LEVEL UP

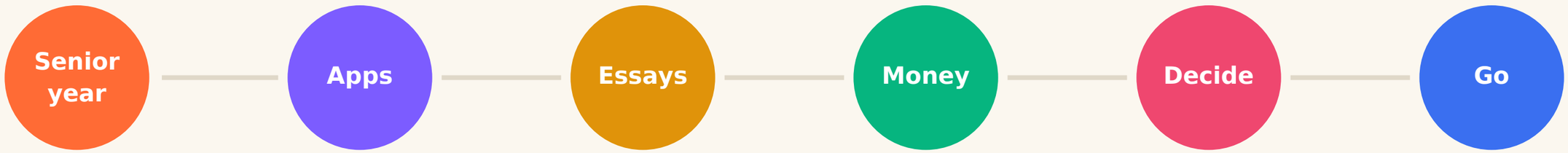
YOUR NEXT MOVE

College Apps • Resume • First Job • Essays • Money

By: KJ Digitalworld

Name: _____ Grad year: _____

Undated • Hyperlinked • GoodNotes & Notability ready



Home Base

Tap a tile to jump there

- How to Use
- Grade Timeline
- Senior Year Months
- Application Checklist
- College List
- Compare Schools
- Visit / Research
- Activities List
- Resume Brainstorm
- Bullet Formula + Verbs
- Resume Template
- Resume Example
- Email / Cover Note
- Job Tracker
- Interview Prep
- First Paycheck
- Essay Prompts Decoded
- Story Brainstorm
- So What? Ladder
- Essay Structure
- Essay Outline
- Why Us? Essay
- Revision Checklist
- FAFSA Steps
- Scholarship Tracker
- Real Cost / Net Price
- Ask for a Rec Letter
- Decision Day
- Summer Before College
- Confusing Words
- Cornell Notes (2)
- Dot Grid (2)

Tap the tabs on the right edge from any page - they are always there.

By: KJ Digitalworld

How to Use This Kit

Read this once, then ignore it

1. Tap the tabs on the right edge from any page. Tap Home Base tiles to jump anywhere. Duplicate pages you need more of.
2. You do not need all of this. Pick the tab you actually need this week - Plan, Schools, Resume, Job, Essays, Money, After.
3. Deadlines move. Every date here is a rule of thumb. Confirm the real date on the school's own website before you count on it.
4. The resume page is a template, not a form to fill once. Come back to it after every semester and add one new line.
5. Essays: write badly first, on paper, fast. Editing a bad page is easy. Staring at a blank page is not.
6. Money: never pay a company to 'handle your applications' or 'guarantee a scholarship'. That is how students get scammed.
7. If a page feels like too much, do the smallest box on it. One line filled in is a win, and wins stack.
8. Bring an adult you trust to the Money and Decision Day pages. Not to decide for you - to read the fine print with you.

By: KJ Digitalworld

The Whole Road, Grade by Grade

You do not do it all at once

9th GRADE — Try loud and fail cheap

- Join 2-3 clubs, drop the ones that bore you
- Read something you picked yourself
- Keep grades steady - raise your hand early
- Start a 'stuff I did' folder (photos, flyers, receipts)

10th GRADE — Go deeper on one thing

- Pick 1-2 activities and actually stick with them
- Get a first job, babysitting, or volunteer hours
- Take the hardest classes you can handle
- Peek at colleges - just for the vibe, no pressure

11th GRADE — Build the evidence

- Run for something: captain, editor, lead
- Ask 2 teachers now for future recommendation letters
- PSAT in Oct; SAT or ACT in spring
- Summer: a job, a program, or a real project

12th GRADE — Apply, decide, go

- Aug: build your list + Common App account
- Nov-Dec: early + regular applications in
- Oct 1: FAFSA opens - file early
- Mar-May: decisions, compare offers, May 1 reply

By: KJ Digitalworld

Senior Year, Month by Month

The year, in order

AUG

- Make your college list
- Open a Common App account
- Take a practice test

SEP

- Pick your teachers for rec letters
- Start your resume
- Visit a campus if you can

OCT

- FAFSA opens Oct 1 - do it
- Finish the main essay
- Send SAT/ACT scores

NOV

- Early Decision / Early Action in
- Confirm every transcript went
- Keep grades up - midyears

DEC

- Regular Decision essays
- Check the portal for 'missing'
- Rest. Really.

JAN

- RD deadlines (Jan 1-15)
- Private scholarship apps
- Follow up on anything missing

FEB

- Check portals weekly
- Update resume
- Look at more scholarships

MAR

- Decisions start landing
- Read the offer letter closely
- Visit finalists' days

APR

- Compare net price, not sticker
- Ask for more aid if needed
- Say thanks to your teachers

MAY

- Reply YES to one school by May 1
- Pay the enrollment deposit
- Decline the rest politely

JUN

- Graduate
- Send final transcript to your school
- Unmute your summer

By: KJ Digitalworld

Application Checklist

One school at a time

DO THESE

- [ ] Common App account open + password saved
- [ ] Personal info + family info done
- [ ] School + counselor entered correctly
- [ ] Transcript requested through your counselor
- [ ] Counselor recommendation requested
- [ ] 2 teacher recommendations requested
- [ ] Test scores sent (if you're sending them)

DO THESE

- [ ] Activities list: 10 slots filled
- [ ] Main essay: 650 words max, proofread
- [ ] Supplemental 'Why us?' essays done
- [ ] Application fee paid OR fee waiver used
- [ ] FAFSA submitted (Oct 1 or soon after)
- [ ] CSS Profile if the school needs it
- [ ] Portfolio / audition / interview scheduled

Same list, every school. The only thing that changes is the 'Why us?' essay and the deadline.

By: KJ Digitalworld

College List Builder

Aim for 6-9 schools

School	Reach / Target / Safe	Deadline	Cost / year	Still want it?

Reach = you'd be thrilled, not sure. Target = your grades fit the middle 50%. Safe = you'd say yes tomorrow and can afford it.

Rule: at least 2 safes you would actually attend, and at least 1 school whose price you already know.

Compare Schools Without Losing Your Mind

Same rows, same columns

What matters	School A	School B	School C
Major I'd actually study			
Graduation rate			
Real cost after aid			
Scholarships offered			
Distance from home			
Size (students)			
First-gen / support office			
Gut feeling (1-10)			
Money I'd still need			
Can I visit again?			

Fill this in with a parent or counselor. A number you wrote down beats a feeling you half remember.

By: KJ Digitalworld

Campus Visit & Research Notes

What to notice, what to ask

MY NOTES

ASK THESE

- What's the real 4-year cost?
- How many students work while enrolled?
- Who do you talk to when you're stuck?
- How big are intro classes, really?
- What happens if you change majors?
- Where do students actually hang out?
- What's the weekend like on campus?
- How many people finish in 4 years?

Activities List (1 of 2)

Colleges want 10 things you actually did

Activity / job / club	Role	Years	Hrs / week	What it taught you

Include: paid jobs, family responsibilities (babysitting, caring for someone), sports, church, art, gaming guilds, helping at home.

The last column is the one colleges read. 'Learned to show up when I did not feel like it' beats 'team player'.

By: KJ Digitalworld

Activities List (2 of 2)

Colleges want 10 things you actually did

Activity / job / club	Role	Years	Hrs / week	What it taught you

Rank them 1-10 in the order you want colleges to see them. Put the ones you love near the top.

If a box is empty, that's fine. An honest 6 beats a padded 10.

By: KJ Digitalworld

Resume Brainstorm

Dump it all, then sort

PAID WORK

cashier, tutoring, lawn, babysitting, online gigs

VOLUNTEER / FAMILY

church, food bank, caring for siblings

SCHOOL

clubs, student council, honor societies, committees

SPORTS / ARTS

teams, band, theater, dance, art shows

PROJECTS

a channel, a mod, a garden, a business, a robot

SKILLS

software, languages, tools, certifications

How to Write a Bullet That Doesn't Suck

Three pieces, every time

THE FORMULA

Did WHAT + with HOW MUCH / HOW OFTEN + so WHAT HAPPENED

Example: Ran the Friday register (what) for 4 hours a week (how much) and trained 3 new cashiers (so what).

RUNNING THINGS

- led
- ran
- organized
- trained
- coached
- planned
- mentored
- coordinated

MAKING THINGS

- built
- designed
- wrote
- filmed
- coded
- edited
- launched
- repaired

PEOPLE THINGS

- helped
- taught
- greeted
- resolved
- advised
- supported
- translated

NUMBER THINGS

- raised
- cut
- saved
- grew
- sold
- tracked
- doubled
- managed

Never write: 'responsible for' • 'hard worker' • 'team player' • 'duties included'. Those are blanks, not bullets.

If you can't count it, estimate it: 'about 30 customers an hour' is a real number and nobody will check.

By: KJ Digitalworld

Resume Template

One page. Black on white. No photo.

YOUR FULL NAME

city, state • phone • school email • link (portfolio, LinkedIn, or none)

EDUCATION

School name • expected graduation: Month Year

GPA (only if 3.0+) • relevant classes: 2-4 of them

EXPERIENCE

Job / title • employer • Month Year - Month Year (or 'present')

bullet (what + how much + so what)

bullet

bullet

LEADERSHIP & VOLUNTEER

Role • organization • dates

bullet

bullet

SKILLS & AWARDS

software, languages, tools, certifications • honors, lists, contests

Save it as a PDF. Name the file like this: FirstName-LastName-Resume.pdf (a human opens it before a computer does).

By: KJ Digitalworld

Resume Example

What 'done' looks like

JORDAN ELLIS

Maplewood, NJ • (555) 014-2288 • jordan.ellis@school.edu • linkedin.com/in/jordanellis

EDUCATION

- *Maplewood High School • expected graduation June 2027*
- *GPA 3.6 • AP Biology, Statistics, Introduction to Computer Science*

EXPERIENCE

Barista • Corner Cafe • June 2025 - present

- *Ran the morning register for 4 shifts a week, about 30 customers an hour*
- *Trained 3 new cashiers on the register and the opening checklist*
- *Cut the weekend line wait by roughly 4 minutes by restocking the bar before rush*

LEADERSHIP & VOLUNTEER

Captain, Girls Soccer • 2025 - 2026

- *Ran 3 practices a week for 18 players; organized a food drive that collected 420 cans*
- *Peer tutor, Maplewood Library • 60+ hours teaching math to grades 6-8*

SKILLS & AWARDS

- *Google Workspace, Excel (basic), Python (intro), Spanish (conversational), CPR certified*
- *Principal's List 4 semesters • Region 1 All-Tournament team*

Every line has a number in it. That's the whole trick - numbers make a teenager look like a worker.

By: KJ Digitalworld

The Email That Gets a Reply

Six lines, no novel

SUBJECT: Application - Barista, Maplewood - Your Name

Hi Ms. Alvarez,

I'm a junior at Maplewood High and I'd love to apply for the weekend barista job.
I can work Saturday and Sunday mornings, and I can start the first week of next month.
My resume is attached. I've made coffee at home every day for three years, and I ran the concession stand at 12 soccer games last season, so I'm used to a long line.
Thanks for reading - I'm happy to come in and talk anytime.

Your Name • (555) 014-2288

RULES

- Attach the resume as a PDF before you write a word of the email - then you can't forget it.
- Say when you can work and when you can start. That's the first thing they filter for.
- One real detail beats five adjectives. 'Ran the concession stand at 12 games' is a detail.
- Send it, then wait 5 business days. Then one short follow-up. Then move on - never twice more.

By: KJ Digitalworld

Job Search Tracker

Treat it like a pipeline, not a lottery

Job / place	Where you found it	Applied (date)	Follow up (date)	Status	Next move

Status = applied / called / interviewed / offered / no. If it's been 2 weeks with no 'no', that's a 'no' - keep applying.

Aim for 5 new applications a week. The 'no' is not the verdict on you, it's the math.

By: KJ Digitalworld

Interview Prep

STAR: Situation, Task, Action, Result

ANSWER IN 4 BREATHS

- **S** what was going on
- **T** what you had to do
- **A** what YOU did
- **R** what changed

THEY WILL ASK

1. **Tell me about yourself.**
2. **Why do you want to work here?**
3. **What would you do if a customer was angry?**
4. **Tell me about a time you made a mistake.**
5. **Tell me about a time you worked with a difficult person.**
6. **What's your biggest strength? (with proof)**
7. **Why should we pick you over the other applicant?**
8. **Do you have any questions for us? (always: yes)**

Your First Paycheck

The money part nobody explains

YOUR FIRST DAY FORMS

- W-4 - tells them how much tax to hold back
- I-9 - proves you're allowed to work
- Direct deposit form - your bank's routing + account
- Time clock / schedule - ask how overtime is counted
- Keep every pay stub. Screenshot them.

GROSS VS NET

Gross = the hours x rate they promise you

Net = what actually lands in your account

Taxes take about 20-25% of gross. If they say $15/hr, you're really getting about $11.50. Price your time with the real number, not the sticker one.

Pay stub check: hours right? rate right? deductions?

WHERE IT GOES

50% spend it (food, gas, fun - guilt free)

30% save it (a real 'oh no' fund, then bigger goals)

20% give or invest (family, a cause, or a first Roth IRA)

Open a checking account with no monthly fee. If a bank charges you to hold your own money, leave.

Never let a 'payday' loan anywhere near you. That's a fire, not a tool.

By: KJ Digitalworld

The 7 Essay Prompts, Translated

650 words max, 250 min

1 Identity / background

Who are you, and what would a stranger never guess from your grades?

2 Obstacle / failure

Something went wrong. What did you actually do next, and what did it cost you?

3 Challenged a belief

You changed your mind about something. What made you change it?

4 A problem to solve

A real problem you've solved, or one you want to fix - local is fine.

5 Growth moment

The moment you stopped being the person you were last year.

6 Lost track of time

The thing you'd do for 6 hours and not notice. Why that one?

7 Any topic

Free write. Only use this if you already have a story you love.

Pick the prompt that has a real story in it - not the one that sounds smart. Colleges can smell a made-up lesson.

By: KJ Digitalworld

Story Brainstorm

Write 6 ugly sentences. No deleting.

A TIME I FIXED SOMETHING

A TIME I WAS WRONG ABOUT SOMEONE

SOMETHING I DO THAT NOBODY ELSE DOES

A DAY THAT CHANGED HOW I SEE MY FAMILY

SOMETHING I'D DO FOR FREE FOREVER

A RULE I BROKE (AND WHY)

SMALL IS BETTER

- Small beats big: 'I wash dishes at my dad's restaurant every Sunday' is a story. 'I learned the value of hard work' is nothing.
- A list of tiny moments: what do you do every week that takes more than 20 minutes? Write down 8 of them.
- Now circle the one where you feel something when you read it back. That's your essay.

By: KJ Digitalworld

The So What? Ladder

Do this 5 times. It's the whole essay.

WHAT HAPPENED

the plain fact

I got cut from the team.

SO WHAT

why it stung

I'd planned my whole year around it.

SO WHAT

what you did

I came to tryouts again anyway, as a manager.

SO WHAT

what it changed in you

I learned I like the work, not the trophy.

NOW WHAT

who you are because of it

I choose things I'll stick with, not things that look good.

If you can only get to rung 2, you don't have an essay yet - you have a summary. Keep asking 'so what?' until it gets uncomfortable.

By: KJ Digitalworld

Essay Structure

650 words, four blocks

HOOK **90 words**

Drop us into one moment. Not a quote about life - a Tuesday.

THE SCENE **180 words**

What happened, in order, with one specific detail that proves you were there.

THE TURN **200 words**

Where it got hard, or where you were wrong. This is the part they're actually reading.

SO WHAT / NOW **180 words**

What you carry forward - shown by something you do now, not a promise.

Cut every sentence that could also be in anyone else's essay. That's your editing pass, and it's usually 100 words.

By: KJ Digitalworld

Essay Outline Planner

Fill this before you write a paragraph

MY OUTLINE

The one moment I'm writing about:

Why it still bugs me / still matters:

The detail a reader will remember:

What I believed before it:

What I believe now:

What I do differently because of it:

By: KJ Digitalworld

The 'Why Us?' Essay

250 words. Prove you looked.

THE TEMPLATE

1. I came here because of ___ (a class, a professor, a lab, a program - name it exactly).
2. Last year I ___ (a thing you already did that connects to it).
3. At your school I'd ___ (a specific thing only this school has: a club, a center, a partnership).
4. Outside class I'd ___ (how you'd actually live there).
5. I want to leave with ___ (the thing you want to be able to do).

THE TEST

Swap test: if you can paste another school's name in and it still reads fine, delete it and start over.

Find 3 real things: a class number, a professor's actual research, a student-run thing you'd join.

Name the building, the program, the partnership. Specificity is the whole signal.

Never write: 'I love the campus and the friendly community'. Every school says that about itself.

Never write: 'your school has excellent academics'. That is the ad, not the reason.

Write the first draft by hand. It stops you from sounding like a brochure.

Keep it under 250 words. Short and specific beats long and flattering.

By: KJ Digitalworld

Essay Revision Checklist

Do these in this order

CHECK THESE

- [ ] Read it out loud - your mouth finds bad sentences.
- [ ] Cut the first two sentences. Usually the warm-up.
- [ ] Cut 'very', 'really', 'truly', 'in today's society'
- [ ] Swap 'was' verbs: 'was happy' → 'grinned'.
- [ ] Circle every adjective; keep the ones you'd say aloud
- [ ] Check the word count: 650 max, and 250 min.
- [ ] Have a stranger read it: what did they learn?

CHECK THESE

- [ ] No quote or dictionary definition in line 1
- [ ] No thesaurus words you'd never say out loud.
- [ ] The last line is a thing you do, not a promise.
- [ ] Check names, dates, and the other school's name
- [ ] Paste it into the portal and check the formatting.
- [ ] Sleep on it, then read it once before submitting.
- [ ] Then let it go. Done beats perfect.

By: KJ Digitalworld

FAFSA Without the Panic

Free. Always free. October 1.

1. Make an FSA ID at studentaid.gov - you and a parent each need one. Do it the week before, not the night of.

2. Gather: your SSN, your school list (up to 100 schools), and a parent's tax info. If parents are divorced, it's the one who gave more money.

3. File on October 1 (or the day you can). Some aid is first-come - the date you submit genuinely matters.

4. Use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool to pull tax numbers in. Typing them by hand is how people get audited.

5. List every school you're applying to, even the ones you're unsure about. You can delete later; you can't undo a missed deadline.

6. Watch your email for 'verification' - it's normal, not a red flag. Reply with the exact forms asked for.

WATCH OUT

The FAFSA is free. Any site that charges you to file it is a scam - including one that looks like a government page.

Your result is the SAI (Student Aid Index). It is not what you'll pay. It's one number colleges use to build an offer.

Renew it every year, in October, for every year you're in school.

By: KJ Digitalworld

Scholarship Tracker

Local beats fancy

Scholarship	Amount	Deadline	What they want	Done?

Best odds: your town's rotary, your parent's union or employer, your county foundation, your church, a local business, your major's association.

A $500 local award with 12 applicants beats a $20,000 national award with 9,000.

NEVER pay to apply for a scholarship, never give your bank log-in, and never 'buy' a guaranteed list of awards.

By: KJ Digitalworld

What College Actually Costs

Sticker price is a rumor

STICKER - GRANTS & SCHOLARSHIPS = WHAT YOU PAY

Every college is required to have a Net Price Calculator on its own website. Run yours before you fall in love.

School	Sticker / yr	Grants	Net price	Loans offered	4-yr total

Grants and scholarships = free money, it never comes back. Loans = borrowed money, it comes back with interest.

Rule of thumb: don't borrow more each year than you expect to earn in your first job out.

You can ask for more. Email the aid office with a competing offer and one honest sentence about your family's year.

Cost of attendance includes room, board, books, laptop, transport and fun - not just tuition.

By: KJ Digitalworld

Asking for a Recommendation Letter

Ask in person, follow up in writing

WHO TO ASK

- A teacher from junior or senior year who knows your name
- Someone who saw you improve, not just someone who saw you excel
- A coach, boss, or employer counts too
- Ask 3-4 weeks before the deadline, minimum
- Ask 2-3 people so you're not stuck with one

THE EMAIL

Hi Mr. Reyes,

Would you be willing to write me a recommendation for my college applications?

I was in your class in 10th grade and again this year. I'm applying to schools with a marine biology program.

Deadline: Nov 1. I'll send my resume, my activities list, and the exact link.

Thank you - no pressure either way.
Your Name

THE BRAG SHEET - HAND THIS OVER WITH THE ASK

- Classes you took with them + a grade you're proud of (even a hard-earned C+)
- A project or moment from that class you'd want them to mention
- Your 3-5 activities, with hours and years
- One thing about your family or life they might not know (only if you want them to)
- Your deadline, the portal link, and where you'd like the letter sent
- Your resume, even a rough one

By: KJ Digitalworld

Decision Day

You're picking a fit, not a trophy

THE OFFER LETTER, LINE BY LINE

- Grants & scholarships (free money - the number that should make you relax)
- Federal student loans (borrowed, and you'll pay interest)
- Work-study (a job you have to actually work to earn)
- Parent PLUS / private loans (read this one twice, out loud)
- Room and board estimate (the part that surprises people)
- What's NOT in the letter: books, laptop, transport, health fees, spring break

THE CALENDAR

- Most colleges want your answer by May 1. That's the one date everyone honors.
- Say yes to exactly one school and pay that deposit. Then politely decline the others - the spot goes to someone on the waitlist.
- Early Decision is binding: if you're accepted you must go. Read that one twice before you sign anything.
- Waitlisted is not rejected. Send a letter of continued interest - one page, honest, with a new grade or award.

By: KJ Digitalworld

The Summer Before You Go

This is where students quietly disappear

DO THIS FIRST

- [ ] Send the FINAL transcript to the college you chose
- [ ] Finish the housing form + deposit
- [ ] Immunizations and health forms
- [ ] Confirm your orientation date and register
- [ ] Reply to the placement test email (yes, even the math one)
- [ ] Set up your college email and check it weekly

DO THIS FIRST

- [ ] Tell the financial aid office your plan if anything changed at home
- [ ] Find out your advisor's name and email them
- [ ] Buy the laptop you already have - don't wait for a sale
- [ ] Learn to do your own laundry, seriously
- [ ] Save the number for the campus writing center in your phone
- [ ] Keep one adult in the loop about money and mail

This is called 'melt' - you got in, you said yes, and then paperwork ate your summer. Don't let paperwork win.

By: KJ Digitalworld

Confusing Words, Translated

Nobody tells you these

Common App	one application you can send to 100+ schools	**FAFSA**	the free federal aid form, due Oct 1
SAI	Student Aid Index - your need number, not your bill	**EFC**	the old name for SAI; you'll still see it
ED	Early Decision - binding, you must attend if accepted	**EA**	Early Action - early, but not binding
REA / SCEA	early to one school only; check each school's rule	**RD**	Regular Decision - the normal January deadline
Rolling	they read applications as they arrive - apply early	**Net price**	real cost after free money
Cost of attendance	tuition + room + board + books + everything	**Work-study**	a campus job funded by your aid package
PLUS loan	a loan a parent signs for - their name, their debt	**Verification**	the school asking for proof of your FAFSA
Waitlist	you're second in line; a spot opens if someone leaves	**Yield**	the % of accepted students who actually show up
Title IV	federal aid money; the code for 'this school is legit'	**Bursar**	the office that bills you
Registrar	the office that handles schedules and transcripts	**Prerequisite**	the class you need before the next class
Transfer credit	college credit you bring in from AP/other colleges	**Gap year**	a planned year off before you start

If a word shows up in an offer letter you cannot decode, email the aid office and ask. That is literally their job.

By: KJ Digitalworld

Cornell Notes (1 of 2)

Cue column, notes, summary

CUES / QUESTIONS	NOTES

SUMMARY - 2 sentences, in your own words, the same day

By: KJ Digitalworld

Home

Plan

Schools

Resume

Job

Essays

Money

After

Cornell Notes (2 of 2)

Cue column, notes, summary

CUES / QUESTIONS	NOTES

SUMMARY - 2 sentences, in your own words, the same day

By: KJ Digitalworld

Dot Grid (1 of 2)

Maps, diagrams, mindless thinking

By: KJ Digitalworld

Dot Grid (2 of 2)

Maps, diagrams, mindless thinking

By: KJ Digitalworld