

How to Get into a Top College

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Many students dream of getting into top colleges or selective high schools. As owner of MyEdMaster, a tutoring company, and a graduate of Phillips Exeter Academy (the #1 private high school in the US) and Yale University, I have more than 35 years professional experience, helping countless students get into top colleges (and high schools). I know what works in getting students admitted to the best schools.

Over the years, top schools have become more selective. Years ago, if you had an A average, high SAT scores, good teacher recommendations and solid extra-curricular activities, that was all you needed. Now, tutors are readily available to help students get good grades and SAT scores. You still can't get into top schools without them, but they are not enough. Let's put this in perspective. There are over 36,000 high schools in the US. The top 10 colleges have a combined freshman class of just over 18,000. This means that if you are the top student in your school, you still have only a 50% chance of attending a top 10 college. You might be thinking, "What more can I do than to be the top student in my school?" or "What if I'm not the top student in my school? Is there hope for me?"

To answer these questions, let's look at the admissions process from the colleges' point of view. Top colleges like Ivy League schools were set up at times when most people didn't go to college. These schools were set up to educate the future leaders of society. This is still part of their culture. They view themselves as educating top students from around the world to become future leaders of society. Your job is to convince them that you are one of those people. So, how do you do that? The best indicator of what you will accomplish is what you have accomplished so far. So, what are they looking for?

Over the years, I've worked with thousands of students. The students who made the most selective schools had three things in common: top grades (with lots of AP or IB classes), high SAT or ACT scores, and, above all, outstanding extra-curricular accomplishments. High grades and test scores are very important. Top colleges won't even consider you without them. That's why my tutoring company, MyEdMaster, provides high quality instruction in academic subjects and SAT/ACT preparation. We routinely see students get As in their classes and many students get high 1400s, 1500s and even perfect scores in their SATs or 35s and 36s in their ACTs.

But if all you have is high grades and test scores, you're probably not going to go to a top 10 school. What distinguishes the students who do go to the top is their extracurricular achievements. Since so many students have As in their classes and high test scores, top colleges want to know, "Since we are going to accept only about 5% of the students who apply, what sets you apart from the other 95%?" The key is to find a way to accomplish something that most high schoolers don't. You must be able to explain on your college application, "Why you?" This is an important question since it carries over into the rest of your life. When you apply for jobs, there will be other highly qualified applicants for the same position. The company will want to know, "Why you?" Some students have a natural answer. When I attended Yale, there were two well-known movie stars there. That was their answer to the question "Why you?" I played for the Yale chess team and our number 1 player was ranked number 2 in the country. That was his answer. Other students may be nationally-ranked musicians or athletes.

But such students are rare. Statistically, only a few students are going to be at the top of their fields of interest. What about the rest? Most students need a way to stand out that is still within reach of what they can do. Over the years, I've seen students do the following to stand out and get into top schools: start their own companies, start non-profits, get internships at selective programs, publish scientific papers in professional journals, compete in and win science fairs and other competitions. Perhaps my greatest student success story involves a 9th grader who came to me for SAT preparation. He got a perfect SAT score on his first try. I told him that he was definitely top-school material, but he'd need something more. I talked to him about getting an internship and how to do it. He followed my advice and landed a summer internship at the prestigious Johns Hopkins University. That internship continued over the years to the point where he was able to submit the research he was doing to the Intel Science Fair, which won a national prize and \$150,000 in college scholarship money. He got into Stanford University, and he was invited to present his work at the Nobel Prize awards ceremony. A less dramatic, but perhaps more noteworthy, example involved a young lady who had a good (but not perfect) GPA and SAT scores. However, she was the master of getting competitive internships, including at the Smithsonian, the US State Department and the World Bank. She also started a non-profit for which she got a Disney grant and built a national workforce of student volunteers. She graduated Cornell University.

I realized that while these students' accomplishments were exceptional, not everyone is lucky enough to find a professor at a prestigious university who is willing to mentor him or her. Not everyone can be the applicant selected to work at the World Bank for a summer. To help my students, I wanted to create something that was available to all students and could lead to extraordinary accomplishments, while giving students the chance to grow and improve. Therefore, I started two new programs at MyEdMaster: a scientific research program and an education technology company. Over the years, I had seen students who published scientific papers get into top colleges, but it was tough for them to find willing mentors. So I became the mentor. We've had over 300 students successfully publish scientific papers in professional journals. Some have published as many as 8 papers. These have been serious research efforts. For example, one paper shows that a theory that helped a professor win a Nobel Prize in economics is wrong and what the corrected theory should be. Several papers document teaching methods that improve student learning. Another paper shows that playing videogames cooperatively actually boosts middle schoolers' teamwork skills, but playing them competitively reduces teamwork skills. Our papers are not only published in journals but are also posted on Research Gate, a free research clearinghouse, where they have been read by over 65,000 scientists from around the world. Our students are being heard.

Our second extra-curricular activity is a technology company called METY Technology. We are developing health-related software that takes the latest research in longevity and wellness and uses machine learning to make personalized recommendations on what people can do to live longer and healthier. Students are co-owners and co-founders of this company, which has over 40 professionals working on this product, along with the students. The product is scheduled for completion by the end of 2023.

These programs have caused the number of MyEdMaster students getting accepted at Ivy League and other top schools skyrocket. It's a validation of the principles I described earlier. High grades, high SAT/ACT scores and outstanding extracurricular accomplishments are the keys to getting into top colleges. I am happy to help your kids get into top colleges. You can visit www.myedmaster.com, contact me at john@myedmaster.com or 571-242-6986. Let's build a success story together.