

SENIOR PROJECT HANDBOOK

The Learning Center

INTRODUCTION TO SENIOR PROJECT

What is Senior Project?

Senior Project is designed to provide you with the opportunity to apply all that you have learned in twelve years of school to a project which will challenge you, stretch your limitations, and reward you. It is your chance to learn about and participate in an area that you feel passionate about. **If you could do anything, what would it be? Take this opportunity to help define your future goals and actually get started!**

Senior Project consists of four major components: the project, the paper, the portfolio and the presentation. This handbook will guide you through the process. It includes most of the information and forms you will need to complete the project.

The Project

The project is the core of the Senior Project experience. **The goal is to choose a personal interest or career goal, learn as much as you can about it, and take it to a new and challenging level.** You should **create/design/experience something that can actually be used.**

For Example... A possible project for someone who might be interested in a career in advertising would be to learn about and then actually design an effective advertising campaign around a societal problem such as teenage smoking. You will present your project to a senior board and incorporate what you have learned using technology and other appropriate tools.

The Paper

After you've decided upon a project, you will need to know more about how to complete it. That's where the research paper comes in! With the approval of your teacher, you will select a research paper topic which will help you to learn more about whatever it is you've decided to do. The paper will typically be completed during the fall semester.

For Example... If you plan to design that advertising campaign, wouldn't it be helpful to know about the problem and what makes for effective advertising? You might want to write a research paper entitled *The Art of Advertising: What goes into an effective advertising campaign.*

The Portfolio

Since much of the work on your Senior Project will be done outside of class, you will keep accurate records of the time you devoted, where you went, who you talked to, what you learned, and so on. The portfolio is simply a place to keep all of that. Eventually, your portfolio will be examined by your Senior Board judges and graded for completeness and attention to detail.

The Presentation

Finally, using your ipad or a desk top computer, you will present your project at Senior Boards. You will make a formal presentation to a panel of judges that might include parents, teachers, your fellow students, and your mentor. You will share with them all about your project and

paper, the process you followed, what you learned along the way, and your personal growth as a result of your ambitious project. If you chose a project that really excites you and captures your interest, your enthusiasm will shine through to your Board.

The Project Phase

What to do and how to do it...

How do I pick a project?

Because Senior Project is one of the most important assignments of your high school career, not to mention the fact that it will take up much of your time in the coming months, you need to **consider your choice of project very carefully.**

Pre-planning

Think about all of the things you are interested in—things you would like to fix, do, learn, understand, see, improve, create, experience, or own. Brainstorm your ideas as they come to you; don't edit yourself at this point. If you're into sailing and want to sail solo to Hawaii, write it down. You can always eliminate ideas later if they turn out to be impractical or too expensive. Narrow your ideas down to three or four ideas which are "do-able" and prioritize them. In deciding whether or not a particular project idea will work, take into consideration whether or not research information is available and whether the project is one you can afford. Your project should take you *at least* fifteen hours to complete, should maintain your interest for an extended period of time, and meet the approval of your parents. Also, remember that in order to qualify as a Senior Project, your plan needs to be one which will stretch your abilities and challenge your limitations.

Minimum Requirements of the Project

Your project must...

- be a personal stretch and challenge,
- take a minimum of fifteen hours outside of class time to complete
- be approved by your teacher and by your parents
- be individual—no group or collaboration projects

Acceptable Paper Topics and Projects

The following are sample projects. Only finished projects reflecting quality will be accepted:

- Plan an effective advertising campaign
 - Spend time in an advertising firm and design your own advertisement
- Work with the handicapped
 - Coach a Special Olympics participant or participate in other volunteer opportunities
- Design effective strategies for teaching reading
 - Create lesson plans and work as a teacher's aide
- Learn about small business
 - Spend time in a business you are interested in and participate in a project for them
- Learn about acting/directing/costume design
 - Help out at a local theatre and then write your own play, be an actor, or designer
- Study how to become a recording engineer
 - Develop and record your own music in a recording studio

UNACCEPTABLE PROJECTS

These projects will cause problems and are not acceptable for your Senior Project.

- Weather dependent projects: landscaping a garden may be fun and productive, but what will you do when it doesn't rain? Plan accordingly.
- **Group** or collaboration projects: you may be reliable, but your friends and colleagues may let you down. No collaboration or joint projects will be allowed without special permission from the TLC.
- **Unfinished** work: we know you mean well when you say you will write a novel, but turning in three chapters is not quality, finished work and will not be accepted.
- **No stretch or challenge**: Activities such as baby-sitting your nephew, or taking pictures of your friends and family demonstrate no effort. This is your opportunity to take a risk and do something worthwhile for yourself or your community.

MORE IDEAS FOR SENIOR PROJECTS

• CAREER-RELATED

- o Train for fire fighting
- o Become EMT certified
- o Event Planning
- o Explore nursing or medical career
- o Teach a class
- o Design and draft architectural plans
- o Learn cosmetology skills
- o Journalism: write an article for a local paper
- o Law enforcement: participate in ride-alongs
- o Learn graphic art skills
- o Learn how to be a recording engineer
- o Learn broadcasting skills
- o Learn professional culinary skills

• LEARN OR DEVELOP SKILLS OR INTERESTS

- o Become certified and teach a swimming or aerobics class
- o Learn massage or physical therapy skills
- o Sew a quilt or piece of clothing
- o Create a stock portfolio and invest
- o Learn kick-boxing or scuba-diving, etc...
- o Compose and/or perform a piece of music
- o Learn to play an instrument
- o Create art (learn oil painting, create a portfolio, etc...)
- o Coach a sports team
- o Learn photography
- o Build a wood or welding project
- o Learn new computer skills
- o Learn how to make jewelry

- o Learn a new language
- **VOLUNTEER WORK OR COMMUNITY SERVICE**
- o Work with the elderly, young children, or others in need
- o Organize a TLC community service project
- o Tutor a child or adult who needs help
- o Help at the Town Lake Animal Shelter or Austin Pets Alive!
- o Help the homeless through an organization in Austin
- o Volunteer for reading for the blind
- o Participate in Special Olympics
- o Participate in Habitat for Humanity
- o Work for Austin Parks and Recreation

The Senior Project Selection Interview

Once you're convinced you've got some workable possibilities, prepare for your Senior Project Selection Interview. **Before you can begin work on your project, you will need to get approval from your teacher.** Your teacher will ask you to explain what your plans are and how your choice of project will be a stretch and challenge for you.

NOTE: **If your teacher is in any way uncertain about your project, they may ask you to revise and/or elaborate on your project description prior to approving** your project. Once your project is approved, however, feel free to congratulate yourself; you've just taken the first step towards completing your Senior Project requirement.

Do I need my parents' permission?

Yes, regardless of your age, you must have parental permission for your Senior Project.

Parent Permission

It's not only important, but it's required that your parents know about Senior Project, what you're planning to do, and how important it is to your graduation. There should be no surprises when the end of the year rolls around.

Project Advisors

Your **TLC teachers** will serve as your on-campus project advisors. As outlined above, they will **discuss with you the practicality of your project and verify your progress** and your project completion. The TLC teachers will guide you through each step of your Senior Project process—they are your on-campus resource for basic questions, general guidance, and project verification. We will ask to see progress on your project throughout the year.

The Outside Mentor

Your Outside Mentor will be **someone from the community** who will assist you with learning about your topic and completing your project. Your Outside Mentor should be someone you seek out because of his or her expertise in the field of study around your Senior Project. While in some rare circumstances this may be your parent or another relative, you are encouraged to **seek out someone outside of your family** and involve that person in the excitement of your project. An Outside Mentor is someone who can give you advice, answer specific

questions, and verify the hours you commit to working on your project. Think of him/her as a reference, a troubleshooter, a guide. Make sure you pick someone dependable who you can count on to be there when you need help.

How Do I Prove That I Did All the Work?

The Project Log

As you are working on your project, you will be expected to keep a project log and a timeline. You should have a log entry for each time you do any project-related work. The log will help your Senior Board Panel to better evaluate your project. Your log and timeline will ultimately be included in your portfolio.

Ok... NOW you can begin!

Once you've made it this far, your project is approved (HOORAY!), but keep in mind, you're now committed to the project. You will not be allowed to change your project after the approval process is completed, so don't pick something that you have no intention of completing. You've got to make it work—that's part of the learning experience. Remember, you will be required to show progress at various stages throughout your project.

The Research Paper

I don't know what to write about!

Deciding what to write about may not be as easy as it might seem, so you'll be getting some help from your teacher. Your teachers can help you find a suitable topic.

The Paper

Writing a research paper should be nothing new to you. You'll use the MLA format. If you should forget how to use the MLA format, fear not, your teacher will help you with this.

Minimum Requirements of the Paper

Your paper must...

- be at least 4 pages, typed
- use at least 5 resources
- use at least 2 accurate MLA parenthetical references per page
- have a cover page
- have a work cited page
- use charts and graphs when appropriate, but not pictures and drawings merely for the sake of decoration.

The Portfolio

What's this! I have to do a portfolio too?

Your Senior Project Portfolio is simply a collection of all forms, documentation, and evidence you have collected. It documents the entire Senior Project process.

Your portfolio must include...

- * Cover Page, typed, include your name and title of project
- * Table of Contents
- * Letter of Introduction to Judges
- * Senior Project Approval Form
- * Parent Permission Form
- * Outside Mentor Form
- * Letter of Intent
- * Time Line page
- * Project logs (15 hr. minimum)
- * Photographs, charts, graphs, artifacts from beginning, middle and end of project
- * Mentor Thank you letter

The Presentation

Public speaking! I don't think so!

If you have finished your project, prepared your portfolio, and completed the research paper, you shouldn't be nervous about your presentation. You should be proud of the work you have done. Senior Boards is your opportunity to shine—to showcase what you have accomplished.

The Presentation

The culminating activity for your Senior Project will be your Senior Boards. Your Board might consist of parents, teachers, TLC members, and your mentor. Your speech will be eight to ten minutes in length with a five minute question and answer period. You should plan to be rehearsed and professional in your manner, dress, and appearance.

Minimum Requirements of the Presentation

Your presentation must...

- be eight to ten minutes in length, with a five minute question and answer period
- include a multi media display using your ipad or computer through the projector, **including a video of an interview with a mentor.**
- include a report on the challenges the project required of your personal and academic growth.

The following elements should be explained in the presentation:

Goal of the project

- The student should explain the project, prove the thesis, or demonstrate the new skill
- The reason for the selection of the project
- How the project was accomplished, including important resources used
- The problems encountered and how the problems were solved.

Self Reflection

- What did you learn about yourself by doing this project?
- What did you learn about others?
- Would you recommend your project to other students?

Questions

- Student will answer questions from the panel

That's it?

Congratulations! You made it. If all went well, Senior Project should be a memorable experience, partly because you designed the project from start to finish. And don't forget all the many years of hard work you spent honing the skills you put to good use in your senior year.

We are proud to send you off into the world as a High School Senior Project graduate!

The Portfolio

Models, forms and stuff...

OK, so where do I get the samples and forms?

Here's a list of the **forms** you'll need for your portfolio.

You should print out only the individual pages that you need.

- 1) Senior Project Approval Form
- 2) Parent Permission Form
- 3) Time Line
- 4) Outside Mentor Form
- 5) Sample Interview Questions
- 5) Letter of Intent
- 6) Logs
- 7) Letter of Introduction to the Judges
- 8) Thank You Letter Format

Senior Project Approval Form

Student Name (please print) _____ Date _____

Teacher _____

What is your topic and who are you going to ask to be your mentor?

Describe some ideas you have for your project or presentation.

Student Signature _____ Date _____

Teacher Signature _____ Date _____

NOTE: In order for your approval process to be complete, this signed form must be submitted, along with your Parent Permission Form and Outside Mentor Form, for inclusion in your portfolio. You have made a commitment to complete this project, and you will not be permitted to change the topic after the final approval.

Parent Permission Form

As a parent/guardian of _____, a senior at TLC, I am aware that my son/daughter will participate in senior project activities.

For the project, my son/daughter has chosen to:

He/she has my permission to complete this project, and I agree to release TLC/Westlake High School, the Eanes School District, and its employees from all claims arising from financial obligation incurred, or damage, injury, or accident suffered while my son/daughter participates in the project that he/she has chosen.

My son/daughter has chosen _____ to be his/her Outside Mentor for Senior Project.

The above named Mentor has agreed to the responsibilities outlined in the Outside Mentor Agreement form and letter.

I hereby _____ DO _____ DO NOT (check one) authorize my son/daughter to meet his/her Outside Mentor off-campus for the purpose of working on Senior Project.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

TIMELINE

Proposed Timeline: Fill-in the activity number and the date you will complete each task.			
Jan			
Jan			
Feb			
Feb			
March			
March			
Apr			

Actual Timeline: Fill-in the activity number and the date you actually completed the task.			
Jan			
Jan			
Feb			
Feb			
March			
Mar			
Apr			

Activities that need to be completed in certain months													
Jan		Feb		Feb		March		March		April		April	
#1	project chosen	#4	Find a mentor	#8	Paper turned in	#12	logs	#14	logs	#17	logs complete	#20	letter of intent to judges
#2	Approval Form	#5	Outside mentor form	#9	Timeline check with teacher	#13	Begin Project	#15	complete project	#18	timeline Check with teacher	#21	present
#3	Parent Permission	#6	Proposed time line	#10	Begin mentorship			#16	Timeline Check with teacher	#19	portfolio complete		
		#7	research complete	#11	1 st semester portfolio complete								
Notes							Notes						

Outside Mentor Letter

Dear Senior Project Mentor:

Seniors at TLC are required to complete a Senior Project prior to graduating. Senior Project is comprised of four components: a project, a paper, a portfolio, and a presentation. The purpose of Senior Project is to challenge students to expand their horizons, stretch and challenge their abilities, and showcase their achievements.

This year, they began this process by selecting a project and having it approved. Because they have chosen a project which will require them to take a topic further than they have ever done before, an essential component in their success is an Outside Mentor – an adult who has experience or knowledge in the student’s chosen field of study. Mentors may be teachers, community members, or business professionals who are willing to guide students through each phase of project completion. In this role, mentors are asked to assist, encourage, and support the student in completing the project, gaining information for the paper, and planning the oral presentation. Mentors serve in an advisory capacity only. It is the student who is responsible for completing required work. Additionally, mentors assist in verifying the progress of a project at various checkpoints during the year. A Senior Project Mentor’s commitment of time will vary depending upon the complexity of the student’s project. Since there is no specific amount of time that a student will be required to spend with his/her mentor, the mentor and student will establish a meeting schedule. Meetings between the mentor and the student must occur on the school campus or by phone, unless written permission is given by the student’s parents to allow meetings off campus.

Thank you for taking the time to share your experience and expertise with our students. Senior Project depends upon the generosity of people like you.

Sincerely,
The Learning Center
Senior Project Committee

Outside Mentor Agreement Form

Student's Name _____

Mentor's Name _____

Mentor's Phone: _____

I, the undersigned, have met with the above named student and have discussed his/her plans for the Senior Project at TLC. I acknowledge that the student will work on his/her project over the course of the school year and that I will offer assistance in completing the project phase of TLC's Senior Project during that time.

I understand that I will be a resource and consultant for the student and will be asked to verify the student's progress and hours spent. I also understand that Senior Project is the sole responsibility of the student and that I am not to complete the project for the student.

Signature _____ Date _____

Thank you for your support of The Learning Center at Westlake High School.

Project Log Form

Name _____

Date _____

Activity _____

Time _____

Directions: Your log should include what you have accomplished and the time you spent each day completing it (i.e. writing, designing, constructing, planning, taking classes or lessons, contacting sources, volunteering, etc...). You should also reflect on what you did and what you learned. Your commentary will help you remember what you did and what you thought when you begin to prepare for your presentation. This is the place to show all your effort, hard work, and progress on your project.

If you are documenting time spent with a mentor, please ask for your mentor's signature on this form.

Mentor's Signature _____

Letter of Intent

This is a document you write after your ideas have been approved, but before you do any “hands-on” work on your project.

This is in letter form and should be addressed to the TLC teachers. It will explain what your final plans are for your project, how you plan to go about finishing it, and what the finished product will be like.

Your LETTER OF INTENT must be typed and provide all of the information requested; it should reflect your best writing/spelling/grammar; and it must be signed by you.

Your LETTER OF INTENT must be approved BEFORE you begin your project.

[Current Date]

[Your Name]

The Learning Center

Dear TLC Teachers:

[Paragraph 1] Describe the general area of interest (such as art, communications, social problems, physical fitness, automotive). Explain why you chose this area. Explain in detail what you already know or have done in this area (your experience/knowledge). Identify what you hope to learn or accomplish by doing this project.

[Paragraph 2] What specifically will you need to research (find out) and learn in order to be able to do your project? Who and what do you plan to use for resources? Include names of two people/authorities you plan to interview for information and identify their expertise/background.

[Paragraph 3] Describe your project, giving very specific details – what your project will be, what you will actually do, who and/or what will be involved, possible mentor to help you, estimated cost of project, estimated time required to complete project, and what will you consider to be a completed project. Explain clearly how this project will stretch you beyond current knowledge and/or current skills. [Remember that the Senior Project is designed to stretch your limits and skills by exploring a new area or skill or by developing and extending a skill beyond your current skill level; it is **not** an opportunity to do again something which you already know or have done.

Sincerely,

[Your Signature]

Letter of Introduction

One of the first impressions the judges will have of you will come from this letter. The purpose of this writing is to give the judges an introduction to you as a whole person beyond the work you have done on the Senior Project. They will be able to see you as a young adult with goals, interests, and opinions. This letter, therefore, must be in your best writing and must be a sincere expression of how you perceive certain aspects of yourself. This letter may include any of the following topics:

Describe yourself

- your school life
- Hobbies
- Goals
- Driving principles or passions
- Individual talents
 - hopes for the future

Describe your project

- Challenges, obstacles or any unusual circumstances
- interesting facts about your topic
- describe your mentor and what you did with them
- describe your project in detail
- sum up your thoughts and thank the reviewers.

The preceding list is only intended to give you some suggestions. You can write on other topics or choose one or two from the list above to develop in detail. Type this letter using a formal business letter format. Use the “Sample Letter” on the following page as a model.

Sample Letter of Introduction to Judges

April 1, 2015
Judges, Senior Project Board
The Learning Center

Dear Judges:

As a soon-to-be graduate of TLC, I want to take this opportunity to tell you about myself and some of the things I learned this year. I learned the following: procrastination did not help me write a better paper, graduation is earned (not just given as an automatic ticket at the end of the senior year), and an accomplishment means much more when you work hard and stay with it. These lessons will be very useful to me when I leave here and go on to further training and into the workforce. I wasn't sure if I could make it through four years of high school and graduate. My family has moved around a lot because of my dad's job, and I never could seem to achieve what I wanted to in school. Whenever we moved into a new area, I was very frustrated. Often I had to repeat something I had already learned or be confused because I came in during the middle of a unit. But it has always been important to me to complete my education because I want my family to be proud of me, and I want to go on to college. My parents have always had a lot of faith in me and my abilities, and I want to prove to myself that I can achieve something important. The choice of my Senior Project on carpentry relates to my career goal. I want to be a master carpenter. I love wood and working with it. I can see myself making beautiful pieces of furniture and cabinets for new homes. Too many people these days don't appreciate the time and skill it takes to make quality furniture. I would like to draw their attention to the art involved in carpentry. My family really appreciates my work in this area. In fact, my parents and grandparents are currently negotiating over who will keep the walnut coffee table I made for my project. I want to leave something with my family when I move on to college, so I decided that they should keep it. Although I had to cut back on my hours of work at Starbucks coffee shop to work on school assignments and Senior Project this year, I am now very happy that I did. I found that I enjoyed researching Victorian styles of furniture, and I gained a lot of satisfaction from making my walnut coffee table. Thank you for listening to my presentation.

Sincerely,
Joe Student

Thank You Letter Format

Your community mentor is an important part of your success in the Senior Project. It is important that you formally thank them even if you have verbally done so. Also, remember that writing a thank you letter to your community mentor is very important to the success of our Senior Project program.

- Write your letter and prepare an envelope before the conclusion of your Culminating Activity.
- Give the envelope with your thank you letter to your mentor on your last day.
- If you have already completed your internship, mail the letter to your mentor.
- You must include a copy of the letter in your portfolio.
- Be sure to include the following in your letter.

January 1, 2015
Mentor Name
Company Name
4321 Their Avenue
Austin, TX 78746

Dear _____:

(First Paragraph)

Explain the purpose of your letter, i.e. why you are thanking your mentor.

Express your thanks simply and directly.

Include a line or two to say specifically what you appreciated about your mentor; a special quality, feature, example, or action would be appropriate.

(Second Paragraph)

You should end the letter with a general statement about how the internship helped you.

Thank them, again.

Sincerely,

Signature (put 4 spaces between Sincerely and your printed name).

Typed Student Name