

# You are more than your GPA & SAT

## How to express ALL of who you are on your College Admissions Applications

High school students often feel as if they are nothing more than the sum of their GPA and SAT score. You are judged and ranked according to these numbers. You compare yourselves to your friends and classmates, and that legendary student at some other school who scored a 1600 and has a 4.0 unweighted GPA. You study for countless hours (and maybe even spend thousands of dollars) to improve your SAT score by just a few points (while secretly hoping for a miracle leap of 50-100). You're taking numerous AP and/or IB classes to earn college credit and impress admissions officers with your challenging course-load. The stream of exams, tests, quizzes, and papers seems endless. And it extends beyond the classroom. You participate in a gazillion activities, clubs, and organizations—not to mention doing hundreds of hours of community service, for Bright Futures. You play more than one varsity sport and strive to break records and earn the title of “most valuable player.” You're stressed and exhausted from all of this work, yet anxious and worried that you must keep it up or you won't be accepted. You fear that you won't be good enough for admission into even your “safety school” (maybe UF or SFCC). It almost seems as if the sum of who you are is represented by two mere numbers, your GPA and SAT score. Even if you have high grades, did well on the SAT, and are proud of these numbers, you may feel that it is not fair to reduce all of your unique qualities into two little figures. And, you're right!

Though you may have heard that colleges and universities only care about your GPA & SAT scores, this is not always true. In fact, most colleges judge prospective students holistically, meaning they consider students' academics as well as other factors when evaluating whether or not the student will be sent the “fat envelope” (acceptance), instead of the thin “we regret to inform you...” letter of response from the admissions office. Every college and university utilizes a different formula to evaluate students for admission. Typically this consists of a student's Academic Record (GPA, SAT/ACT scores, rigorous course-load), involvement in sports, activities, clubs, and organizations (with more points for leadership), essays and personal statements, letters of recommendation, interviews, and various other factors – like, whether or not your parents are alumni or if you are a minority or are the first in your family to attend college. The Princeton Review website (<http://www.princetonreview.com/college/>) has a great “Quick Search” tool to help you discover which factors weigh most at the schools to which you're applying. For example, at the University of Virginia, an elite public research university, the most important factor in selecting students for admission is school record, followed by class rank, letters of recommendation, and whether or not your parent(s) are alumni. In comparison, Emory University, considers school record to be most important, followed by recommendations, standardized test scores, essays, and extracurricular activities. Harvard, an ivy league school and the top ranked public university, lists school record as most important, followed by recommendations, character/personal qualities, extracurricular activities, and talent/ability. As you can see, there is much variation among how schools select students for admissions – clearly school record and letters of recommendation are essential. SAT scores are not as emphasized as you might think, instead these schools consider your involvement in activities to be very important. Most colleges would much rather admit interesting, involved, and well-rounded students to enrich their campus life.

### How can you express to the Admissions Committee (who read through thousands of applications, selecting a small percentage) that you're the kind of student that would enhance their student body?

1. **GPA:** Your grades & school records ARE important, so be sure to keep working and don't let senioritis set in until after Spring Break and AP exams as many top schools require mid-year reports.
2. **SCHOOL RECORD:** Take rigorous courses your junior and senior year (hopefully you've already done so in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade too). Colleges look at the types of courses you take, not just your GPA. Admissions officers know that it can be much more work to earn a B in an AP Literature class than an A in regular or honors English. Not only will taking advanced courses benefit your weighted GPA (note that colleges use their own formula for calculating your weighted GPA), colleges especially want to see juniors and seniors take the most challenging courses offered at their schools.
3. **TEST SCORES:** Do what you can to improve your SAT/ACT scores. It is a good idea to take the SAT 2-3 times, but if you've already repeated it more than 3 times and have seriously studied and prepared but have not improved very much, you may want to settle for your score rather than repeat it for a 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> time. Scores can improve with disciplined study, preparation, and practice- whether you choose to use a book, computer program, tutor, or testprep course – what's most important is that you set aside a few hours a day, everyday, for at least 6 weeks prior to the exam, instead of trying to cram it all in one week before the Saturday morning test.
4. **CLASS RANK:** Another part of your academic record is your class rank; some colleges still use class rank as an important indicator for admissions (like UVA, Princeton, and UNC-Chapel Hill). However many colleges place less emphasis on class rank or do not use it at all because of inconsistencies in calculation and reporting by high schools.

*If you are a senior, there is not much you can do to dramatically improve your Academic Record, though you should make an effort to maintain your good standing throughout the year, and pull things up, if possible. There are at least 3 other major factors that colleges focus on when selecting students: Letters of Recommendation, Essays and Personal Statements, and Extracurricular Activities.*

5. **ESSAYS & PERSONAL STATEMENTS** are key to a strong application. They should be well written, thoughtful, and creative. The Essay is the best opportunity to communicate your personality, the essence of who you ARE to the Admissions Committee. Don't try to fit yourself into some perfect mold that you think they're looking for. Instead, honestly express your own values – personally, academically, socially, and politically. What's really important to you? Why? What would you like to change about the world? What are your dreams and goals? Answering these questions can be difficult, especially when the essay topics or prompts are very narrow and specific. The most important tip is to start early, don't procrastinate. Brainstorm, outline, write, edit, and revise; remember that writing is a process (not just a final product). Ask for help. The best essays are those that are rewritten time and time again and polished. Be sure to tell a story in your own voice. Leave the readers with a lasting impression of your unique gifts, talents, and interests-- because you ARE more than your GPA & SAT.

6. **LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION** from teachers, counselors, coaches, supervisors, and other adults are required by many schools and are options (recommended) at others. The admissions committee wants to get a picture of who you are from the perspective of someone else; they care about how well you're regarded as a student and person by those who've taught, counseled, coached, or supervised you. Ask potential letter-writers early and politely. Faculty members are already overworked and underpaid—writing a letter of recommendation is often done on their own time. Be gracious and helpful; provide letter writers with a well organized packet of all of the materials (required forms, preaddressed & stamped envelopes, your resume) and patiently remind them of deadlines. Finally, be sure to let them know of your acceptances and thank them graciously.

7. **EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES:** your involvement in sports, clubs, organizations and other endeavors is your chance to market yourself and convince the Admissions Committee that you belong at their school. The "Common App" (used by most colleges, even many of the top, elite schools) asks you to list each activity in which you're involved, the years in high school which you've participated, and the amount of time you spend on each activity each week, as well as any details like if you've held a leadership position or have been recognized for excellent efforts. Colleges that do not use the Common App like to see this information on a Resume or "Brag Sheet." Everyone should write a Resume/Brag Sheet, as you can paste the information from it into the Common App, and it's helpful to give a copy to the writers of your letters of recommendation. Putting together a strong Resume/Brag Sheet can be one of your strongest assets in the college admissions process. Together with your essay(s)/personal statement and letters of recommendation, the Resume/Brag Sheet gives the Admissions Committee a picture of who you are, emphasizing your unique strengths, talents, gifts, abilities, and interests. ***The Resume/Brag Sheet may be your most effective opportunity to show the admissions committee that you are more than the sum of your GPA & SAT scores.***

**There is not a single correct way to format the Resume/Brag Sheet. How you choose to list the information on your Resume/Brag Sheet will depend on your unique combination of talents and involvement. Most Resume/Brag Sheets include some of the following categories:**

- Extracurricular Activities (school-related and those outside of school), such as clubs, organizations, music, drama, etc.
- Sports (varsity, junior varsity, club or community teams, competitions, tournaments)
- Leadership (student government, elected offices held, supervisory experience, committee chairperson)
- Advanced Study (rigorous courses, dual enrollment, internships, research experience, study abroad)
- Community Service (volunteering and philanthropy)
- Employment (part-time and summer jobs)
- Awards & Honors (both academic and non-academic)
- Interests & Hobbies

In order to write a strong Resume/BragSheet, begin by simply making a list of everything that you've done in highschool. Then, go back through your list thoroughly, checking to be certain you have not accidentally omitted important details. Finally, create a nicely formatted document with the information organized under clear headings (as suggested above). Remember that this is your chance to convey to the Admissions Committee that you are much more than your GPA & SAT score – you are a dynamic, involved, and interesting being. For an example of a correctly formatted Resume/BragSheet, go to [www.windowsofopportunity.org](http://www.windowsofopportunity.org)

**For more information or help with your college applications, please contact:**

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## Resources & Information

### Books

- *Colleges that Change Lives* by Loren Pope. Penguin Books, 2000. ISBN: 0140296166 (also online at [www.ctcl.com](http://www.ctcl.com))
- *Cool Colleges: For the Hyper-Intelligent, Self-Directed, Late Blooming, and Just Plain Different* by Donald Asher, 2000. ISBN: 1580081509
- *How to Write a Winning College Application Essay* by Michael James Mason. Prima Lifestyles, 2000. ISBN: 0761524266
- *Rock Hard Apps: How To Write A Killer College Application* by Katherine Cohen. Hyperion Press, 2003. ISBN: 0786868627
- *The Career Guide for Creative and Unconventional People* by Carol Eikleberry. Ten Speed Press, 1999. ISBN: 1580080758
- *This Book is Not Required* by Inge Bell. Pine Forge Press, 1998. ISBN: 0761985727
- *Where Do I Go from Here? Getting a Life After High School* by Esther Drill. Penguin Press, 2004. ISBN: 0142002143

### Websites

Florida Academic Counseling and Tracking for Students - tons of info about careers & colleges (you can log in and view your highschool & college transcript, see your Bright Futures eligibility, apply for schools in the state of Florida, and take tests to help you figure out what careers interest you most)  
[www.facts.org](http://www.facts.org)

College Board - this is the home of the SAT, AP, and SAT II test. You can register, check your scores, and search schools  
[www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)

National Association for College Admissions Counseling - click on "students" then click on "An Internet Road Map for the College-Bound Student"  
[www.nacac.com](http://www.nacac.com)

The Princeton Review Counselor-o-Matic search tool  
<http://www.princetonreview.com/college/research/advsearch/match.asp>

Fiske Guide to Colleges & Universities  
<http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/college/cofiske.htm> & <http://www.fiskeguide.com/>

US News & World Report Best Colleges 2004  
[http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/college/rankings/rankindex\\_brief.php](http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/college/rankings/rankindex_brief.php)

The Common Application - over 300 schools accept the CommonApp, other schools use the service at Embark.com  
<http://www.commonapp.org/>

### SAT Prep

2 sites for "word of the day"- you can have the word emailed to you by signing up  
<http://www.wordsmith.org/words/today.html>  
<http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/mwwod.pl>  
SAT Question of the Day - <http://www.collegeboard.com/apps/qotd/question>

### Financial Aid & Scholarships

Florida Bright Futures Scholarship: <http://www.firm.edu/doe/brfutures/>  
Student Guide: Financial Aid from the U.S. Department of Education: [www.studentaid.ed.gov/guide](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov/guide)  
Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA): [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)  
FastWeb: [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)  
CollegeNet: [www.collegenet.com](http://www.collegenet.com)  
Smart Money: [www.smartmoney.com/college](http://www.smartmoney.com/college)

### For more information, please contact:

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### ***I am More***

I am more than my SAT score, than my GPA.

I am more than my dress or social status at school, in my community.

I am more than my skills on the soccer field,  
more than any rumor,  
more than a clean room and washed dishes.

I am more than a pretty face,  
more than a tongue piercing.

I am more than a rejection letter to college.

My name is not 3.6, 1050 - my name is not bad student, lazy, worthless.

I am the future.

I am an individual, I am an outcast, I am separate from my classmates. I am lively, I am friendly, funny, intelligent.

I am of worth, I am still nowhere near the pinnacle of my ability, strength, and talents.

I am a student. I am an aunt, a sister, a daughter. I am a servant. I am a teacher.

I am loving, I am an object to be loved.

I am not worthless. I am not worthless.

I am strong enough to push through this - determined enough to make a difference, to show I have meaning.

I am more than they see, more than they can know, more than I am.

(Written by M. Miller, Buchholz c/o 2000)

### **Thoughts:**

What would you attempt to do if you knew you could not fail? ~Unknown

You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face... You must do the things you think you cannot do. ~Eleanor Roosevelt

Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you've imagined. ~Thoreau

It's never too late to be what you might have been. ~T.S. Eliot

Let the world change you... and you can change the world. ~ Che Guevara

To laugh often and much, to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children, to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends, to appreciate beauty, to find the best in others, to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch... to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded! ~Ralph Waldo Emerson

Everything that is done in the world is done by hope. ~Martin Luther

For a long time it seemed to me that life was about to begin – real life. But there was always some obstacle in the way, something to be gotten through first, some unfinished business, time still to be served, a debt to be paid. At last it dawned on me that these obstacles were my life. This perspective has helped me to see there is no way to happiness. Happiness is the way. So treasure every moment you have and remember that time waits for no one. Happiness is a journey, not a destination. ~Souza

Have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language.

Don't search for the answers, which could not be given you now, because you would not be able to live them. and the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without ever noticing it, live your way into the answer... ~Rainer Maria Rilke