



What do Colleges Care About?

Grades/G.P.A./Class Ranking

Grades matter! There's no question that your grade point average is a key part of the admissions equation. Admissions committees view your grades as future indicators of how likely you are to succeed in undergraduate or graduate classes.

It's also important to note that grades in traditional "college prep" courses are often weighted more heavily than easier classes; and challenging yourself with advanced courses (such as AP!) are often given the greatest weight.

Standardized Test Scores (SAT/ACT)

You need to perform well on whatever standardized test is required for admission. Most schools -- or ratings of schools -- list score ranges of recently admitted students. Always strive to do your best the first time, but know that you can take these tests repeatedly. Note, that while some schools will use your highest scores, others will take the average of your scores.

Activities/Experience

Undergraduate colleges like to see applicants who have shown leadership in one or more volunteer or extracurricular activities. Remember that quality is favored over quantity, thus do not to join as many clubs as possible, but show a deep and long-term commitment to one or two activities -- and try to take a leadership role in at least one of them.

Application Essay/Personal Statement

If done properly, the application essay (or personal statement) is a chance for you cut through the other applications and make yourself stand apart from the other applicants. Some admissions counselors make initial judgments about an application's strength and standing by grading the personal statement before any other part of the application. Remember that while you can't go back and change your grades, class rank, or standardized test scores, you *can* control the quality of your application essay!

Your application essay should show self-awareness, honesty, and depth. Avoid ego-driven autobiographies, lying or exaggerating about circumstances, or having an essay that is a bit too polished for your writing skills. On the other hand, be extremely certain that your essay is completely void of typos, misspellings, and writing style errors.

Letters of Recommendation

Strong recommendations are a critical part -- perhaps the most critical part -- of the college application. Persuasive letters of recommendation -- ones that gush about the applicant -- can turn the heads of the admissions committee while average letters -- ones that could be written about any good student -- can raise doubts.