develop now will serve you throughout your entire career, regardless of which path you choose.

Ready to strengthen your communication toolkit?

If you don't think workplace communication is your strong suit yet, that's OK - there's always time to work on your skills and there's plenty of help available to do so.

There are more resources to help you get started on [building strong workplace communication skills](#) on our website, along with lots of [careers inspiration](#) for anyone who shines in [communications fields](#).

Job Spotlights

How to become an Optical Dispenser

Optical dispensers (also known as opticians) interpret optical prescriptions, fit glasses and contact lenses, and help customers select frames that suit both their visual needs and personal style. Working closely with optometrists, they ensure that every pair of eyewear fits comfortably and provides clear vision.

If you have excellent attention to detail, enjoy working with people, and are interested in combining technical knowledge with customer service, a career as an optical dispenser could be perfect for you.

What skills do I need as an optical dispenser?

- Strong attention to detail
- Excellent communication skills
- Patient and adaptable
- Fantastic teamworker
- Good hand-eye coordination
- Great problem-solver
- Customer service-focused
- Organised and efficient

What does the job involve?

- Interpreting optical prescriptions
- Taking measurements to ensure proper fit
- Assisting customers in selecting appropriate frames
- Advising on lens options, coatings and special features
- Adjusting and repairing frames
- Educating customers on eyewear care and maintenance
- Maintaining accurate customer records
- Managing eyewear inventory and displays

What industries do optical dispensers typically work in?

- Health Care and Social Assistance
- Retail Trade

What Career Cluster do optical dispensers belong to?

Because the core of their job involves supporting other people with their health, most optical dispensers belong to the [Guardian Cluster](#). There are also elements of the role that might suit [Coordinators](#) (organising records and managing inventory), [Linkers](#) (selling products and supporting customers), and [Makers](#) (fitting and repairing frames).

What kind of lifestyle can I expect?

Optical dispensers are commonly employed by optometrists, optical retailers, or even specialist optical dispensaries, and work standard business hours. If you work in a retail store, you may need to work some evenings and weekends to accommodate customer schedules. Part-time and casual opportunities are also common for those seeking extra flexibility.

Most optical dispensers earn an average salary throughout their careers. There are opportunities for further training and upskilling that may lead to higher wages.

The role involves being on your feet for extended periods as you move around the store greeting customers and assisting with fittings. The hands-on nature of the job means opportunities to work remotely are extremely limited.

How to become an optical dispenser

To work as an optical dispenser, you usually need to complete a relevant qualification, such as a [Certificate IV in Optical Dispensing](#). This course involves a combination of both theory and practical experience, and can also be done as a traineeship.

In some cases, you may be able to start working as an optical assistant and build some skills and experience before receiving in-house training from your employer or support to study externally to become an optical dispenser.

What can I do right now to work towards this career?

If you're in high school and you'd like to find out if a career as an optical dispenser is right for you, here are a few things you could do right now:

- Look for work experience opportunities at local optometry practices or optical retail stores.
- Develop your customer service skills through part-time retail work or volunteering.

- Work on your fine motor skills through hobbies like model building, origami, or learning a musical instrument.

Where can I find more information?

- [International Opticians' Association](#)
- [Optical Dispensers Australia](#)
- [Association of Dispensing Opticians of New Zealand](#)
- [Association of British Dispensing Opticians](#)
- [Irish Association of Dispensing Opticians](#)
- [American Board of Opticianry](#)
- [Opticians Association of Canada](#)

Similar careers to optical dispenser

- Optometrist
- Optical Designer
- Ophthalmologist
- [Retail Assistant](#)
- Pharmacy Technician
- [Pathology Collector](#)
- [Lab Technician](#)
- Dental Technician

Find out more about alternative careers on [our Job Spotlights page](#).

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