



## **Admissions**

The holistic admissions process can be confusing to both college-bound students and their parents, but identifying what college admissions officers are looking for in students' applications can actually be pretty simple.

Colleges and universities are trying to build a class, and outside of grades and test scores, they're looking for students who can positively contribute to the campus community and will graduate in four years. The Admissions Rubric breaks down what college admissions officers are looking for into two categories, the "hard factors" like grades, test scores, and courses, and the "soft factors" like extracurricular activities, essays, demonstrated interest, and more.

Both hard and soft factors have multiple elements that, when examined separately, seem overwhelming. However, there are three main things that admissions officers are looking for examining applications, which can be demonstrated through a combination of hard

and soft factors working together to build a compelling applicant profile.

### **Defined Interests**

A popular myth that many parents and students still believe is that colleges want to admit well-rounded students. The reality is that colleges want to build a well-rounded class made up of specialists. Colleges want to see students pursuing the things they're truly passionate about in their activities, coursework, outside reading, community service, and more.

Students can show defined interests through their activities, course work, competitions, outside reading, essays, and more. For example, a student interested in engineering can take rigorous math and science courses in high school, take and perform well on SAT Subject tests in math and science, participate in local, national, or international science fairs and robotics competitions, and pursue other activities that can merge engineering with another area of interest like music or environmental activism.

A student with a number of different ,unrelated activities that they've only participated in superficially or for just a year or two will not be impressive to

admissions officers and can signal that a student isn't serious about his or her academic path. It can also make it hard for admissions officers to see how a student will fit into the fabric on campus or fill an institutional need – something extremely important to consider when making admissions decisions. Defined interests are key to standing out when applying to college.

### **Academic Achievement**

This may seem like a no-brainer, but it's important for college-bound students to understand that grades are the most important factor that colleges will consider when evaluating applications. Many students will spend a lot of time stressing over the SAT or ACT, hoping that a perfect score will make them a shoo-in at their top-choice schools. Yes, test scores are important, but those alone will not warrant admission.

Students should strive for an [upward grade trend](#) and a rigorous, yet appropriate, course load. Colleges want to see students taking courses with increasing difficulty each year and performing well in them. This shows admissions officers that students are mature and can handle the rigors of a college course load. Like

standardized testing, good grades in rigorous courses are necessary in order to gain admission but not sufficient to warrant admission on their own. This is why it's important to understand the admissions rubric and how admissions officers make decisions.

## **Context Outside of Your Grades, Courses, and Activities**

So a student has defined interests and good grades in rigorous courses – what else could colleges want to see? This is where other soft factors like the essay and demonstrated interest come in. Grades, courses, and activities are important, but they only show one facet of who someone is as a student. Colleges want to see more context about who students are, what their goals are, and what motivates them. Context is key, as it helps applicants become three-dimensional and can help an admission officer advocate for an already qualified applicant when it comes to making final decisions.

Students can provide additional context in their personal statement essays, and through, supplemental essays It's important when students are completing their application essays,

especially the personal statement, to reveal something about themselves that can't be found anywhere else in the application. For example, a student whose top activity is rock climbing shouldn't write his or her essay about rock climbing. Instead, they should reveal something new. Maybe it's about why that student is vegan. Or how their relationship with a family member influenced that student's goals. Students should show a slice of their lives. Admissions officers are people, too, and they want to see multiple sides of who students are as people, not just what they did in the classroom.

Demonstrated interest, through visiting, contact with admissions officers, and supplemental essays, can also provide additional substance to students' applications. Colleges want to admit students who will attend, and demonstrating interest provides another level of context – it signals that they're serious about this school, they've done their homework, and they've spent time thinking about how they'll fit into this campus. This shows that students are thoughtful, prepared, and mature. They're not just applying to apply – they're multi-dimensional and easier for admissions officers to actually picture at the school.

When preparing for the college admissions process it's critical for parents and students to understand that there's no one element that will ensure an offer of admission. Students need to craft comprehensive college prep plan in order to have the best chance of admission at their top-choice schools. By understanding the admissions rubric and what college admissions officers are looking for in applications, students can better prepare by focusing their interests, performing well in school, and staying true to who they are and what they're passionate about. By IvyWise

At LF Educational Consulting, we work with students in every phase of the college admissions process, from 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders just starting to think about their college plans, to juniors and seniors. Contact us today for more information on our college guidance services.

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