



What Colleges Look For in Students

While generalizations are dangerous on any topic, it is reasonably safe to say there are common criteria which colleges use to judge the acceptability of an applicant. The most selective colleges will review each component of the application more carefully and will be more discriminating than less selective schools. The factors below are important to most colleges:



The Transcript: Academic Foundation

Your high school record is the **first and most important factor** considered for admission. Colleges look at two critical aspects:

- **Program Strength:** They want to see consistent coursework in the five major academic areas: **English, Social Studies, Math, Science, and World Language**. The more selective the college, the more demanding your high school program should be.
- **Grades Received:** Your grades demonstrate your success within that challenging curriculum.
- **Crucial Tip: Take a full, demanding schedule senior year!** Colleges expect you to maintain your academic momentum.



Standardized Test Scores (SAT/ACT)

Test scores are generally considered in **relation to your overall academic record**, serving either to validate your existing performance or to demonstrate greater potential.

- **Role:** Standardized tests **will NOT override** a student's performance throughout their high school career.
- **Test Optional:** Many schools are test optional. If you feel standardized testing does not accurately reflect your potential, your grades will be weighed more heavily if you choose not to submit scores.



Letters of Recommendation

Recommender	Focus of the Letter
Counselor	A comprehensive report on your personal and academic qualities, interests, and activities . This highlights your most positive traits and includes teacher input on classroom performance.
Teacher	Describes your strengths as a student , focusing on projects, written work quality, and class participation. May also focus on your potential for academic growth and personal qualities.

Not all schools require Rec Letters



Extracurricular Activities

Admissions counselors are interested in how you spend your time outside of class. Participation and achievement can significantly enhance your application.

- **Key Rule:** GREATER INVOLVEMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT IN A FEW SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES IS MORE IMPRESSIVE THAN SUPERFICIAL INVOLVEMENT IN MANY. Show depth, leadership, and commitment.



Essays

The essay is where the student "**comes to life**" and is a critical differentiator, especially at highly selective schools where applicants often have similar GPAs and test scores.

- **Purpose:** Allows you to **individualize your application**, demonstrate your unique voice, and showcase your writing skills.
- **Requirements:** Not all schools require an essay; some may require several supplements.



Interview (When Applicable)

An interview is a personal exchange of information between you and the college. Interviews may be **required, recommended, or optional**. Not all schools offer an interview option.