



The Character Quotient: Unlocking Success in College Admissions



by **PETER TILLES** — July 29, 2023 in **Business**



In the competitive realm of college admissions, your ability to reveal and demonstrate your character becomes the silver bullet, separating you from all the rest. In fact, almost every facet of your application should and will reveal elements of your character.

So what does it mean when we say that the admissions process is a CHARACTER-BASED evaluation?

At a high level, there are three macro-level questions any college admissions committee is going to ask about your applications:

1. If we admit you, can you thrive academically?
2. Are you likely to go on and do meaningful things with your life after college?
3. Are you authentic?

So, let's break these down one by one:

If We Admit You, Can You Thrive Academically?

This first question relates to your academic profile and will demonstrate your academic potential, among other things. So what will they be evaluating?

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Your 4-year Curriculum Choices:

The first thing most admissions committees will do is review your transcript. From a character perspective, colleges will ask if you have challenged yourself to the fullest extent possible within the context of the curriculum offered by your high school. They will look for signs in your transcript that you value learning and personal growth over getting good grades.

Your Grades:

The key here is to find the right number of challenging courses to take that will enable you to excel in them. It is not useful to load up on taking the most difficult courses if it is going to stress you out and your grades suffer.

Your SAT or ACT scores (if you are planning to submit them):

So how does one's character manifest through their ACT or SAT decisions? Imagine someone who takes either test and gets a very high score in the 98% percentile.

Question:

- Should this person take the test again to improve their score?
- Or might it send a more positive message to college admissions committees to declare victory and devote their time to other endeavors supporting and driving their personal growth?

Are You Likely to Go On and Do Meaningful Things with Your Life after College?

When admissions committees ask this question, they are evaluating your potential beyond the classroom. They will be looking for you to demonstrate significant depth and substance in those activities you choose to pursue.

So, what does that mean? Well, could you speak for 30-45 minutes about any one of your extracurricular activities? Just a few of the questions you should be able to answer are:

1. What do you do?
2. Why do you do it?
3. What challenges have you faced?
4. How have you overcome them?
5. What have you learned about yourself?
6. How have you applied these learnings in other areas of your life?

Whether through your personal statement, supplemental essays, interviews or letters of recommendation, you must demonstrate the depth of thought and reveal your character strengths while making insightful connections.

For example, we were preparing a student who wanted to study engineering. When we asked her why, she spent 30 minutes explaining her various experiences, how she approached them, what she learned from them and her logic and rationale for how she came to realize that she wanted to be an electrical engineer.

She was able to demonstrate the challenges she had faced along the way, how she overcame them and what she learned about herself from those experiences. As we listened to her, we kept asking ourselves this question: Is she likely to go on and do meaningful things with her life? Ultimately, the answer was clear: *“If she is demonstrating this much depth and substance now, imagine what she will be doing in 5 years when she graduates from college.”*

Doing something meaningful doesn’t necessarily mean becoming a CEO, an award-winning author, or a researcher who discovers a cure for cancer. It simply means, are you a person who, when you pursue anything, do you approach it with thoughtfulness, care, and diligence while pursuing deeper and deeper levels of immersion? In other words, will you make the most out of anything you do?

Are you Authentic?

This question, as it relates to your character, looks at what you do, both in and out of the classroom and is about demonstrating your true motivations for making the decisions that you have made during high school. In other words, if questions one and two are about demonstrating your potential both in and out of the classroom, this question focuses on whether or not you are demonstrating a genuine desire to maximize your potential.

We were approached by a local high school’s guidance department regarding the applications of an accomplished valedictorian. Surprisingly, this student had been rejected by 14 out of 15 colleges, leaving the administrators baffled. Our assessment revealed several indications of inauthenticity throughout the application.

One conspicuous sign was found in her transcript, where she had progressively taken more challenging English courses from 9th to 11th grade, consistently earning A’s. However, in 12th grade, she opted for regular English instead. This decision raised questions about her motivations.

Considering her past performance and lighter extracurricular load, it became apparent that her motive for downgrading her English class was driven by the fear of losing the Valedictorian title if she didn’t secure an “A” in the AP level course. This revelation suggested that her focus was more on winning a title than maximizing her personal growth. Combined with other concerns in her application, these red flags ultimately resulted in her rejections.

So, as you embark on the voyage of college admissions, embrace the role that character plays, which is the compass that will guide your path. It will not only empower you to maximize your probability of admission but also to embark on a transformative educational journey that will help shape your future success.



Peter Tilles

About Peter Tilles: Peter Tilles is the Co-Founder & Managing Partner of Princeton College Consulting. With over ten years of experience as a passionate and dedicated educator and mentor, Peter has assisted a select group of students in the United States, Asia, Europe, and South America in achieving their admission goals. He achieves that through a focus on authentic character development, which enables students to develop the skills and necessary experiences that lead to significant personal growth. Peter frequently speaks domestically and abroad about the intensely competitive college admissions and athletic recruiting processes. Peter brings 30 years of experience as a

successful entrepreneur and senior executive to bear on the college admissions process. He has served in numerous senior strategic, operational, and leadership roles with Citigroup, UBS, and PDI, a pharmaceutical commercialization company where Peter served as President of their market research and consulting division. He has also served and continues to serve on various for-profit and nonprofit boards. Contact Information: Official website: <https://www.princetoncollegeconsulting.net/peter> LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/peter-tilles-563567/> New Jersey Address: 300 Witherspoon St Princeton, NJ 08542 Contact #: (609) 454-8520 New York Address: 590 Madison Ave New York, NY 10022 Contact #: (646) 530-8420

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