



Westminster School at Oak Mountain *College Advising*

How to Create a Cohesive Application

Four Years Reduced to 4 Minutes

- Applicant pools for many colleges are growing and many are still score optional
- AO's now read up to 100 applications a day which means only 4 minutes to make decision which will affect your next steps
- All four years of your high school experiences, accomplishments, grades, and relationships will come down to this one decision made in 4 minutes!
- Don't you want to make the right impression during those 4 minutes???



SOUNDBITE

THE ADMISSIONS SECRET
THAT GETS YOU
INTO COLLEGE AND BEYOND

SARA HARBERSON
FOUNDER OF APPLICATION NATION™

Soundbite

- Sara Harberson is an independent college counselor with 20 years of experience
- Has an online group called "Application Nation"
- She was an Associate Dean of Admissions at The University of Pennsylvania and Dean of Admissions at Franklin and Marshall College
- Former Director of College Counseling at The Baldwin School

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What is a Soundbite?

Most admission officers wrap up your application in one summary statement – a “soundbite” that is shared with the committee to decide if you are rejected or accepted

EXAMPLES:

“The SAT Score is a bit low for a pre-med applicant in our pool, but his straight-A record with AP Calculus and AP Biology suggests he can handle the premed curriculum, and his responsibility of taking care of his elderly grandparent allows me to see him working with dementia patients one day in the future – ADMIT”

“Really strong test scores across the board with straight As too, but the student does not distinguish himself in the sea of premed applicants – DENY”

Student has one of the highest GPAs in the twenty applications we've received from her high school but if you look closely, her curriculum is not nearly as strong as it could be – DENY

A Soundbite helps you be **Intentional**

- When you know your Soundbite you can be **intentional** with your college applications
- The pieces of your applications (transcript, activities, awards, scores, letters of rec, essays), will be crafted with the Soundbite as a guiding principle
- Each layer of the application will make a similar impression of who you are and where you are heading to the admission officer
- This creates a cohesive application that quickly paints a *clear* picture of who you are
- In the slides ahead you will learn:
 1. How to discover your Soundbite
 2. Rules to craft your Soundbite
 3. How to communicate your Soundbite to others
 4. How to make choices based on your Soundbite

**Soundbite
as guiding
principle
will
determine**

What classes you take in high school

Which standardized tests you take

How you spend your free time

Which teachers write letter of rec

Topics you choose for essays

Which major you list in application

Which colleges you apply to

Where you enroll in college

Find Your Soundbite

- What's special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about you or your life story?
- What details of your life might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants
- What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admissions committee to be interested in you?
- What personal characteristics do you possess that would improve your prospects for success in the field or profession?
- What is your personal defining statement or "[elevator pitch](#)" - that is your soundbite!



The Benefits of the Soundbite

- Helps you know and define yourself
- Helps how to present yourself to others in an authentic way
- Can move an admissions officer to admit
- It is not about straight As or perfect scores, but students who are not afraid to be themselves
- One will know their strengths and limits, and make choices that reflect what is important to them
- You don't have to be a world-class athlete or national winner – just a world-class human

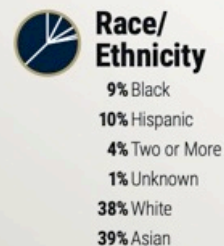


Georgia Tech's 2021 Incoming Class

Georgia Tech welcomed a record number of first-year and transfer students to campus in 2021.



14% first-generation
college students



12% of incoming
Georgia
students
come from
rural areas



102
Countries

Top Countries

- India
- China
- South Korea
- Canada
- Brazil
- Vietnam
- Indonesia
- Colombia
- Panama
- Spain

Top States

(After Georgia)

- Florida
- New Jersey
- Virginia
- Texas
- California
- New York
- North Carolina
- Illinois
- Maryland
- Pennsylvania

Georgia Tech

Admissions Secrets you never know how you might fit in

- AO's are paying attention to all parts of the application: transcript, test scores, recommendation letters, activities/honors and essays
- But ALSO declared major, race, gender, home address, high school school profile, citizenship, parent's education, parent occupation and if applying for financial aid
- Will be trying to fill an admissions goal - you never know how you might fit in



Harvard's Class of 2021

Geographical breakdown

New England	16.6%
Middle Atlantic	20.7%
South	18.3%
Midwest	9.9%
Central	1.8%
Mountain	3.4%
Pacific	13.2%
Territories	0.5%
International	15.6%

Intended field of concentration

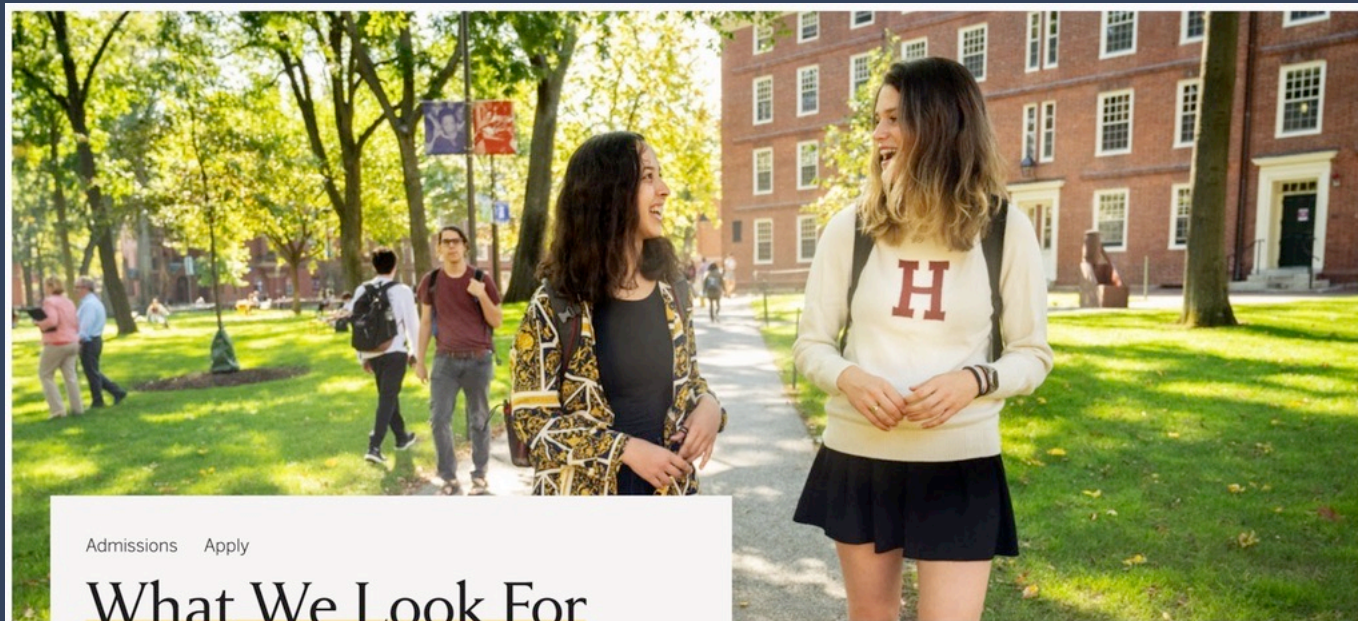
Humanities	15.3%
Social Sciences	28.1%
Biological Sciences	18.3%
Physical Sciences	7.6%
Engineering	10.3%
Computer Science	8.1%
Math	6.0%
Undecided	6.3%

Ethnicity

African American	15.9%
Asian American	25.9%
Hispanic or Latino	12.5%
Native American	1.1%
Native Hawaiian	0.5%



What Harvard is looking for...



[Admissions](#) [Apply](#)

What We Look For

On this page

[Growth and Potential](#)

[Interests and Activities](#)

[Personal Character](#)

[Contribution to the Harvard Community](#)

[Our Process](#)

There is no such thing as a "typical Harvard student"

In our admissions process, we give careful, individual attention to each applicant. We seek to identify students who will be the best educators of one another and their professors—individuals who will inspire those around them during their College years and beyond. As we read and discuss your application, here are some things that will be on our minds.

**How can you
be noticed?**



First step to develop your Soundbite is to **Know Your Strengths**

Develop self-awareness

Be a specialist, not a generalist

Be specific about your strengths

- My best subject is English
- My best subject is English because I am a good writer
- I am a comedic writer
- I am a comedic writer working on a project
- I am a comedic writer working on a TV pilot to resurrect the 30-minute American sitcom

Recognize what you can do exceptionally



Finding Strengths:

Are there any **academic** classes you are clearly strong in?

Was there one **academic topic** you found particularly interesting?

Is there an **activity or hobby** you do in free time that you have strength in?

Do you have a **personality** strength that others have acknowledged?

Do you have a **leadership** role, job or **awards** for this strength?



Finding Limitations:

List any and all academic, extracurricular, and personality weaknesses

Maybe its low test scores, a bad grade, lack of activities, no awards, learning difference

Acknowledge them, then move on! See them as **limitations**, not weaknesses

Adjust your college application to lead with your strengths

If weak test scores – apply score optional. You do not have to report low AP scores

If you are diagnosed with learning difference, it's your right to keep it private

Consider church work or family time as activities or find activities that match interest

Use your personality to shine over awards or join competition that uses your strengths



Discovering your Uniqueness

1. Is there anything unusual about your upbringing, family or life that positively or negatively affected you?
2. If negatively affected you, is there a silver lining that is reflected in you right now?
3. Do you have a very specific focus within your interests that you hope to pursue?
4. List one, two or three things you do or about yourself that are different from everyone else you know
5. List out all your academic, activity, and personality strengths



Soundbite Development

1. If you could pick the most powerful words (nouns and verbs only) to describe yourself, what would they be?
2. If you had to write the most powerful, positive and distinctive sentence to describe you, what would it be?
3. What should you do in the future to further support this Soundbite?
4. Could any other student have the same exact Soundbite as the one you created?
5. If so, how would you tweak it to make sure it is as distinctive as possible?



Soundbite Rules

RULE # 1 – First person – it puts the focus on the student, and the student owns the statement

RULE # 2 – One Concise Sentence – this is your “pitch”, elevator statement. Concise will force you to choose words carefully. No more than 40 words


RULE # 3 – Present Tense – Do not refer to the past; state who you are now and where you are heading. Seize the moment!

RULE # 4 – Use Nouns and Verbs – not adjectives. Nouns and verbs are powerful. Don’t use common words either (i.e., hardworking, helpful)

RULE # 5 – No one else should have your Soundbite – show guts, initiative, stand out in the crowd




Examples of Soundbites



I am a cultivator of plants and relationships, and I see the world as a greenhouse, ensuring that those in my care and company feel the warmth of the human spirit

I am the person who is always there for a friend, family member, or classmate who is struggling in everyday life or during larger moments in their lives, and this leads me to my passion for forensic nursing, which values solutions, healing and justice for victims



I capture sunrises on film and in my mind, giving me clarity in math and science and the ability to see how the study of the brain impacts nature, our outlook, and the world around us

I am the brains and courage behind my state's anti-vaping campaign, which teaches teens my mantra: do the right thing instead of the popular thing

I research and analyze how successful companies survive during economic downturns to help our family-owned business stay afloat during the 2020 recession

I write, direct, and star in my own films (in and around my hometown) about teenagers facing life's complicated issues of love, loss, and following your dreams

How to Use Your Soundbite

- Do **not** list your Soundbite on the application
- Do use it to map out your decisions - classes, activities, colleges you apply to, major
- Put it in on the computer or bathroom mirror
- Let it evolve over time - room for change
- Give yourself opportunities to pivot
- Look at it when filling out your application, asking if what you are writing supports it
- Provide different variations to different teachers writing letters of recommendation
- Share it with your college advisor or teacher



Map it Out

- Once you know your strengths – pursue it!
- Once you know your limitations – pivot away
- Have a goal in mind that plays to your strengths
- Specialize and be different from the crowd
- Be intentional with your choice of classes, activities, colleges and major based on your Soundbite
- Set goals and map out a plan on paper that highlights your strengths and demonstrates your interests

“Map It Out” examples for Business, Pre-Med and Engineering majors in following slides



Map it out: Engineering

- Transcript – take the highest level of math and science classes, Physics I and II, AP Calculus AB and BC classes, if available
- Grades – high grades across the board, especially math and science
- Electives – Computer Science, C# Programming, Intro to Engineering
- ACT/SAT Plan – high scores in Math (and Science for ACT)
- Rec Letters – Physics teacher, Robotics coach, Calculus teacher
- Activities – Programming Club, Robotics Team, Geek Squad job, Tech Team at church or school
- Essay Topic – Show curiosity, self-starter, ability to work with a team

Map it out: Pre-Medicine

- Transcript – take the highest level of math and science classes, AP Statistics or Calculus AB, Biology, Chemistry, Anatomy, Physics
- Grades – high grades across the board, especially math and science
- Electives – Psychology, Medical Terminology, Spanish, Biochemistry
- ACT/SAT Plan – high scores in Math (and Science for ACT)
- Rec Letters – Anatomy teacher, Biology teacher, supervisor at work
- Activities – Lifeguard, CPR certification, EMT certification, hospital volunteer, clinic volunteer, medical mission trip with church
- Essay Topic – Show compassion, sense of adventure, interest in diversity

Map it out: Business

- Transcript – take the highest level of history, English, and math like AP Calculus AB or Statistics, possibly Business Math
- Grades – high grades across the board, especially math and English
- Electives – Economics, US Government, Macro or Microeconomics
- ACT/SAT Plan – high scores in Writing and Reading, also Math
- Rec Letters – Economic, History or English teacher, supervisor at work
- Activities – School leadership, school or community mentor, leadership team at church, work as a cashier (anywhere), invest in stock market
- Essay Topic – Show responsibility, leadership, ability to work with a team

Be a Storyteller - Transcript

- Do the classes support your Soundbite?
- Is there something that stands out?
- Does it meet the minimum requirements of the college you are applying?
- Are there trends?
- Are you taking most challenging courses?
- Do you show interest in your intended college major?
- Are you succeeding in the important courses



WESTMINSTER

SCHOOL AT OAK MOUNTAIN

www.westminstersknights.org

5080 Cahaba Valley Trace
Birmingham, AL 35242
205.995.9694

Academic Achievement Record

Legal Name:	Elinor Fulcher
Parent/Guardian:	Robert and Kimberley Fulcher
Address:	835 Miller Circle Indian Springs, AL 35124
Phone Number:	205-555-8888

Birthdate:	October 20, 2004
Email:	elinor.fulcher@westminsterknights.org
Date Printed:	June 26, 2022
Graduation Date:	May 15, 2022

Freshman Year:				
		credit	grade	points
The Westminster School at Oak Mountain		2018-2019		
	Art	0.25	A+/100	1.10
H	United States Literature	1.00	A+/97	5.40
H	United States History	1.00	A/95	5.20
	Algebra I	1.00	A-/90	4.00
H	Biology	1.00	B+/88	4.40
	Spanish I	1.00	B/86	4.20
	Rhetoric I	0.50	A-/92	2.00
	Theology I	0.25	A+/99	4.40
	Video Production	1.00	P/100	
Annual Credits and GPA:		6.00		5.12

Junior Year:				
		credit	grade	points
The Westminster School at Oak Mountain		2020-2021		
	Art	0.25	A+/100	1.10
H	Medieval Literature	1.00	A+/97	5.40
H	Medieval History	1.00	A/95	5.20
	Algebra II	1.00	A-/90	4.00
H	Anatomy	1.00	B+/88	4.40
H	Spanish III	1.00	B/86	4.20
H	Junior Thesis	0.50	A-/92	2.00
	Theology I	0.25	A+/99	1.10
	Music	0.25	A+/100	1.10
Annual Credits and GPA:		6.25		4.56

Sophomore Year:				
		credit	grade	points
The Westminster School at Oak Mountain		2019-2020		
	Art	0.25	A+/100	1.10
H	Ancient Literature	1.00	A+/97	5.40
H	Ancient History	1.00	A/95	5.20
	Geometry	1.00	A-/90	4.00
H	Chemistry	1.00	B+/88	4.40
	Spanish II	1.00	B/86	4.20
	Rhetoric II	0.50	A-/92	2.00
	Theology II	0.25	A+/99	4.40
	Music	0.25	A+/100	1.10
Annual Credits and GPA:		6.25		5.09

Senior Year:				
		credit	grade	points
The Westminster School at Oak Mountain		2021-2022		
	Art	0.25	A+/100	1.10
H	Modern European Literature	1.00	A+/97	5.40
H	Modern European History	1.00	A/95	5.20
AP	Statistics	1.00	A-/90	5.00
H	Physics	1.00	B+/88	4.40
H	Senior Thesis	1.00	B/86	4.20
	Theology IV	0.50	A-/92	2.00
	Music	0.25	A+/99	1.10
	Yearbook	1.00	P/100	
Annual Credits and GPA:		6.00		4.73

Early College Credits: Auburn University, Auburn First			
DE	World Geography	1.00	Summer 2021
DE	Personal Finance	1.00	Summer 2021

Additional Graduation Credits:			
	Latin I	1.00	2017-2018

Due to the nature of our program, some credits earned prior to high school.

CUMULATIVE GPA: 4.567

Number of Credits Earned by Department									
Math	Science	History	English/ Literature	Foreign Language	Rhetoric/ Thesis	Theology	Fine Arts	Electives	TOTAL:
4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	2.50	1.25	2.00	4.00	29.75

Grade Scale: A+ 97-100 A 93-96 A- 90-92 B+ 87-89 B 83-86 B- 80-82 C+ 77-79 C 73-76 C- 70-72
AP = Advanced Placement, DE = Dual Enrollment, H = Honors

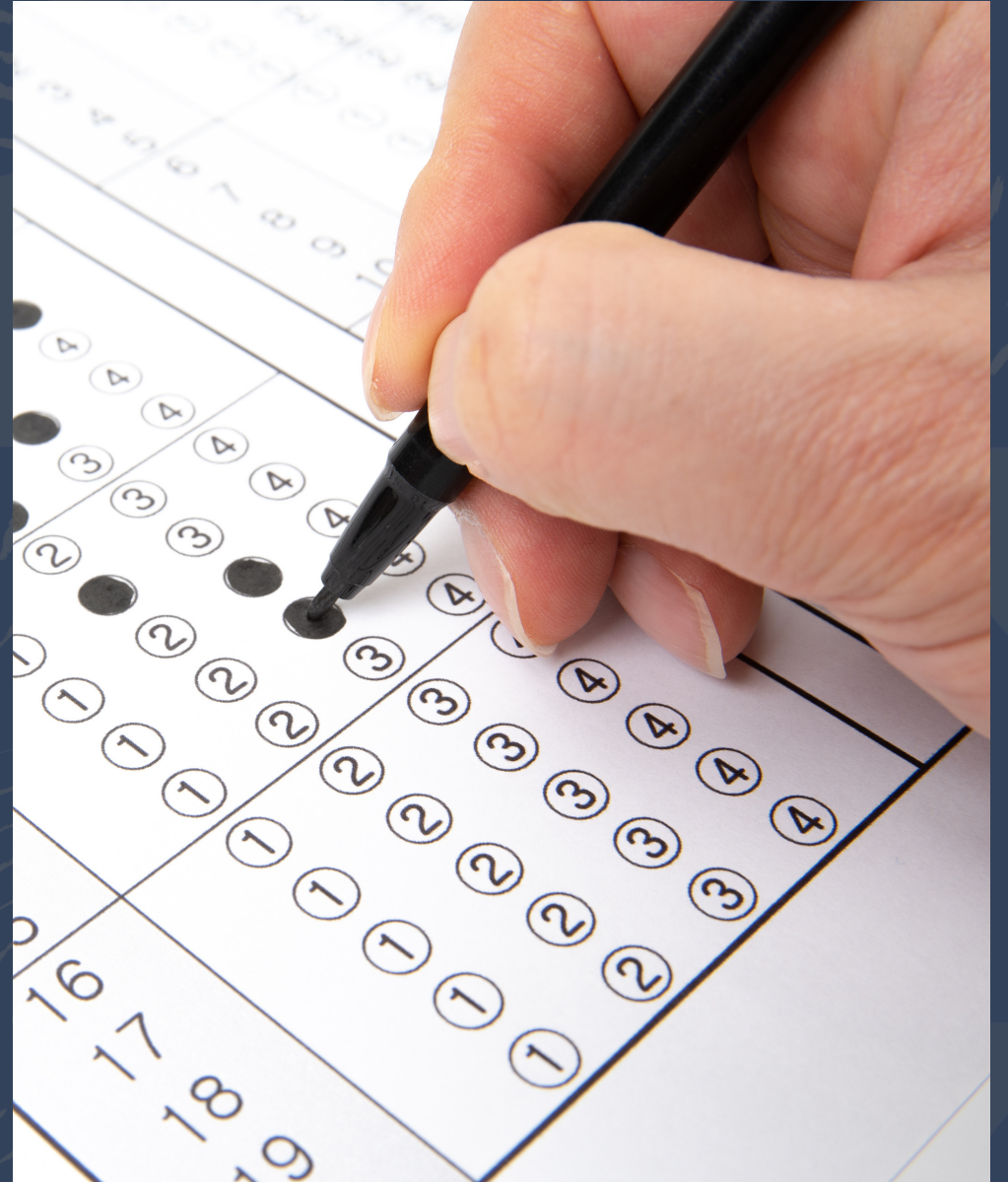


SCHOOL CODE:
010382

Signature of School Official/Title/Date

Be a Storyteller - Test Scores

- Is ACT or SAT better for you?
- Should you apply score optional?
- Do score strengths point to Soundbite?
- Does college require AP's?
- Are the AP scores putting you in the best light?
- Are there other tests you can take that play to strengths - CLT?



Be a Storyteller - Activities

- Most powerful way to convey your Soundbite is with your activity list
- Are they aligning with your interests?
- Do they support your intended major?
- Do they highlight your strengths?
- 50 characters to list role on Common App
- 100 characters to describe what you do
- Use activities to highlight who you are



Be a Storyteller - Essay

- Tell a unique story that puts you in a positive light
- Does the story show self-awareness or growth?
- Can anyone else tell this story?
- Is this information anywhere else on my application?
- Does this story reflect your Soundbite, directly or indirectly?



Example of Essay Topics for Soundbites

Soundbite: My family has always taught me to “pass the ball,” share the spotlight, and do the right thing—and while this may seem fundamental, I live by these actions and let others see the power of kindness

Essay Topic: “Freshman backpack” took on a whole new meaning for me when interviewing for Peer Leaders as a freshman. In the stress of staying focused on making a good first impression, as well as making good on a promise to myself to take new chances, I somehow managed to keep my backpack on my back through the entire interview. I realized now that it served as an authentic moment representing who I am and who I strive to be

Soundbite: I use my theater background, public speaking skills, and on-air TV personality to make people feel comfortable, laugh, and enjoy their everyday lives, and there is no better way to do this than in the field of hospitality

Essay Topic: Sometimes, when everything goes wrong, it goes right, especially when a snowstorm hits and you and your dad have to drive almost one thousand miles and over twenty hours, during which you learn a lot about your dad and yourself

Be a Storyteller - Recommendation Letters

- You can control what teachers write with how you ask for letter of recommendation
- Does this teacher support your Soundbite or know what makes you special?
- In your meeting with teacher or thank-you note following, mention your Soundbite
- Reference lessons and moments from that class that made an impact



In Conclusion

- Know yourself - strengths and limitations
- Celebrate your journey and uniqueness
- Craft your Soundbite and live by it
- Map out your classes, activities, letters of recommendation and essays
- Intentionally support your Soundbite
- Tell a clear, compelling story with the layers of your application
- Control the final statement admission officers say about you



