

The Activity-List Checklist

What admissions counsellors actually look for

An admissions counsellor does not start by counting activities or hours. They read for a few signals that show a real person behind the list. **A few things that are genuinely your child's own beat a long list every time.** Use this checklist to audit the list you have today.

How to use this

- Sit down together, parent and student, with the current activity list in front of you. Allow 20 to 30 minutes.
- Go through the six sections and tick honestly. An empty box is useful information, not a failure.
- The aim is not a longer list. The aim is to find the few things that are truly your child's own, and to see where the next six months should go.

1 Depth and consistency

- ☐ Has the student stayed with this activity for two or more years?
- ☐ Has their involvement grown rather than stayed flat, for example more hours, harder work, or a bigger role over time?
- ☐ Would the people who run this activity recognise the student as a regular, not an occasional face?
- ☐ Is this something the student would keep doing even if it never appeared on an application?
- ☐ Can you point to one or two interests that clearly matter more than the rest?

What a counsellor is really asking: is there a genuine, lasting interest here, or a collection of things tried once and dropped?

2 Growth, from member to leader

- ☐ Can you name one responsibility the student holds now that they did not hold a year ago?
- ☐ Have they moved from simply attending to helping run, organise, teach or mentor?
- ☐ Do other people now rely on the student for something specific?
- ☐ If there is a title, is there real work behind it that you could describe in a sentence?
- ☐ Has the student handled a setback or a problem in this activity and kept going?

What a counsellor is really asking: is this a student who grows into more over time, or one who stays comfortable in the same spot?

3 Initiative

- ☐ Did the student start, build or fix something without being asked?
- ☐ Is there a moment where they saw a gap or a problem and did something about it?
- ☐ Have they created anything you could show another person, for example an event, a group, a piece of work, a small project?
- ☐ Do they pursue things in their own time, not only when a teacher or parent sets them up?

What a counsellor is really asking: does this student wait to be told what to do, or do they move on their own?

4 Impact on others

- ☐ Can you name who benefited from the student's work, and how?
- ☐ Did the activity help a team, a club, a younger group, a family or a community in a way someone else would confirm?
- ☐ Is there something that would not have happened, or happened less well, without the student?
- ☐ Could one teacher or mentor describe the student's contribution in specific detail?

What a counsellor is really asking: did the student actually contribute something real, or just occupy a seat?

5 Genuine intellectual curiosity

THE ONE THAT SETS A STUDENT APART

- ☐ Has a question from class ever led the student to read, build, test or write something beyond the syllabus?
- ☐ Do they follow an interest for its own sake, not because it will be marked or graded?
- ☐ Can the student talk about a topic they chose themselves, and explain why it grabbed them?
- ☐ Is there a book, a course, a project, an experiment or a piece of writing they took up on their own?
- ☐ Have they changed their mind about something after looking into it properly?

What a counsellor is really asking: is there a mind here that chases its own questions? This, more than anything else, is what makes a student memorable.

6 How Grades 11 and 12 are spent

- ☐ Do the senior years show a clear direction, rather than a scramble of new activities added late?
- ☐ Is the student deepening and leading in Grade 11, not just joining more things?
- ☐ Is there a project or a piece of work from these years with a real outcome you could point to?
- ☐ In Grade 12, is the student sustaining and completing what they built, rather than starting from scratch?
- ☐ If you had to name what the senior years are really about for this student, could you, in one sentence?

What a counsellor is really asking: when it mattered most, did the student go deeper and finish what they started?

Weak vs strong activity descriptions

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES, NOT REAL STUDENTS

WEAK DESCRIPTION	STRONG DESCRIPTION
Member, Science Club	Ran six weekly sessions of the junior science club, planning simple experiments for Grade 6 students and training two classmates to help lead them. Two years.
Volunteer, local NGO	Volunteered every Saturday morning for a year at a reading programme, took over the booking of weekly slots, and kept the group running when the coordinator left.
Played football	Played school football for three years, became vice captain in Grade 11, and started a short pre-season fitness routine the team still uses.
Interested in coding	Taught myself Python after a maths class on probability, built a small tool to settle an argument about a card game, and wrote up what I got wrong the first time.

How to rewrite any description. Use five parts, in plain words:

Role + **action** (what you actually did) + **duration** (how long) + **result for others** (who it helped) + **what you learned**.

Keep specifics small and honest. A plausible detail such as "ran six weekly sessions" is fine. Invented large numbers are not, and a good counsellor can tell the difference.

Timing, grade by grade

Grades 8 to 9

Explore. Try widely and notice what sticks. This is the time for breadth, so there is something real to narrow down later.

Grade 10

Narrow to two or three interests that matter most. Start taking responsibility inside them, not just attending.

Grade 11

Lead, initiate and deepen. Aim for one project with a real outcome you could describe to someone else.

Grade 12

Sustain and complete. Document what you built. Do not start lots of new things just for the application.

Application timelines differ for the US, the UK and India, so check each university's own dates. As a general guide: the US Common App uses a structured activities list, UK UCAS puts the weight on an academic personal statement and super-curricular interest, and private Indian universities such as Ashoka read the whole profile. For current rules, always check the live Common App and UCAS guidance and each university's page.

Common mistakes to avoid

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Listing one-off events as if they were long commitments. | ☐ Activities chosen only because they might look good. |
| ☐ Padding hours so the numbers look impressive. | ☐ Titles with no real work behind them. |
| ☐ Ten clubs with no role in any of them. | ☐ A sudden rush of new activities in Grade 12. |

A few things, done honestly and deeply, beat a long list.

Want a second pair of eyes on your child's activity list? Book a free profile review with Anannt. Send us a photo of your ticked checklist.

WhatsApp Dubai **+971 58 585 3551**

WhatsApp India **+91 96076 03939**

anannt.ae