

It's Not Only About the Grades

Of course colleges want to know that you have academic ability. The easiest way for them to judge this is by looking at your grades. However, you can safely assume that most of the applicants to your college of choice will have grades that are at least as good as yours. Extracurriculars and community service can help you stand out, but the following 14 character attributes are *really* what colleges consider when having to decide between students with very similar qualifications. When applying to colleges, you will have to get teachers to submit recommendation letters on your behalf. **They will be asked to evaluate you on each of the following criteria.** Treat each and every day as though you are being evaluated based on each of these . . . because you are.

Intellectual Promise

While your intellectual promise comes through in several different ways, one of the key indicators is your ability and willingness to *ask questions*, to *probe for understanding* of issues beyond the literal. This shows curiosity and interest.

Quality of Writing

This is somewhat self-explanatory, but remember that each and every time you submit a piece of writing, whether it's a full paper or just a few sentences, you're putting a small piece of yourself out there. Make the most of it; show that you care about your work.

Creative Thought

Many students adjust very nicely to the boundaries set for them. This is an important part of being successful in any pursuit. However, true innovation and leadership often come from those who are willing to consider things from a different, new perspective. This takes risk and isn't always easy.

Productive Discussion

Having ideas and questions is great, but to be human is to share, to interact. As teachers, we learn so much about you by witnessing your willingness to be part of an active and dynamic exchange of ideas. Think of humanity's greatest thinkers and leaders; if they hadn't been willing to share their ideas, how much would we have missed out on?

Faculty Respect

How do you conduct yourself on a regular basis? How do you interact with not only your peers, but with the adults in your world? Because of the position they have attained and role that they play, your teachers deserve your respect. Showing that respect is how you earn it for yourself. It's an exchange.

Disciplined Habits

Often, what separates the successful student/individual from those who are less so, is his or her ability to stay on top of all of his or her responsibilities. Developing disciplined habits helps us to face each new challenge with the resources necessary to overcome it. Being prepared every day and always completing your work on time is how you demonstrate disciplined habits on a regular basis.

Maturity

By the time you're in high school, you need to see yourself as a young adult and conduct yourself in a way that demonstrates your personal values. Maturity is a quality that affects several facets of your life. Behavior is perhaps the most obvious of these, but others get a sense of your maturity in just about everything you do to interact with the world around you.

Motivation

Conscientious students are intrinsically motivated; they do not complete their work just to avoid bad consequences or to gain a reward. Their performance is based upon self-formulated values. They know that the work they do will help them to become the best versions of themselves and they are motivated by the genuine desire for personal improvement.

Leadership

You do not have to be the captain of a team or a class officer to be a leader. In fact, leadership manifests itself in small ways throughout the weeks, months, and years of school. Do you express your opinions respectfully but confidently even when they differ from those of others? Do you volunteer ideas that are risky or unproven when others do not dare to raise their hands? Do you conduct yourself in a way that serves as a positive example to others? These are some of the ways that we identify everyday leaders.

Integrity

Having integrity means that others can depend upon you and that you live according to principles founded in respect, honesty, trustworthiness, maturity, and morality. Teachers recognize this in you by observing your conduct day after day.

Reaction to Setbacks

It is inevitable that we will fall short of our goals sometimes. It isn't a question of "if"; it's a question of "when." There's an aphorism that says, "*Falling down is life, getting back up is living.*" How do you respond when you fail to meet a goal? Do you look for a way for it to be your teacher's fault? the task's fault? your computer's fault? Or do you let go of the *victimism*, take responsibility, and look for a way to learn and grow? That's what colleges want to see—that's what we want to see.

Concern for Others

Your teachers aren't with you all day every day. Colleges know this, yet they want to get our perspective on your concern for others. What they know is that you demonstrate your concern for others through what you say, what you write, and how you treat others on a daily basis. Behaviors as fundamental as holding a door, saying "*thank you*," "*good morning*," "*have a nice day*," or simply listening attentively to others all serve as an indicators of your concern for others.

Self-confidence

You demonstrate your level of self-confidence through the way you interact with others—peers as well as teachers. It is important that you not be afraid to express yourself. When doing so, make meaningful eye contact with those to whom you are speaking, speak at an appropriate volume, and be open to views that differ from your own.

Initiative

You may have heard of the term "self-starter." This is a person who takes it upon him or herself to initiate opportunities for him or herself. In school, a student with initiative doesn't wait for the teacher to ask him or her to come in for extra help, for example; he or she recognizes the need and takes the initiative to go to the teacher voluntarily. He or she readily volunteers ideas in class. These are simple examples, but you can show initiative in a number of ways.

Over the course of a year, a teacher gets to know the kind of student you are based upon a collection of experiences, observations, and interactions. It is important to remember that you are rarely judged by your intentions, but are always judged by your actions. How you conduct yourself matters a great deal because it is the way you tell the world, "**this** is who I am." You want your teacher to be able to say more than, "*he was on time to class and completed his work*," or "*she was polite and never got a detention*." Give them something positive to say. Start today!