

THE CRITERIA COLLEGES USE TO MAKE ADMISSIONS DECISIONS

Most colleges and universities evaluate their applicants academically and non-academically to give applicants an overall rating. The academic evaluation is the most important of the two.

ACADEMIC CRITERIA

1. Demonstrated Academic Achievement

Your high school transcript, especially the grades earned are of utmost importance.

2. Rigor of Coursework

Have you taken honors, advanced, or Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate courses?

3. Standardized Tests

Your SAT I or ACT scores supported by your SAT II scores are a supplemental factor though many schools are moving away from reliance on these. However, they are slightly greater importance for science and engineering majors.

4. Teacher Recommendations (though many schools do not require these)

Carefully choose people who know you well and who can speak to your academic qualities, not just teachers that gave you As.

5. Demonstrated Motivation

Do your records and recommendations show your motivation for a particular course of study? How well did you prepare for your major? Though you should be careful here because not all schools consider your major as a factor in the application. Find out from each school's admissions website whether major is a factor.

6. School Attended

How well have graduates from your high school done as compared to institutions across the country?

NON-ACADEMIC CRITERIA

7. Activities and Interests

What have been your primary extracurricular activities in high school or in your home community? Remember that two or three well-developed interests are preferable to lots of half-hearted involvement in clubs and activities.

8. Evidence of Leadership in Activities

Were you just a member of an organization, or did you contribute as an officer? Were you responsible for creating new programs or projects? What did you accomplish?

9. School Counselor Recommendation (though many schools do not require these)

What does it say about your academic and non-academic interests, ability, and motivation?

10. One Outside Recommendation

THE CRITERIA COLLEGES USE TO MAKE ADMISSIONS DECISIONS

This can be helpful if the writer knows you well and can relate information about you which is not asked for on a form the college/university supplies. Letters from powerful alumni which recommend your family or parents are of little help and tend to bog down, rather than help the admissions process.

11. Personal Part of Application

Can you express yourself well in writing? Those long essays are very important. Do not rush at the last minute to write them. Write your own essay and be honest. For many schools this is the only opportunity for the school to hear your voice. Also be sure to use this as a space to talk about anything that was not already discussed elsewhere in the application.

12. Personal Interview

At the most selective colleges/universities, the interview on campus or with a local alumna/alumnus can be significant.

13. Special Talent

Any Admissions Committee seeks out uniqueness in your admissions credentials, an exciting or different consideration which sets you apart from the other candidates and may produce a favorable decision for you. Good colleges and universities want interesting students: outstanding musicians, artists, actors, athletes, writers, editors, photographers, dancers, orators, etc. They are seeking a well-rounded class more than well-rounded individuals.

14. Children of Alumni

You will receive careful attention at some colleges/universities and can expect to get a "second look."

15. Level of Interest Demonstrated

It is important to visit colleges before you apply and let your admissions counselor know who you are and how interested you are in attending. This is especially important at private colleges/universities.