What the Ivies + Northwestern Say They Weigh

Each school's own admissions filing, in plain language

ClearThread Studios - October 2026

Every college in the country files a public report called the Common Data Set. One page of it, known as C7, is the school's own statement of what counts in admissions: each factor on the list is marked Very Important, Important, Considered, or Not Considered. It is the closest thing to the school grading its own priorities, and almost no parent ever sees it.

This sheet puts that page for all eight Ivy League schools plus Northwestern in one place, exactly as the schools filed it, with the edition year noted for each school. Use it to check your teen's application against what their schools say they weigh, before anything is submitted.

> **One caution:** this is what schools *say* they weigh. It is the starting point for a smart application plan, not the whole story of any single decision.

How to read the four levels

Very Important	The top tier. These factors carry the most weight in the school's own statement.
Important	One step down from the top. Still weighed seriously.
Considered	Two steps below the top tier. The school looks at it, but it rarely carries a file on its own.
Not Considered	The school says it does not weigh this factor at all.

Inside

Brown - Columbia - Cornell - Dartmouth - Harvard - Northwestern - Princeton - University of Pennsylvania - Yale, followed by the patterns that show up across all nine schools.

Brown University

Common Data Set, 2025-2026 edition (published by Brown's Office of Institutional Research)

THE SURPRISE

Brown puts test scores at the very top, but extracurricular activities sit one step down in Important. The interview counts for nothing at all.

Very Important (8)

- Rigor of secondary school record
- Class rank
- Academic GPA
- Standardized test scores
- Application essay
- Recommendation(s)
- Talent/ability
- Character/personal qualities

Important (1)

- Extracurricular activities

Considered (6)

- First generation
- Alumni/ae relation
- Geographical residence
- State residency
- Volunteer work
- Work experience

Not Considered (3)

- Interview
- Religious affiliation/commitment
- Level of applicant's interest

Columbia University

Common Data Set, 2025-2026 edition (Columbia College and Columbia Engineering)

THE SURPRISE

Class rank and extracurricular activities sit at the very top at Columbia, while test scores sit in Considered, two steps below the top. The interview and demonstrated interest count for nothing.

Very Important (7)

- Rigor of secondary school record
- Class rank
- Academic GPA
- Application essay
- Recommendation(s)
- Extracurricular activities
- Character/personal qualities

Important (1)

- Talent/ability

Considered (6)

- Standardized test scores
- First generation
- Alumni/ae relation
- Geographical residence
- Volunteer work
- Work experience

Not Considered (4)

- Interview
- State residency
- Religious affiliation/commitment
- Level of applicant's interest

Cornell University

Common Data Set, 2025-2026 edition

THE SURPRISE

At Cornell, GPA and class rank sit in Important, one step down, while the essay sits at the very top. Test scores sit in Considered, two steps below the top.

Very Important (6)

- Rigor of secondary school record
- Application essay
- Recommendation(s)
- Extracurricular activities
- Talent/ability
- Character/personal qualities

Important (2)

- Class rank
- Academic GPA

Considered (8)

- Standardized test scores
- Interview
- First generation
- Alumni/ae relation
- Geographical residence
- State residency
- Volunteer work
- Work experience

Not Considered (2)

- Religious affiliation/commitment
- Level of applicant's interest

Dartmouth College

Common Data Set, 2025-2026 edition

THE SURPRISE

Dartmouth is the only school on this sheet that counts demonstrated interest at all, and only in Considered, while test scores sit at the very top.

Very Important (8)

- Rigor of secondary school record
- Class rank
- Academic GPA
- Standardized test scores
- Application essay
- Recommendation(s)
- Extracurricular activities
- Character/personal qualities

Important (1)

- Talent/ability

Considered (7)

- Interview
- First generation
- Alumni/ae relation
- Geographical residence
- Volunteer work
- Work experience
- Level of applicant's interest

Not Considered (2)

- State residency
- Religious affiliation/commitment

Harvard University

Common Data Set, 2025-2026 edition

THE SURPRISE

Harvard marks nothing Very Important, and nothing Important either. Every factor it weighs sits in Considered, so on paper nothing outranks anything else.

Very Important (0)

None. Harvard's filing leaves the top tier empty.

Important (0)

None. This tier is empty too.

Considered (14)

- Rigor of secondary school record
- Academic GPA
- Standardized test scores
- Application essay
- Recommendation(s)
- Interview
- Extracurricular activities
- Talent/ability
- Character/personal qualities
- First generation
- Alumni/ae relation
- Geographical residence
- Volunteer work
- Work experience

Not Considered (4)

- Class rank
- State residency
- Religious affiliation/commitment
- Level of applicant's interest

Northwestern University

Common Data Set, 2024-2025 edition

THE SURPRISE

Test scores are only Considered at Northwestern, while the essay, activities, talent, and character all sit at the very top.

Very Important (8)

- Rigor of secondary school record
- Class rank
- Academic GPA
- Application essay
- Recommendation(s)
- Extracurricular activities
- Talent/ability
- Character/personal qualities

Important (0)

None. Northwestern's filing puts nothing in this tier.

Considered (8)

- Standardized test scores
- Interview
- First generation
- Alumni/ae relation
- Geographical residence
- Volunteer work
- Work experience
- Level of applicant's interest

Not Considered (2)

- State residency
- Religious affiliation/commitment

Princeton University

Common Data Set, 2024-2025 edition

THE SURPRISE

Nine factors at the very top is the fullest top tier on this sheet, and Princeton still says it does not track demonstrated interest at all.

Very Important (9)

- Rigor of secondary school record
- Class rank
- Academic GPA
- Standardized test scores
- Application essay
- Recommendation(s)
- Extracurricular activities
- Talent/ability
- Character/personal qualities

Important (0)

None. Princeton's filing puts nothing in this tier.

Considered (6)

- Interview
- First generation
- Alumni/ae relation
- Geographical residence
- Volunteer work
- Work experience

Not Considered (3)

- State residency
- Religious affiliation/commitment
- Level of applicant's interest

University of Pennsylvania

Common Data Set, 2024-2025 edition

THE SURPRISE

The interview counts for nothing at Penn. It is Not Considered, and test scores sit in Considered while five factors sit at the top.

Very Important (5)

- Rigor of secondary school record
- Academic GPA
- Application essay
- Recommendation(s)
- Character/personal qualities

Important (5)

- Class rank
- Extracurricular activities
- Talent/ability
- Volunteer work
- Work experience

Considered (5)

- Standardized test scores
- First generation
- Alumni/ae relation
- Geographical residence
- State residency

Not Considered (3)

- Interview
- Religious affiliation/commitment
- Level of applicant's interest

Yale University

Common Data Set, 2025-2026 edition

THE SURPRISE

Yale's top tier is nearly as full as Princeton's, but test scores sit in Considered, two steps below the essay. Yale does not track demonstrated interest either.

Very Important (8)

- Rigor of secondary school record
- Class rank
- Academic GPA
- Application essay
- Recommendation(s)
- Extracurricular activities
- Talent/ability
- Character/personal qualities

Important (0)

None. Yale's filing puts nothing in this tier.

Considered (8)

- Standardized test scores
- Interview
- First generation
- Alumni/ae relation
- Geographical residence
- State residency
- Volunteer work
- Work experience

Not Considered (2)

- Religious affiliation/commitment
- Level of applicant's interest

The patterns across all nine schools

What they nearly all weigh most

The application essay and character/personal qualities are Very Important at eight of the nine schools. The one exception is Harvard, and only because Harvard leaves its top two tiers empty for every factor. Rigor of the school record and recommendations sit at the very top at the same eight schools. In plain terms: at almost every school here, the essay is one of the few top-tier factors your teen can still improve this fall.

Where they split: test scores

Standardized test scores are Very Important at three schools (Princeton, Brown, and Dartmouth) and only Considered at the other six. The same score can be a headline factor at one school on your teen's list and a background factor at another.

Where they split: demonstrated interest

Seven of these schools say they do not consider the level of applicant's interest at all. That means the visits, the emails, and the tours are not tracked as love by Princeton, Harvard, Yale, Penn, Columbia, Cornell, or Brown. Dartmouth is the only school here that weighs interest, and only as Considered.

Where they split: interviews

The interview is Not Considered at Penn, Columbia, and Brown. It is Considered at Princeton, Harvard, Yale, Cornell, Dartmouth, and Northwestern. And one factor is unanimous: religious affiliation is Not Considered at all nine schools.

Put the sheet to work

The essay is a top-tier factor at eight of these nine schools, and it is the one your teen can still change. ClearThread scores essays on six plain-language checks, the things readers actually react to. Your teen's scores are free: scores only, so you can see exactly where the essay stands before you decide what to do next.

Get the free scores at **clearthreadstudios.com/free**

Your story, at its clearest.

Sources and notes

Every list on this sheet comes from the school's own Common Data Set filing, section C7, read directly from the school's official publication and date-stamped with its edition year. Editions: Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Cornell, Brown, and Dartmouth, 2025-2026; Princeton, University of Pennsylvania, and Northwestern, 2024-2025.

Brown publishes its Common Data Set through its Office of Institutional Research dashboard rather than a PDF. The Brown figures here are read from that official filing for 2025-2026.

Prepared by ClearThread Studios, October 2026. Filings change by edition; check your school's current Common Data Set for the latest year.