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**Freshman & Sophomore Year College Readiness Guidelines**

**School Year 2014-2015**

**For more updated and scholarship information visit**

[**http://ephscollege.weebly.com**](http://ephscollege.weebly.com)

[**http://elpaso.episd.org/welcome/index**](http://elpaso.episd.org/welcome/index)

**https://www.facebook.com/ephscounselingcenter**

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**College Readiness Senior Year Checklist**

**General Information**

* Visit “College For All Texans” website. Lots of really good information!
* Continue to challenge yourself and take solid elective courses (don’t take a blow-off schedule, fight senioritis).
* Attend college fairs in your area.
* Visit college campuses, visit many, and visit often. Attend events at the colleges you are interested in.
* Talk to people whose opinions you respect about the schools you are considering
* Go stay with friends who are in college. Find out what they like and dislike.
* Explore careers and job opportunities in those careers. Talk to your parents and your friends’ parents about what they do.
* Make sure your high school counselor knows what you’re looking for in a college so he/she can help you choose the best one for you.
* Talk to your friends about what they plan to do after high school.

**Early Fall**

* Read the College Answer Guy’s “Making the Most of your Relationship with your High School Counselor”.
* Gather applications to the schools you are considering (note deadlines for admission, scholarships, housing, etc.).
* Sit down with everyone who has a stake in your college decision and solicit their input. Listen to what everyone has to say.
* Line up people to write letters of recommendation (choose people who actually know you, not just those with a cool title). Give them plenty of time to write the letter(s).
* Borrow scholarship information (contact names, addresses, applications, etc.) from someone a year ahead of you who received several scholarships and/or had the same major as you, or someone with comparable involvements and activities.
* Get to know the admission criteria for your top schools. Know where you stand in relation to those requirements and work toward changing what you can (if you fall short). If you do fall short of the requirements, early application could be your ticket “in”.
* Take the ACT/SAT in September/October (repeat as necessary or desired).
* Apply for admission (if seeking early admission).

**Mid-Fall**

* Talk to your high school counselor about local scholarships and get the applications.
* Keep checking back periodically throughout the year for information on the latest scholarships, but don't drive them nuts!
* Apply for admission (unless you already have).
* Apply for scholarships before Christmas break if application deadline isn’t earlier. (verify the arrival of your application, transcripts, etc.).

**Spring**

* Attend a financial aid workshop with your parents.
* Apply for financial aid (as soon after Jan. 1 as possible) )
* Go back for a second or third visit to campuses you really like.
* It’s time to make a decision!

**As Soon as You Choose a School**

* Apply for housing
* Get familiar with your college and what you will need when you get there. Learn about:
* Housing options (on-campus, off-campus, Greek, etc.)
* Course selection/scheduling
* Faculty/Programs in your major
* Do you need a car?
* Where will you park?
* Do you need a bike?
* Should you have your own computer? Desktop or laptop?

**Summer before college**

* Enroll as early as you possibly can.
* Attend a summer orientation program. Also be sure to enroll in a freshman orientation class, even if it isn't required.
* Make a list of what you will need to take to college (coordinate with your roommate so you won't have two of everything). Carpet? Refrigerator? Microwave? Stereo? Computer? Etc.
* Work with your parents on a financial plan or budget. Where will your money come from? Who pays for what? How/When to ask for more? What constitutes an emergency? Consider a credit card - really, just for emergencies.
* Make a list of personal care items you use and go price shopping. You won't believe how much a toothbrush costs!
* Start planning for how you’ll communicate with your parents and friends while you’re at college – e-mail, cell phone, IM, etc. Consider cost, availability and ease of communication. Ensure clear and easy communication with your folks and see if they’ll pay for part or all of that. You should probably pay for the rest.
* Make sure to take a tour of YOUR classes before school starts so you won't get lost or look foolish on the first day of class.

**E-Sources**

[www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov) Free Application for Federal Student Aid

[www.pin.ed.gov](http://www.pin.ed.gov) Log in to apply for password for FAFSA -both student and parent need one in order to apply.

[www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org) ACT registration

[www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) SAT registration

[www.collegeforalltexans.com](http://www.collegeforalltexans.com) Texas Financial Aid Information and Institutions

[www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org) Application used for out of state Universities

[www.applytexas.org](http://www.applytexas.org) Application used for non private Texas Colleges/Univ.

[www.4scholarships.com](http://www.4scholarships.com) Scholarship information

[www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com) College financing information

[www.eguidance.com](http://www.eguidance.com) College selection and admission information

[www.gmsp.org](http://www.gmsp.org) Gates Millennium Scholarships

[www.lulac.org](http://www.lulac.org) Scholarships for minority students

[www.http://bhpr.hrsa.gov](http://www.http://bhpr.hrsa.gov) Health careers Scholarships

[www.elks.org](http://www.elks.org) Elks Club Scholarship

[www.discovernursing.com](http://www.discovernursing.com) Nursing scholarships

[www.jamesbeard.org](http://www.jamesbeard.org) James Beard Culinary scholarships

[www.archfoundation.org](http://www.archfoundation.org) American Architectural Foundation Scholarships

[www.scholarships.com](http://www.scholarships.com) Broad range of Scholarships by major

[www.finaid.txstate.edu](http://www.finaid.txstate.edu) Texas Application for State Financial Aid- foreign or non-citizen students

[www.studentaid.ed.gov](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov) Planning and paying for college

[www.questbridge.org](http://www.questbridge.org) Full College Scholarship Deadline: September 27th

[www.zinch.com](http://www.zinch.com) Admissions and Financial Information

[www.utep.edu/scholarships](http://www.utep.edu/scholarships) Broad range of scholarship information not limited to UTEP.

[www.eligabilitycenter.org](http://www.eligabilitycenter.org) NCAA College-Bound Student-Athletes

[www.berecruited.com](http://www.berecruited.com) Network for College Sports Recruiting

[www.tea.state.tx.us](http://www.tea.state.tx.us) Explanation of Eligibility for Automatic College Admission

**College Readiness Junior Year Checklist**

* This year's academic record will go a long way toward either helping or hurting your chances of gaining admission to your schools of choice. You can make up ground if you've been slacking and you can keep up the hard work you've already exhibited.
* Volunteer to help someone a year older than you locate scholarship information with the understanding that you’ll get all their information when they’re through.
* Take the PSAT in October (this one is to qualify for National Merit Scholarship Competition). It can be very important
* Attend an ACT/SAT preparation workshop (if you can't, you should purchase practice books, software, etc. to help you prepare)
* Take the ACT and/or SAT during the spring semester. That way you'll have at least one score going into your senior year. This also puts you on schools’ mailing lists and gives significant information to the schools you are considering.
* Research possible colleges and request or download information from them
* Visit college campuses (campus tour, visit with advisors/faculty, pick up admission packet)
* Take solid elective courses (extra math, science, foreign language, social sciences, computers, etc.)
* Talk to friends and family to gather ideas on colleges
* Run for leadership positions in the organizations you are involved in
* Ask your high school counselor for suggestions as to colleges you should consider but might not have thought of on your own (based on major, scholarships, location, etc.)
* Get to know the admission criteria for your top schools. Know where you stand in relation to those requirements and work toward changing what you can (if you fall short).
* Get involved in extracurricular activities
* Volunteer in your community
* Explore careers and job opportunities in those careers
* Study hard and do well in school – Remember, your grades will count toward college and will show up on your permanent record
* Start to attend events on college campuses (plays, concerts, sporting events, activities related to your major, etc.)
* Get to know your high school counselor (the College or Senior Counselor) and let them get to know you and your goals, career aspirations, schools you are considering, etc. Your parents may want to go along too.
* Talk to your friends about what they plan to do after college. Talk to your parents and your friends’ parents about what they do.

**TOP TIPS FOR WINNING SCHOLARSHIPS**

* **APPLY ONLY IF YOU ARE ELIGIBLE.** Read all the scholarship requirements and directions carefully and make sure that you are eligible before you send in your application.
* **UNDERSTAND THE SCHOLARSHIP’S MISSION.** Know why they’re giving out the money.
* **REMEMBER WHO YOUR AUDIENCE IS.** Think about who the judges are likely to be.
* SHOW HOW YOU FIT WITH THE SCHOLARSHIP’S MISSION.
* **BE PROUD OF YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS**. Don’t be afraid to brag. Judges want to see how your achievements impact you personally.
* FOCUS ON LEADERSHIP AND CONTRIBUTIONS.
* **MAKE YOUR APPLICATION STAND OUT.** Set yours apart with unique accomplishments.
* **START EARLY.** Take time to read the stories and essays of previous years’ winners.
* **COMPLETE THE APPLICATION IN FULL.** If a question doesn’t apply, note that on the application. Don’t just leave a blank.
* **PAY ATTENTION TO DETAILS.** Get every required signature.
* AVOID USING UNKNOWN ABBREVIATIONS.
* **FOLLOW DIRECTIONS.** Provide everything that is required. But don’t supply things that aren’t requested – you could be disqualified. Be accurate.
* **NEATNESS COUNTS.** Make a couple of photocopies of all the forms you receive. Use working drafts as you develop your application packet. Always type the application.
* **WRITE AN ESSAY THAT MAKES A STRONG IMPRESSION.** A strong essay is personal and specific. Include concrete details to make your experience come alive: the ‘who,’ ‘what,’ ‘where’, and ‘when’ of your topic. The simplest experience can be monumental if you present honestly how you were affected. Keep the essay relevant.
* **WATCH ALL DEADLINES.** Impose your own deadline that is at least two weeks prior to the official deadline. Use a calendar to keep track of all deadlines.
* **TAKE STEPS TO MAKE SURE YOUR APPLICATION GETS WHERE IT NEEDS TO GO.** Make a copy of the entire packet and keep it on file. If your application goes astray, you can always reproduce it quickly. Make sure your name (and social security number, if applicable) appears on all pages of the application. Pieces of your application may get lost unless they are clearly identified.
* **GIVE IT A FINAL ‘ONCE-OVER’.** Proofread the entire application carefully. Be on the lookout for misspelled words or grammatical errors. Ask a friend, teacher, or parent to proofread it as well.
* **ASK FOR HELP IF YOU NEED IT.** If you have problems with the application, do not hesitate to call the funding organization.
* **REMEMBER –** **YOUR SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION REPRESENTS YOU!** Your ability to submit a neat, timely, complete application reflects on you. It’s your face to the sponsor. Play to your strengths. Take pride in yourself by submitting the best application you can.

# TOP TEN ADVICE BY STUDENTS

1. Treat looking for scholarships as if it were your job. Put in the time and you will get paid.
2. Do as many scholarship searches as you can. Finding them is half the battle.
3. Being involved in school, church and community activities are the best ways to make an application stand out.
4. Study hard and get good grades. ACT/SAT scores count. Study at least 80 hours for the test.
5. Treat every scholarship application like a jewel. Make the application perfect.
6. Do some volunteer work.
7. Check all of the local chapters of national organizations. Rotary, Lions, Elks, etc.
8. Pick the right people to write your recommendations.
9. Don’t shy away from scholarships based on difficult essays. If everyone is afraid of them less people apply
10. Above all, BE HONEST. Don’t lie about finances, grades, work experience, or anything!

WHAT SCHOLARSHP PROVIDERS LOOK FOR IN AN APPLICATION

At First Glance

**The judge’s first evaluation of your application is a quick one – usually only 15 to 30 seconds. Most applications don’t get past the first stage. Make certain that your application is:**

* **Complete. Check to see that you’ve included all the requirements.**
* **Neat. An application with stains or messy handwriting won’t make the cut.**
* **Are all of the required documents included? Be sure you’re not leaving out references, transcripts, photographs or anything else the application requires.**
* **Are all of the questions answered? Scan your application to see if you’ve left anything out.**

The Second Cut

**After an application makes it past the first round, the judges separate “OK” from “great.” Thorough and well-thought-out-responses make it through to the next round. Make sure your responses are complete and answer the question. Check and re-check all of your essays for spelling and grammatical errors.**

The Final Decision

**According to Mark Davis, President of the Coca-Cola Scholars Fund, judges pay special attention to:**

* Academics **– It’s important to have a competitive GPA. However, providers also consider how challenging your course load and school are. They also check to see if you’re taking the right courses to reach your goals and how well you did in those courses.**
* Leadership **– If leadership is part of the criteria they’re looking for, judges will examine your activities. They’ll also look for a range of leadership positions.**
* Service **– They’ll want to know if you’ve been continuous in your volunteer efforts. If volunteer work is required by your school, they’ll look for activities that go above and beyond the required service job.**
* Creativity **– You can show your creative side if you play an instrument, write stories, paint pictures or act in plays. Demonstrate your ability by letting the judges know if you’ve won any awards.**
* Special Circumstances **– If you’ve overcome obstacles to achieve your goals, the judges want to know about it. Let them know how you achieved all that you’ve done, in spite of the roadblocks you’ve encountered.**

SCHOLARSHIP MYTHS

***MYTH #1:*** “Only students with high academic achievement win merit scholarships.”

**The Real Story:** Scholarships are awarded to students with all sorts of talents and interests. Many of the best scholarship programs are designed for students in such diverse fields as music and the arts, foreign languages, community service, science, leadership, writing and oratory. Typically, these programs are entirely “grade blind” – meaning that grades are not used as a judging criteria.

***MYTH #2:*** “Scholarship applicants should seek to compile the longest list of extracurricular activities.”

**The Real Story:** Winning scholarships is about quality, not quantity. Most scholarship winners distinguish themselves by the devotion they have demonstrated to a particular activity or activities, rather than by the sheer quantity of their involvement. Communicate who you are and what you care about through the activities you participate in and enjoy.

***MYTH #3:*** “Scholarship contests are conducted on a level playing field.”

**The Real Story:** Each scholarship contest has its own biases. This is not to say that scholarship judging is unfair. Each scholarship program is looking for students with particular qualities. It’s essential to define each scholarship’s ‘”ideal applicant” and to emphasize personal attributes consistent with this definition.

***MYTH #4:*** “Applying for scholarships is just like applying for college.”

**The Real Story:** Scholarship contests are characterized by substantially more head-to-head competition that directly compare students to one another. Students who devise creative techniques to stand out from the crowd have a distinct advantage. In this way, a good scholarship application (which distinguishes you from everyone else) will likely be a good college application – but the reverse is not necessarily true.

***MYTH #5*** “The track record you’ve already accumulated determines whether you’ll win scholarships.”

**The Real Story:** What you do after you decide to apply for scholarships is just as important as the record you have already accumulated.

***MYTH #6:*** “Scholarships are the biggest source of financial aid.”

**The Real Story:** When it comes to the entire financial aid package, private scholarships account for a little more than one percent. Federal loans and grants make up almost 60 percent of all financial aid.

***MYTH #7:*** “There is a special scholarship just for me.

**The Real Story:** There may be a “special scholarship” that matches your distinct qualifications – however, there’s a big difference between being eligible and winning. If the scholarship is just for you, it can also be just right for hundreds of other students.

# *MYTH #8:* ***“Millions of scholarship dollars go unclaimed every year.”***

**The Real Story:** This claim is usually made by computerized scholarship search companies that hope you will send them money to find those millions that are just lying there waiting for you. There might be some scholarships that do go unused every year, but no one seems to have concrete examples of these vast untapped resources. The millions you hear about are unused employee tuition benefits.

**About PSAT/NMSQT**

The Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) is a program cosponsored by the College Board and [National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC)](http://www.nationalmerit.org/). It's a standardized test that provides firsthand practice for the SAT®. It also gives you a chance to enter NMSC scholarship programs and gain access to college and career planning tools.

The PSAT/NMSQT measures:

* Critical reading skills
* Math problem-solving skills
* Writing skills

You have developed these skills over many years, both in and out of school. This test doesn't require you to recall specific facts from your classes.

The most common reasons for taking the PSAT/NMSQT are to:

* Receive feedback on your strengths and weaknesses on skills necessary for college study. You can then focus your preparation on those areas that could most benefit from additional study or practice.
* See how your performance on an admissions test might compare with that of others applying to college.
* Enter the competition for scholarships from NMSC (grade 11).
* Help prepare for the SAT. You can become familiar with the kinds of questions and the exact directions you will see on the SAT.
* Receive information from colleges when you check "yes" to Student Search Service.

**What Is the PSAT Test?**

The PSAT Test is a standardized pencil-and-paper test, just like the fifty you’ve taken throughout your elementary, middle and high school career. It gives students, usually juniors, an idea of how they’ll score on the SAT

**When Do I Take the PSAT Test?**

* Your junior year
* In October (usually toward the middle of the month)
* PSAT Registration Dates

**Why Should I Take It?**

* **National Merit:** The PSAT is also called the NMSQT, or the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test. Scoring well on the PSAT can get you a National Merit Scholarship (a.k.a. – CASH), boost that college application, and impress your mom.
* **Scholarships:** Speaking of cash, you can still get some from other organizations, even if you don’t qualify for the National Merit Scholarship.
* **MyRoad:** This online college and career planning guide, offered for free to students who take the PSAT, gives you all sorts of tools like a personality profiler so you know which career suits you best. Use it in conjunction with My College QuickStart, another planning guide from College Board.
* **STAT Prep** Once you’ve taken the PSAT, you’ll have a better idea of what’s coming on the SAT. Think of it as a movie trailer for the big box office hit.
* **College Info:** If you check yes to the Student Search Service on the PSAT, you’ll receive information from different colleges who are interested in having you apply.

**What’s on the PSAT Test?**

The PSAT has the following three sections:

1. [**Critical Reading:**](http://testprep.about.com/od/psat/a/PSAT_CR.htm)
Tests vocabulary, main idea, fact vs. opinion, and more
Split into two 25-minute sections
Contains 48 questions total
2. [**Mathematics:**](http://testprep.about.com/od/psat/a/PSAT_Math.htm)
Tests basic arithmetic, algebra and geometry
Split into two 25-minute sections
Contains 39 questions total
3. [**Writing:**](http://testprep.about.com/od/psat/a/PSAT_Writing.htm)
Tests grammar, mechanics, and word choice
Has one 30-minute section
Contains 39 questions total

**How is it Different from the SAT?**

* **Structure:** SAT has 10 sections; PSAT has 5 sections
* **Length:** SAT is 3 hrs. 45 mins.; PSAT is 2 hrs. 10 mins.
* **Purpose:** SAT is used for college admissions and scholarships; PSAT is used for National Merit Recognition and scholarships.
* **Scoring:** SAT has a possible score of 2400; PSAT has a possible score of 240. Obviously the scores correlate, so the PSAT helps you figure out what you’ll score on the SAT.

**What Is FAFSA?**

All students are expected to contribute towards the cost of their college education. How much you and your family will be expected to contribute depends on your financial situation—and is what is referred to as your Expected Family Contribution or EFC.

The **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** is the form used by the U.S. Department of Education to determine your Expected Family Contribution (EFC) by conducting a “need analysis” based on financial information, such as income, assets and other household information, which you (and your parents if you are a [*dependent student*](http://www.fafsa.com/understanding-fafsa/fafsa-dependency)) will be asked to provide. The form is submitted to, and processed by, a federal processor contracted by the U.S. Department of Education (ED), and the results are electronically transmitted to the financial aid offices of the schools that you list on your application.

FAFSA is the application used by nearly all colleges and universities to determine eligibility for federal, state, and college-sponsored financial aid, including grants, educational loans, and work-study programs.

**FAFSA Eligibility**

Nearly every student is eligible for some form of financial aid, including low-interest Federal Stafford and/or parent PLUS loans, regardless of income or circumstances, provided that you:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Bullet | are a U.S. citizen, a U.S. national or an eligible non-citizen;  |
| Bullet | have a valid Social Security Number;  |
| Bullet | have a high school diploma or GED;  |
| Bullet | are registered with the U.S. Selective Service (if you are a male aged 18-25);  |
| Bullet | complete a FAFSA promising to use any federal aid for educational purposes;  |
| Bullet | do not owe refunds on any federal student grants;  |
| Bullet | are not in default on any student loans; and  |
| Bullet | have not been found guilty of the sale or possession of illegal drugs during a period in which federal aid was being received.  |

**Applying for Aid...FAFSA is step #1**

To be considered for federal financial aid, you must complete and submit a FAFSA. Additionally, most states, colleges and universities use the FAFSA to award other types of institutional financial aid, including state- and college-sponsored financial aid, such as grants, educational loans, and work-study programs.

*(Note: In addition to the FAFSA, some states/colleges require additional forms or applications for aid. Check with your school’s financial aid office for any state- and/or school-specific requirements.)*

**FAFSA Deadlines**

Many states, colleges and universities have filing deadlines that are much earlier—some occurring as early as the first few weeks in January. Additionally, applicants have to pay particular attention to deadline specifics, as some refer to the date by which individual FAFSAs must be *submitted* (Transaction Receipt Date), while others refer to the date by which individual FAFSAs must be *fully* *processed* (completed by the federal processor and made available to the school financial aid office).

**IMPORTANT: We *strongly* encourage *all* students to check with their school’s financial aid office to determine their exact FAFSA deadline requirements, and to file their FAFSA as soon as possible after January 1st.**

**What are good SAT scores?**

SAT scores are just one of many criteria used by colleges to make admissions decisions. Nevertheless, their importance shouldn’t be underestimated. As much as admissions officers say they take an open-minded and holistic approach to their decisions, SAT scores can make or break an application. And let’s face it -- it’s easier to compare numerical data than it is to decide whether a semester in France should be ranked higher than a state soccer championship.

Also, schools usually make their SAT data public, and they know that their reputations depend upon high numbers. A college won’t be considered “highly selective” or “elite” if its students have an average SAT math score of 470.

So what is a good SAT score? The exam consists of three parts: Critical Reading, Mathematics and Writing. The scores from each section can range from 200 to 800, so the best possible total score is 2400. The average score for each section is roughly 500, so the average total score is about 1500. For the 1.65 million test-takers in the class of 2011, the mean scores were 497 critical reading, 514 math, and 489 reading.

Very few students get a perfect SAT score, even those at the country’s top colleges. The list below shows the middle range of SAT scores for different schools. The middle 50% of admitted students fell within these numbers. Keep in mind that 25% of students who were admitted scored *below* the lower numbers listed here.

Finally, you'll see that some of the school profiles include the critical reading and math scores, but not the writing scores. This is because the writing part of the exam is still new, and many schools do not yet use it in their admissions decisions. We're likely to see that change in the next couple years as colleges figure out the relationship between the writing score and academic success.

[**Auburn (Main Campus)**](http://collegeapps.about.com/od/collegeprofiles/p/Auburn_Profile.htm)

* Critical Reading: 500 - 600
* Mathematics: 520 - 620
* Writing: 490 - 590

[**Duke**](http://collegeapps.about.com/od/collegeprofiles/p/Duke_profile.htm)

* Critical Reading: 660 - 750
* Mathematics: 690 - 780
* Writing: 670 - 770

[**Harvard**](http://collegeapps.about.com/od/collegeprofiles/p/harvard_profile.htm)

* Critical Reading: 690 - 790
* Mathematics: 700 - 800
* Writing: 690 - 790

[**MIT, Massachusetts Institute of Technology**](http://collegeapps.about.com/od/collegeprofiles/p/MIT_Profile.htm)

* Critical Reading: 670 - 770
* Mathematics: 740 - 800
* Writing: 680 - 770

[**Stanford**](http://collegeapps.about.com/od/collegeprofiles/p/Stanford_profil.htm)

* Critical Reading: 670 - 770
* Mathematics: 690 - 780
* Writing: 680 - 780

[**UCLA**](http://collegeapps.about.com/od/collegeprofiles/p/UCLA_Profile.htm)

* Critical Reading: 570 - 680
* Mathematics: 610 - 740
* Writing: 580 - 710

[**UTEP**](http://collegeapps.about.com/od/collegeprofiles/p/university-of-texas-el-paso.htm)

* Critical Reading: 390 / 510
* Math: 420 / 520
* Writing: - / -

[**New Mexico State**](http://collegeapps.about.com/od/collegeprofiles/p/new-mexico-state-university.htm)

* SAT Critical Reading: 410 / 530
* SAT Math: 430 / 540
* Writing: 390 / 520

[**University of Texas at Austin**](http://collegeapps.about.com/od/collegeprofiles/p/UT_Austin.htm)

* Critical Reading: 540 / 670
* Math: 580 / 710
* Writing: 540 / 680

**What are good ACT scores?**

The importance of ACT scores should not be underestimated. Colleges certainly take many factors into consideration when they make an admissions decision, but scores on the ACT or SAT give them the easiest tool with which to compare students. Put yourself in the shoes of an admissions officer for a moment. Which should you value more: Applicant A's semester in France or Applicant B's solo performance in the all-state symphony? It's a hard call. But a 34 on the ACT is undeniably more impressive than a 28.

Also, realize that most schools make their ACT data public, and they know that their reputations depend upon high numbers. A college won’t be considered "highly selective" or "elite" if its students have an average composite ACT score of 19.

So what is a good ACT score? The exam consists of four parts: English Language, Reading, Mathematics and Science. Each category receives a score between 1 (lowest) and 36 (highest). Those four scores are then averaged to generate the composite score used by most colleges. The average composite score is roughly a 21. That is, about 50% of test-takers score below a 21.

For students who took the ACT with writing, the writing section is scored on a 12-point scale. The average score is between 7 and 8.

Very few students get a perfect ACT score, even those who get into the country's top colleges. In fact, anyone scoring a 34, 35 or 36 is among the top 1% of test-takers in the country. The list below shows the middle 50% range of ACT scores for different schools. The middle 50% of admitted students fell within these numbers. Keep in mind that 25% of students who were admitted scored *below* the lower numbers listed here.

To view the complete profile for a college, click on the school's name below.

For ACT score information for hundreds of other colleges, explore the [A to Z list of admission profiles](http://collegeapps.about.com/od/choosingacollege/a/CollegeProfiles.htm).

[**Auburn (Main Campus)**](http://collegeapps.about.com/od/collegeprofiles/p/Auburn_Profile.htm)

* ACT Composite: 24 / 30
* ACT English: 24 / 32
* ACT Math: 23 / 28
* ACT Writing: 7 / 8

[**Duke**](http://collegeapps.about.com/od/collegeprofiles/p/Duke_profile.htm)

* ACT Composite: 30 / 34
* ACT English: 30 / 35
* ACT Math: 29 / 35
* ACT Writing: 8 / 10

[**Harvard**](http://collegeapps.about.com/od/collegeprofiles/p/harvard_profile.htm)

* ACT Composite: 31 / 35
* ACT English: 32 / 35
* ACT Math: 31 / 35
* ACT Writing: 8 / 10

[**Stanford**](http://collegeapps.about.com/od/collegeprofiles/p/Stanford_profil.htm)

* ACT Composite: 30 / 34
* ACT English: 30 / 35
* ACT Math: 30 / 35

[**UCLA**](http://collegeapps.about.com/od/collegeprofiles/p/UCLA_Profile.htm)

* ACT Composite: 25 / 31
* ACT English: 25 / 32
* ACT Math: 26 / 33

[**UTEP**](http://collegeapps.about.com/od/collegeprofiles/p/university-of-texas-el-paso.htm)

* ACT Composite: 16 / 22
* ACT English: 14 / 21
* ACT Math: 16 / 23

[**New Mexico State**](http://collegeapps.about.com/od/collegeprofiles/p/new-mexico-state-university.htm)

* ACT Composite: 18 / 24
* ACT English: 17 / 24
* ACT Math: 17 / 24

[**University of Texas at Austin**](http://collegeapps.about.com/od/collegeprofiles/p/UT_Austin.htm)

* ACT Composite: 25 / 31
* ACT English: 24 / 32
* ACT Math: 26 / 32
* ACT Writing: 7 / 9

Students with Disabilities

If you require test accommodations due to a documented disability, please contact the testing center for information concerning your needs.

**The Letter of Recommendation**

**GPA and test scores are the two most important factors in college admissions, but that doesn't mean you should neglect the other parts of your application.**

Competitive colleges use the letter of recommendation to assess your passions, goals and character. They want more than just a statistic.

Solid recommendations tell a college whether you're the type of candidate they seek. Most schools ask for two recommendations, generally from teachers at your high school. Some allow you to submit additional recommendations from employers, counselors or coaches.

To snag strong recommendations, consider the following advice.

**Build Relationships Early**

Get to know your teachers well before you ask them for recommendations. You don't need to sip tea in the teacher's lounge or invite them to a matinee. Just take advantage of opportunities to speak with them, especially the ones you like (or the ones whose classes you excel in). Seek help or advice when you have a tough paper or a difficult test. When you really get to know a teacher, he or she will be able to speak to your true character and your strengths, not just your score on the last exam. Many colleges also expect a recommendation from your guidance or college counselor, so don't neglect that relationship!

Cultivating relationships like this is often called "networking". Networking isn't sleazy or opportunistic. In fact, personal relationships are the best way to find great opportunities. Networking with professors in college will get you great grad school recommendations. Networking with colleagues post-college will help you score great jobs. Start practicing now!

**Pick Wisely**

Don't feel compelled to get a letter of recommendation from a teacher just because he or she gave you an A+. You're looking for a well-written, compelling letter from a faculty member who knows you well or who teaches a subject you're interested in. Sometimes, you can get a very strong recommendation from a teacher who has seen you struggle or overcome difficulties

Don't be afraid to ask potential recommenders whether they feel comfortable writing for you. Some will say no (they're overworked or don't feel they know you well enough), and that's okay. You want recommenders who are enthusiastic about the task.

**Treat Your Recommenders Well**

Give your recommenders plenty of advance notice that you want them to write for you. Once they agree, make their job as easy as possible. Give them everything they need to complete the task, including a stamped envelope, the recommendation form (with your information already filled out), and a clear list of deadlines and addresses.

We also recommend that you provide a list of your achievements, activities, goals and any other topic you think is important. Keep it brief.

Deliver all this material to your recommender in person and ask if there is anything else they need from you. And don't forget to write a thank-you note. This person is doing you a big favor!