

Get Into an Ivy!

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Based on the four years Dr. Hernandez was Assistant Director of Admissions at Dartmouth College and the 20+ years of college consulting work we have done collectively as the premiere college consultants in the U.S., we know what makes applicants stand out among their competition. Here is a collection of our tips for maximizing your odds at the Ivies (Harvard, Dartmouth, Princeton, U Penn, Cornell, Brown, Columbia, and Yale) and other top schools:

- 1) **Dare to be different:** Pursue an unusual activity if you love it. Colleges appreciate "niche" applicants: budding meteorologists, expert costume designers, Revolutionary War reenactors, etc....
- 2) **Pursue awards that validate your talents:** For musicians, receive top national awards; for math geniuses, enter national math competitions. U.S. colleges may not know your high school, but they will recognize top international and national awards.
- 3) **Don't play sports just because you think colleges want you to be well-rounded:** If you're not going to be an athletic recruit, it's silly to do a sport all three seasons. Pick your strongest sport if you love it, but spend the other seasons on academic pursuits.
- 4) **Get a job:** The more humble the better, especially if you come from a wealthy area. Show you're not spoiled and not afraid to work.
- 5) **Be high impact:** If you're an artist, create a portfolio. If you design jewelry, sell it locally or online. If you're a philosopher, take a course online through Yale and publish your final paper. Show colleges what you're capable of producing.
- 6) **Be scholarly:** Valedictorians are de rigueur at the Ivies, but colleges want to admit those who LOVE LEARNING, not just good students!
- 7) **Don't feel limited by the Common Application:** The Common App is becoming less and less adaptable, but there are still ways to pop off the screen/page and present as a focused scholar. Leverage the Common App, don't be confined by it.
- 8) **Try to establish "dominant areas" in one-two academic areas and one-two extras:** Colleges don't want well rounded KIDS, they want a well rounded CLASS; the more specialized you are, the better.
- 9) **Focus on applications:** Don't dash off your applications three weeks before they are due. Colleges want to see that you've put effort into your applications – a sloppy application will not help your case. Write essays that push you into an Ivy once your scores and grades put you in range.
- 10) **Teacher recommendations matter:** Ask your teachers to focus on your intellectual strengths (and give examples) more than on your character. Too many teachers talk about how "nice" the applicant is, while colleges want to know how strong an intellect you are. And, of course, SHOW your teachers that you love to learn and aren't just a grade grubber.

