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WHAT DO COLLEGES LOOK FOR IN STUDENTS?



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It may seem top secret, but colleges are perfectly willing to reveal their most important admission factors. You just need to know where to look.

Colleges typically consider grades in tough courses most important in admissions. But what else do colleges look for? According to the [National Association for College Admission](#)

Counseling (NACAC), colleges list the following admission factors as the most important.

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS IN COLLEGE ADMISSIONS?

GRADES IN COLLEGE PREP COURSES

Most colleges will consider your grade in college prep courses the strongest sign of your ability to do well in college. If you perform well in your [AP courses](#), it suggests that you have the ability to take on the college workload. Even if you struggled early in your high school career, colleges will look favorably upon strong improvement in subsequent years.

STRENGTH OF CURRICULUM

Colleges look for students who took the most challenging courses available to them who performed well in each class. Some high schools don't offer many college prep classes. If that is the case for your high school, admissions officers will take this into account. They may also look favorably upon students who seek challenge outside of school; for example, by taking community college courses or AP courses online.

ADMISSION TEST SCORES

Your SAT and/or ACT scores might count highly if the college requires or accepts them. Many colleges are now [test optional](#), [test flexible](#), or [test blind](#). Scores from AP tests and the [International Baccalaureate](#) (IB) exams may also be important, especially to more selective colleges. To best prepare for your tests take a college test prep course or buy a prep book. This will help you study and determine the best way for you to conquer your test and receive the best score possible.

GRADES IN ALL COURSES

Your overall [GPA](#) also serves as an indicator of your academic success in high school. Colleges may look at your transcript to get an idea of how you performed in your classes. A transcript is a list of every class taken throughout high school and the grade received in each class. Some colleges will also look at the types of classes you took in high school and note whether you took honors and AP courses if they were available.



HOW TO GET INTO A GOOD COLLEGE: THE NEXT MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS

EXTRACURRICULAR COMMITMENT

Colleges pay attention to your involvement in extracurricular activities. But what counts most to colleges is how long and how deeply you have been committed to one or two of those interests. This could be sports, clubs, music groups, or various other activities. They take into account the leadership roles you have held, what you accomplished, and how much time you committed to the activity.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Many colleges require recommendation letters from your teachers and high school counselor. Other colleges may require additional letters from individuals who know you well and can provide insight into your academic abilities, character, and personality.

ESSAY OR WRITING SAMPLE

Many colleges will ask you to submit an essay or personal statement and some will require you to answer additional questions with shorter essays. Here is your opportunity to put your

personality into your application. [A well-written essay](#) can tip a decision in your favor and a poorly written one can do the opposite.

DEMONSTRATED INTEREST

Going on a [college visit](#), talking with admission officers, or doing an enthusiastic interview can call attention to how much you really want to attend. Applying for an [early decision](#) may also make a good impression.

CLASS RANK

Colleges that use this factor want to see how much competition high school students had to face to achieve rank. Fewer and fewer colleges are giving class rank much importance. According to the NACAC, fewer than half of high schools now track class rank.



PERSONAL QUALITIES

Some colleges look for signs of certain personal traits -- such as curiosity, social consciousness, or persistence -- that they feel help students succeed in college. You might be able to get an idea of which traits your colleges value by reviewing their admissions websites and mission statements, or by asking an admissions counselor or current student what types of students succeed at the school. See [9 Personality and Character Traits Colleges Look for in Applicants](#).

DO ALL COLLEGES USE THE SAME CRITERIA WHEN ADMITTING STUDENTS?

Colleges don't all consider the same factors when deciding whether or not to admit prospective students. Talk to a college counselor to learn about what your school of choice considers before accepting students. This can help you be prepared for college applications and interviews. Listed below are some examples.

- [Liberal arts colleges](#), which encourage students to study broadly, may give factors such as essays and demonstrated interest considerable weight.
- [Highly selective colleges](#) attract thousands of outstanding students. These colleges typically look to the "next-most important" factors to make their decisions.
- At very large universities, some admission decisions may be made solely based on GPA and test scores.

Colleges consider many factors when admitting students. Remember that different colleges take different factors into consideration during the admissions process. After learning more about these college admission secrets, do some research about the schools you are applying to and find new ways to stand out!

See who got in where, and how you compare against other real applicants. View the qualifications and admissions decisions of thousands of real students.



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