



MatchCollege



Crush the Odds:
Get into Your
Top College Choice

Make no mistake about it – getting into your top choice of college programs may not be easy. Granted, some students have an innate knack for testing but grades alone may not be enough to get you into your first choice of college programs. It will take planning, diligence, and focus to get from where you are at today to where you would like to be in the future. With that, we invite you to join us on this journey to get you on the right track and improve your odds to get into the best college for you.

University and college programs around the country report they are receiving a record number of applications. The bulging number of applications coupled with the increased competition for each seat translates to a suppressed acceptance rate at most schools. In fact, acceptance rates around 7% dominate the media in an aggregate view. It is widely accepted this paradigm shift is a direct result of the use of a Common Application. Right or wrong, there is a system you need to understand to get into your choice of college programs. Read this guide carefully to boost your admissions odds to great college programs.



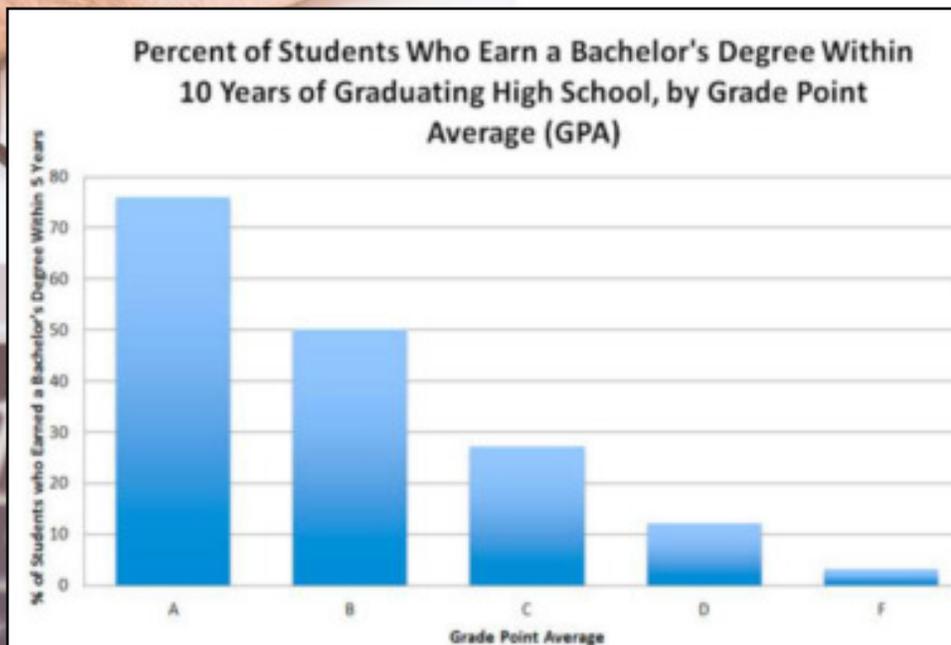
Grades

The importance of grades as a predictor of college success cannot be understated. Grades plus a proper cadence of college-ready courses have been cited as the single biggest driver of college success. Your grades will not only help determine if you go to college, they will strongly correlate to your rate of acceptance to the college of your choosing. For further clarification, let's break this duality down into bite-size pieces.

The Effect of Your Grades on College Success. A recent [study](#) by GradNation paints a compelling story of how your grades shape college success. The graph below depicts the percent of students that earn a bachelor's degree inside ten years of high school by GPA.

Some important pieces of information behind the numbers of this study include:

- Grades transcend ethnic, income, and racial differences
- Students with a GPA of 3.5 or better are 13 times more likely to earn a bachelor's or associate's degree
- There are more than five times as many students that earn a bachelor's degree versus an associate's degree with a GPA between 3.0 and 3.49
- More than 90% of students with an A average and 80% of B average students enrolled in college.



The great news for young students is the fact that grades are controllable. Meaning, the work you put in today are highly correlated with college success later in life. Take school serious, invest quality time to earn good grades, and expect the best for your future.



Test Well

It is true that many colleges utilize a holistic, individual admission process. That being said, standardized test scores are an important decision making factor across the board. Standardized tests like the ACT and SAT are an indicator of a school's level of selectivity and are often published on their website in the admissions section.

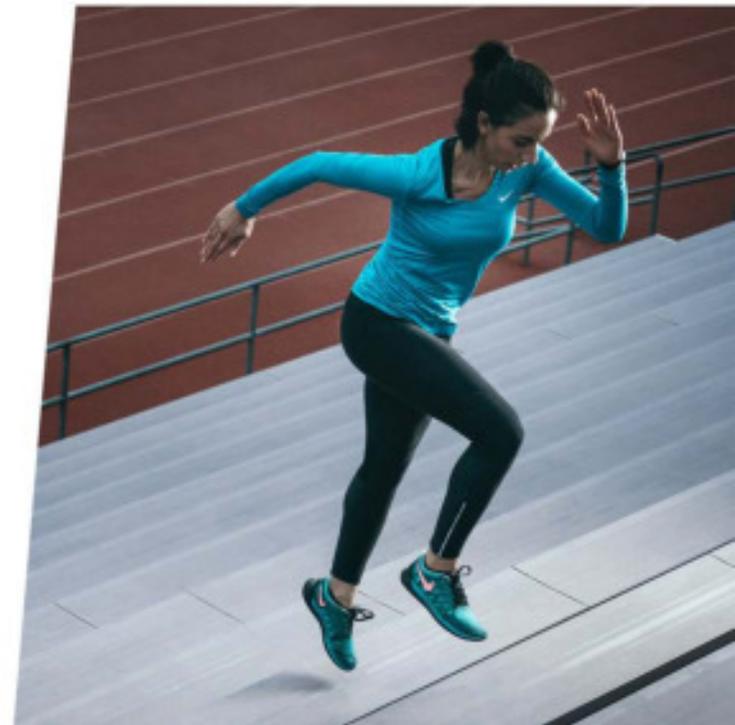
That being said, there is a little-known factor you need to know about to boost your chances of getting into the school of choice. Many students have never heard of a super score but need to be acutely aware of it.

What is a super score? A **super score** is when a college or university utilizes your highest section score from all tests taken for evaluating and reporting purposes. Knowing this little-known fact should motivate you to take and retake standardized tests to maximize section scores within each test. Do not discount the importance for obtaining the best possible scores you can muster on each section of any standardized test. Take the time to research the scoring methodology on the school's website to ascertain if a super score is utilized.

Athletic Talent

There are over 420,000 NCAA student athletes [enrolled](#) in college. With [programs](#) ranging from mainstream (baseball, football, basketball, soccer) to less mainstream (cycling, wrestling, rodeo, badminton) there are myriad options to showcase your athletic skills in college. In addition to the benefit of earning a scholarship to help pay for college, recruited student athletes have a distinct advantage in the college admission process.

A study performed by [Princeton University](#) professors Espenshade, Chung, and Walling illustrate a demonstrable difference in admission rates for athletes. They contend the admission process is not solely based on grades but rather a highly individualized and holistic review of each applicant. The Princeton University team conclude that athletes are twice as likely as nonathletes to gain college acceptance. Additionally, the study concluded that recruited athletes can garner an admission boost of around 300 SAT points using regression coefficients to convert this admission preference.



Early Decision

Are you familiar with the Early Decision process? Most young students have not heard of this process but it can have a marked impact on getting into your top college. If you have definitively elected a single school as your top choice and your credentials are in place, the Early Decision process can significantly boost your odds of acceptance. For colleges and universities that offer Early Decision, it is quite common for acceptance rates to be 2-3 times higher than other applicants in the general pool.

It is important to note that not every college has an Early Decision program so a little extra leg work will be necessary to determine if this can help you. Colleges may post Early Decision statistics on their website or publish articles covering the details of the process.

The admissions officers tend to agree Early Decision applicants are often better qualified and better prepared to succeed in college. Nonetheless, the clear statistical [advantage](#) can be up to 40% better by applying early if you are intent on gaining admission to a specific college or university. Increase your odds by considering Early Decision or at least applying in the beginning of a rolling admission season.



Legacy Status

What is a legacy status for college admissions? An applicant is granted legacy status at a college if an immediate family member is currently attending the school or has attended the school in the past. Presuming you are completing The Common Application for college, the “Family” section will indicate if an immediate family member has attended the college or university and if you qualify for legacy status.

A study performed at Harvard University sheds light on the importance of legacy status. The research concluded that a primary legacies acceptance rate was increased by an astounding 45% compared to other applicants. In real terms, this means a college acceptance rate of 25% can be upwards of 70% accounting for legacy status. Additionally, a Princeton University study lead researchers to the conclusion that legacy status accounted for an equivalent of approximately 240 SAT points to a candidate’s test score.

Why is legacy status important to a college? There are two primary reasons why legacy status is a consideration for a college admission department. The first is rooted in prospective donations to the school. There is a strong correlation between family loyalty to a college and their monetary donations. The more positively alumni perceive their school, the greater propensity for donating. The second reason is based on a term known as “yield”. In the world of college admissions, a college will extend offers to students they want to attend and expect reciprocation. The rate at which college admission offers are accepted is known as yield. A college or university with a high yield translates to the school getting the students they want to enroll. Legacy applicants are familiar with the school and family loyalty improves the school’s yield.

Do not presume a legacy status will offset mediocre grades. In other words, a strong college or university are unlikely to admit a legacy student with a muted opportunity of succeeding in school. A legacy status is most likely to help an admission team when comparing qualified college applicants to one another.



A photograph of a laptop, a smartphone, and a small plant on a wooden surface. The laptop is on the left, showing a webpage. The smartphone is in the center, and the plant is on the right. The background is a wooden table.

Demonstrable Interest

What is demonstrated interest in a college or university? Demonstrated interest is an ambiguous term as it varies by school; whereas grades, extracurricular activities, and standardized test scores are quantifiable.

Based on a college or universities desired yield, a school will back into the relative importance of demonstrated interest. In other words, if a school maintains a very high yield the value placed on demonstrated interest will likely be high as well.

How do you demonstrate interest in a college? You need to be strategic and tactical when it comes to demonstrating a level of interest in a college without going too far. Some suggestions to help kick-start your list may include:

- **Establishing relationships:** meeting or emailing an admissions officer, professor, or coach
- **Attending on-campus events:** attend an information session, college fair, or alumni interview
- **Be attentive:** if a college hosts a high school visit, be personable, genuine, make great eye contact, ask good questions, and follow-up with a personalized hand-written note
- **Join:** sign up for an email newsletter or subscribe to the school's mailing list
- **Essay strength:** crafting a well-researched supplemental essay to illustrate people and programs at the school of interest
- **Be early:** make sure to arrive early for all events & interviews. Have your college application sent in early, as well.
- **Connect:** reach out to the school for additional information not found on their website. The school records contact from applicants and may demonstrate a high level of interest if done properly.

Stand Out

The vast majority of college programs across the country desire a diverse student body. Understand what makes you different and capitalize on those differences. In marketing, this process is known as developing a hook. Something unique, salient, and compelling to help you stand out from the other applicants in the general pool.

Think of the many things that make you unique and accentuate that during interviews, applications, and essays. A primer may include any number of the following factors:

- **Geography**
- **Experiences**
- **Interests**
- **Talents**
- **Background**
- **Extracurricular Activities**
- **Volunteer Experience**
- **Leadership Qualities**
- **Prudently Manage Social Media**
- **Include a Resume of Accomplishments**
- **Master the Interview Process**
- **Receive Great Recommendations**
- **Demonstrate Financial Prowess**
- **Compelling Supplementary Materials**



A young man with a black backpack is sitting on a concrete ledge, looking out over a town and hills. He is wearing a white t-shirt and dark pants. The background shows a town with red-roofed buildings and green hills under a clear sky.

Demand Accuracy

Demand accuracy from yourself. Do not create a college essay expounding on your goals to be a top-tier accountant when they do not offer an accounting degree. Resist the temptation to recycle essays that may be littered with grammatical errors and inaccurate information about you and/or the school. Poor decisions like these are a quick path to a rejection letter from any college or university. Ensure your application is error-free, interesting to read, and representative of you. Provide insight and examples to portray you in a positive light to help shape an admissions decision.

Make sure your college application is carefully reviewed in triplicate. Errors that make it to a college admission officer can quickly translate to sloppy work, carelessness, attentiveness, and lack of interest. After drafting your college application, review it the following day for errors or areas of improvement. Let someone you trust review it the following day to provide feedback one final time before submission. You only get one chance at a first impression so make it count.

Prepare extensively for a prospective college admission interview. Although the interview names vary from school to school (evaluative, on-campus, optional, alumni, informational), take them seriously and be vigilant about preparing for them. Think carefully about questions you may be asked and prepare to answer them accurately and concisely. Ask great questions that cannot be found by reading the school's website and write down the answers on a notepad to demonstrate interest and accountability. Students who are able to interview are accepted at a markedly higher rate than the general pool. Apply for an interview early and do not miss the deadline.