

How to Make Sure Your Application Is Doing Its Job: The Values Scan

What's the job of your college application? To demonstrate the interests, skills, qualities, and values you'll contribute both on the college campus and beyond.

Here's how to you make sure your application is doing its job:

The Values Scan

This is the process I've used with my one-on-one students for years. It's a *great* way to either build confidence (if the application is revealing a lot¹) or reveal gaps (if it isn't). It's fast too.

Step 1: Create an "Almost Done" document.

Copy and paste the following items onto a single document:

- Personal Statement
- Activities List
- Additional Info Section
- Supplemental Essays

Label the document with your name and the words "Almost Done." You'll see an example of what this looks like below.

Step 2: Read through your application and scan it for values.

This means simply making a note of each value you're communicating right next to where you're communicating it. As you work through each section, ask these three questions:

1. Which of my values are being communicated really clearly in my application?
2. Which of my values could be made clearer?
3. Which values are missing, but could or should show up?

Feel free to make revisions before the next step.

Step 3: Share your "Almost Done" document with someone you trust and who knows you well.

When you do, ask them the same three questions above. See if they agree with your assessments. Take what each person says with a grain of salt; don't feel obligated to revise everything they suggest. While outside opinions are valuable, don't forget this is your application.²

Step 4: See if each item from your "Everything I Want Colleges to Know About Me" exercise (p. XX) is coming through in your application.

If not, could this be something worth including in your Additional Information section?

Once you've done these four things, you should have a pretty clear sense of all the qualities your application is revealing.

¹ This can be especially useful for students who are perfectionistic and just need to be shown all the ways their application is revealing who they are.

² For more on the dangers of getting feedback from too many people, check out the Treasure Trove.

Below is a great example of a completed Values Scan. If you want to remember how this application started, flip back to the pre-work on p. XX.

Adrian's "Almost Done" Document

Main Personal Statement

At six years old, I stood locked away in the restroom. I held tightly to a tube of toothpaste because I'd been sent to brush my teeth to distract me from the commotion. Regardless, I knew what was happening: my dad was being put under arrest for domestic abuse. He'd hurt my mom physically and mentally, and my brother Jose and I had shared the mental strain. It's what had to be done.

Living without a father meant money was tight, mom worked two jobs, and my brother and I took care of each other when she worked. For a brief period of time the quality of our lives slowly started to improve as our soon-to-be step-dad became an integral part of our family. He paid attention to the needs of my mom, my brother, and me. But our prosperity was short-lived as my step dad's chronic alcoholism became more and more recurrent. When I was eight, my younger brother Fernando's birth complicated things even further. As my step-dad slipped away, my mom continued working, and Fernando's care was left to Jose and me. I cooked, Jose cleaned, I dressed Fernando, Jose put him to bed. We did what we had to do.

As undocumented immigrants and with little to no family around us, we had to rely on each other. Fearing that any disclosure of our status would risk deportation, we kept to ourselves when dealing with any financial and medical issues. I avoided going on certain school trips, and at times I was discouraged to even meet new people. I felt isolated and at times disillusioned; my grades started to slip.

Over time, however, I grew determined to improve the quality of life for my family and myself.

Without a father figure to teach me the things a father could, I became my own teacher. I learned how to fix a bike, how to swim, and even how to talk to girls. I became resourceful, fixing shoes with strips of duct tape, and I even found a job to help pay bills. I became as independent as I could to lessen the time and money mom had to spend raising me.

I also worked to apply myself constructively in other ways. I worked hard and took my grades from Bs and Cs to consecutive straight A's. I shattered my school's 100M breaststroke record, and learned how to play the clarinet, saxophone, and the oboe. Plus, I not only became the first student in my school to pass the AP Physics 1 exam, I'm currently pioneering my school's first AP Physics 2 course ever.

These changes inspired me to help others. I became president of the California Scholarship Federation, providing students with information to prepare them for college, while creating opportunities for my peers to play a bigger part in our community. I began tutoring kids, teens, and adults on a variety of subjects ranging from basic English to home improvement and even Calculus. As the captain of the water polo and swim team I've led practices crafted to individually push my comrades to their limits, and I've counseled friends through circumstances similar to mine. I've done tons, and I can finally say I'm proud of that.

But I'm excited to say that there's so much I have yet to do. I haven't danced the tango, solved a Rubix Cube, explored how perpetual motion might fuel space exploration, or seen the World Trade Center. And I have yet to see the person that Fernando will become.

I'll do as much as I can from now on. Not because I have to. Because I choose to.

Activities and Awards List

(1) President, California Scholarship Federation (CSF)

Planned meetings, recruited members, advocated for college readiness, provided information on college applications; part of a statewide honors society.

(2) Captain of the Varsity Swim Team

I lead practice routines to individually match needs of my comrades. Motivate teammates to push themselves to their limits. Rigorous solo training over summer

(3) Social Media Account Manager

Edit documents, run various social media pages, research new methods to promote growth of online traffic and convert traffic into sales or potential customers.

(4) Water Polo Varsity (9,10,12) Captain for 12

Play as goalie, participate in fundraisers, lead practices, lead during games alongside our coach, prepare/cleanup pool on game days.

(5) Chemistry Club (12)

Discuss college-level chemistry on topics that include: stoichiometry, organic chemistry, and quantum mechanics. Ran a community water quality lab.

(6) Providing Academic Support to K-12 Students

Topics have included: simple math, calculus, APUSH, AP Chemistry, English, physics, and computer integrated operations

(7) Advanced Band/Orchestra (10)

First oboe in Advanced Band and Orchestra. Performed at LAUSD Arts Festival, Received superior rating at LAUSD "Let's Celebrate" Festival

(8) Construction and Remodeling

Helped local residents in repairing, renovating, and maintaining apartments. Duties include demolition, painting, landscaping, and installing floors.

(9) Engineering club (11)

Brainstormed and planned out an event to showcase our HS's science department to Local Middle School Students

(10) Wrestling Varsity (11)

Learned to maintain weight, wrestled at 152 LBs. Participated and planned fundraisers. Taught basic wrestling skills to beginners

Additional Info

(11) Could not finish wrestling season.

- Mom and older brother were in a car accident
- Responsibilities at home stacked up and I was also working at the time to pay bills, so I was unable to stay for practice

(11) Water Polo: Could not get a team going

- Returned from summer without coach or lifeguard
- Worked with Swim Coach to find a lifeguard and coach
- By the time we had them in place, we had to forfeit the season

(11-12) Summer Courses

- Tried to take college courses during the summer but I could not afford the classes and there was an issue regarding my residency

(10) Learned oboe to play in Advanced Band and Orchestra during second semester of sophomore year.

- Although I was in the Beginning Instruments (Advanced Band conflicted with Swimming during 6th period) I practiced the advanced music on my own and performed with the advanced section.

AP Physics I

- I was the first student at my school to ever pass the AP Physics I exam.
- There were two issues during the test: 1) the test began late because the previous test (AP Spanish) ran long and 2) during the AP Physics I exam, the fire alarms went off and continued for about an hour (the second half of the test). Unfortunately, this was the only time the test was offered and I was nonetheless proud of my score.

Calculus BC Explanation

After taking Calculus AB in my Junior year I wanted to take Calculus BC in my senior year. Unfortunately, my teacher felt he wouldn't be able to teach the class, and he lacked the knowledge/training to teach it. Instead I took up a second science, AP Physics II, during my senior year. I am one of the first students to take this course at my school.

Swimming

I've swam on a county team. During the summer I would practice at a park about 12 miles away, and travel either the same or farther to compete. Competed at LA84. Most Valuable Swimmer, Scored most points at swim meets, shattered school record in 100M Breaststroke, and qualified for city section on multiple occasions.

Student Athlete of the Year, Varsity Wrestling

Given to the student with the highest GPA on the wrestling team. Course load was also the most rigorous on the team, and I earned straight As.

Highest SAT Score in My Class

Scored a 1910 on old SAT (570 CR, 730 Math, 610 WR), which was the highest overall test score in my grade.

Nominated for the USA All-American Award, Water Polo

Recognizes outstanding athletes that have exemplary performance and sportsmanship. Requires athlete maintain a GPA of 3.5 or more

League Champions Water Polo

Went undefeated in our league for the Fall Water Polo Season of 2013. Played as goalie.

Required excellent team coordination.

Stanford Supplemental Questions³

Briefly elaborate on one of your extracurricular activities or work experiences. (150 word limit)

Our school's CSF chapter, was originally founded as an honor's society designed to help students find scholarship opportunities. But two years ago the club's engagement was at an all-time low. I saw an opportunity to make a difference, so I ran for President of the club, and won.

As President, I ran membership drives, presented the organization in different classrooms, and reached out to students during lunch, growing membership from 15 to almost 70. At the time, members were concerned that our school lacked adequate college preparation, so I turned the club's attention to preparing students for college. We created presentations focusing on requirements for state universities, brought in guest speakers, and created opportunities for students to become more involved in our community through fundraisers like car washes and toy giveaways.

Our aim has become clear: to help students get to the college of their dreams.

Name your favorite books, authors, films, and/or artists. (50 word limit)

Books: A Solitary Blue, House of the Scorpion, Harry Potter Series, Heart of Darkness, This Is for the Mara Salvatrucha: Inside the MS-13

Films: The Butterfly Effect, Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy

Documentaries: The World According to Monsanto

Artists: Avenged Sevenfold, The Strokes, Paul Halley, George Gershwin, Weezer, The Architects

What newspapers, magazines, and/or websites do you enjoy? (50 word limit)

Websites: BBC World News, StoryVault, Crunchyroll

What is the most significant challenge that society faces today? (50 word limit)

³ Note that, while I'm using the Stanford prompts as an example, the values scan will apply for any school.

We're going too fast. Society emphasizes fast cars, fast service, fast food, and of course fast communication. But if we go too fast, we miss out on the opportunity to think through decisions before making them. Particularly at this point in history, it's imperative we think through our decisions meticulously.

How did you spend your last two summers? (50 word limit)

Swimming training at El Cariso, where I ended up competing for my county, working construction.

What were your favorite events (e.g., performances, exhibits, competitions, conferences, etc.) in recent years? (50 word limit)

200 yard individual medley

100 yard backstroke

Chicano Youth Leadership Conference

My little brother's drill team recital

What historical moment or event do you wish you could have witnessed? (50 words)

The Christmas truce of World War 1914 on the Western Front. An act of humanity amidst war and turmoil; just thinking about it leaves me speechless.

What five words best describe you? (10 words max)

Busy, geeky, introspective, assiduous, Fish.

Stanford students possess an intellectual vitality. Reflect on an idea or experience that has been important to your intellectual development. (250)

While most students and even some adults cower in fear at the utterance of the word "calculus," I quake with excitement.

Want to know how fast that falling object is accelerating? You can derive it with calculus. Need to know the rate of decay for an unstable compound? Just take the derivative. Need to find the volume of a peculiar shape? There's a chance a simple integral can help you out. You get the point.

It's simple: One plus one is two, two times two is four, the derivative of x is one, and the integral of one is x plus c . Calculus, like any other form of math, is the language of logic.

I've reached a point where my life has begun to revolve around math. When I can, I drop in on my old math teacher's class to tutor students in precalculus or calculus. I've spent nights discussing weird equations, all sorts of problems, and different applications of mathematical concepts with my older brother.

I've also started to seek ways to apply math to the rest of my life, and it's become a part of my philosophy. Everything scattered in the world and universe is bound together by an underlying force. I believe we can represent this force through math, just as Euler attempted to in his famous equation: $e^{i\pi} + 1 = 0$ by combining 4 fundamental constants into one beautiful identity.

I haven't decided on my major yet, but you can bet it'll be math heavy.

Virtually all of Stanford's undergraduates live on campus. Write a note to your future roommate that reveals something about you or that will help your roommate -- and us -- know you better. (250)

Hi Roommate!

I am extrovertly introverted, but definitely not the other way around. That means I tend to keep to myself while I work, but when I need a break I look for ways to indulge myself in the company of others. In fact, after my morning run a couple days ago at the park near my house, I was delighted to meet an older gentleman who will soon be a father. We had an insightful conversation over the state of the nation.

At home, whether I'm experimenting in the kitchen, organizing my work area, or studying a mind-boggling concept, know that there will be music playing--anything from pop to country, metal to classic, and even K-pop. If you're not a fan, don't worry I have these awesome headphones, that light up by the way.

I should mention that I prefer a neat room (I call it "modernistic decor"), to keep things organized and simple.

Most of all, I have an undeniable passion for deep, pensive, lively conversations on a myriad of topics. It's these conversations that keep my point of view and mind from becoming static. I expect to learn just as much from my classes as I will from the diverse student body at Stanford, especially you.

What matters to you, and why? (250)

Five years ago I took up a demolition job from a couple of neighbors so that I could help my mom pay bills around the house. I did a good enough job the first time that my neighbors told me that, if I wanted, I could continue working with them on other construction projects.

It has been a demanding job and I made numerous mistakes at first, like using the wrong tools for different tasks or the wrong size screw. On occasion, I was scolded for my mistakes and I felt incompetent, as I wasn't able to complete tasks as fast as my co-workers. There were even days that I considered quitting, but I stuck with it.

Since then, I've built, repaired, and remodeled numerous homes for family, friends, neighbors, and even strangers. I've removed and replaced carpets; broken down walls as well as driveways; installed cabinets, lights, both wood and tile flooring; and painted room after room.

Working in construction has made me feel like a bigger part of society, because I'm shaping the buildings and offices my community uses. Although I don't make the choices in design, my workmanship is reflected in every job I've done. Because of this, my most memorable projects are those that I've taken on by myself.

But this is not what I will do the rest of my life.

What matters to me is supporting my family. But there are other ways I can help. Getting a degree is the next step.

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Why do a Values Scan?

1. A Values Scan can build your confidence. If you've followed the advice in these chapters, your application will reveal a wide range of skills, qualities, interests, and--of course--values. You can submit knowing you're showing many parts of yourself.

On the other hand...

2. This exercise can also illuminate where more work needs to be done. Maybe one of your extracurricular essays isn't revealing much about you. Or maybe you find that the same value is coming through repeatedly in every part of your application; you may decide to make a few small changes in order to show a wider range of values. As I suggested at the start of this chapter, consider revising based on these questions:

1. Which of my values could be made clearer?
2. Which values are missing, but could or should show up

Final Check

Before you submit, notice if certain schools are getting parts of you that other schools aren't. Could it be, for example, that School A is getting a much better sense of you than School B because School A has more supplemental essays? If so, you might consider a bullet-point summary of a particular supplemental essay for School A in the Additional Info section for School B. For an example of how to do these summaries, see the "Durham Youth Commission" example on p. XX. But, as I've said before, don't overdo this. Be judicious.

Once you've completed these checks, it may be time to submit.

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In the Treasure Trove, you'll find:

- [A short video on the dangers of getting feedback from too many people](#)