

COLLEGE APPLICATION

What Colleges Look For – Admission Criteria

Below, you can see the components in which colleges are interested when deciding whether or not to admit an applicant. Each college has a different way of evaluating this information:

- High School Transcript / Grade Point Average (GPA)
- Class Rank
- Test Scores (SAT, ACT)
- Courses (AP, Pre-AP)
- Personal Essays
- Activity Involvements
- Recommendations
- Interviews

Grade Point Average (GPA): GPA is the average of your grades of the classes that you took in high school. GPA is very important for colleges because it is the best predictor of academic success in college. The higher your GPA is, the greater the college and scholarship opportunities are. However, even if you are a senior student, it is not too late to improve grades and colleges are impressed by an upward trend.

Class Rank: Class rank is the student's place in the class followed by the total number of students in the class. (For example, 8th out of 59). Class rank is mostly important when applying for scholarships.

Test Scores: As a method of comparison, colleges require standardized tests such as SAT and ACT. Besides SAT and ACT, some schools also require SAT Subject Tests in subjects of the student's choice. They indicate advanced college and major planning. Any of these tests can be taken more than once.

Courses: Beyond good grades, colleges seek students who take challenging course work during high school. Taking Pre-AP or AP courses will be the best challenging course indicators to colleges.

Personal Essays: Most colleges require one or more essays on specific topics. More and more universities ask for a “personal statement” where you state your background, interests, and objectives. For applying a selective college, your essay plays a very important role because it demonstrates your individuality and excitement. Therefore, you should use this tool in a way that sets you apart from other applicants.

You can get help from your parents, teachers, and school counselors about some helpful tips and strategies on how to approach different types of essay questions. Books can also be good references in that they offer some examples of successful college essays. Finally, you need to know that good organization, coherent sentence structure, correct spelling and usage, and careful proofreading are necessary in an essay.

Activity Involvements: You are asked to list your community and school activities such as clubs, athletics, school organizations, community work, etc. Colleges mostly look for the contribution to school and community, rather than large numbers of activities.

Recommendations: Some colleges require at least one letter of recommendation from a high school teacher, counselor, or other adult who knows you well. Some schools prefer academic teachers, while other schools accept coaches’ or advisors’ recommendations. Usually the person writing the letter sends it directly to the college, but sometimes school counselor sends them with the transcript.

Interviews: This component is a requirement for some competitive colleges. Even if it is not required, it is a good idea to set up an interview because it gives you a chance to stand out in a large pool of applicants and make a personal connection with someone who will have a voice in deciding whether or not you will be offered admission. Interviewer may be an admissions officer, alumnus or a professional interviewer. Interviews should be scheduled early in your senior year, otherwise you may not make an appointment before application due date.

During the interview, you should be ready to talk about your interests, extracurricular activities, books you’ve read, and meaningful reasons for applying for that college. Similar to essays, you can ask for help from your parents, teachers and school counselors to have an effective interview session.