

## What Are Colleges Looking For?

A college admissions office wants to see more than just high test scores and grades. How can you separate yourself from the crowd?

### *On Your Application?*

*Grades and standardized test scores:* It's obvious, but these marks are one of the first things colleges look at.

*Extracurricular activities:* Quantity doesn't mean quality. Have you taken a leadership role in your chosen activities? What have you accomplished?

*Rigorous course schedule:* Schools want to see challenging courses that will help you grow academically. Don't take classes just to pad your GPA.

*Follow the rules:* If an application asks you to choose one essay, don't answer them all. Read the application directions completely before answering any questions.

*Include everything:* Verify all forms have been signed and that you've included all essays and recommendations. Doublecheck that you haven't left out anything important.

*On-time arrival:* Note when the application deadline is and send it in with plenty of time to spare. You may want to send your application via certified mail for added assurance that it arrived on time.

### *On Your Application Essay?*

*Show, don't tell:* Don't just list your attributes; get specific. For example, saying that you're helpful is not as dynamic as relating your experiences with helping younger students learn how to read.

*Creativity counts:* Avoid cliches or standard essay topics. Try to come up with something an admissions office hasn't seen a million times before.

*No spelling errors:* First, spellcheck your essay. Then, read it again for usage mistakes. Have a parent or teacher look it over for spelling and grammar errors.

*Personality:* The application essay is your opportunity to show your prospective college what makes you you. Ask yourself whether what you've written is memorable, engaging and in your own voice.

### *In Your Interview?*

*Arrive early and dress the part:* Know where the interview will be held ahead of time so you won't arrive late. Dress on the conservative and understated side. If you have questions about the dress code, call the college and ask.

*Identity:* Admissions offices want to know you as a person. If you're discussing your accomplishments, highlight why they were meaningful for you, or what you got out of them.

*Spontaneity, positivity, confidence:* Sounding like you're reading off of a cue card won't leave them with a fond memory. It's a good idea to rehearse, but remember that the interview should be a conversation. Be natural, sure of yourself and optimistic about your future college career.

*Interest in the college:* Come prepared with questions or impressions you have about the college to demonstrate your interest level. Place less emphasis on your plans after graduation and more on what you want to learn and accomplish while a college student. Follow up with a thank-you note.

**FastTip:** Remember that college selection is all about matching. Each school has their own idea regarding the students they want. There is no need to pretend to be something you're not.

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600,000 scholarships  
and over  
4,000 colleges  
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