

Ivy League Admissions Guide

How to Prepare for Ivy League Admissions

Ivy League schools are considered among the most prestigious in the country, if not the world. Every year, tens of thousands of eager students apply to these highly selective institutions with the hope of securing a coveted spot among an illustrious group of students, scholars, innovators and researchers. But do you actually know what it takes to become a competitive applicant?

Unfortunately, social media, the Internet and even well-intentioned family members and friends peddle misinformation about the Ivy League admissions process! At AcceptU, we are not only committed to dispelling this misinformation, but we also want to help students refine their academic and extracurricular profiles so that they can stand out from other applicants in the crowd. This guide will provide an overview of Ivy League history, what makes its admissions process unique and how you can differentiate yourself from other applicants.

What is the Ivy League?

Did you know that the Ivy League is an athletic coalition comprised of eight schools in the northeastern United States? The league includes Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, Princeton, University of Pennsylvania and Yale.

Most of these schools were founded during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with Harvard being the oldest, established in 1636. The term “Ivy League” was not coined until 1945 - 46, when the administrators of all eight schools came together to develop an intercollegiate tournament to promote college athletics as a source of national entertainment.

In the mid-1950s, Ivy League schools began organizing competitions in numerous sports, especially football. Over time, however, the Ivy League began to expand its focus beyond the realms of athletic programming. In recent years, the term “Ivy League” has become less synonymous with athletics and more aligned with academic excellence and top-tier research. Ivy League graduates of the modern era have become national and international leaders, Nobel laureates, world-renowned intellectuals and artists - just to name a few achievements.



How to Stand Out in the Ivy League Admissions Process

Ivy League schools receive thousands of applications each cycle and have developed a streamlined process for evaluating candidates. Once all applications have been submitted, admissions officers typically divide them by geography and/or college division. After all parts of the application have been assessed, individual readers are tasked with separating them into three categories: yes, maybe and no. Afterward, admissions officers meet to deliberate over which candidates should be accepted. Additional committees are formed if a consensus has not been reached.

Unfortunately, the admissions process is not standardized across the Ivy League. Some schools emphasize and minimize certain parts of the application more than others. Also, not every school has a centralized admissions office that evaluates all applications. For example, Cornell requires its applicants to apply directly to the college or school that houses their major of interest. We encourage you to look at each school's admissions website to get a better idea of what is required.

Let's take a look at the admissions statistics for the Class of 2026:

College/School	# of Applicants	# of Admitted Students
Brown	50,649	2,546
Columbia	60,377	2,253
Cornell (Class of 2025)*	67,830	5,836
Dartmouth	28,336	1,767
Harvard	61,220	1,954
Princeton	37,601	1,647
University of Pennsylvania**	55,000	2,400
Yale	50,015	2,234

* The 2026 data for Cornell are not available until mid-summer 2022.

** The total number of applicants for UPenn has not been revealed yet.

The admissions statistics for the Class of 2026 indicate that the acceptance rate for Ivy League schools is less than 10% at each university, and as low as 3 to 4% at a few schools. This means that most students who apply, unfortunately, do not receive offers of admission. That said, there are strategies you can adopt to help you become a competitive applicant.

Since academic excellence is at the forefront of Ivy League admissions, first-year applicants must demonstrate high academic achievement by taking the most rigorous courses available to them in all areas of study, including math, science, English, social studies, and foreign language, regardless of their intended major.

In addition, students should demonstrate consistent long-term engagement in extracurricular and service-oriented activities. Extracurricular activities should build on academic interests. For example, if you are interested in computer programming, you should participate in a robotics or coding club, develop an app, or build a website, to name a few. If you are interested in majoring in history, you should create an independent research project that utilizes archival documents. For those interested in literature, you should consider essay contests, writing for your school or town newspaper, or becoming an editor of a literary journal. Regardless of the activities you choose, consistency is key.

Ivy League schools are looking to admit the next generation of leaders - individuals who will dedicate their lives to helping others in need or becoming leaders in their academic field. It is not enough to just be a great student; you must also display strong moral character, active involvement, a commitment to service, engagement with your school or community, or an entrepreneurial spirit. You can demonstrate many of these traits by assuming leadership roles within your extracurricular activities, mentoring or tutoring others, coaching or managing employees at your summer job. Another suggestion is to found a club, organization or initiative that seeks to fill a void or address a

need within your local communities. Being an agent of change starts at home!

How Not to Get Into an Ivy League School

While there are several positive ways to set yourself apart from other applicants, there are equally as many bad ways to hinder your opportunity for admission.

Here are some of the most common drawbacks that can negatively affect applicants' chances of being admitted into an Ivy League institution:

- Mediocre or poor academic performance
- Lack of rigor in the curriculum
- Does not treat others well in high school, as reflected by letters of recommendation
- Does not demonstrate a genuine interest in the proposed area of study
- Does not come across as unique or interesting
- Potential campus contributions are not apparent
- Does not take initiative
- Does not demonstrate leadership ability

Ivy League admissions is highly competitive. Hence, there is no room to submit an application that does not meet essential admissions criteria. Poor academic performance will lead to rejection. Poor conduct inside and outside of the classroom will lead to rejection. An uninteresting profile will lead to rejection. So, be mindful! Take the application process seriously and do your best to avoid these common pitfalls.



General Advice

If you are interested in applying to Ivy League schools, start as early as possible.

In ninth grade, create a college file for your transcripts, extracurricular activities, honors and awards. Include the number of hours per week and weeks per year for the positions held in your extracurricular activities. Spend some time getting to know your school counselor and teachers, as they will be responsible for writing letters of recommendation in support of your applications. Work hard in all classes and do your best to earn the highest grades possible. Try to establish yourself as a leader within and outside of school. Take the initiative and create clubs or organizations that expand your knowledge of subjects, issues or topics that interest you. Dive deeply into these subjects on your own - during the school year in an independent study or during the summers.

Take diagnostic standardized tests in your sophomore year to determine your strengths and weaknesses, and then study hard for these tests in the summer before your junior year. Plan your standardized testing dates, keeping in mind your other academic, extracurricular and social commitments.

Consider interesting and unique summer activities. Start planning in December or January of your sophomore and junior years so that you have meaningful summer experiences just before Grades 11 and 12.

Create a narrative, tell a story that is memorable, interesting and uniquely you. Have you thought about pursuing something exciting and new that tells admissions officers about you and your interests, and gives them a sense of how you will contribute on the university campus? Maybe you will participate in a study abroad program in a semester or summer; perhaps you will learn a new language on your own; why not take your ten-speed bicycle and turn it into an electric bike?

The summer before your senior year, you will want to focus on writing compelling college essays that demonstrate originality, a genuine interest in your proposed area of study and a sincere interest in the schools you are applying to. You also want to prepare for interviews and ensure your transcripts and standardized scores are up to date and easily accessible.

With hard work, determination and the right support, the Ivy League may very well be within your reach.



