

LOW TEST SCORES?

TIPS ON HOW TO BUILD YOUR COLLEGE RESUME



You have read the books; you have taken the classes, and you have studied your vocabulary for months. After all of your hard work and preparation, you suddenly find yourself sitting in your test room with sweaty palms, twenty-five pencils, and a blank mind. Although these exams seem like some of the most important tests of your life, it is important to remember that the SATs and ACTs are not the “be all, end all” of college admissions decisions.

While test scores are important, they are only one criteria looked at by most colleges today. In fact, some top notch colleges have recently stopped requiring SAT and ACTs on the application, for they are not always the most accurate way to judge a potential candidate. Bates College, Texas State University-San Marcos, Colorado Technical University, and Berklee College of Music are among three of the hundreds of schools that allow for optional SAT or ACTs. A full list of colleges with the optional test scores can be viewed at www.fairtest.org.

Nevertheless, if the school of your dreams does require SATs or ACTs, there are other ways that you can build your application in order to get the school to see past the low scores. First, be up front about a low score. If college entrance exams are required, then the school is going to see them no matter what. While you may be afraid to draw any extra attention to a low test score, it can be helpful to attach a short letter to your application explaining that your scores may not reflect your true academic ability. You can do this by comparing your current GPA to your test scores in the letter. This will show the college that you work hard in school and are able to achieve good grades despite low standardized scores.

Secondly, in the case of low scores, if you are given a choice between filling out the Common Application online or the school’s individual application, it is always better to complete the school’s application for admission. This may give you more of an opportunity to

show yourself as a unique person depending on how the application is structured. Also, although many schools are accepting applications online, it can be better to submit it through the mail. The reason for this is because online applications and the Common Application usually ask for SAT /ACT scores first, and this is the first item that the college will see. However, when an application is sent by mail, the person receiving the application is more likely to review your entire package, rather than just viewing your test scores online and moving on.

Next, if your scores are low, it can be helpful to place all of your academic honors and awards at the top of your resumé, rather than in the middle or bottom. With this structure, your academic honors are more likely to stand out and be seen by the college. This will hopefully lead them to investigate your application further and allow them to see past the low score.

Lastly, be sure to mention your extra-curricular activities in your college application essay. This will help to reinforce your work ethic and show the admissions office that you are a well-rounded person with a lot more to you than just a raw score. Most colleges are looking to accept a student that will contribute to their school in a positive way. Therefore, if you are able to show that you can make a difference at the college or university in both your resumé and essay, this will prove that your personality, interests, and work ethic are more important than test results.

Bottom line—do not fret! Although SATs and ACTs seem like some of the most crucial tests in the world, it is important to remember that colleges are also looking for a well-rounded person with activities and interests that can enhance their school. Test scores are just a number, and you are more than just a score.

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