

Rate your extracurricular activities

Find out where you can strengthen your EC profile to increase your chances of getting into your dream school!*



Worksheet provided by

college  Lead

*Disclaimer: This worksheet does not guarantee admission into any college but rather is a recommendation on how to improve your extracurricular profile. Every student is different, so there is no way one worksheet will perfectly fit your needs. Do additional research and talk with your school college counselor to figure out a plan that's best for you. College Lead takes no responsibility and assumes no liability for any content made available through its website.

INTRODUCTION ✨

Hi there! If you're looking to improve your extracurricular activities and maximize your chances of getting into college, you've come to the right place.

It's common knowledge that everyone has to get good test scores and grades to get into a good college. That means that good grades and test scores are now the *baseline expectation* and *not a differentiator* for college applications. A rising trend I've noticed from my time at Harvard and receiving the highest score for EC's in [my admission file](#) is that extracurriculars are now the main way to differentiate yourself. And this isn't confirmed, but my guess is that extracurriculars play a bigger role in college admissions with [more and more schools going test optional](#) because of Covid-19.

With that, let's get started!

P.S. I highly recommend pairing this worksheet with this [YouTube video on how to plan your EC's](#).

[You can also meet with me via Zoom to get one-on-one help.](#)

LIST OUT YOUR EC'S

First, make a copy of this document so you can edit it. In the upper left corner, go to File -> Make a Copy. Then, continue below.

Example

EC activity	Theme	Volunteering?	Leadership role?	# of years?	Hours per week
Mock Trial	Public Speaking	No	Yes, co-captain	3	10
Youth Orchestra	Music	No	No	4	7
Animal Rescue Foundation	Animals	Yes	Yes, trainer	2	4

Write down your EC's in the table below. (Add more rows if you need to.)

EC activity	Theme	Volunteering?	Leadership role? (Y/N)	# of years?	Hours per week

TALLY UP YOUR SCORE 1 2 3 4

Example: using the sample chart from the last page

# of activities	# of themes	# of volunteer activities	# of leadership roles	Average # of years
3	3	1	2	3

Your Scores:

# of activities	# of themes ¹	# of volunteer activities	# of leadership roles	Average # of years ²

RESULTS

Remember that every student is different. Take these scores and numbers as an approximation and suggestion. The suggestions below are best suited for students aiming for the top 25-ish colleges in the US.

Activity Count - do you have the right number of activities?

If you have 6 or less: Consider adding a couple more. You have room for 10 EC's and 5 honors in the Common App. While you don't have to fill all 10, it's a good idea to aim to fill a bit more of the slots. If adding on one or two more EC's means taking 3 AP classes instead of 5, by all means go for it. As I mentioned earlier, getting good grades and test scores are becoming the baseline expectation for admission to top colleges. Harvard will probably not accept you just because you have perfect scores but might if you have above average scores and are nationally ranked in an EC.

If you have 6-10: Great! You've hit the sweet spot. Keep at it. Just make sure that all these can be bucketed into 4 themes at most (see 'Theme' section below). That will help you develop a spike. Having a spike makes it more likely that you'll be able to get regional or national level awards in that theme, since you have had the opportunity to really work hard on and focus on a skill.

¹ You can bucket similar themes together. For instance, speech & debate or theater & music.

² Exclude one-time activities. For example, a summer internship or program.

Using myself as an example, music was my spike. I took private lessons, joined a nationally-recognized orchestra, and spent the summer in competitive music camps. Having most of my EC's focused on music gave me the time to consistently practice 2 hours a day, which then helped me to place in several national and international flute competitions.³

If you have 13 or more: If you are still involved in all 13 activities, consider dropping at least 3. You only have room for 10 EC's and 5 honors in the Common App. You will have room for a mixture of up to 20 EC's and honors for the University of California, but even then they emphasize that they want to see more quality than quantity. How you get quality is by developing a spike or specialization. And that's what the theme category is for.

Themes - do you have a spike?

If you have 1-2: You are very focused and have found where you'd like to concentrate your time. Just make sure you are able to rank regionally or nationally in these themes. Feel free to explore a bit if you have the bandwidth. Doesn't hurt to try out another field or two.

If you have 3-4: You're in the sweet spot. You've probably gotten the chance to explore a few areas and have hopefully found your spike or edge. Keep it up!

If you have 5 or more: Looks like you're still trying to find what you are interested in. If you are a freshman, this is totally fine. If you're a sophomore or junior, however, try to narrow down your themes and find which ones you are most interested in concentrating your time in.

It's the unfortunate reality where top colleges are looking for a strong spike or edge. If you have 4 or more themes, you probably don't have the time to develop the specialized skills needed to earn honors and awards you can add to your college application. Try to find your passion, what you enjoy doing the most, or what you can see yourself excelling in. And don't worry. Dropping one theme now doesn't mean you're dropping it for life. You can always pick it up again in college when you have time, like what [this UCLA student](#) did.

³ I was focused on music to a fault. I even co-founded a local performing arts society in my county and ran workshops on sight reading, playing chamber music, and more. This goes to show that you can diversify your EC's within a certain theme which was music in my case.

Volunteer activities - do you check the box?

Your goal is to have **1-3** of these. This is more of a check-the-box activity, unless public service is your [spike](#).

Leadership roles - are you a self-starter?

This one is a little more nuanced.

3-4 is a good number to aim for. That being said, keep this in mind: quality > quantity. One example of quality > quantity is if you are the founder and president of some club or organization. That's much more impressive than being the vice president of the Key Club.

If you have **more than 4**, great. Just make sure that you have had a significant impact in each of these leadership roles. For both the Common App and University of California, you will have to provide some sort of description for what you achieved in that role. The first description is stronger than the second:

1. Founder and president of school's first Mock Trial team. Recruited district attorney as coach, grew team to 25 members, and brought team to regional level.
2. President of Honors Society. Organized 2 volunteering activities per semester.

Average # of years

This metric only matters if you're a junior, since you've had a total of three years of high school. That being said, freshman and sophomores reading this, remember that colleges in general like to see commitment. It's not a perfect correlation, but usually the longer you continue or do an activity, the better and more specialized you become.

The higher the better. Colleges like to see consistency because it shows that you are committed and not flaky⁴. For yourself, staying longer with an EC means it's more likely that you have a leadership or more senior position in the EC and have developed a spike or mini spike.

CLOSING NOTES

Hope this was helpful! There's only so much feedback I can provide based on numbers alone. If you'd like me to take a closer look at your EC's, [send me a message](#). I'd be happy to help.

⁴ There are exceptions. One is if you moved frequently throughout high school.

For more college prep tips and resources, subscribe to [my newsletter](#) and [my YouTube channel](#).

FAQ ?

Is it alright if my EC's don't line up with what I want to study in college?

Yes! It's completely fine. See [this series](#) to hear perspectives from students and recent graduates from Harvard, UCLA, UC Davis, and more.

Would love to hear any other questions you have!